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John Connor

Precedent for the New World: The Spanish Conquest of the Canary Islands

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- John Horgan's *The End of Science* (Little, Brown & Co, 1996)
- 'Mega-Tsunami', *Horizon*, broadcast BBC2, 10th October 2000, 9pm
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- George Woodcock's *Anarchism* (Penguin, 1986)
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- — 'Running on Emptiness' in *Green Anarchist* 45/46 (Spring 1997), pp. 22–24.
- — *Elements of Refusal* (Paleo, 1999)

Contents

Precedent for the New World	5
A Pre-History of the Canaries	9
The Canary Isles Re-Enter History	13
After the Conquest	19
Bibliography	21

Bibliography

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Although largely forgotten by history, the spectre of the Guanches and what was done to them continues to haunt it. The racism Ferdinand and Isabella originated to justify their enslavement and colonialism in Africa and the New World has wrought havoc through history, and the emphasis on investment and the rational development and exploitation of resources (human, as well as sugar) begun in the plantations of Madeira and the Canaries potently linked rising capitalism and imperialism. There is some-thing else lurking here too, premature Modernist arrogance, a belief that what exists already in the form of traditional cultures must be swept away at the convenience of the vile aggradisements already mentioned, what the self-interested hucksters promoting them call 'Progress' and 'Western civilisation'.

Of course, history is what we make ourselves and if we are to avenge the Guanches, we must do it for ourselves for — in their broader, more elaborated form — the enemy they fought is the enemy we now face. History holds many unconscious ironies though. Scientists agree that another spectre haunts the modern world, one known only to well to Bentor in the last days — the spectre of the volcano demon, *Guajato*. As they have grown over aeons, the volcanoes of Gran Canaria have built, layer upon layer, the rock between the lava layers flimsy and water-weakened. An eruption could sheer away many millions of tonnes of rock into the Atlantic, unleashing a tidal wave hundreds of metres high that could swamp the western US seaboard from Florida to Newfoundland up to 50 km inland.³ The effects would be like a new Great Flood or the Biblical drowning of Pharaoh's people in the Red Sea. The sheer loss of human life and economic dislocation to a modern, complex industrial economy cause by such a catastrophe would have knock-on effects around the world that would make the 1929 crash look like a kid's tea party. Just as the Canaries created the New World, it will destroy it. Those that experienced indifference at the destruction of the Canary islanders' world will feel the terrible force of the island's indifference on their world. Those that thought their civilisation had enslaved Nature will finally discover it their master.

³ 'Mega-Tsunami', *Horizon*, broadcast BBC2, 10th October 2000, 9pm.

Precedent for the New World

O brave new world, that hath such people in it!

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

Though these words are Miranda's, they might equally be those of Caliban, the levelling wild man of Prospero's island. In Huxley's *Brave New World*, they actually are Caliban's — or his nearest equivalent, the Savage. These are words of both awe and terror uttered by one facing an other incomprehensibly more sophisticated and more ruthless. These words have echoed down history from those on the edge of Empire, facing either absorption or elimination by it.

Columbus's 1492 voyage to the New World has often been identified as a turning point in the history of the last millennium. His governorship of Hispaniola — during which the native Caribs (from which the Caribbean derives its name) were enslaved and 90% died of disease or abuse within the first decade thanks to Columbus's quest for gold — is said to have set precedent for Cortez and Pizarro's looting of the Aztecs and Incas and the destruction of their civilisations. The gold and silver extracted from these was, in turn, said to have funded Habsburg domination of Europe for the next two centuries and the creation of the modern world out of the feudal order that preceded it.

Although we won't deny the *conquistador* was a new kind of man, a forerunner to modern man, the account of what Rosa Luxembourgh would have described as primitive accumulation above — the material basis of the modern world — only tells half the story. The other half of this story is Africa. The very basis of the ease of the *conquistadors'* take-over of the New World — the indigenous peoples' vulnerability to European diseases — also made them useless as a labour force and so Africans had to be shipped in instead as slaves. In 1537, Pope Paul III actually recognised the humanity (or, perhaps, the economic uselessness) of the Indians to the extent of forbidding their reduction to slavery — a consideration not also extended to the Africans that replaced them. For the next three centuries, the exploitation of Africa made that of the New World possible.

This was the 'Middle Passage' so crucial to the Triangular Trade that ensured the maturation of capitalism and underpinned the elaboration of Enlightenment high culture – the shipping of slaves from Africa to harvest such staples of European life as sugar, cotton and tobacco in the New World. It built the investment infrastructure of capitalism. Lloyds grew from coffee house to international exchange on the backs of slaves. Beyond this, the profits of slavery funded the innovations that made the Industrial Revolution – and supersession of slavery itself – possible, such as Lewis Paul's spinning machine.¹ It is probably also no coincidence that industrialisation began in an area where the slave trade was most important – the textile industry of the British north-west – and, indeed, *indiennes* (shoddy Manchester-manufactured cottons) were key in the exchange for slaves on the African leg of the Triangular Trade. Ultimately, the Portuguese proved more adept at the 'great game' of imperialism than the Spanish – the 1493 Treaty of Tordesillas gave them the best slave ports in equatorial Africa and Brazilian plantations which proved so extensive and productive that they supplied even north America with tobacco until eclipsed by more industrialised European nations in the late-18th century – but it was the Spanish that came first, and it was they that set the pattern.

There is, however, something more specific linking the exploitation of both Africa and the Americas, more original. Most historians pass over it as a mere footnote and Franco forbade all discussion of it in Spain during his dictatorship, but a key – both to laying the material basis of the modern world and to the elaboration of a workable model of colonialism – was the Spanish and Portuguese conquest of the Azores, Madeiras, and Canary Islands during the 15th century. There, the native ecology was completely burned off and replaced by a European one, so much so that what was originally there is now completely unrecoverable. This taught the *conquistadors* that they could go pretty much anywhere in the world and prosper, spurring further conquests, including that of the New World. As Alfred Crosby argued in his 1986 history, *Ecological Imperialism*:²

¹ Hugh Thomas' *The Slave Trade* (Papermac, 1998), p. 249

² Arno Karlen's *Plague's Progress* (Indigo, 1995), p. 96

After the Conquest

After winning victory, de Lugo consolidated it by building another Santa Cruz over the hearths of the Taoro. The *conquistador's* capital remains Tenerife's capital to this day. For the people of the island, de Lugo's victory meant enslavement and extermination through disease and overwork. Ultimately seven sugar mills were established on the island and we have no reason to doubt the brutalities meted out against plantation workers so graphically described in Voltaire's *Candide* weren't also meted out to the remnant Guanches 200 years earlier.

The survival option was in many ways worse than this, the adoption of Christian religion and the mask of Leviathan. Those that were not slaves opted to be slave-drivers, traders in wine and human misery on the African main-land. Bar a few local idiosyncrasies, they lost their faith, their language, their spirit of brotherhood and independence was reduced to the acquisitive individualism of their conquerors ('I owe fealty to the king alone and he is far away'), and ultimately they all but lost to history as a distinct culture:¹

There were originally 100,000 Guanches. By 1530, they were reduced to a diseased, apathetic handful; by 1600, there remained only some mixed-blood [*sic*] Hispano-Guanches, and soon even this remnant vanished. Today all that survives of them are some mummified nobles hidden in caves and a half-dozen sentences written in their otherwise lost language.

A major target of the Spanish slave trade from the Canaries were the Guanches' cousins, the north African Berbers on the shore opposite. However, the Spanish didn't have it all their own way. By the 1520s, the Berbers had enough, stormed the Spanish fort built at Cape Juby and ensured it was never re-occupied.²

¹ Arno Karlen's *Plague's Progress* (Indigo, 1995), p. 96. We're pleased to quote the Guanches' "half-forgotten" words so they will not otherwise be lost utterly. Despite Franco, their ancient dance also survives on the Canaries, so we may still judge for ourselves whether – as Bocaccio said – it's 'almost like the French'.

² Hugh Thomas' *The Slave Trade* (Papermac, 1998), pp. 330–331.

[T]he Iberian conquest of the Azores, Madeiras and Canaries [w]as a pilot program for the reshaping of European colonies in the Americas, Africa, Australia, and Oceania. In all these places, the newcomers would conquer the human populations and Europeanize entire ecosystems. They dared this because they had seen from the Iberian experience in the Canaries that European crops and herds would thrive in all but the most hostile, unfamiliar environments, and that the fiercest indigenes could be beaten despite their superior numbers and home-ground advantage. As a result, tens of millions of natives around the world would die.

Beyond the ecology was the question of the indigenous people dependant on it. The Azores and Madeiras were uninhabited, but the Canaries were home to an estimated 80,000 Stone Age people, the Guanches. The *conquistadors* had been crusaders since the dawn of the millennium, both in the Holy Land and during the Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors — indeed, the latter reached its completion during the colonisation of the Canaries. However, the invasion of the Canaries *wasn't* a crusade. The Spanish weren't up against the old enemy, Islam, a culture more advanced than themselves. The religious justification for the Guanche genocide had to be new-forged around ideas of racial and / or cultural — not religious — supremacy, and the exploitation levelled against them by their conquerors was much more rational — and modern — than that (eg. their organisation of sugar cane plantations and refineries). It was the first true colonialism and later served as a model for that in the Americas and the wide world beyond.

The islands' geography was also important, as stepping stones both to Africa and the Americas. Without Canaria, Spain would have never been granted access to the African shore — and thus the enslavement of its inhabitants — by the Borgia pope, Alexander VI. It was off the Azores that Juan de Colon ('Juan the Colonist' — Columbus' true name) found the ocean currents that propelled him to what he termed 'the West Indies' and he also had much experience of Spanish colonialism, which he was later to apply himself in Hispaniola.³

³ Thomas, *op cit.*, p. 88

Columbus lived for a time on Portugal's plantation island of Madeira, with its then ample population of slaves. He married the daughter of Bartolome Perestrello – an elderly fellow Genoese who had been a protégé of Prince Henry [the Navigator] and was the governor of the second-largest island of the archipelago, Porto Santo. Columbus had also worked as a sugar buyer for the Genoese banking family of the Centuriones; and . . . must have seen slaves in the Canary Islands, working on the sugar plantations which he himself knew well

resident of the Canary Islands who had “examined the terrain and marvelled that the Spanish ever won” (p. 85).

Extending this principle, Jared Diamond later argued that early domestication of livestock was one of the keys to Western civilisation's later world domination, as contact with such animals meant their immune systems were less naive than those of others they were to encounter and Westerners also had a larger repertoire of diseases which they could infect these others with, intentionally or otherwise.³ Those arguing Western civilisation's ‘superiority’ simply because it successfully exterminated so many other, better societies are simply putting the argument of the smallpox-laden blanket.

As he was unable to face de Lugo down in open battle, Bentor fled into the interior, the cliffs of Tigaiga by the Teide volcano (‘the realm of *Guajota*’, a Guanche hell), and continued guerrilla attacks from there with other ‘free Guanches’ living off their flocks and lurking at night like *Guajota* himself. De Lugo claimed victory on Christmas Day 1494 and began building his own capital, Santa Cruz, still Tenerife's principal municipality. Thereafter, Bentor was only a small-scale irritant and the Spanish had learned how to deal with guerrilla resistance during the previous century of suppressing it on other Canary islands.⁴ Eventually, popular history records, Bentor gave up hope and hurled himself from a cliff top crying “*Vacaguare!*” [‘I want to die!’] rather than submit to the Spanish empire. Given Guanche sacrificial customs, we wonder whether this was a message Bentor chose to take with him to his father and other Taoro *mencey* ancestors.

³ Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel* (Norton, 1997), chap. 11.

⁴ It should be said that other peoples resisted much more effectively using such tactics. Sakolsky and Koehenline's *Gone to Croatan* (Autonomedia, 1993), pp. 79–94, 263–281 notes how Florida's Seminole Indians and the escaped slaves that joined them in the Great Dismal swamp were *never* defeated by rising Amerika despite 300 years of their trying, until they fled to Mexico to become the Gullahs in the 1850s. *The Serpent and the Rainbow* notes how the Maroons of Haiti (slaves escaped to the mountains of the interior) used voodoo (especially its poisoning techniques) to drive out the French in the Revolutionary period, one of the few successful slave rebellions in history.

A Pre-History of the Canaries

The Ancients knew of the Canaries. The Romans named them and Plato may have meant them for Atlantis, for do they not have volcanic springs and lie “beyond the pillars of Hercules” [the straits of Gibraltar]? Between then and their rediscovery by Genoese *razzias* [slavers] in the mid-14th century — in search of ‘rivers of gold’, ironically what the rivers of equatorial Africa that millions of slaves were shipped down came to be called a century later — they were the ‘Forgotten Isles’ of Europe, consigned to folk tale.

The Guanches arrived in the 1st century BC. They came from north Africa and were related to the Berbers of the Atlas Mountains, the tribal anarchists¹ condemned as *barbari* [barbarians] in the days of Rome and so admired by the 19th century anarcho-anthropologist, Peter Kropotkin. Sometime between their arrival and that of the Genoese, the Guanches left off the use of boats, cutting themselves off from the mainland and even from each other island of their archipelago.

Their material culture was rudimentary. They had no metal whatsoever, preferring wood, stone and bone. Sometimes — as in battle — they wore nothing, and skins at most. Pictures from the Conquest period make the Guanches look like Fred Flintstones in their crude, shaggy ponchos. They lived in caves formed by island lava tubes or made huts out of loose stones and branches, usually in the bottom of steep, defensible ravines with a pool for water. They lived off their *ana* [herds] of small goats and sheep. Their shepherding skills were apparently remarkable, each shepherd knowing each animal without marking any. Like the Basques, they used high-pitched whistles to communicate in the mountains — often forming communication chains to spread messages across an entire island — and used their shepherd’s crooks to vault across crevasses there with incredible skill. The women gathered ferns and pine nuts and in the less arid northern reaches of Tenerife, the most populated island,

¹ Harold Barclay’s *People Without Government* (Cienfuegos Press, 1982), pp. 87–90

The Mexicans thought the Spaniards were gods, but the Guanches knew they were men and, as such, found much to despise in their behaviour.

This led Tiguano to make his disastrous decision to do battle with de Lugo’s army on the Agüena plain. Spanish cavalry — totally alien to the mountain-dwellers’ experiences of war — quickly made mincemeat of the Guanches. Bencomo and Tiguano were killed, as were half the warriors with them in the rout that followed. Faced with opposition so disorganised by this disaster, de Lugo passed Acentejo without significant resistance. The Guanches regrouped under Bencomo’s son Bentor, the newly-elected and last grand *mencey* of the Canaries, at the Araitau Valley. As the Guanches were in a near-unassailable mountain position, what followed was more siege than battle and here the terrible lesson that the *conquistadors* subsequently used to dominate the New World was learned. Bentor’s warriors died at the rate of hundreds a day from the ‘Guanche drowsiness’, sore throats and colds that were common Spanish crowd diseases against which they had no immunity, and which their conquerors called *peste* and *modorra*.¹ This was the decisive weapon, something the Spanish themselves conceded and which Crosby argues made the conquest of Tenerife possible at all:²

According to the view of historians who attribute victory to the technological, then it would seem that the Spanish (with horses, iron and muskets) would have no trouble defeating the Guanches. However Crosby shows us the Spanish did not have an easy time — even with superior technology. . . . It was not until the Spanish were able to gain a foothold on the coast of the island and introduced their own animals and germs that they were able to gain victory. Crosby even quotes a friar of the time, Eoniviova, giving his assessment of the Spanish campaign, saying “if it had not been for the pestilence, it would have taken even longer” (p. 93) for the Spanish to have won — if at all. Crosby states that a local British

¹ Arno Karlen’s *Plague’s Progress* (Indigo, 1995), p. 95.

² Guanches web pages / B-lecture. Pages quoted from Alfred Crosby’s *Ecological Imperialism* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

had small gardens of barley, wheat, peas and beans, though only men were allowed to plough these, using shoulder bones to break the ground.

Reactions to the Guanches were varied, but all were unrealistic projections onto an Other. Prefiguring the 'Noble Savage' mythology that arose when Enlightenment *philosophes* heard tell of Oceanian peoples, the illustrator of the French epic poem, the *Roman de la Rose* portrayed the Guanches as Arcadians, innocents living in a new Garden of Eden. The Italian author of the *Decameron*, Boccaccio described them in 1341:²

[When] gold and silver coins were shown to them, . . . they took no notice. They were equally innocent of the knowledge of weapons. They respected natural law. They seemed to know nothing of individual property, but divided everything up equally. They spoke a 'polite' tongue like the Italians, sang sweetly and danced 'almost like the French'. Their houses were . . . 'of wonderful contrivance'. Their 'temple of oratory' was adorned with . . . the image of a man, sculpted in stone, javelin in his hand.

The *conquistadors* described them in equally unrealistic, if more uncomplimentary, terms:³

dogs and monkeys [of] barking or howling speech, disgusting table manners, and eating uncooked food, like Sir John Mandeville's hairy race of islanders who 'eat both flesh and fish all raw'.

Surprisingly, they didn't also resort to the traditional libel dating from early Christian times that their enemies were *anthropagi* [cannibals], a refinement of the imperialist technique of demonising and then exterminating tribal peoples that had to wait until Columbus invaded the Caribbean. As the Church obviously wasn't prepared to accept that anyone still lived in a pre-lapsarian state — an argument against authority already tried on by many a heretic — idealists arguing the Guanches lived without government only supported the *conquistadors* calls for

through baptism, once a firm Papal principle. Externally, Ferdinand and Isabella tried to match Henry the Navigator's empire-building achievements by funding voyages of discovery — including Columbus's in 1492.

With all Moorish lands and captives divvied up between ex-soldiers, attention would inevitably turn again to unconquered Tenerife. Time appeared to run out on 3rd May 1494 when Alonzo Fernandez de Lugo landed on Arocca beach from Gran Canaria at the head of a 2,500-strong invasion force, including Christianised ex-Guanches from that island. De Lugo had obviously been doing deals through the Franciscan missionaries of the Canarian bishopric of Telde, for the poorest four southern kingdoms weren't willing to stand against him. Bencomso, grand *mencey* of Taoro was prepared to fight and appointed Tinguano his *siyoine* over the remaining five defiant kingdoms. Armed with arquebuses, cavalry and the same arrogance that characterised later *conquistadors* in the New World, de Lugo struck inland but found the island deserted. *El silbo* — the island-wide network of whistled warnings that always greeted the arrival of slavers — preceded him. Eventually de Lugo's army arrived at Acentejo [Running Waters], a ravine leading to Taoro territory. Entering the ravine, de Lugo's column was taken utterly by surprise, bombarded from above by huge boulders, and almost decimated. 80% of the would-be conquerors died in minutes, de Lugo was himself grievously injured and was forced to flee, leaving his lost men to the wild dogs [*Canis*] from which the Canaries were first named. This near-forgotten victory of a Stone Age people over an early-modern army ranks alongside that of the Sioux at Little Big Horn or the Zulu *impis* over the British at Isandhwana — and was as tragic. The Guanches thought their invader expelled permanently — never believing such crushing losses could be made up — and built a village at Acentejo to mark their victory.

Of course, de Lugo had millions to recruit a second army from, even within Spain, though it cost him his entire fortune to do so. He, too, was taking a big gamble when he landed at Arocca again only two years later, 1496. This second war, de Lugo was more cautious, building the fortress of Gracie [Grace] to retreat to if necessary. While de Lugo was less confident, the Guanches were the opposite:

² Felipe Fernandez-Armesto's *Millennium* (Black Swan, 1995), p. 452

³ *ibid.*, p. 453

were lost and others in Europe were also threatened by ascendant Islam, Madeira was first to be put over to this crop. This was both capital- and labour-intensive – in Lewis Mumford’s meaning, technological exercises. Both Guanche and African slaves were put to building terracing and the back-breaking work of cutting cane, a historically important marriage of slavery and sugar. Beyond this, much sugar was used to produce wine, a commodity which fuelled the African slave trade through addiction. Here, already, we have a ‘triangular trade’ established in miniature.

The great Guanche hold-out was Tenerife. There are hints in the historical record that even at this early stage, attempts were made to win access to the island using trade rather than strong-arm tactics. In a tactic soon to be repeated again and again throughout history, the indigenes were offered strong Madeira wine and iron implements to win their co-operation. This wasn’t too effective as the island remained independent for almost a century thereafter, but we have seen these same tactics worked a lot more effectively promoting African collaboration with the slave trade in the tropics and, of course, but later proved devastating to the Amerindians. It’s generally agreed slavery didn’t agree with the fiercely independent Guanches, many of those on colonised islands converting to Christianity to obtain manu-mission (Reconquest convention holding that no Christian could enslave another), though it must also be said that this didn’t stop them collaborating with slaving expeditions against their brother Berbers on mainland Africa.

Pressure built through the century, especially after the Moslem seizure of Constantinople in 1453 cut off the supply of Slavic slaves from the East and Borgia pope Calixtus III issued his bull *Dum Diversas* encouraging the enslavement of all pagans (including non-Moslem ones) elsewhere in an attempt to reignite crusading zeal. By 1492, self-styled ‘Catholic Monarchs’, Ferdinand and Isabella had united Spain, expelling the last of the Moors with the fall of Grenada. They then set about consolidating and extending their power. Internally, they had the Inquisition expel, kill or force conversion on Spain’s Jews (for bigoted religious reasons seen as an ‘enemy within’) and even introduced the notion that Jewishness was a racial – as distinct from religious – characteristic to the world in order to excuse anti-Semitism against *conversos*. A century later, this expedient doctrine was also used to stop African slaves obtaining manumission

their enslavement. The ideology elaborated during the Conquest period by the Augustinian friar Martin Alfonso de Cordoba in his *Garden of Noble Maidens*, a collection of homilies commissioned by Queen Isabella of Castille herself in 1460, was that:⁴

the barbarians are those who live without the law; the Latins, those who have law; for it is the law of nations that men who live and are ruled by law shall be lords of those who have none. Wherefore they may seize and enslave them, because they are by nature the slaves of the wise.

It’s worth noting here how this differed from previous excuses for enslaving Moslems – that captives of war forfeited their liberty, on Roman precedents – but, as in the Holy Land two centuries earlier, the Moors were clearly less “barbarians” than the Christians crusading against them. The trouble for all concerned was that the Guanches had laws – and religion too, of their kind.

Like the inhabitants of Oahiti encountered by Captain Cook in a later century, those of the Canaries were organised into rudimentary kingdoms, each ruled by a *mencey* [king], who carried the *arepa* [big stick] as a mark of his office, and a council of *archimencen* [nobles], who oversaw ritual transitions of power and were the only other permitted landowners. Below them were *cichici-quitzas* (a sort of middle class) and even *achicaxina* (pelebs). Such class stratification wasn’t unheard of in mainland Berber society – particularly in Morocco – but there it was moderated by clan affiliations and no effective enforcement of Council decisions being available beyond community co-operation. These were pretty small polities. On Tenerife alone, there were nine kingdoms, though most deference was shown to that of Quenehi (“the highest”). The kings controlled food allocation (and thus their own kingdom) at annual festivals, during which a truce was imposed on inter-clan warfare.

⁴ Hugh Thomas’ *The Slave Trade* (Papermac, 1998), p. 71. Nor have these ideas died their death. Many modern texts pretend the Guanches were a Cro-Magnon remnant, supposedly ‘evolutionarily inferior’ to *homo Sapiens*, who can therefore presumably be excused for exterminating them. And we thought such racist arrogance ended with the Nazis. . .

Boccaccio certainly got it wrong about the Guanches' pacific nature. As in 'Heroic era' Oahiti, they were a warrior society complete with *siyoinés* [war chiefs] appointed by the ruling *mencey*, and though their shepherd's staffs, clubs and sharpened stones might not have impressed a world that had already smelt gunpowder, the Guanches were to prove they were weapons enough.

Although less than in Oahiti — and most other agricultural societies — there was even limited human sacrifice, in this case a warrior volunteering to throw himself from a cliff top into the sea bearing the intestines of a dead *mencey* and word from his successor once the dead king's mummy was safely stowed away in the clan's traditional cave.

In terms of the supernatural, the Guanches believed in the sun god *Maijéc*, the Earth goddess *Achguayaxiraxi* (worshipped as Mary by those ultimately Catholicised) and *Guajota*, a demon associated with the islands' volcanoes and said to roam at night as a lone dog preying on herds.

The Canary Isles Re-Enter History

From occasional kidnappings into slavery by the Genoese, Portuguese and Spanish *razzias* in the 14th century — the latter sponsored by the Perazi family of Seville — the Guanches found themselves facing full-scale invasion by 1404.

Backed by Enrique III of Castille, the Norman mercenary Jean de Bethencourt landed on Lanzarote on 27th February 1404 and immediately built a castle as a strong-point to raid from and retreat to, in true crusader fashion. The Normans had fallen on hard times in Europe at least two centuries previously, as can be seen by de Bethencourt being pushed to its utmost extremities to find land and title. This he did, however, dominating neighbouring islands like Fuerteventura, La Gomera and Las Palmas as early as 1408 and then declaring himself 'Lord of the Isles' in the streets of Seville. At this time, there wasn't a proper plan of exploitation worked out, as evidenced by de Bethencourt's nephew, Maliot, actually being exiled back to Madeira when he tried to pursue the slave trade on Lanzarote when he inherited his uncle's fief thirty years later. Meanwhile, other islands such as Gran Canaria were already half-way depopulated by the activity of other *razzias*.

It took until 1480 for the Canaries status to be regularised and leave the 'no mans land' it existed in between Spain and Portugal. In this year, Portugal ceded all claim to the Spanish throne and the Queen of Castille, in her turn, recognised Portuguese primacy in the African slave trade. Following this, the Santa Cruz de la Mar Pequeña fortress was built opposite Fuerteventura. It and Las Palmas became sites of regular slave markets — as opposed to irregular slave raids — under Diego Garcia de Herrera and his nephews from 1485, and it became a stepping stone for slavers to import from further down the coast, the Cape Verdes islands. An attempt was made to exploit the Canaries as a hake fishing ground but following financial backing in 1484 from early Genoese, Portuguese and German capitalists including the Welsers of Augsburg, the Canaries became sugar islands. Europe acquired a taste for sugar as a fabled 'spice of the Orient' during the Crusades and when plantations in the Holy Land