



## THE CANARIES AS PORTS OF CALL

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While historians have been concerned with the history of trading companies and shipping lines and economists have analysed the flows of commodities and the finance of foreign commerce, it is geographers who have paid most attention to the shifts in the pattern of ports and changes in their function and equipment. They have discussed the characteristics of ports such as general cargo ports and specialised ports such as oil terminals, liner ports and ferry ports. They have also paid attention to differences between terminal ports, intermediate ports — and ports of call.

But what is a port of call? In popular English parlance it is each of the public houses visited by a seaman when he comes ashore to enjoy an evening out. But it is also a term which has received more detailed academic examination. As a result of an international congress organised in Brussels by the Société Jean Bodin in 1968, three volumes were subsequently published entitled *Les grandes escales*<sup>1</sup>, the French equivalent of the English term 'ports of call'. After accounts of ports of call in many parts of the world —the Mediterranean, the Baltic, the Atlantic and the Pacific— from ancient times to the twentieth century, an attempt was made to produce a general synthesis to answer the question 'what is a port of call?'. Setting the scene for the contemporary discussion, two previous definitions were cited. In the middle of the eighteenth century a French writer, Savary, defined ports of call as 'les ports où abordent les navires pendant leurs voyages, soit pour rafraîchissement ou autres choses nécessaires, soit pour y débarquer partie de leur

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1. *Les grandes escales: Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin pour l'Histoire Comparative des Institutions* (Bruxelles: Editions de la Librairie Encyclopédique, 1972-4) XXXII-XXXIV.

fret ou pour recevoir des marchandises dans leur bord'<sup>2</sup>. A century or so later an English author, Robert Stevens, stated that 'Ports of Call are ports at which a charterer requires that a vessel shall call for the purpose of receiving orders for the discharge of cargo at the port for which she is finally destined'<sup>3</sup>. One hundred years on, the Brussels conference produced a much wider definition. In my own contribution on 'British ports of call in the nineteenth century', I listed seven types of port of call as follows<sup>4</sup>:

- a) ports of call for orders or market intelligence
- b) for victualling or water
- c) for stores (consumable or other) and for repairs
- d) for or with mail
- e) coaling stations, bunkering ports
- f) passenger cruise ports of call
- g) to take on or put off crew
- h) political ports of call

I noted, further, that wartime provided a more specialised instance of a calling port<sup>5</sup>. And I also added that intermediate cargo ports were regarded by some as ports of call but I excluded from consideration harbours of refuge, the resort to ports of call under stress of weather, and did not discuss outports where vessels take on or put off pilots<sup>6</sup> or ports of call for naval vessels.

In the Brussels volume, three further types of ports of call were identified:

- a) fiscal ports. Of these, the best example is provided by Elsinore in Denmark which between 1429 and 1857 was the place where the Sound dues were collected from vessels entering or leaving the Baltic<sup>7</sup>.
- b) ports for the formation of convoys. Three examples will suffice:

2. J. SAVARY DES BRUSLONS: *Dictionnaire universel de commerce* (Copenhagen, 1759-65) II, col. 361.

3. ROBERT WHITE STEVENS: *On the stowage of ships and their cargoes, with information regarding freights, charter-parties & c.* (7th ed. London, 1878) p. 501.

4. *British ports of call in the nineteenth century in Les grandes escales*, XXXIV Période contemporaine et synthèses générales, pp. 22-3.

5. *British ports of call in Les grandes escales*, XXXIV, 23 note 4.

6. *British ports of call in Les grandes escales*, XXXIV, 23.

7. See Charles Hill, *The Danish Sound Tolls and the command of the Baltic* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1926).





Spanish convoys formed at Cuba before crossing the Atlantic<sup>8</sup> and French convoys gathered at Martinique before returning to France<sup>9</sup>; other places, such as the Azores, were designated where ships which had been delayed could rejoin their convoy<sup>10</sup>.

c) wintering ports (Winterlage). These were places where vessels spent the winter. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century Mozambique served as an 'escale d'hivernage' on the Portuguese route to the East Indies for vessels which had missed the monsoon<sup>11</sup>.

But this is to categorise rather than to explain. According to some, a port of call is a port at which a vessel 'calls' rather than 'enters' and the 'call' is in a non-freight-earning capacity. Such a 'calling' vessel does not pay light dues nor is she liable to harbour or port charges. The ship does not usually figure therefore in the shipping returns of tonnage entering or clearing the port since these commonly relate only to vessels which enter or clear in a freight-earning capacity. In consequence, to distinguish a port of call further as far as the vessel is concerned, a bill of lading does not usually exist for this particular port. Ports of call are ports visited for other than direct trading purposes. But this is a definition which is open to challenge on several counts. First, if an intermediate cargo port or a passenger cruise port can be accepted as instances of ports of call, then it is not accurate to say that the call is in a non-freight-earning capacity. Then, even if a vessel 'calls' in a non-freight-earning capacity, it is liable to pay light dues. It also has to pay port or harbour dues, the charges depending on which part of the harbour and what services are used. Only naval vessels of the home flag are exempt<sup>12</sup>.

In his discussion of a typology of ports of call, John Gilissen suggested that a threefold scheme could be derived from the functions which the ports of call performed<sup>13</sup>. There were:

8. JAN A VAN HOUTTE: *Les problèmes humains et sociaux de l'escale: rapport de synthèse* in *Les grandes escales*, XXXIV, 648.

9. L. DENOIX: *Les escales de la Compagnie des Indes au XVIIIe siècle* in *Les grandes escales*, XXXIII *Les temps modernes*, p. 219.

10. VIRGINIA RAU: *Les escales de la «Carreira da Índia» (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles)* in *Les grandes escales*, XXXIII, 16, 25.

11. RAU: *Escales de la «Carreira da Índia»* in *Les grandes escales*, XXXIII, 19.

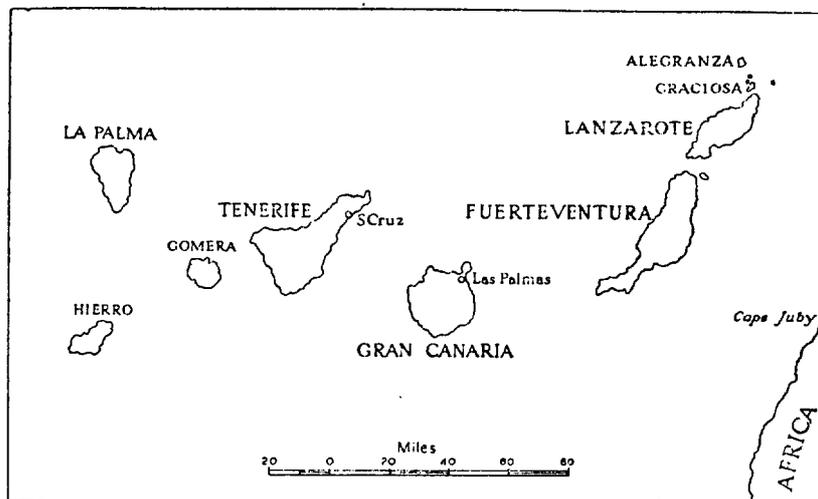
12. Letter from P. E. STONHAM of 3 August 1971.

13. *Une typologie des escales: histoire des grandes escales vue sous l'angle institutionnel* in *Les grandes escales*, XXXIV, 699-715.

1 *escales techniques*: harbours of refuge, for victualling and water, coaling stations, calls for crew, wintering ports, ports for repair or stores and convoy ports

2 *escales économiques*: transit ports, ports for the partial unloading or loading of cargo, for orders, passenger liner calls and mail calls

3 *escales politiques*: military ports, fiscal ports and imperial ports



*The Canaries*

As will be obvious from the foregoing, ports of call for some routes may be terminal ports for others. Further, individual ports of call may not serve all the range of functions set out and in some cases may only have one function. Much will depend on location, on technology and on the time involved. The pattern and employment of ports of call has changed over time. When Europe began to develop trading relations with the wider world in the age of sail, islands in the oceans in many parts of the world suddenly became of importance. When steam replaced sail the pattern changed and it was further altered first by the construction of the Suez Canal and then of the Panama Canal which altered the routes of some vessels. The convoy port had its apogee in the se-

venteenth and eighteenth centuries, the coaling station its peak of importance in the nineteenth century.

And so we must turn to the Canaries which, like the other islands in the Atlantic — the Azores, the Cape Verde Islands, Ascension, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha — have served as ports of call in various ways and at various times from 1600 to the present day. Situated in the eastern Atlantic, the Canaries are about 1500 sea miles from the English Channel, about 4500 miles from South America and South Africa and about 70 miles off the African coast. They lie on the great circle routes between Europe and South America and between Europe and South Africa. They consist of seven islands<sup>14</sup> of which Tenerife and Gran Canaria have been the more important in maritime matters.

As is typical of the other Atlantic islands — Madeira, the Cape Verdes, Ascension, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha — the Canaries are lacking in harbours. On Gran Canaria the headland of La Isleta provided a degree of shelter for La Luz, the port of Las Palmas, and an artificial harbour has been formed by the construction of three moles: the inner or old breakwater, 1250 yards long; the outer or new breakwater to the seaward, 2835 yards long; and the Muelle de S Catalina which runs at right angles to the other two and forms an inner harbour<sup>15</sup>. A smaller sheltered area has been formed by the Muelle Commercial. The general depth of the outer harbour is 36 to 42 feet and the inner harbour 3 to 42 feet. Berthing conditions are good. There are no docks but ship-repairing is a relatively important industry. Elsewhere on Gran Canaria there are only beaches, some of which have been protected by small moles. A number are difficult to use because of swell and wind.

On Tenerife there are two ports, the modern port of Santa Cruz and the relatively insignificant Puerto de la Cruz. A harbour has been formed at Santa Cruz by the construction of two moles, the Muelle del Norte, 150 yards long, and the Muelle del Sur which was extended in 1938 from a length of 250 yards to about 1200 yards. About two-thirds of the enclosed area has a depth exceeding 26 feet. The harbour is partly open to winds from the north-east and a swell generally sets in because of the prevalence of easterly winds. There are no docks here.

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14. In addition to which there are numerous small islets.

15. The original breakwater at Las Palmas was built by Swanson & Miller. PETER N. DAVIES, *The trade makers: Elder Dempster in West Africa, 1852-1972* (Allen & Unwin, 1973), p. 183, note 1.



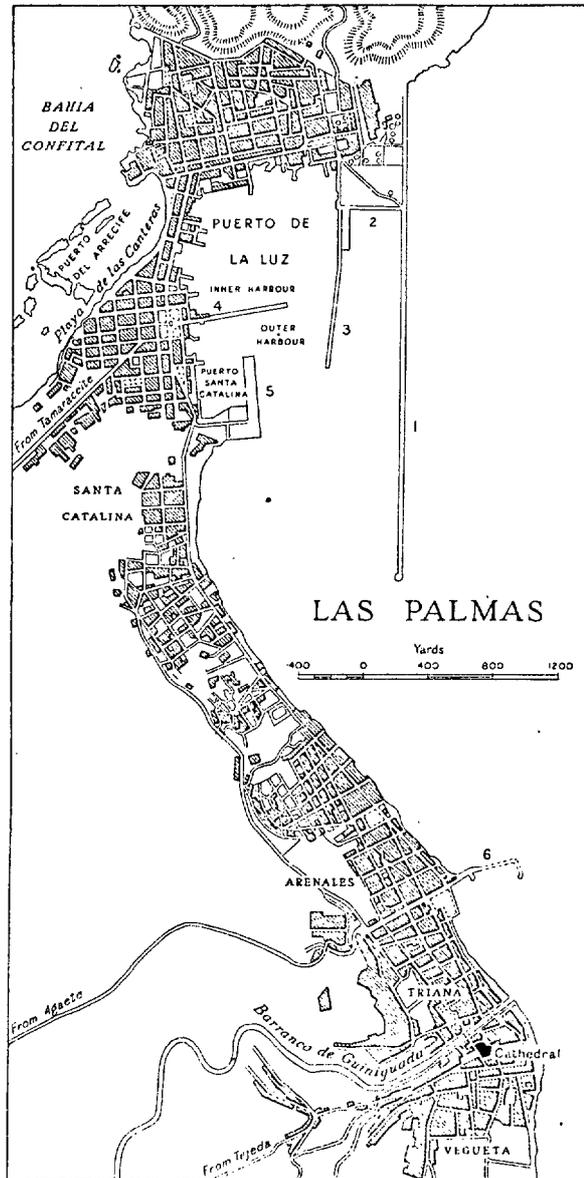
On the eastern side of Puerto de la Cruz there is a small harbour with two short moles but vessels usually anchor about three-quarters of a mile offshore in 50 fathoms of water where they are sheltered from south-easterly winds but exposed to northerlies.

On Gomera, S Sebastián is the single port and the only frequented anchorage. It consists of a small sandy bay at the mouth of the barranco about one mile south-west of Punta de S. Cristóbal. The outer anchorage near the entrance to the bay has 10 to 15 fathoms of water but is exposed to south-easterly winds and cannot offer much security in November and December. There is, however, an inner anchorage within a small well-protected creek (Puerto de la Hila) in the northern part of the bay. The method of discharging goods and passengers is by boat to the landing-stage at Puerto de la Hila or by boat to the beach in front of the town.

From a commercial point of view La Palma is the third most important island of the Canaries. The bulk of its trade passes through the capital, Santa Cruz, and most of the remainder through Puerto de Tazacorte. In addition, Santa Andrés on the north-east coast has a small landing place with a quay that is used by fruit vessels in good weather. The anchorage at Santa Cruz, considered one of the best in the Canaries, is in 10 fathoms about 300 yards from the beach; it affords shelter except during winds from an easterly quarter. The harbour itself is protected by a mole which projects southwards from the southern end of the town. This mole is about 1400 feet long and 65 feet wide and has a depth of 20 feet or more alongside part of its length. It is accessible for ships drawing up to 26 feet but the depths on its inner side range from 12 to 21 feet. The harbour provides good shelter except from south-easterly winds. Since there is no harbour at Puerto de Tazacorte, the inter-island vessels lie off shore and receive fruit from boats or, during the long spells of rough weather, by means of a mechanically-worked aerial cable stretching from the cliff. The usual anchorage, in 17 fathoms at about half a mile off the beach, is exposed to west winds.

The coasts of Hierro are steep and uninviting and the island is probably the most inaccessible of the Canaries. The main anchorage off the island is on the north-east coast at Puerto del Hierro which lies south of Punta Caleta. Here a short mole has been built which can be used by small craft. The anchorage lies in 5 fathoms near the shore of the bay with 17 fathoms close outside it. A second anchorage lies near the southern headland of Punta Restinga in Puerto de Naos with depths





*Plan of Las Palmas and Puerto de la Luz*  
 1 Outer (new breakwater). 2 Esplanade. 3 Inner (old) breakwater. 4 Muelle de  
 S. Catalina. 5 Muelle Comercial. 6 Muelle de Las Palmas

of 9 to 11 fathoms; this is rarely used except by coastal vessels engaged in local trade. A third exposed anchorage, seldom used, stands off the west coast at Puerto de los Reyes.

All the so-called ports of Fuerteventura are mere anchorages except Puerto de Cabras, the capital and chief port. Here there is a stone pier which projects about 100 yards into the sea from the eastern end of the town, thereby giving additional shelter to a creek 40 yards wide by 50 yards long into which small vessels can enter. Inter-island ships berth alongside the pier or anchor in the roadstead just off the port. On the west coast Puerto de Tostón and Puerto de la Peña are rarely visited except by small local boats or by a few sailing-vessels in summer. On the south-east coast the Puerto de Gran Tarajal is visited by inter-island vessels and by fruit boats on the way to Puerto de Cabras. The small bay here is well sheltered except with winds from the east through south to south-west. A small pier has been built but all cargo is transhipped by surf boats and passengers are carried by waders through the surf.

The only frequented ports of Lanzarote are about midway along the east coast at Arrecife where an extensive series of longshore reefs forms the two ports of Naos and Arrecife. Puerto de Naos lies in the shelter of Islote Cruces and the submerged reef adjoining it; on the south it is bounded by the Islote Francés. The harbour is small but secure and has depths of between 9 and 19 feet over sand and mud. The northern entrance between Arrecife de la Raya and the coast has a depth of 7 to 11 feet and is generally used during winds from between north and east. The southern entrance between the Islote Cruces reef and Arrecife del Peregil has similar depths and is generally used when winds are from the south or west. There is a short quay and large ships may obtain anchorage off the port in 18 to 22 fathoms of water. Immediately south-west of Puerto de Naos and connected to it by a very shallow passage are the two basins of Santa Ginés and Estila which act as harbours for small boats and have access by a narrow boat-passage to the Puerto de Arrecife. Here the harbour is mainly formed by the Islote de Santa Gabriel and Arrecife Quebrado. This natural protection has been greatly increased by the construction of a breakwater from the southern end of Santa Gabriel island. The pier is 670 feet long and of this length 250 feet has a depth of 15 feet alongside at low water and will take vessels of up to 800 tons. There are also three moles accessible only to lighters, one at any state of the tide and the other two at high water. Large ships may obtain anchorage in 17 to 30 fathoms in the





roadstead south of Arrecife Quebrado but this anchorage is exposed to southerly winds<sup>16</sup>.

The ensuing discussion will consider the Canaries as ports of call under the following heads:

1 Escales techniques

- a) for victualling and water
- b) for stores and repairs
- c) harbours of refuge
- d) coaling and oil-fuelling stations
- e) convoy ports and privateering base

2) Escales économiques

- f) for orders and market intelligence
- g) intermediate cargo ports
- h) for or with mail
- i) passenger cruise ports of call

3) Escales politiques

- j) imperial ports of call

1 Ecales techniques

- a) for victualling and water

To the subject of the provision of facilities for victualling and water, little attention has been paid in studies of the shipping industry, in histories of individual shipping lines or in accounts of the development of ports. Yet food and water were essential for the operation of ships and the carriage of passengers and some steps had to be taken to make sure they were available at ports. For victualling and water the islands in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans came into prominence. Convenience was important but price was also a factor. In the Atlantic, Madeira, the Canaries, the Cape Verde Islands, St Helena, Ascension Island

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16. This account of the ports and landing places in the Canaries is taken from *Spain and Portugal IV The Atlantic islands* (Naval Intelligence Division, 1945), pp. 134-8, 162-3, 174-5, 184-5, 191, 201, 212-13.

and the Falkland Islands were places where ships might obtain food and water either as a planned and regular call or in an emergency when food supplies ran out or water was exhausted.

Because they could provide abundant water and supplies, the Canaries were indispensable ports of call on the route to the New World. Columbus called at Gomera before setting out on his first voyage to the Indies, taking on provisions at San Sebastián before he left on 7 September 1492. On his second voyage he collected domestic animals at Gomera and, like other explorers after him, called at the Canaries on his other two outward voyages. The Canaries were important on the outward voyages to the West Indies but, because of the pattern of winds and currents, played little part in the return traffic. It was the Azores which served as the 'Canaries de Retours'.

Pierre Chaunu argues that at first Gomera was the island at which more vessels called than any other because it was furthest west but later it gave place to Lanzarote, the nearest island to Europe. For the period 1550-60 Chaunu has calculated that 33 per cent of vessels called at Lanzarote and 31 per cent at Gomera. The other islands were much less important; 12 per cent called at Gran Canaria and only 5 per cent at Tenerife while 19 per cent of the returns did not specify at which island in the Canaries the vessel called<sup>17</sup>.

In the eighteenth century the French Compagnie des Indes, for example, arranged for its vessels to call at Tenerife regularly to replenish their supplies of water, to take on fresh food and to stock up with wine (and also wood)<sup>18</sup>. The ships of other nations, including Dutch East Indiamen<sup>19</sup>, also called for such supplies. And if any of the crew had fallen victim to scurvy they would be put ashore at the port of call to be restored to health.

By the later nineteenth-century, however, the large ocean-going sailing ships had little need for victualling or fresh-water ports except in an emergency. The deepsea sailing vessel sailed self-contained relying on canned foods and replenishing its fresh water supplies from rain.

17. PIERRE CHAUNU: *Séville et l'Atlantique VIII (1) Les structures* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1959), 359-60.

18. *Les grandes escales*, XXXII, 218.

19. JAAP R., BRUIJN, F., S. GAASTRA and I. SCHOFFER: *Dutch-Asiatic shipping in the 17th and 18th centuries, II Outward voyages from the Netherlands to Asia and the Cape 1595-1794* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979).





especially during doldrum showers when the salt was out of the sails. But since the regular and passenger lines required food and water for passengers and crew, the victualling call remained of importance in the steamship era though the need for victualling calls was reduced in this case also by the increased availability of canned foods. Information about how and when these needs were satisfied is scanty. Food supplies for vessels were usually obtained from ship chandlers but so far this question has been little discussed in print<sup>20</sup>. Then, too, how was water supplied? Was any capital investment involved? Who was responsible? Which investors played a part? Were shipping companies involved? As a partial answer to these questions, it is known that Elder Dempster owned water tanks at Calle San Martín and at La Masita in Santa Cruz on Tenerife<sup>21</sup>.

b) for stores and repairs

In the age of sail, ports of call were of significance for supplies of stores and for repair. Consumable stores such as canvas and cordage, pitch, rosin, tar, billet wood, turpentine, candles and vinegar would require regular replacement and ships might require other stores in cases of emergency. In a storm a sailing vessel might be dismasted, lose spars or rigging or suffer damage to her sails and these might have to be replaced. Since it would be cheaper to sail a considerable distance under jury rig to a destination rather than put into a port partially to re-rig, many repairs would be made at sea. But sometimes more needed to be done and the vessel would then put into port. Certainly vessels en route for the West Indies or South America would put into the Canaries for repairs and it has also been stated that the treasure fleets used normally to refit in the Canaries before proceeding to Cadiz and Seville<sup>22</sup>.

While acquiring stores and carrying out repairs were of importance when sailing vessels ruled the seas, they continued to be of significance in the age of steam. In the event of damage to a steamship or the breakdown of its machinery which could not easily be repaired at sea, the possibility to seek shelter to carry out repairs in the Canaries would be

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20. It has been suggested that by the second half of the nineteenth century there was a big organised structure of agents or managing agents in all ports of call who looked after the interests of the calling vessels. See also JAMES S. LEARMONT, *Master in sail* (Percival Marshall rev. ed. 1954), pp. 152, 187.

21. DAVIES: *The trade makers*, p. 453.

22. *Spain and Portugal*, p. 58.



taken readily if the ship was in the vicinity. Alfred Jones established a large marine engineering workshop and a ship repair yard at Puerto de la Luz on Gran Canaria<sup>23</sup>.

c) harbours of refuge

Chaunu describes the Canaries as serving as shelter in two respects. Though not well-endowed with the northern coasts of the islands battered by the winds, the Canaries sometimes provided protection from bad weather. In January 1582, for example, some ships sought refuge from the storms at Gomera and, Chaunu continues, this was not a rare occurrence.<sup>24</sup> On Lanzarote, Puerto de Naos was important as a refuge for small shipping in stormy weather.

The Canaries also served as a refuge from privateers<sup>25</sup> although they were not always successful in this role<sup>26</sup>.

d) coaling and oil-fuelling stations

But the development of the steamship transformed the pattern of ports of call. The early steamships had relatively inefficient and coal-hungry engines and therefore needed to replenish their stocks on long ocean voyages. Moreover, if coal was carried, freight could not be carried. As W S Lindsay wrote in 1874:

Whatever may be gained by not requiring to stop at any intermediate port I consider it a mistake in a commercial point of view to suppose any advantage is to be derived from taking on board on a steam -ship, especially when engaged on foreign voyages, sufficient coal to carry her out and home. The space the coals occupy in a steamer ought to be of more value, for the reception of cargo than the cost of sending coals in sailing vessels to the ports abroad where required, and than any loss sustained by the expense and detention of shipping them there<sup>27</sup>.

If therefore a vessel could coal at fairly frequent intervals she was likely to operate more profitably. But coal was not everywhere availa-

23. DAVIES: *The trade makers*, p. 126.

24. CHAUNU: *Séville et l'Atlantique*, VIII, 357. For other examples see the notes to tables in *Séville et l'Atlantique*, II-IV.

25. CHAUNU: *Séville et l'Atlantique*, VIII, 357.

26. See below section e.

27. *History of merchant shipping and ancient commerce* (London, 1874; reprinted New York: AMS Press, 1965), IV, 494, note 1.



ble; it therefore had to be supplied to the bunkering stations which were set up from the colliery areas. Amongst the ports chosen as coaling stations were Las Palmas and Tenerife. Before 1869 many vessels called at these ports on voyages to and from South America, Africa, Asia or Australia. After the construction of the Suez Canal vessels for Asia and Australia no longer went round the Cape but steamships trading to and from South Africa or South America continued to coal at one of the Atlantic islands.

Amongst the people attracted to the Canary Islands was Alfred Jones, the founder of Elder Dempster, in search of a place to establish a coaling depot for his ships which traded with West Africa. To make this possible, Jones bought collieries at Garth and Maesteg in South Wales and set up two subsidiaries, the Grand Canary Coaling Company and the Tenerife Coaling Company, in 1884 which ran the bunkering facilities in the Canaries<sup>28</sup>. The effect on the Canaries was marked. 'Before Sir Alfred established the Grand Canary Coaling station at Puerto de la Luz in 1884', it was asserted,

The port of Las Palmas was only an open roadstead and about twenty ships per month called there, but four years later the monthly average had increased to a hundred and Grand Canary became one of the most important centres for the coaling of steamers trading to and from South America, Australia, New Zealand and South and West Africa<sup>29</sup>.

Cory Brothers, the major South Wales coal exporting firm, had bunkers in both Las Palmas and Tenerife<sup>30</sup> while coal from the north of England was available at Tenerife<sup>31</sup>. A small amount of German coal was also available in the Canaries, some of it brought by Norwegian vessels which also carried timber for the crates used to pack bananas and tomatoes for export.

28. PETER N. DAVIES: *Sir Alfred Jones: shipping entrepreneur par excellence* (Europa Publications, 1978), pp. 66, 105.

29. DAVIES: *The trade makers*, p. 126.

30. Founded in 1842 in Cardiff, Cory Brothers had 80 coaling stations by 1913. For a list, see *Les grandes escales*, XXXIV, 50.

31. ADAM W. KIRKALDY: *British shipping: its history, organisation and importance* (Kegan Paul, 1914), pp. 602-10.

The choice of bunkering port depended on price - and the cheapness of coal at the Canaries led to a growth in its coal trade. An incident involving an individual vessel helps make the point. Lord Lugard, who on one occasion travelled with Alfred Jones to West Africa via the Canaries on the SS *Benin* in 1898 and did not enjoy his journey, was especially annoyed when the vessel left the Canaries for she had been stacked with coal to such an extent that it was level with the bulwarks:

This, of course, is in utter violation of the Board of Trade rules, which prescribe, I believe, a clear gangway from stem to stern. Thus our lives are risked, and not merely to carry a little extra cargo and make money, but because this coal is cheaper than that at Sierra Leone & c. It is wanted for her *return voyage!* and so we are subject to this filth and inconvenience of constant flying coal dust and our lives risked for Jones' pocket<sup>32</sup>.

Elder Dempster vessels also coaled at the Canaries on their homeward voyages from West Africa<sup>33</sup>.

The Canaries became one of the major coaling stations provided with British coal. About 1900 bunkers for the British Admiralty, for other navies and for over 200 different shipping lines meant the sale of over a quarter of a million tons annually from Las Palmas<sup>34</sup>. 'The coal imported into the Canaries', one commentator wrote, 'is not needed for local industries; there are none; it is destined to supply the bunkers of steamships calling'<sup>35</sup>. By 1913 so great was the increase in demand that over 1 million tons of British coal (out of a total of 21 million tons) was exported to Las Palmas compared with a similar amount to Montevideo and 1.5 million tons to Port Said<sup>36</sup>. In this, price played a part. When Owen Philipps (later Lord Kylsant) acquired Elder Dempster, he thought the Grand Canary Coaling Company.

32. Davies, *Sir Alfred Jones*, p. 115.

33. Davies, *Sir Alfred Jones*, p. 67.

34. Davies, *Sir Alfred Jones*, p. 61.

35. A J Sargent, *Seaways of the empire: notes on the geography of transport* (Black, 1918) p. 6.

36. Committee on Industry and Trade (Balfour), *Survey of overseas markets* (HMSO, 1925) Statistical Tables, part II.



Should have a bigger proportion of the 'Coal Pool'. The other six members disagreed and in October 1910 a price-war broke out. This continued for several years and at one time the Las Palmas price dropped to equal the Cardiff price. During this time Philipps's opponents imported Newcastle coal in hired Danish ships - tomatoes being backloaded for the return voyage. Eventually, however, the situation was regularised [by] the setting up of the Atlantic Isles Depot Agreement<sup>37</sup>.

In 1912 nearly 7000 steamships with a total tonnage of 16 million tons called at the Canaries to bunker cheaply. More than half were British ships but there were also ships belonging to Germany, Spain, Norway, France, Italy and Austria-Hungary<sup>38</sup>.

Bunkering was facilitated at both Las Palmas and Tenerife by the use of steam tugs and lighters, some of which were owned by the two Elder Dempster concerns, the Grand Canary Coaling Company and the Tenerife Coaling Company<sup>39</sup>.

The bunker market was also affected by the demand for shipping. The main influence controlling the coal trade of the Canaries was to be found in the demands of the South American market. When the maize crop failed in the Argentine in 1911 ships were diverted to other markets and so the number of calls in the Canaries for coal dropped<sup>40</sup>.

The replacement of coal-fired snips by oil-fuelled vessels brought about a further shift in the pattern of bunkering but the Canaries were able to hold their position as major bunkering ports of call. An oil refinery was established on Tenerife in 1929 with the result that its cargo receipts were dominated by imports of crude oil for this installation while its list of shipments were headed by petroleum products. Las Palmas also became an important oil bunker port. It was able to offer oil cheaply, as it had done coal, because a number of oil companies established oil terminals there and the competition between oil suppliers kept prices down. In the 1930s it was stated that the facilities for oil-fuelling were excellent, 'pipelines being laid on to numerous points on the inner and outer breakwaters'<sup>41</sup>. In 1956 Las Palmas sold

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37. Davies, *The trade makers*, pp. 182-3.

38. Sargent, *Seaways*, pp. 3-4.

39. Davies, *Trade makers*, p. 455.

40. Sargent, *Seaways*, p. 8.

41. *Spain and Portugal*, p. 138.





1.9 million tons of oil for bunkers and Tenerife 0.7 million tons<sup>42</sup>. For Las Palmas a peak of 2.6 million tons reached in 1970. With the oil crisis and the world depression bunkering fell sharply and the 1983 figure was less than 1.5 millions.

e) convoy ports and privateering base

The Canaries served as a meeting place for Spanish convoys and for the Portuguese also before the vessels set out on their westward voyages across the Atlantic.

Because of their position astride the sea routes down the African coast and across the Atlantic, the Canaries also served as a nest for privateers. Around 1540 they served as a base for French corsairs. The Englishman, John Hawkins, also launched his raids on Spanish shipping from 'the fortunate archipelago'<sup>43</sup>. The Dutch East India vessel *Hof van Breda* which sailed from Texel on 22 May 1675 was taken in the Canary Islands by four Turkish privateers after a heavy fight with more than 100 casualties<sup>44</sup>. And many other examples could be cited.

## 2 Escales économiques

f) for orders and market intelligence

Before the age of radio, messages could usually only be sent to a ship if she could put into port. Calling for orders or market intelligence was therefore a method by which owners or masters could obtain later information and masters could receive new instructions. In the seventeenth, eighteenth and much of the nineteenth century, it was common for European merchants to have agents with whom they could correspond. *The Bolton letters*, which provide a record of an English merchant living in Madeira who acted for London merchants between 1690 and 1714, vividly illuminate how an agent in another Atlantic island operated<sup>45</sup> and no doubt other agents carried out similar functions in the Canaries.

The position improved in the later nineteenth century when the

42. Gunnar Alexandersson and Gövan Nörstrom, *World shipping* (Wiley, 1963) p. 247.

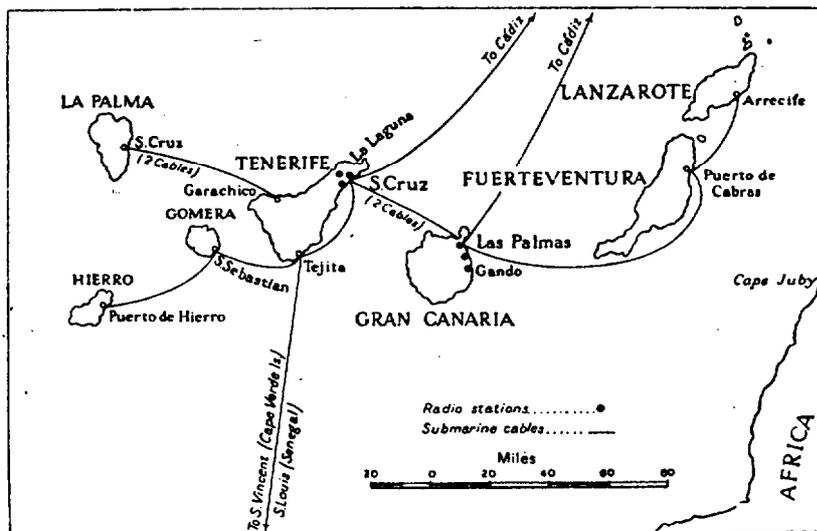
43. Chaunu, *Séville et l'Atlantique*, VIII, 357.

44. Bruijn et al. *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, II, 188-9.

45. André Simon, *The Bolton letters: the letters of an English merchant in Madeira 1695-1714, vol. I 1695-1700* (Werner Laurie, 1928).



Atlantic islands were linked with Europe and Africa by submarine cables and it then became possible to telegraph messages to the Azores, Madeira or the Canaries. The English Eastern Telegraph Company laid a cable from Lisbon to Madeira in 1873—a link between Porthcurno (Cornwall) and Lisbon having been completed earlier—and in the following year cables were laid from Madeira to St. Vincent in the Cape Verdes and then on to Recife in Brazil. The whole chain from England to Brazil was open for traffic in June 1874<sup>46</sup>. Two Spanish-owned cables were laid connecting the Canaries with Cadiz, one running direct from Las Palmas and the other direct from Santa Cruz de Tenerife, the first becoming operational in December 1883. An Italian cable was laid from Malaga to Confital Bay (Las Palmas, Gran Canaria) and another from Teija (Tenerife) to Sao Vicente (Cape Verde Islands), and a French cable from Teija to St Louis (Senegal). As the accompanying map shows, the main islands of the Canaries were also linked by



The Signal Communications of the Canaries

cable. Two cables ran from Regla Bay (Tenerife) to Confital Bay and another two from Garachico (Tenerife) to Bajamar (near Santa Cruz, La Palma). Single cables ran from Teija to San Sebastián (Gomera),

46. K C Baglehole, *A century of service* (Cable & Wireless, 1969) pp. 43-4.



from San Sebastián to Puerto del Hierro (Hiero), from Las Palmas to Puerto de Cabras (Fuerteventura) and from Puerto de Cabras to Arrecife (Lanzarote)<sup>47</sup>. All of these were Spanish-owned. These cables increased the importance of the Canaries as calling ports for orders.

In 1878 Stevens wrote that:

The custom has much increased of late years to direct great numbers of vessels, especially those which are grain-laden, to a port of call in the first place, in order that facilities may be given for the sale and resale of cargoes at any market in the United Kingdom or the Continent which may offer the greatest advantages up to the latest period. This custom is fast extending, but is now chiefly practised in the grain, seed, and sugar trades. Those engaged in any particular trade generally agree on a form of charter-party which may be best suited to the peculiar circumstances of the case.

Stevens further noted that there were also 'ports of call on an outward voyage to which the masters of vessels are directed by charter-party to proceed for the purpose of receiving orders as to the loading port'<sup>48</sup>.

Not only sailing vessels but steamships also made such calls. Until the first world war it was common practice for a considerable proportion of the wheat and maize despatched from the Argentine to be consigned not to a fixed destination but 'for orders'. The same was true for grain ships from Australia and California coming to Europe via Cape Horn. In both cases, ships would be cleared for Las Palmas or Tenerife, their ultimate discharge port being left uncertain. Telegraphed instructions also provided the basis of operation for trans ships which could receive orders directing them to the most appropriate port for the cargo they were carrying or give instructions about future cargoes.

Their importance of this category of ports of call has inevitably declined with the improvement in communications and the general adoption of radio which have rendered it unnecessary for a master to put into port to receive instructions or to obtain the latest news about the state of the market.

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47. *Spain and Portugal*, pp. 106-7.

48. Stevens, 'Ports of call', *On stowage*.



g) intermediate cargo ports

The Canaries owed their importance more to their position as ports of call than to their own production. Apart from coal and then oil which were brought in to stock the bunkers, the Canaries required foodstuffs to feed both their own population and the great numbers of visitors who came by sea and also —though this lies outside the immediate scope of this paper— by air. Maize, wheat and flour were obtained chiefly from the Argentine, sugar, potatoes and preserves mainly from Great Britain and fish, poultry, coffee, olive oil, canned goods and other foodstuffs from other sources as well. The manufactured goods needed by the population were almost entirely brought from outside. In the 1930s the chief imports were hardware and machinery of various types, cotton goods and other textiles, rubber goods, paper, matches and pottery. The iron and steel products were shared mainly by Belgium, Germany and Great Britain but the latter was the most important source of textiles. The Canaries also required imports to foster their agricultural production: artificial fertilisers and chemicals came from Great Britain and Belgium, sulphur from France and Italy and fruit-packing materials mainly from Sweden and Portugal. Most of this trade was carried on by vessels making intermediate calls<sup>49</sup>.

The export trade falls into three phases; first wine, then cochineal, then bananas and tomatoes. In early Spanish colonial days Canary wines were exported to the West Indies and Mexico and even over the Isthmus of Panama to Peru. Canary wine was also carried in the later seventeenth and during the eighteenth centuries to the English colonies in North America and the West Indies but the market for Canary wine in England was restricted by the limited market which the Canaries provided for English exports<sup>50</sup>. The trade in Canary wine fell off during the early decades of the nineteenth century and especially after 1850. Some of this wine trade had been carried on vessels which sailed directly to the Canaries but most of it was carried on vessels which were making intermediate calls.

The second phase was briefer. The Canaries found a market for cochineal which was used as a dye particularly in the textile trades. Beginning with 8 lb in 1831, the shipments of cochineal rose rapidly, especially after the collapse of the wine trade about 1850. In 1869

49. *Spain and Portugal*, 98-9.

50. A D Francis, *The wine trade* (A & C Black, 1972) pp. 133, 162.



exports exceeded 6 million lb (worth £700,000)<sup>51</sup>. Four years earlier John Dempster had written to prospective clients:

Knowing that you are large importers of cochineal I take the liberty of writing to ask your opinion with respect to our steamers calling at Grand Canary or Teneriffe during the cochineal season. My idea of rate would be 1/2 d. per lb., and if we thought there was any likelihood of our getting cochineal in any quantity at that rate, we might arrange for to call at one or both ports on the homeward voyage<sup>52</sup>.

With the development of aniline dyes in the 1880s, the trade in cochineal dropped sharply. Exports of cochineal to the United Kingdom fell from £64,579 in 1885-9 to £13,388 in 1910-14<sup>53</sup>. A small quantity of cochineal continued to be produced for the manufacture of rouge and lipstick and for use in silk-dyeing<sup>54</sup>.

The third and continuing phase concerns the export of agricultural products, particularly bananas and tomatoes. The banana trade is discussed in another paper presented at this conference. Like the cochineal trade, the banana and tomato exports were carried on ships which called at the Canaries as well as those whose voyages terminated there. A list of the main shipping lines which were calling regularly at the islands during the early part of 1939 runs as follows<sup>55</sup>:

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| British lines: | Shaw Savill (Liverpool to S. Africa and Australia)<br>Elder-Dempster (Liverpool, and London to gulf of Guinea)<br>Blue Star (London to S. America)<br>Natal (London to S. and E. Africa)<br>Royal Mail (London to S. America)<br>Union-Castle (London to S. and E. Africa)<br>Yeoward (Liverpool to Canaries) |
| German lines:  | German Africa (Hamburg to gulf of Guinea, and to S. and E. Africa)  |
| Italian lines: | Italian (Naples to Vancouver; Genoa to east and west coasts of S. America)<br>Lloyd Triestino (Trieste to S. Africa)  |

51. *Spain and Portugal*, p. 133.

52. Davies, *The trade makers*, p. 58.

53. Davies, *The trade makers*, p. 151.

54. *Spain and Portugal*, p. 159.

55. *Spain and Portugal*, p. 100.

French lines:	Navigation Paquet (Marseilles to Canaries) Faire et Fraissenet (Marseilles to gulf of Guinea)
Spanish line:	Transmediterránea (Barcelona, and Bilbao to Canaries)
Belgian line:	Maritime Belge (Antwerp to gulf of Guinea)
Norwegian line:	Fred. Olsen

From this list it is clear that most of the steamships entering the Canaries were calling vessels.

*h) for or with mail*

Since Las Palmas is conveniently situated at the crossroads of the oceans of the world, in addition to the mail routes from Spain which had their destination in the Canaries, other vessels called at Las Palmas or Tenerife both to bring mail to these ports and to carry it away. In addition to the Union and Castle Line vessels<sup>56</sup>, other steamships made mail calls in the Canaries, often bringing passengers as well. The African Steam Ship Company's mail steamers made a call at Tenerife en route to West Africa<sup>57</sup>. There were Spanish vessels on the runs from Genoa to Cuba and back and from Southampton to Kingston (Jamaica) and return, Portuguese liners on routes between Lisbon, Curaçao and Fort Lauderdale and on the Lisbon-Rio de Janeiro routes, vessels of the Lloyd Triestino and Navigazione Generale Italiana sailing between Genoa and South America and Greek vessels as well. After the amalgamation of the Union and Castle Lines in 1900 Union Castle intermediate vessels used to touch at Tenerife and Las Palmas alternately until 1939. Since the war fortnightly mail calls were made at Las Palmas by Union Castle liners, both on the outward and homeward voyages. But these have now been withdrawn. The development of regular air services has provided a quicker and more frequent alternative route for mails and so the mailship service to Las Palmas has virtually ceased, as it has done worldwide<sup>58</sup>.

*i) passenger cruise ports of call*

The economic and social history of the passenger cruise trade is uncharted territory and only an outline can be given here. By 1884 the attractions of the Canaries with their soft climate and plentiful sunshine were being set out in articles in British journals and tours were

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56. Marischal Murray, *Union-Castle chronicle 1853-1953* (Longmans, 1953) p. 299.

57. Davies, *The trade makers*, p. 75.

58. The mail carried by air exceeded that brought by sea for the first time in 1956.



being advertised and no doubt similar advertising appeared in publications in other European countries. In the British case, intermediate steamers of both the Union Line and the Castle Line were doing well from the tourist trade. A circular of the Union Line, issued in 1889, referred to the Canaries as islands to which there was 'a growing traffic in invalids'<sup>59</sup>. The itineraries varied somewhat but in general the Castle liners went to Las Palmas and the Union liners to Tenerife<sup>60</sup>. To inform tourists, a literature developed. *Brown's Madeira, Canary Islands, and Azores* ran through many editions before it ceased publication in 1932 and was then succeeded by A Gordon Brown, *Ma-deira and the Canary Islands* (3rd edition, 1963) which was specifically designed for the 'stop-over' visitors travelling on the Union Castle liners.

In 1912 it was reported that the number of ship passengers visiting Tenerife was 12,000. Twenty years later the number had grown to 37,000 while in the same year 43,000 passed through Las Palmas<sup>61</sup>. In 1940 the figure for Tenerife had risen to 43,000<sup>62</sup>. The passenger cruise business in subject to the competition of other forms of holiday and the whims of tourists. It declined after the second world war when the stock of passenger vessels was low but the demand for cruising rose again in the 1960s. In 1968 a total of 450,000 passengers visited the Canaries while in 1982 250,000 passengers landed at Tenerife and 268,000 at Las Palmas<sup>63</sup>. In the brochures which can be found in British travel agencies in the mid-1980s are advertised cruises by British companies (Cunard with the *QE II* and P & O with the *Canberra* and *Sea Princess*), the Norwegian line Fred. Olson and the Russian CTC cruise firm. For a period in the 1970s the Finnish Finnjet, which was employed in the summer in the Baltic, operated as a cruise line out of Las Palmas in the winter. No doubt the pattern of passenger cruising will continue to change but it seems likely that the Canary Islands will continue to have a place in the scheme of things.

Such traffic has a marked impact on the local economy. Wherever cruise liners called there was an incentive to provide for passen-

59. Murray, *Union-Castle chronicle*, p. 299.

60. Murray, *Union-Castle chronicle*, p. 299.

61. *Spain and Portugal*, p. 162.

62. Alexandersson and Nörstrom, *World shipping*.

63. Instituto Nacional Estadístico, *Anuario estadístico de España*, LXIII (1983).





gers. Cafés and restaurants, places of entertainment and shops grew up to cater for the tourists and some proportion of the local population came to derive an income from the visit of passenger liners.

### 3 Escales politiques

#### j) imperial ports of call

This is an aspect of ports of call which appears to have had very little importance as far as the Canaries were concerned. In the early modern period, because of the pattern of the winds and currents, Spanish vessels naturally called at the Canaries on their way to the West Indies or South America but from the nineteenth century when the sea routes were developed predominantly by British shipping there has been no need for purely political calls to maintain connections between the Canaries and the outside world. But these links were sharply reduced during the two world wars.

Finally, a rather unusual example is provided by the Dutch East Indiaman, the *Verenigde Provinciën*, which called at the Canaries on its outward voyage in 1652 in order to get rid of some women who had been surprised by the sudden departure of the vessel from the Netherlands<sup>64</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

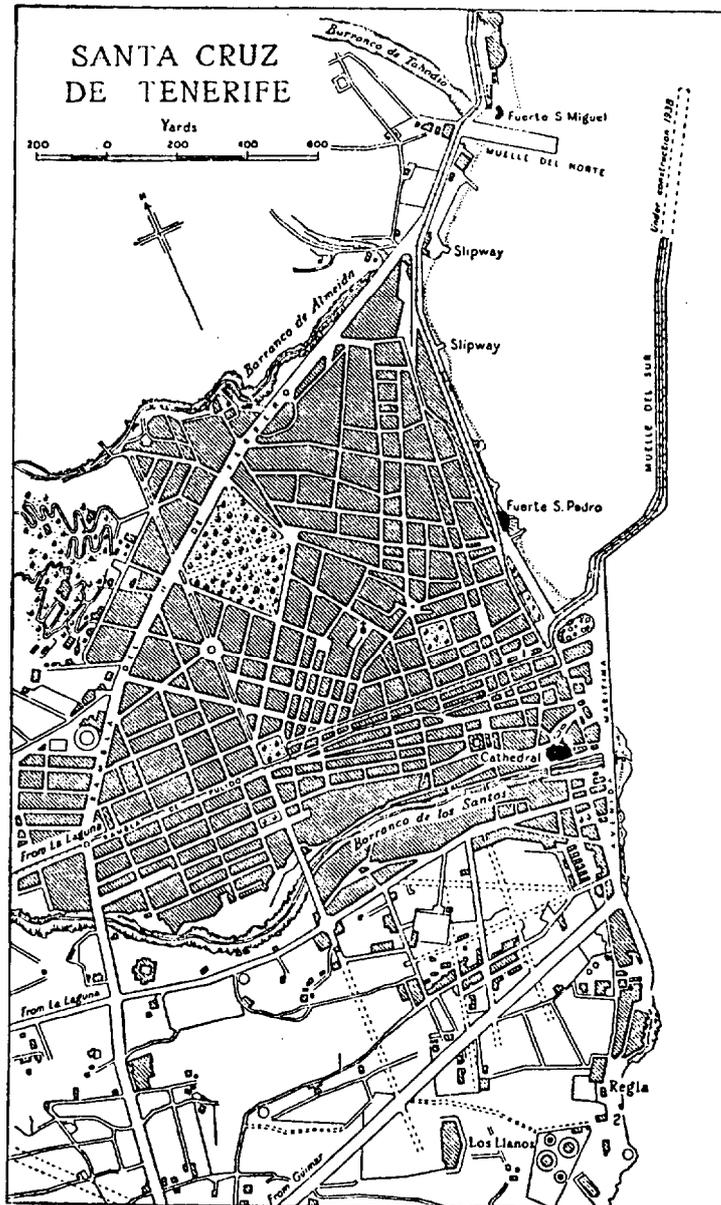
As has been demonstrated above, the role of the Canaries as ports of call was the product of their geographical position and was greatly affected by changing trading relationships, a pattern of meteorological conditions, developments in marine and communications technology and other factors. Sometimes the requirements of a port of call had small and limited consequences and resulted in little capital investment but in other cases, of which the Canaries provide examples, the role of a port of call was of major significance, resulting in substantial capital investment, a spread of expertise, developments in terms of organisation and institutions and the growth of employment. For this reason it is appropriate to devote a paper to a discussion of

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64. Bruijn et al. *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, II, 108.

this subject for port activities and tourism are major aspects of the islands' economy and it is also appropriate that it should be presented by an Englishman in view of the fact, as other papers to this congress also demonstrate, that British shipping and investment has played a major role in the recent economic history of the Canaries. But, of course, what is said here is only an outline. It is, however, a story which is worth telling at this length and, in the future, in more detail.





*Plan of S. Cruz de Tenerife*  
 1 Plaza de la Constitución. 2 Cable hut.