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Tabona, Basalt-Werkzeug der Guanchen, der Ureinwohner von Tenerife, Kanarische Inseln (Photo: Francisco Javier Velázquez)

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A short note about windbreaks and "U-shaped monuments" in Lanzarote (Canary Islands)

Keywords: Canary Islands, Lanzarote, North Africa, Mediterranean, Near East, Southern Europe, ethnology, archaeology, history, geography, indigenes

Abstract:
There are hints that besides semi-circular windbreaks once introduced by the colonizing European population in rural regions of Lanzarote similar structures (USMs) were built by the Canarian indigenes because of religious reasons. Both types are described briefly.

Zusammenfassung:
Es gibt Hinweise, dass die halbkreisförmigen Windschutzmauern, deren Bau einst von europäischen Siedlern in ländlichen Gebieten Lanzarotes begonnen wurde, von ähnlichen Strukturen (USMs) ergänzt wird, die aber dem Bereich der kanarischen Ureinwohner zuzurechnen sind und religiöse Motive haben. Beide Typen werden kurz beschrieben.

Resumen:
Existen indicios de que las paredes cortavientos semicirculares, cuya construcción iniciaron en otro tiempo pobladores europeos en zonas rurales de Lanzarote, se completan con estructuras similares, pero que se han de atribuir a los aborígenes canarios y que tienen fundamentos religiosos (USM). En el presente artículo se describen sucintamente ambos tipos.

From the start the European population of Lanzarote continued to use their reliable wind shelters in all aspects of gardening, agriculture and wine growing (figs. 1, 8). Not considered here are the impressive *picón* (lapilli) sinkholes in the Valley of La Gería which are also protected by low semi-circular windbreaks; but these constructions for vine and fruit trees have clearly no importance as part of an indigenous symbolism.

Nevertheless local people and tourists (walkers) tend to oversee the specially built semi-circular forms of the indigenes because they get lost in the shuffle of other modern walls in the agriculture etc. of the island. What constitutes a pre-Hispanic USM ("U-shaped monument") – and not a windbreak – can be taken from the following list of arguments regarding Lanzarote:

- Its maximal height is estimated below 1,5 meter and its material consists of debris or more or less rough dry-stone walls (the use of rounded or even spherical stones of the surf zone seems not to be authentic – see figs. 5/6).

Fig.1 - Terracing and other rural activities (cereals, lentils, viticulture, use of picón) near Tinajo, Lanzarote. In the foreground the described semi-circular windbreaks of recent times (once started in 1403). In the district also some tumuli and petroglyphs.

- It is symmetric and has therefore an axis which is totally independent from the prevailing NE→SW direction of windbreaks which orient oneself by the Trade Winds. See a classic USM south of the Caldera de Cuchillo, Lanzarote, in Ulbrich 2018a (p.50/fig.19; max. extension ca. 15m).
- A USM is irrational for a contemporary (ancient) agrarian field because the peasant has to plough and seed around it, taking care not to damage a holy place. In modern times of course people have no regards for USMs and frequently destroyed them completely. In fact most older USMs are built on terrain (fig. 2, 3) which never was planned for agricultural activities. Places

of discovery are therefore existent at prominent localities in the natural scenery of the Canary Islands (figs. 3, 7).

- USMs can also be found as a small group or a short row.
- USMs represent a religiously oriented symbolism which bases on the schematisation of female pubics. As such USMs belong to the oldest depictions of mankind and their designs have survived until modern times.

One can find USMs in all of Europe (especially on the Iberian Peninsula, in median southern and southeastern Europe, the shores of the Black Sea), in the mountains, badlands and deserts of the Near East, in North Africa (Sahara, Sahel etc.), in Mediterranean islands and last but not least in eastern Atlantic archipelagos like the Canaries [1] and − most probably − the Açores to name only more coherent regions.

Fig.2a - This ancient USM at the southwestern slope of the Mña. Guanapay (central Lanzarote) shows left hand that one wing has partially slided down and probably still is moving slowly towards the valley. A hint for the advanced age of the construction is not only its groundplan but also the strong weathering and distinct lichen vegetation of the material.

Fig. 2 [2] shows with upmost certainty a genuine indigenous USM whereas the situation with the examples in figs. 5/6 is different. We have to consider that Lanzarote has a strong esoteric community which tends to place pseudo-ancient buildings especially near the coast line. The USM in fig. 5, although not appropriate as modern "beach castle" (too low as windbreak), looks quite "fresh" for a building in the sand which had to endure storms and furious surge since antique times or even earlier. The small superficially layed out stones of the USM in fig.6 is most likely also a fake which may originate from surfers.

Notes:

[1] It is planned to describe step by step the USMs on all remaining Canary Islands (additionally to Fuerteventura and Lanzarote).

Fig.2c - Opposite side of fig.2a. One can see that the mound comprised a big central stone which was originally accompanied by many smaller ones, now without coherence.

Fig.3 - USM near the boreal coast of Lanzarote (Barranco del Burro / northeast of the Mña. Bermeja). The inaccessible coast at that point and the frequently heavy surge seem not to favour this sector as place of an indigenous guard post (*tegala* / see Ulbrich 2016a), but more likely it is an USM at that unspoiled part of the nature ... to be in touch with the Magna Mater Mediterranea.

Fig.4 - Another USM at the northern coast of Lanzarote (Playa de San Juan, west of Caleta de Famara). With this quite often occurring "horse shoe" type* of construction it is most likely not a fake [*see Ulbrich 2016b: 40-41 regarding Near East etc.].

Fig.5 - An alleged classic USM emphasizing the U form. But the orientation to the northeastern Trade Winds and the direct neighbourhood of a new spiral in the sand lets strongly suppose a fake monument (Caleta del Mojón Blanco near Orzola).

Fig.6 - This rare USM with a center-stone (also found with a center-line) is basically one of the most ancient variants of this type of monument. But the small loosely layed stones and the undersized dimensions point to a recent fake (Playa de San Juan).

Fig.7 - Probably another genuine USM (see fig. 2a). Heavily damaged and because of the geological material not covered with lichens (Bahia de Penedo).

[2] The photos of figs. 2a/c, 3, 4 & 7 were shot in an early phase where my scientific attention in Lanzarote was preferrably committed by rock art – therefore no measuring of USMs took place. These depictions of pre-Hispanic USMs are published here for the first time.

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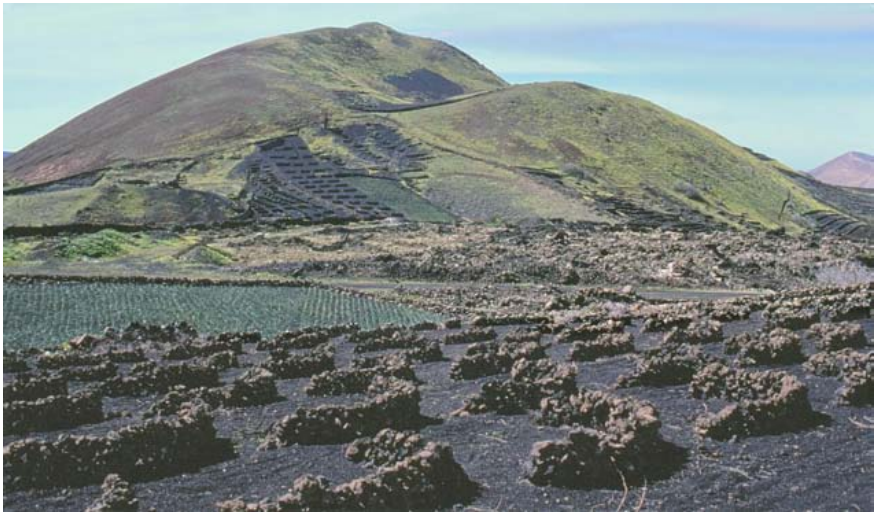

Fig.8 - To be screened from the Trade Winds: in the foreground an untended vineyard with its characteristic semi-circular windbreaks (Mña. Coruja near Tinguatón). Wine came along with the Europeans and was not produced in Lanzarote in times of the natives (majos).

[All photographs by the author]

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