

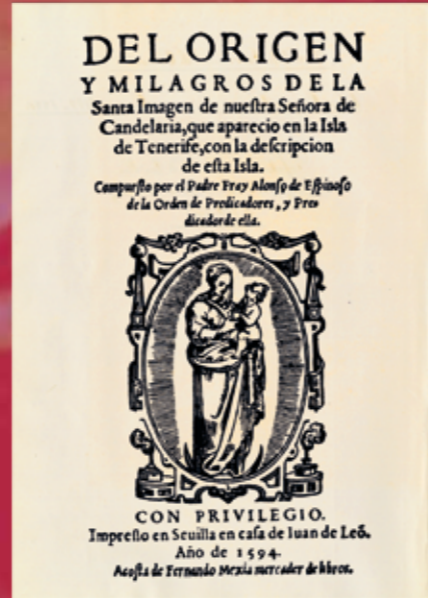


A group of Guanches with spears

The **Guanche Ceremony** is an ancient ritual celebrated yearly on 14 August at sunset. It begins indoors, as Our Lady of Candelaria leads a procession to the outside of her Basilica. Once there, a local group known as Colectivo Guanches de Candelaria re-enacts the discovery of her image, which took place before the conquest of Tenerife.

The Ceremony's script corresponds to the events narrated by the Dominican friar Alonso de Espinosa, in his work *On the Origin and Miracles of the Holy Image of Our Lady of Candelaria, which Appeared in the Island of Tenerife with the Description of this Island*, first published in Seville in 1594.

The work consists of four books in which, in addition to narrating the events related to the apparition of the image of Our Lady of Candelaria, Alonso de Espinosa included a detailed description of the island of Tenerife and its inhabitants, the Guanches. Being one of the first printed volumes about the Canary Islands, it is considered as one of the major sources of the history of the Archipelago, a reference work for all later historians.



An image of Espinosa's book cover

Organized by: Ayuntamiento de Candelaria and Basílica de Candelaria. • Coordinated by: Concejalía de Identidad Canaria • Photographs: Sheila Torres, José-Foto and the photographic archive of the Ayuntamiento de Candelaria



To Download the Ceremony's programme as a pdf file.



The Guanche Ceremony

Candelaria

H A N D P R O G R A M

The re-enactment of the discovery of Our Lady of Candelaria's image is the main representative event of her festivities, which every year gather together thousands of "romeros", - pilgrims-, coming from all over the island, both on 14 and 15 August:

At a particular time every year, almost all the inhabitants of the island go there in pilgrimage [...] as from the priest to the most humble of the peasants, each of them seems to be convinced of its mediation and intercession with Heaven...

George Glas (1764)

The "Ceremonia Guanche", as it is widely known, was the first religious-festive dramatization in the Canary Islands, presenting the historic memory of both the former inhabitants of the Archipelago and that of their descendants. Although we know it dates back at least to the eighteenth century, there is no information as to how and when it was first performed.



Black and white picture of the 1940s. The sandy area during the performance

"native" Guanches. In addition, we see new participants joining the group every year, either because of a family tradition, out of devotion or to thank Our Lady for answering their prayers. Taking part in the Ceremony is for them a source of pride, with a deep sense of ritual strengthening of the collective identity.

Awarded with the town hall's gold medal years ago, the Colectivo Guanches de Candelaria is in charge of performing the Ceremony every year, handing this legacy down from parents to children. Its members come mainly from the local mountainous areas, some of them descending from the

First act: The Discovery

As two Guanche shepherds lead their cattle along the shore, they suddenly notice that their now scared livestock refuse to carry on. They are surprised to find on a stone the figure of a strange woman with a child in her arms. As it was forbidden by law to talk to a woman in a deserted place, the shepherds make her signs to move aside, but she stands still ignoring their gestures.



The shepherds, from behind, watching the image of Our Lady

One of the shepherds gets angry and tries to throw a stone at her, so that she would move away, but he turns stiff when raising his arm. The other shepherd tries to hurt her with his tabona, - a sharp stone -, although, to their amazement, he only manages to hurt himself.

Terrified of these extraordinary incidents, they discuss what to do and decide to go and inform the Mencey of Güímar, since they were his vassals.

Second Act: The Miracle

The two shepherds tell the Mencey all they had witnessed, showing their stiff arms as evidence. Accompanied by part of his people, the Mencey decides to go to the same beach and see for himself. He is astonished at the sight of such a strange woman, so different from all that he had known until then.

The Mencey talking about the image with his people



In spite of his attempts to communicate, the woman does neither respond nor move, to his greater amazement. The Mencey becomes aware of her majestic figure and therefore decides to move her to his dwellings. However, he is afraid of her and dares neither come near nor touch her. For this reason, he orders the two shepherds to carry the figure. Terrified, they move closer and touch the woman, being miraculously healed over their wounds.

The Mencey understands that she is endowed with unearthly powers, and commands that only he and his people are to come near her, to carry her themselves. Due to the discovery, the Guanches jump for joy with their spears as an aid and play their bucios, - conches-, in honour of the image.



The Guanches play their bucios and jump for joy with their spears as an aid

The Guanches move the image to Chinguaro, the Mencey of Guimar's auchón,- cave home-, in order to accommodate her there. He carries her with his own hands while the other Guanches guard her on the way. While advancing, they blow their bucios to pay her the highest tributes.



Image of Our Lady at the beginning of the night procession, escorted by some Guanches

Third Act: The Night Procession

The Night Procession is the epilogue of the Ceremony, during which the image of Our Lady is carried through the local streets with the greatest honours. At around midnight, the Lady of Candelaria returns to her sanctuary, where the Guanches kneel before her and bid her farewell with joy and devotion.



Picture of the Night Procession. A Striking picture of Our Lady

The Guanches escorting the Lady during the procession works not only as a remembrance of the events of her discovery, but also as a means to reinforce their collective identity. For centuries, the "native" Guanches confronted civil and ecclesiastical authorities in order not to lose this ancient privilege, inherited from their ancestors. Nowadays, 14 August is the only time of the year when this privilege is exercised again.

GLOSSARY:

Auchón: Cave home

Chinguaro : Location of the Mencey of Güímar's dwellings.

Güímar: One of the districts in which Tenerife was divided before being conquered.

Mencey: King or lord of a particular territory.

Tabona: Sharp stone used by the Guanches.