

## ***The Legacy of Tenerife to the Americas***

*Annick Sanjurjo Casciero*

This work deals with the emigration of Spanish women during the development of the population in the Americas and describes the participation of women from Extremadura and Tenerife. It establishes the indelible contribution of Tenerife in the transformation of traditional lace into what is now called *Encaje de Tenerife* or *Ñandutí* in Paraguay and other countries of America where similar techniques were created.

# ***THE LEGACY OF TENERIFE TO THE AMERICAS***

**by Annick Sanjurjo**

"The Lace of Tenerife ... roses that are suns" was the name given to the excellent exhibition of Tenerife lace that was presented by the Museum of Ibero-American Crafts in La Orotava, Tenerife, in November 2009, which called the attention for the quality, richness and beauty of the exhibited pieces. Moreover, by including a large number of examples of this lace made in the most diverse parts of the world, mainly in the Americas, it had the merit of presenting evidence of the Canarian presence beyond the coasts of its small territory.

In accordance to the title of the aforementioned exhibition, the terms "roses" - or rosettes - and "suns" are synonyms and identify the *Lace of Tenerife*, a name not used on that island. However, it was frequent in the middle of the last century that the name of lace of Tenerife was used in America, and that there were many hands that did it then, as they are still doing today. The term "rosettes" is not used in this continent. These "roses" are radiated circles on which are interwoven diverse motifs with thread and sewing needle. They are made, each one separately, on a pad called "pique". Once finished, the pins that held them onto the pad are removed and the individual roses are joined together, again with thread and needle, to form the desired garment.



***Roses or Rosetts***



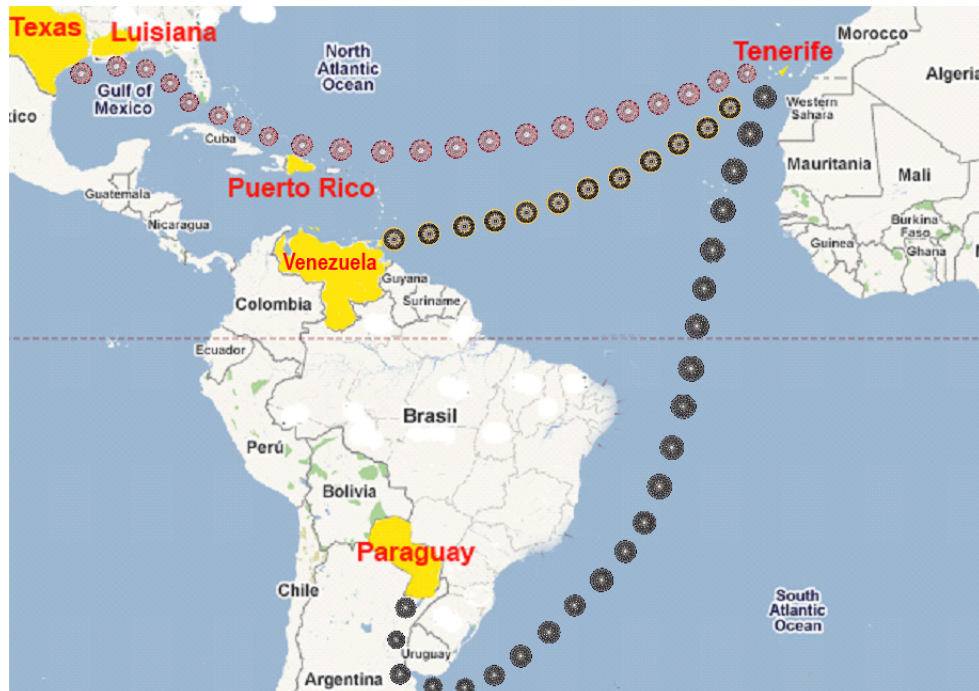
***Piques***

In addition to the name “Tenerife Lace”, the moniker that persisted in Ibero-America is “sun”, just as they were called those made in Extremadura and other locations in Spain. To identify their provenance, the location of their confection was added, such as the suns of Salamanca or those of El Casar in Extremadura; the “suns of Maracaibo” in Venezuela; or in Puerto Rico, the “suns of Naranjito”. To identify its heritage further the last name or family name “of Tenerife” was added.

¿How did it happen that were the “suns of Tenerife” that reached the new world? Simply because the number of Canarians that migrated to America was extremely high. From the beginning of the conquest, and continuing during following centuries, the Canary Islands were free to trade with the New World, and due to a Royal Order of 1511, anyone could embark with the sole authorization of the captain of the ships that docked, mostly in La Gomera and Tenerife, to replenish supplies.

A fact of great importance and interest to the subject that concerns us, was that by the end of the seventeenth century the emigration consisted of entire families, no longer just individuals. In 1678, the Spanish Crown, aware that their Caribbean and North American possessions were invaded by the English and French, decided to protect them by issuing a royal edict, which came to be known as the "Tribute in Blood", since it established that for every five Canarian families one hundred tons of Canarian goods were to be exempt from export taxes. This royal edict benefited settlers by freeing them from paying onerous export taxes. The economic problems of the Canary Island were such that thousands opted for a promising adventure. Emigrants were given free passage, free lands in the colonies, a stipend of 500 Reales, seeds and agricultural tools. In South America, to stop the Brazilian expansion southward, the Crown found Montevideo, today the capital of Uruguay, that resulted on the relocation of 1724 families from the Canary Island and others from Buenos Aires, now the capital of Argentina.

These new immigrants colonized lands, founded towns, and put into practice what they brought with them, mainly their crops and their culture. In general, the majority was devoted to agriculture, some to livestock and, over time, more than one became an important landowner or successful entrepreneur. Meanwhile, the women promoted the lace of Tenerife to such an extent that, even today more than two centuries hence, it is still present.



*Migratory Roads*

It is worth noting that, also after four centuries, there are still in the United States associations of Canarian descendants who continue calling themselves “isleños”, (islanders), clutching stubbornly to their identity.

Between 1740 y 1757, seven hundred and eleven persons arrived to Florida, but because of the war with England in 1763, this territory became English and the majority of the Canarians moved to Cuba.

Particularly fascinating is the history of the 4,000 Canarians who left for Louisiana between 1777 and 1783. In reality, only half would arrive, since the rest preferred to stay in Cuba and Venezuela, where the ships made stops. These 2,000 people founded four towns in southern Louisiana, but the only one that survived to this day, with many difficulties, is Saint Bernard Village, about 35 kilometers east of New Orleans. It is the group that probably suffered the most hardships, and continues to suffer, because of the inclement weather in the territories that were assigned to them, subject to constant storms, hurricanes and floods, since they are very close to the Gulf of Mexico and the swamps of the Mississippi River. This undoubtedly led them to devote a little to agriculture, but mainly to work related to fishing and trapping.





Perhaps because of their constant struggles with the environment they formed a group that jealously maintains its unity, the concept of family, its archaic language, as well as its dances, its music, its meals and typical costumes. Annually, in March, they perform a great celebration, which they call "The Isleños Fiesta" or "The Isleños Festival", where there is no shortage of exhibitions of all the manifestations of their ancient culture, among them, of course, samples of the lace of Tenerife or Teneriffe lace.



Before Hurricane Katrina, which hit them hard in 2005, there were two small but charming museums, one of which worked in a house built around 1840 by Vicente Núñez. Mr. Nunez was

the son of an islander who arrived in Louisiana in 1778 and whose granddaughters donated it so that the Isleños Museum would be established there.



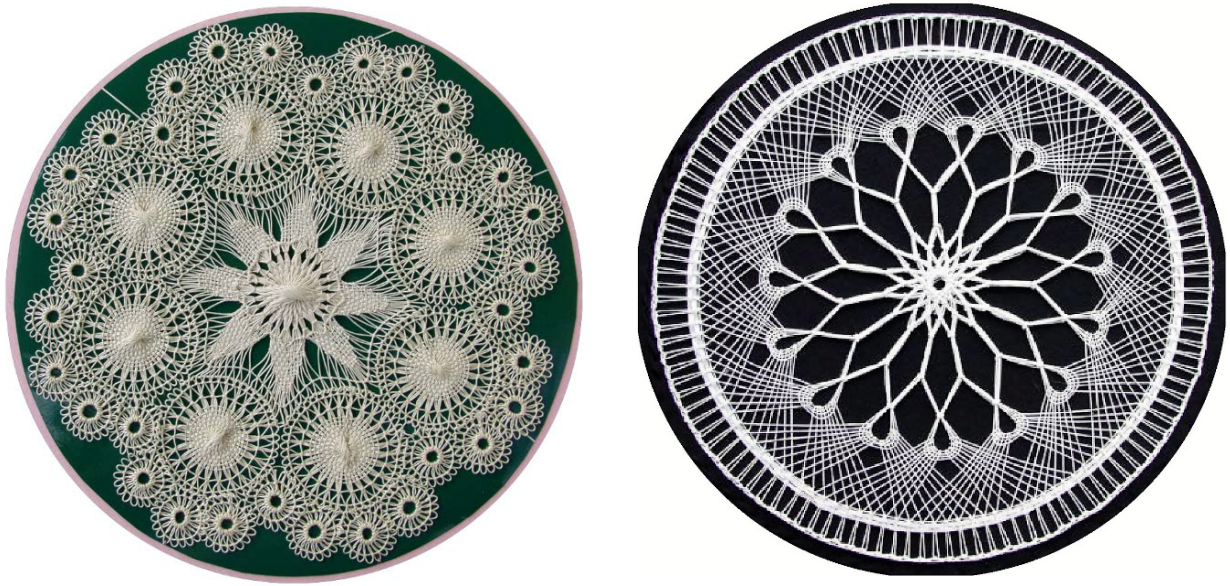
Next door was the library, where a dozen ladies who taught how to make lace met weekly. According to them, this tradition was lost, but one day they found in the attic of a house a small basket that had a label that among other things said "Tenerife", which contained all the implements to make lace: needles, threads, and pad.



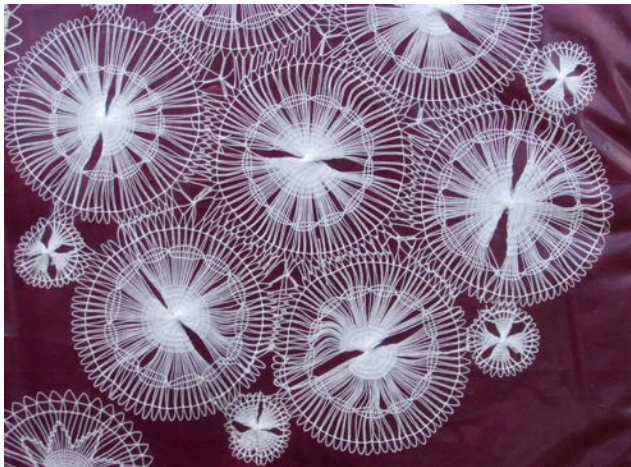
*Original basket with pads*



Not knowing what it was about, they wrote to the governor of the Canary Islands, who financed a stay for them so that they could again learn what they had forgotten. One of the participant guests, who was neither an islander nor lived in Saint Bernard, took up making this lace with such enthusiasm that she started to "reinvent" it, and following a rather complicated process of counting and weaving threads, she made some very elaborate but beautiful suns.



*Suns made by Isleños*



After the hurricane a lot has been innovated, rebuilt or restored, like the house of Mr. Núñez, but there are still hands that keep alive the old lace tradition of Tenerife lace.

Between 1724 and 1783, about 130 families left Cuba for Texas, although majority decided to stay in Cuba. After two years of travel a contingent of 16 families arrived at their destination. They are the ones who, in 1731, participated in the foundation of San Fernando de Béxar, today San Antonio. During a visit made to that city in 2004, it was not possible to gather any information about the lace. However, years before, a young Texan who had been in Paraguay informed us that in the border cities with Mexico this type lace was made, since his mother bought it there.

In Texas, not only Tenerife lace made was made there. The Canarians left traces of the many details of their daily life. Those first Canary islanders participated in the construction of the Cathedral of San Fernando, which is one of the oldest Catholic cathedrals in the United States. On the square in front the church, the descendants of those first islanders are still attending mass yearly commemorating one more anniversary of the founding of the city. Another remarkable example are the Canarian made tablecloths that cover the tables of the former Governor's Palace, today considered a historical monument.

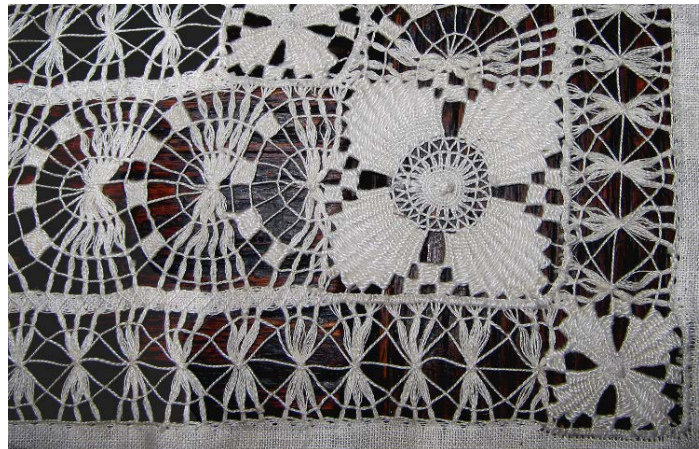


*The original Governor's Palace, San Antonio, TX*





*Details of a tablecloth of the Palace*



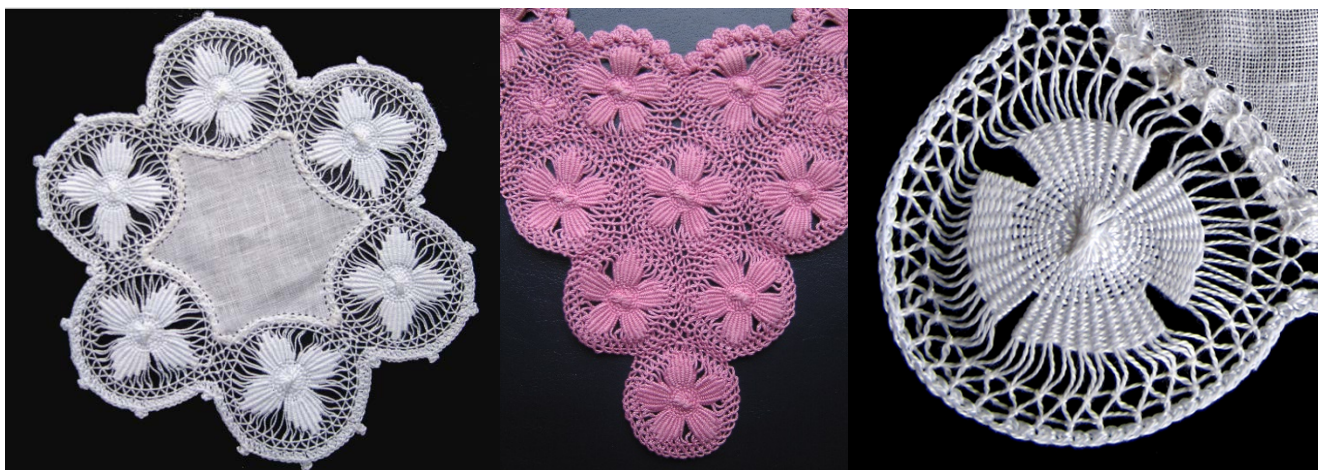
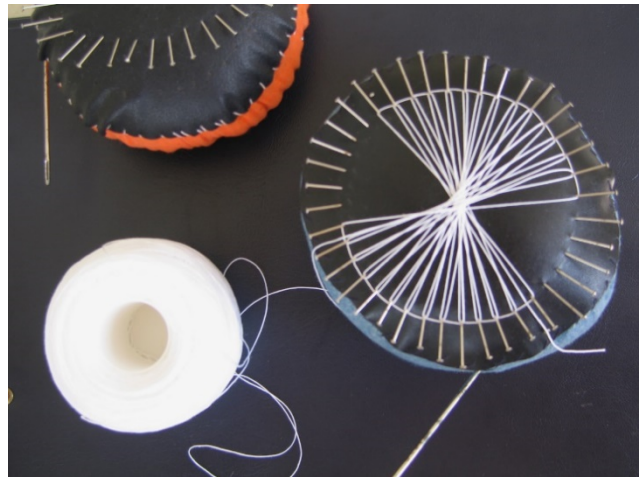
It is possible that these Canarian-Texans have also been responsible for lace made in northern Mexico, with the same technique as the Tenerife lace.





The Canarian emigration was very important in the Caribbean islands and there are remnants of the Tenerife lace as proof of it. The first twenty families arrived in Puerto Rico in 1695, followed by many more afterwards. Just between 1720 and 1730 the Crown partially financed the transfer of 176 families, and this emigration continued until the beginning of the 20th century. Manuel Hernández González, Professor of American History at the University of La Laguna stated: "Since the third decade of the nineteenth century, the Canarians became pioneers of free labor in the cultivation of sugarcane, to such an extent that such a practice was prohibited".

Naturally, the lace of Tenerife also emigrated with them, and it was continued until a few years ago, when it no longer had buyers. Its confection was located mainly in two cities: Naranjito, in the north center of the island, and Moca, in the northwest coast.

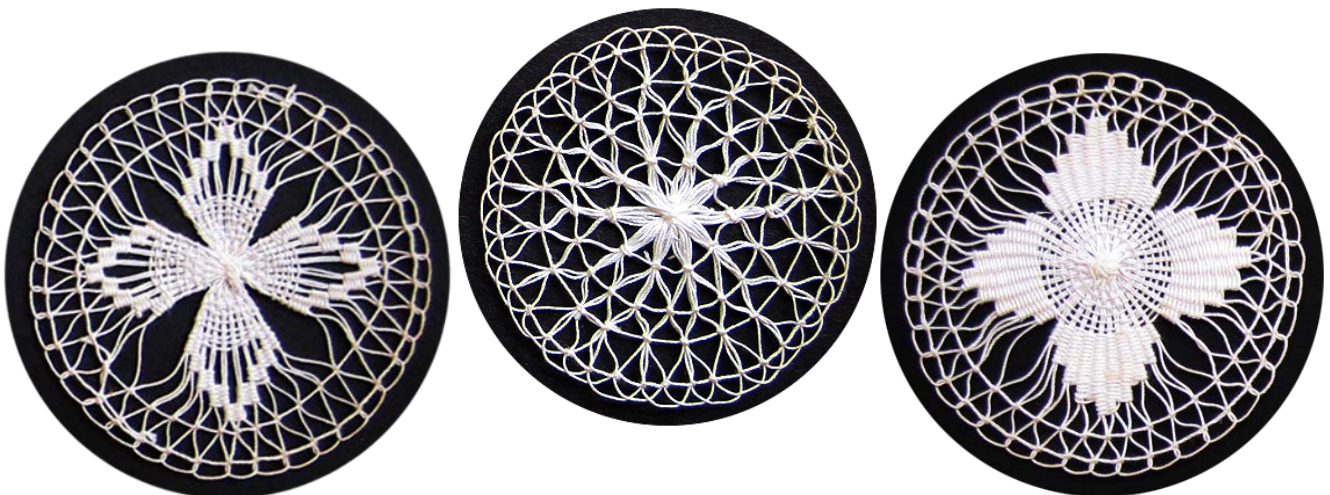
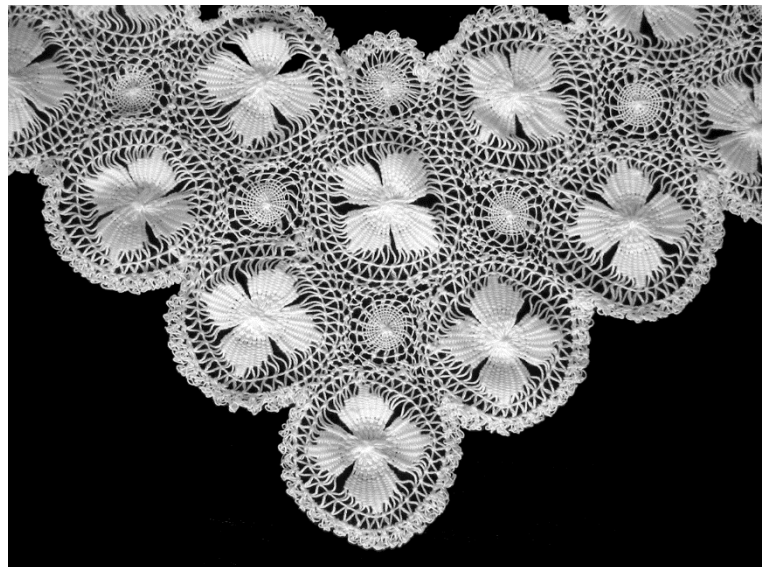
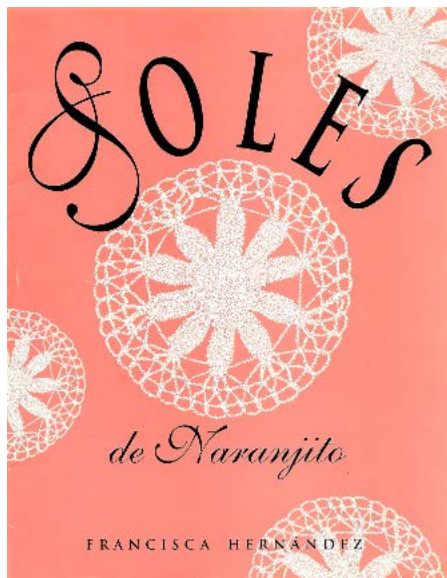


*Samples from Moca*



Although the lacemakers no longer remembered their origin from Tenerife, as girls they learned to make this lace now called "suns of Naranjito" by oral tradition under the guidance of a mother or an aunt. One of the lacemakers even commented that her mother, before dying, had made her promise that she would not stop watering the plants nor ever stop making suns. This is indication of the importance this lace had for that generation.

Naranjito is proud to have a manual published by Francisca Hernández entitled *Soles de Naranjito*. In it, she explains the materials needed to make this lace, as well as her technique that, according to the author, differs from the other "soles" like those of Tenerife or Maracaibo.



*Samples from Naranjito*

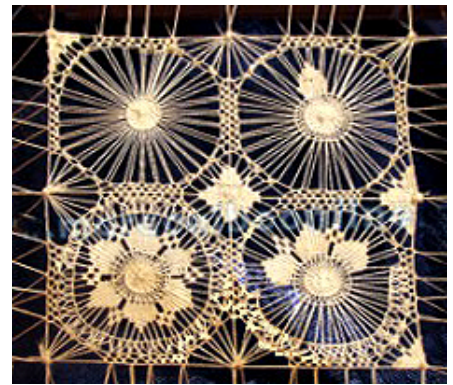
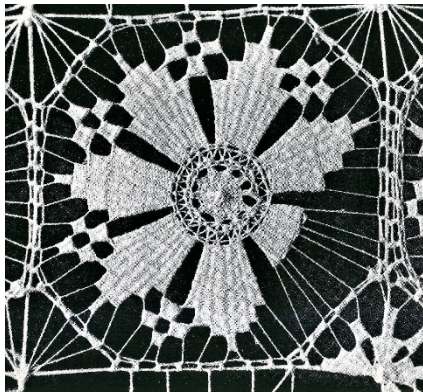
Moca, which until not long ago gave the impression of being a great workshop where all women made lace, also has its manual published by Wilma Pérez Guerra, called *Taller, Soles de Naranjito*. In it she gives the technique and multiple examples of this work. Naturally, in both places, as in other places, the lace of Tenerife remained the same but adapted to the medium: the pad was filled with guano, an acorn that abounds in Puerto Rico; or was replaced for a medium-sized Nescafé jar lid; and the motifs that adorn these suns took local names that reflect a certain sense of humor, such as "wholeheartedly"(?).



In Trinidad, Cuba, the "lace of Tenerife" was still being made with that name. This city, founded in 1514 in the center, south of the island, almost on the Caribbean coast, is located about 330 kilometers from Havana. That location suggests that its existence is due to the fact that ships would anchor there to protect themselves from the fearsome storms of the region. The Villa de la Santísima Trinidad was one of the first settlements established by the Spaniards in the New World, and perhaps because it was isolated in time and space it retains all its colonial charm, to the point that in 1988 it was declared by UNESCO a World Heritage. There UNESCO, in cooperation with the National Craft Center of the Cuban Fund of Cultural Assets, sponsors the "Trinidad Project". One of its objectives is to rescue, preserve and promote "craft traditions linked to the art of the needle" including the lace of Tenerife as reported by Teresita Crego in her article "Santísima tradición" published in *La Jiribilla*, Havana. It is worth noting that the names given to the motifs previously in Spain have been preserved. Others have also been added, taken from the local environment, such as "pineapple peel" and "melon seed".



The Canarian emigration to Venezuela was also significant. Individuals and families began to emigrate approximately in 1670 and continued well into the twentieth century. The lace also emigrated and settled in the present state of Zulia, whose capital is Maracaibo, in Northwest Venezuela. This city was transformed into an important industrial center with much commercial exchange with Europe, where its "soles", called, naturally, "soles of Maracaibo", became famous. It is said that a lady of Canarian origin who lived in Perijá, colonized by Canaries in the state of Zulia, was the one who taught a Zulia woman to make the lace, and that she and her ten daughters took this job to make their living.



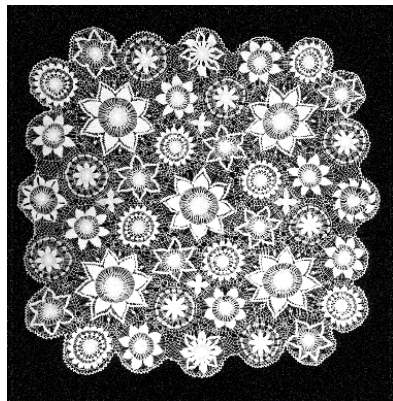
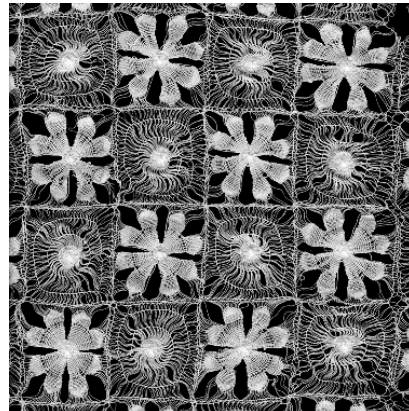
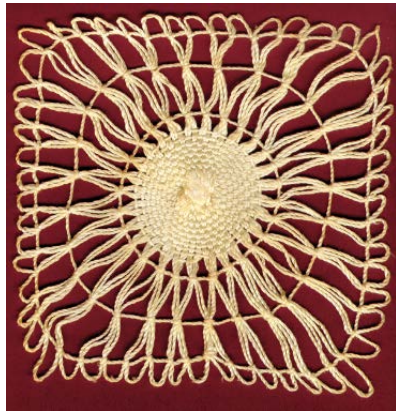
*Suns of Maracaibo*



Besides of the Canarian families that were taken to settle Montevideo and thus protect Buenos Aires from the Portuguese incursions, many Canarians arrived at the River Plate from the beginning of the conquest, although not in accordance with the official plan. The Argentine

historian Paul Groussac, in his book *"Mendoza y Garay"* says that in Tenerife Don Pedro de Mendoza, First Adelantado of the Rio de la Plata and founder of the first Buenos Aires in 1536, joined the expedition of Don Pedro de Lugo, Adelantado and Mayorazgo de Canarias, "with three ships and many hundreds of men", that were ready to set sail for Santa Marta, current Colombia. Although his stay in the region of La Plata, including Paraguay, was brief, more than one man had to remain there, since, according to Groussac, those who remained "have inscribed their name in the pomp of the La Plata conquest". Without a doubt, some female Canary Islanders would also arrive and remain.

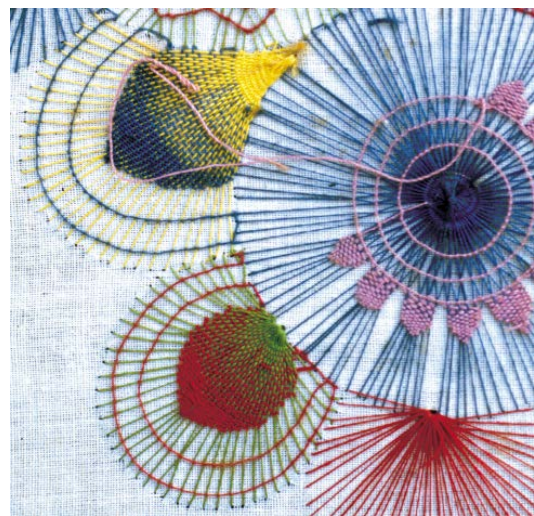
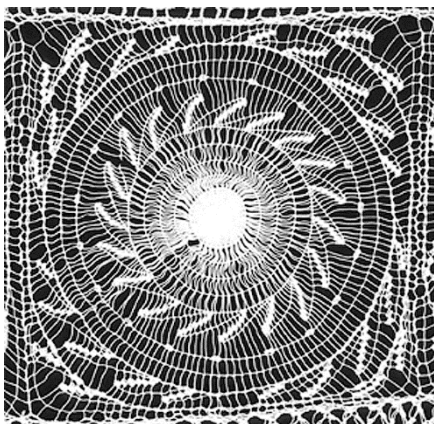
Again, the lace of Tenerife was there to make us remember this presence, even up north in the provinces of Corrientes and Santa Fe, although it has stopped being made many years ago. It was known as "Tenerife lace" and it was also made on a pillow. Both in Montevideo and in Buenos Aires, samples of this lace are found from time to time in antiques' shops, as they became valuable objects of luxury.



*Argentinian Samples*

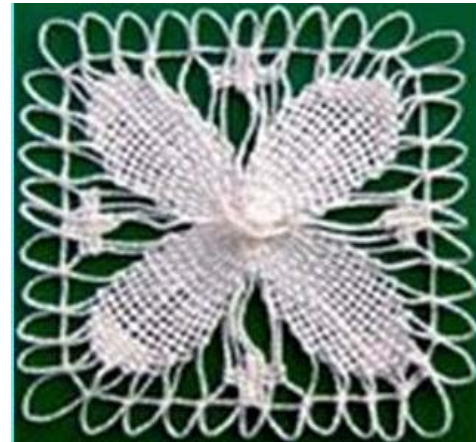


We already know that Canarians also arrived in Paraguay. The presence of a lace very similar to Tenerife in the area of Guarambaré denounces it, but it is evident that it has undergone many transformations in its technique and in the conception of its designs. As far as it can be remembered, it was never done on pads or piques. Its past was obscured by another type of sun lace that is made in the area of Itauguá. It is to be assumed that this lace of Itauguá is rather of Extremaduran origin, as is the one that was made in Salamanca, or the Sol of Salamanca, since it bears a great resemblance to it. This fact may be due to the large number of women from Extremadura who arrived in Asunción, especially in the mid-sixteenth century. Over time, these suns, as well as those of Guarambaré, were renamed "ñandutí", which means "spider web" in Guaraní, the language that is still spoken in the region. His influence reached the north the province of Corrientes, Argentina, and its border with Brazil, that is, the territories where were, and still are speakers of Guaraní.



*Ñanduti Samples from Paraguay*

Although no precise figures are available, the presence of Tenerife lace in southeastern Brazil also denounced the presence of Canarians, who arrived maybe when this territory was still Spanish.



*Samples from Brasil*

This lace also took the name of "nhandutí", with the Portuguese spelling, although, its technique and its motives are from Tenerife. Currently it is still made. Moreover, in Atibaia, a city near São Paulo, many efforts are being made to recover, preserve and disseminate this work. In contrast, in the border area with Paraguay, especially in Ponta Porã, the ñandutí there is made with the Paraguayan technique.

Before finishing, it is necessary to make a small reflection. Just as history records events generally, the great events are carried out, mostly by men. The women's work is not inscribed in any document or historic plaque. It is the one that survives underneath the battles, the great exoduses, the floods. However, this anonymous contribution by women was what it made possible the survival of the conquered territories and, above all, of the preservation and dissemination of their rich cultural individualities. As Carmen Pumar Martínez says in *Spanish in the Indies: Women-Soldiers, Adelantadas and Gobernadoras*: "Without the presence and participation of women, the Hispanic character of the colonial society is unthinkable." The secular survival in the American continent of Tenerife lace is tangible proof of this and it is what keeps alive, more than any monument, the Canarian presence in this continent.



## **Institucions Visited During the Research**

Museo Antropológico de Tenerife, and Mr. Juan de la Cruz Rodriguez.

Centro de Documentación e investigación de las Artesanias de España y América, La Orotava, Tenerife, and Mrs. Milagros Amador.

Centre de Documentacio i Museu Textil, and the Director of the Technical Divisi3n, Mrs. Silvia Carbonell i Basté, Terrasa, España.

Biblioteca Col3n, Organizaci3n of American States, Washington, D.C., USA

Escola de Puntaires de Barcelona, España, and Professors Sras. Ana Vera Martinez y Mrs. Montse Viader i Crous.

Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society Museum, St. Bernard, Louisiana, USA.

Musée Historique des Tissus, Lyon, France.

Museo Etnográfico Textil, Plasencia, Cáceres, España.

Museo del Barro, Asunci3n, Paraguay, and its Director Carlos Colombino.

Museo “Monseñor Juan Sinforiano Bogarín”, and Arquitecto Ramón M. Duarte Burró.

Museu Marès de la Punta, Arenys de Mar, Barcelona, España, and Mrs. Gemma Barrière.

Museu Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil, provided facsimiles of the ñanduti collection belonging to the prominent Brasilan antropologist E. Roquette Pinto.

Museum Textil i d’Indumentaria, Barcelona, España, and its Director Mrs. Rosa M. Martin I Ros.

Spanish Governor’s Palace, San Antonio, Texas.

The Hispanic Society of America, y and Mr. Constancio del Alamo.

The Institute of Texan Cultures, San Antonio, Texas, USA.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Textiles Division, New York, USA.

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