

Opposing Identity: Muslims, Christians and the Military Orders in Rural Aragon

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THIS paper addresses the issue of identity among Christian and Muslim groups in medieval Spain after the Reconquest in the 12th century. A wide variety of archaeological evidence, including artefacts, graffiti, settlement morphology and standing buildings, demonstrates that ethnic and racial divides were etched into material culture and endured until the final expulsion of the Muslim population at the beginning of the 17th century.

Aragon, in the NE. of the Iberian peninsula, is a particularly revealing arena for the study of medieval identity, for in the years following the Christian Reconquest in the 12th century a number of ethnic and religious groups lived side by side. Amongst these were the Christians, mostly new settlers in the first instance, Franks and Jews, who were to be found mostly in urban areas, and Muslims, descendants of a mix of Arabs, Berbers and other tribes.¹ The Muslims were permitted to retain liberties, customs, laws and religion in return for recognizing their subordinate political position and for the payment of taxes.

Depending upon the blending of these groups, the composition of individual settlements varied greatly, from exclusively Muslim to wholly Christian communities. Lordship was partitioned between royalty, secular and ecclesiastical magnates and monastic orders such as the Cistercians,² Hospitallers and Templars who were all rewarded with large estates, particularly along sensitive frontiers (Figs. 1–2).

These religious and social groupings provoke some significant questions. To what extent were differing religious and social identities blurred? Braudel, for example, saw only ‘a maelstrom of competing civilizations whose troubled waters

¹ The Muslims were referred to as *moros* or *sarracenos* in contemporary documents. Today, the term ‘mudéjar’ is taken to mean a Muslim under Christian rule but, after 1526 when the Aragonese Muslims were forced to convert to Christianity, *mudéjares* became *moriscos*. The contemporary term was *cristianos nuevos de moro*. For the Reconquest see A. Ubieto Arteta, *La formación territorial. Historia de Aragón*, Vol. 2 (Zaragoza, 1981).

² Institución Fernando el Católico, *El Cister. Ordenes religiosas zaragozanas* (Zaragoza, 1987). For Military Orders see A. J. Forey, *The Templars in the Corona de Aragon* (London, 1973); M. L. Ledesma, *Templarios y hospitalarios en el Reino de Aragón* (Zaragoza, 1982); A. Luttrell, ‘Hospitaller life in Aragon, 1319–1370’, 97–115 in D. W. Lomax and D. Mackenzie (eds.), *God and Man in Medieval Spain: Essays in Honour of J. R. L. Highfield* (Warminster, 1989). For local parallels see C. Barquero Goñi, *La encomienda hospitalaria de Mallén durante la Edad Media (siglos XII–XV)* (Zaragoza, 1996); A. Conte, *La encomienda del Temple de Huesca* (Huesca, 1986); M. Bonet Donato, *La Orden del Hospital en la Corona de Aragón. Poder y gobierno en la Castellania de Amposta (siglos XII–XV)* (Madrid, 1994).

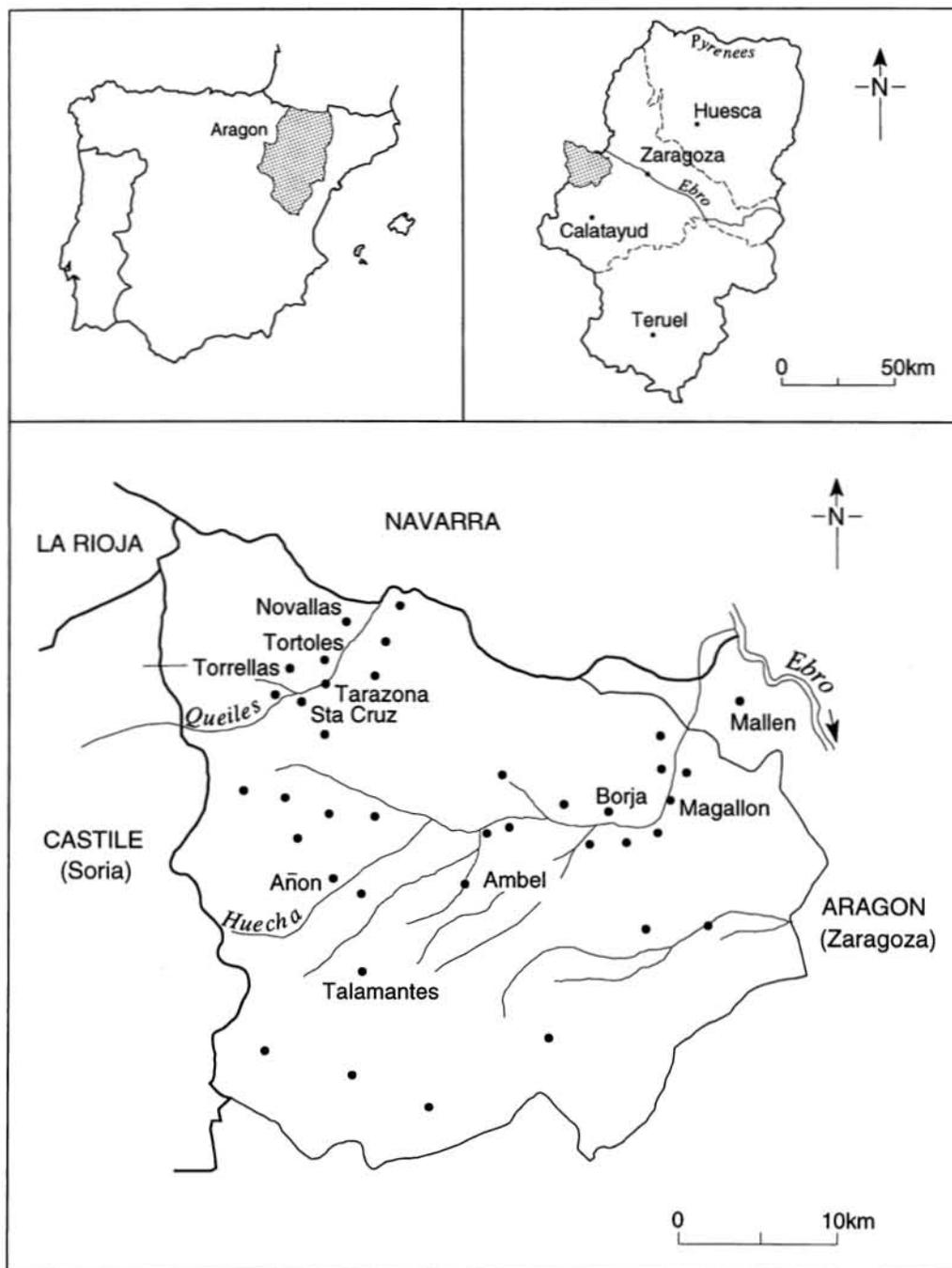


FIG. 1

The study area indicating those places mentioned in the text. Ambel lies in the foothills of the pre-Pyrenean sierras of Moncayo.

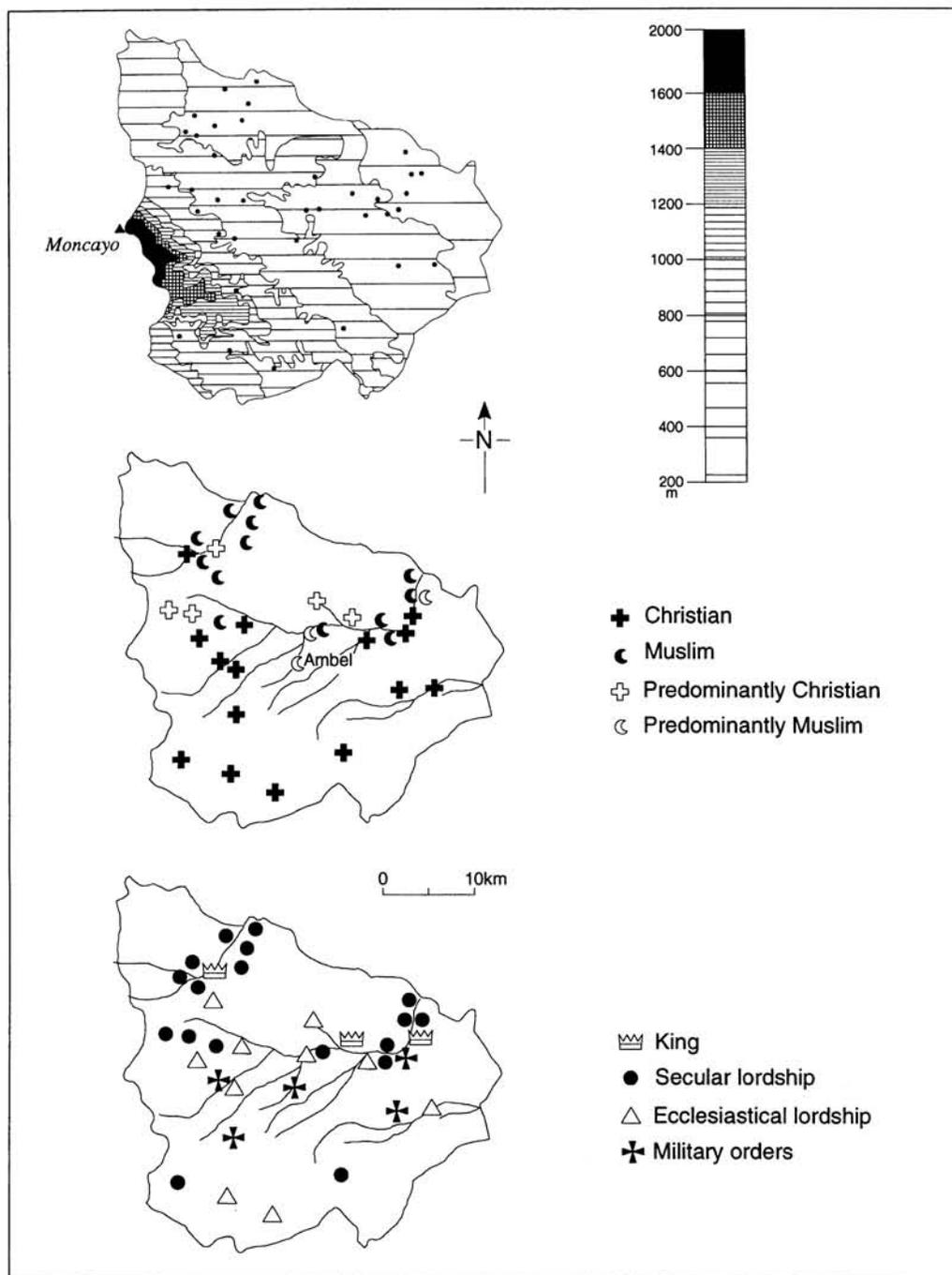


FIG. 2

Map locating settlements of different ethnic groups and their corresponding lordships.

refused to mingle'.³ If so, how was identity expressed or repressed under these circumstances? At whom were images directed? In what way were ethnic boundaries maintained? Did the aspirations of individuals coincide with group identity?

In the past these issues have been scrutinized wholly through written evidence, particularly by examining representations and reports at royal courts. Archaeological study of disenfranchised social groups in Christian Spain, particularly Muslims, has scarcely begun. In response, this paper adopts a more openly archaeological and anthropological approach and is based on a case study of the small medieval rural settlement at Ambel (Zaragoza).⁴ This site is chosen for a number of reasons. First, Ambel was a mixed Christian/Muslim community. Second, this part of Aragon was reconquered in 1118, early on in the Christian campaigns, so the relationships between different sectors of the community can be examined over a 500-year span. Further south, where the Reconquest took place later, there was little opportunity for acculturation to have any effect on the individual rural communities before the Muslim community was forcibly expelled at the beginning of the 17th century. Third, after 1139 Ambel fell under the stewardship of the Templars and then the Hospitallers, 'warrior monks' of the Military Orders who were keen to maintain a positive public image in order to secure recruits and almsgiving as well as to foster Christian morale.⁵

THE STRUCTURE OF THE LANDSCAPE

After the 12th-century Reconquest in this area, most of the Muslim rural population stayed behind under new political leaders.⁶ They perceived themselves as the 'authentic Aragonese', 'the faithful ones' who had remained behind in al-Andalus⁷ and their presence must have been valued by new Christian lords eager to maintain income from rented land and the flow of local irrigation systems in an arid zone.

However, too cosy a picture of continuity would be misleading. Over the next four centuries there was significant reorganization of the landscape. Where significant minorities occurred, ethnic groups coalesced to form the wholly Muslim

³ F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Vol II (London, 1972), 780-97. For medieval and Islamic archaeology and politics see M. Diaz-Andreu, 'Islamic archaeology and the origin of the Spanish nation', 68-89 in M. Diaz-Andreu and T. Champion (eds.), *Nationalism and Archaeology in Europe* (London, 1996). Her suggestion that we might be witnessing the creation of a new myth of a 'fictitious medieval Spain in which Arabs, Jews and Christians lived in peaceful coexistence' is most interesting in the context of this essay.

⁴ C. M. Gerrard (ed.), *Templarios y Hospitalarios en Ambel: su casa conventual, investigación y gestión* (Zaragoza, forthcoming).

⁵ H. Nicholson, *Templars, Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights: Images of the Military Orders, 1128-1291* (Leicester, 1995), 102-24.

⁶ T. F. Glick, *From Muslim Fortress to Christian Castle. Social and Cultural Change in Medieval Spain* (Manchester, 1995); for local context see M. L. Ledesma Rubio, *Los mudéjares aragoneses* (Zaragoza, 1979); J. M. Lacarra, 'Introducción al estado de los mudéjares aragoneses', 17-28 in *I Simposio Internacional de Mudéjarismo (15-17 Sept 1975)* (Madrid, 1981); M. L. Ledesma Rubio, 'Los mudéjares y el cultivo de la tierra en Aragón', 905-12 in *Actas de las III Jornadas sobre el estudio actual de los estudios sobre Aragón (Tarazona, 1980)* (Zaragoza, 1981); J. L. Corral and F. J. Peña (eds.), *La cultura islámica en Aragón* (Zaragoza, 1989); E. J. García Marco, *Los comunidades mudéjares de Calatayud en el siglo XV* (Calatayud, 1993). For mudéjar art see: G. M. Borrás Gualis, *Arte mudéjar aragonés* (Zaragoza, 1985), 2 vols.

⁷ M. D. Epalza, 'El Islam aragonés, un Islam de frontera', *Turiso*, 7 (1987), 9-21.

and Christian communities which can be mapped from late 15th-century hearth taxes. This 'ethnic streaming' may also have accompanied fundamental changes in rural settlement patterns in which small dispersed farmsteads and hamlets were replaced by larger nucleated communities.⁸ The form and extent of these pre-existing rural communities are archaeologically quite unknown in Aragon and it is only recently that the nature and timing of this shift has come under attention. As elsewhere in Europe, large monastic houses were at the forefront.⁹

What is clear is that in the second half of the 15th century Muslim communities were to be found mostly along the fertile floodplains of the Ebro river and its tributaries such as the rivers Queiles and Huecha, whereas Christian communities were perched on higher ground in the foothills (Fig. 2). This has been explained by the deliberate policy, in the second half of the 15th century, of attracting Christian families into depopulated areas in the foothills in order to strengthen the frontier with Castile and provide expertise in the exploitation of wood-pasture.¹⁰ As a result we have a most unusual situation in which ethnicity and religious affiliation directly reflects the topography of the landscape.

For Christian communities the landscape outside the bounds of settlement provided a canvas on which to proclaim their religious affiliation. In Ambel, shrines, hermitages and chapels (e.g. to St Sebastian, a military saint) were constructed which dominated the skyline and clustered at boundaries and the junctions of field paths. And just as religion could be signposted visually by its monuments, the pace of the day-to-day routine of rural life was regulated by the tolling of bells, an aural reminder of the presence of the church. Less obviously, ethnic divisions were also written into the pattern of fields. Around Borja, for example, Christian and Muslim fields were segregated and at Ambel contemporary documents even distinguish between the Christian and Muslim *eras* or threshing floors¹¹ which can be mapped encircling the village.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF SETTLEMENT

Where communities were ethnically mixed Muslims were separated from Christians by forming a new Muslim quarter or *morería*, with its own mosque. At Ambel, this process is unusually well documented from a combination of historical, architectural and topographical sources (Fig. 3). The extent of the 9th- to 11th-century Muslim settlement can be identified from the surviving morphology of roads and houses (Fig. 3A). The plan here is splintered into a number of blocks with numerous narrow dead-end streets and through-routes which respect natural lines of drainage and, even today, become fast-flowing streams in torrential summer storms. The mosque probably stood in the NW. corner, its SW.-NE. alignment reflected by the later church on the same spot with the direction of prayer oriented on Mecca and the *qiblah* and *mihrab* positioned along the S. wall.

⁸ Glick, *op. cit.* in note 6, 105-15.

⁹ S. Teixeira, 'As granjas cistercienses do Mosteiro de Veruela e o repovoamento do Vale do Huecha, provincia de Zaragoza', 459-66 in *Sociedades en transición*, IV Congreso de Arqueología Medieval Española (Alicante, 1993).

¹⁰ E. García Manrique, *Las comarcas de Borja y Tarazona y el Somontano del Moncayo* (Zaragoza, 1960).

¹¹ 1380, Bastardelo, *Archivo Municipal* of Ambel.

The small square which survives immediately to the south may echo an earlier courtyard for ablutions near the mosque entrance.

Perhaps in the late 12th century the settlement was drastically reorganized under Templar supervision (Fig. 3B). The precinct of the new preceptory was established around a substantial pre-existing tower of 9th-century date (Fig. 4). Thus, in a symbolic assertion of power and allegiance this former Muslim monument was hemmed in by a precinct of buildings of explicitly Christian significance. To the east, an extension to the village plan housed a new walled *morería* with its own mosque fronted by a small square. In figure 3B, the geometrical grid of single spinal street and side streets with their long lines of sight contrasts with the rest of the settlement plan. Notably, the alignment of this packet of new houses, which is in no way dictated by the topography of the site, reflected the orientation of the new mosque, which acted as a structuring feature for the whole *morería*.

Even in a local context, the thorough internal re-organization of ethnically mixed settlement was by no means unusual, nor was it restricted to the Military Orders. There was no morphological 'blueprint'. Sometimes the *morería* continued to occupy the old Muslim quarter (e.g. Calatayud), or else it was newly constructed (e.g. Borja, Tarazona, Tudela) and mosques converted into churches, as at Ambel. The church dedication to *Santa Maria* is often suggestive of earlier mosque sites in this part of Spain.¹² In at least one other case the Muslim quarter was also walled (e.g. Chivert).¹³

Segregation in life was maintained at death. Each ethnic and social group had its own cemetery site; there was a Muslim cemetery outside the village and several Christian cemeteries depending on the status of the deceased. The archaeological evidence cannot be discussed in detail here but Christian interments were placed around the entrance to the church¹⁴ as well as under the nave and side chapels with a separate burial place on the N. side of the church for those declared paupers¹⁵ and another reserved for commanders of the Order.¹⁶

¹² The components of rural *moreries* around Calatayud are discussed in García Marco, op. cit. in note 6, 149–57. Plans of 14th- and 15th-century mosques, including local examples at Torrellas and Tórtolas, are published in J. L. Corral and F. J. Peña (eds.), op. cit. in note 6, 48–49. Of the two Ambel mosques, the earlier site, now a hermitage, was comprehensively remodelled in the 17th and 18th centuries while the later site in the new *morería* was noted by antiquarians in the late 18th century. Nothing is visible above ground today.

¹³ J. L. Corral, 'Las ciudades de la Marca superior de al-Andalus', 253–85 in *La ciudad islámica* (Zaragoza, 1991); Gerrard, op. cit. in note 4, document 8.

¹⁴ For a review of recent excavations see A. Gutiérrez and C. M. Gerrard, 'Excavaciones en la casa conventual de Ambel (Zaragoza)', in *Arqueología Aragonesa 1997* (Zaragoza, forthcoming). There is no evidence for this church having a circular plan, though the earliest standing structural phase is 14th-century. However, the base of the Templar church of St Mary's in Zaragoza, excavated in 1991 and dated to the 12th or early 13th centuries, was round (17.5 m diameter) and echoes the form of the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

¹⁵ *Cinque Libri*, Archivo Parroquial de Ambel (APA) t1, sin. pag.; recently uncovered during building works and partially excavated. The human bone was derived from eleven adult males and seven females, three juveniles and one infant of less than five years old. Many suffered from poor dental health and arthritic inflammations of the lower back; pers. comm. A. J. Legge.

¹⁶ APA, t1; though few commanders died in office.

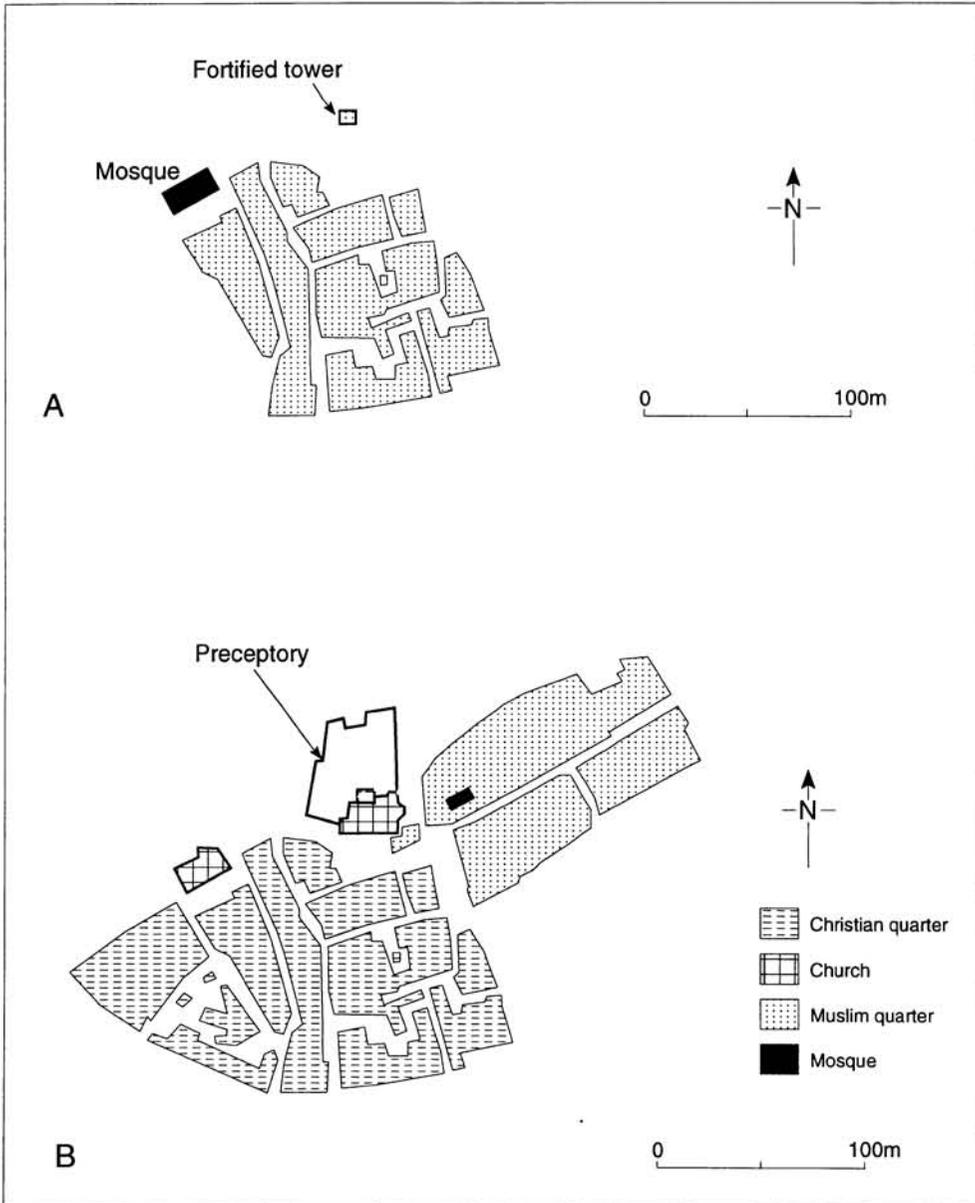


FIG. 3

Two plans to show the changing locations of medieval ethnic groupings and main monuments in Ambel as deduced from archaeological and architectural evidence and from historical documentation. The upper figure (A) can be dated to c. 1100, the lower figure (B) to c. 1200. Later additions to the settlement plan are not shown.

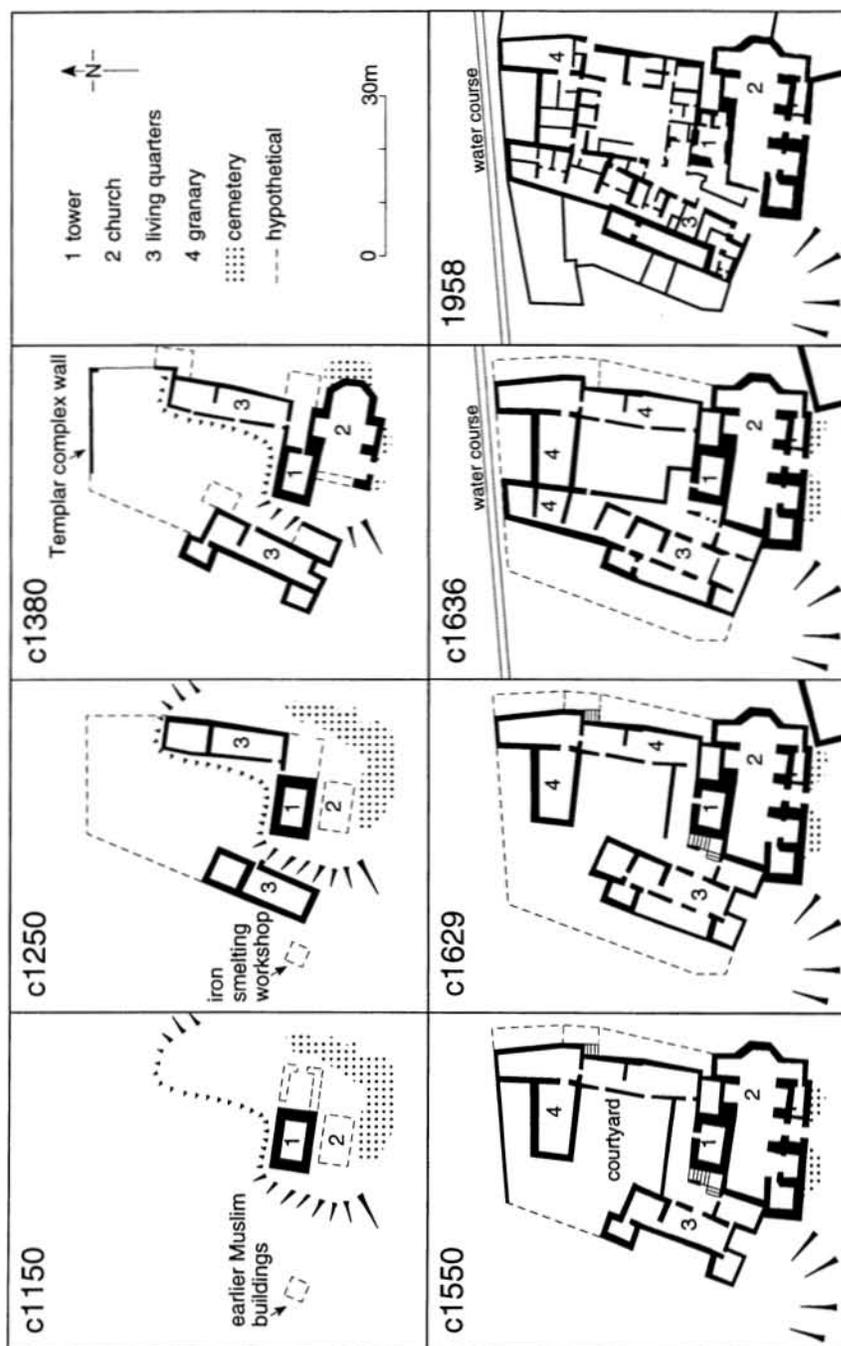


FIG. 4

Phase plan of the preceptory precinct of the Military Orders at Ambel from the 12th century to the present day, as identified from standing building recording, archaeological excavation and documentary study. The preceptory was the centre of a Templar *encomienda* from the mid 12th century to 1307–08. Thereafter ownership passed to the Hospitallers until 1851.

BUILDINGS AND ARCHITECTURE

The better-travelled Templar knight would have been aware of the many similarities between the Ambel precinct and other rural preceptories across Spain and Europe (Fig. 4).¹⁷ These characteristics are those of a large fortified medieval farm surrounded by a circuit of high walls with corner towers and an exterior ditch. Inside the precinct there were two detached first-floor halls in a loose U-shaped arrangement of buildings close to the church. The identity is a fusion of military, religious and agrarian models which would have impressed, as it does today, in its height and volume. The bulk of the building forces the observer to look up and walk around it; the architecture cannot be taken in from a distance and its size is emphasized by its position next to the church (dedicated to St Michael, another military saint), which acts visually as a scale-ruler alongside. Building like this boasts of resources and, during the regular building programmes which were to follow, almost every generation must have been impressed by the continued investment.¹⁸ The construction and maintenance of monuments had as important an impression on everyday experience as their daily use.

Standing building recording has revealed that, in the 14th century, the Hospitaller building at Ambel was heavily fortified with at least seven substantial high towers with thick cob walls. Overall, the external appearance of this building must have been austere and dominating with few accessible windows and high walls with corner towers. Even the church was fortified with arrow loops along an open walkway at second-floor level and newel staircases constructed inside each of the outward buttresses. This pattern of re-fortification is repeated throughout the region in the second half of the 14th century when this was an active military zone on the frontier between the kingdoms of Aragon, Castile and Navarre.¹⁹ The building's vast, blank and internalized appearance contrasts absurdly with the tiny size of the community which once lived inside. Inventories indicate a small administrative and economic centre, perhaps between four and ten brethren at any one time,²⁰ under the control of a commander, though *donati*, brothers leading semi-religious lives, were sometimes present.²¹

By the 16th century there was a central partially enclosed patio or *luna* with church (unusually to the north of the 'cloister'), complete with a new tower and ranges of buildings to the east (the dormitory) and west (the great hall and

¹⁷ For buildings see R. Gilchrist, *Contemplation and Action: The Other Monasticism* (London, 1995) and J. Fuguet, 'L'arquitectura dels templers catalans', *L'Avenc, Revista d'Història*, 161 (1992), 62–67.

¹⁸ The process of emphasizing patronage by creation or construction is termed 'presencing' by P. Graves, 'Social space in the English parish church', *Economy and Society*, 18 (1989), 297–321.

¹⁹ For example, the 'Guerra de los dos Pedros', 1357–69; on castles in this area see A. Gutiérrez, *Fortificaciones en la comarca de Tarazona: estudio histórico-arqueológico*, unpublished MA dissertation (University of Zaragoza, 1991).

²⁰ In 1250 at least five Templar brothers are indicated: Archivo Histórico Nacional, Ordenes Militares (AHN OO MM), Carpeta 628, 18. A late 13th-century inventory indicates seven mules, 30 sheep, wine, oil, salted meats, cereals and seven prisoners: J. Miret y Sans, 'Inventaris de les cases del Temple de la Corona de Aragón en 1289', 61–75, *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona*, vi (1911), 64; a late 16th-century list includes three adult Hospitallers and three servants, APA 11, 218.

²¹ For example, in 1222. The role of these men, who gave their services freely, is discussed in Forey, *op. cit.* in note 2, 289.

commander's private rooms). The northern range was set aside for the storage of agricultural produce.

Inside, the nature and form of boundaries in the 16th-century building seem especially significant. The most public areas were singled out for architectural promotion and bold decorative schemes. The main entrance to the building had a large archway with a shield over the top leading into a dark tunnel framed by tall carved stone columns. Once inside the visitor proceeded up a wide staircase with an ornate carved plasterwork bannister, observing the 47 iron-tipped lances on the walls, and entered an antechamber with a wide door leading into the impressive and well-lit hall with its carved linenfold doors, plaster floor and wooden ceiling. Around the walls there were 47 heraldic shields and leather wall hangings²² and furnishings included wooden chests, three walnut tables covered with painted leathers, as well as andirons and chimney furniture.

There was little to distinguish the 16th-century preceptory from any other secular palace in the region. Many architectural elements, such as the arched galleries, are typical of Aragonese civil architecture²³ and based on a mix of Mediterranean models and a local Muslim workforce labouring with the traditional materials of brick, plaster and wood. What the Hospitallers thought of their newly remodelled building is aptly demonstrated by the change in the terminology used to describe their building in contemporary documents. The 12th-century term 'castle' becomes 'the palace vulgarly called the castle' at the end of the 16th century and, thereafter, simply 'palace'.²⁴

There is good architectural and archaeological evidence to demonstrate that the Hospitallers' communal lifestyle had broken down by this date. From 1350 until 1700 the number of rooms in the Hospitallers building increased significantly from 31 to 85. These smaller rooms were less suited to communal activities and better suited to private ones, a view supported by the size and number of possible bedrooms. Studies of sight lines across the precinct show that the number of short lines increases and that visibility from room to room was becoming more and more restricted as the inhabitants acquired more privacy. Selected rooms were quite elaborately decorated; one contains a series of eight frescoes of local pastoral scenes. All this indicates real changes in the attitude of the Order. As early as 1613 Hospitallers and other Orders had been legitimately marrying and having their children baptized in the church and, when they were present at all, commanders were acting as godparents. Priests had been happy to declare themselves Hospitallers for many years.²⁵ Evidently the original spirit of the Order had been diluted.

²² 1631; AHN OO MM, Leg. 8162.

²³ C. Gómez Urdañez, *Arquitectura civil en Zaragoza en el siglo XVI* (Zaragoza, 1987).

²⁴ AHN OO MM, Leg. 8160, 3.

²⁵ APA, t1, 98v and 140. By the 17th century the rule of chastity was interpreted as matrimonial chastity and poverty indicated by an inventory of goods, implying that Hospitallers were merely administrators of possessions. The need for frequent daily services was commuted to one mass a day and confession thrice yearly: A. Domínguez Ortiz, *La sociedad española en el siglo XVII* (Granada, 1992), 198–207. At least some architectural changes can be attributed to the renting out of parts of the building once communal life ceased.

On the exterior of the building and beyond lordship was stressed through visual statements. Ten plaster shields combining the arms of the Order and commander were affixed to the external facades, all large enough to be visible from the village streets. Inside the church, St Michael's, the walls were also lined with shields and, in the absence of stained glass, these heraldic devices proclaimed that the ownership of church and preceptory were one and the same. There is powerful iconography in mingling scenes from the lives of saints on the side altars with the heraldic shields above. It is especially interesting that a Hospitaller cross should overhang the pulpit, branding the identity of the Military Order on the sermon. Inside, status was reinforced through the seating plan and segregation maintained between the villagers. The second-storey gallery was reserved for brethren while the ground floor was presumably for villagers, servants and the very few converted Muslims. In this arrangement height conferred status and authority and gave privileged visual access to the High Altar during Mass.

In different ways the facades, disposition of space and internal decor of the different phases of this monument all provide visual clues which reinforce the image of its inhabitants. First spirituality, then militarism and finally wealth can be read into the fabric as the preceptory was transformed from a monastery to a palace with all its accompanying architectural grammar. Scale alone differentiated the preceptory buildings from others in the village and this may also have been a crucial difference between the homes of Christians and Muslims in the village. Archaeological evidence now emerging suggests that Muslim houses were considerably smaller with only a living room/bedroom, kitchen and corral on the ground floor and storage for agricultural produce overhead on the second storey.²⁶ Local inhabitants familiarized themselves with the hierarchy of power and ethnic differences merely by stepping into another house or walking down the street.

The construction of buildings, whether grand or insignificant, is only one way in which status can be experienced in architecture. Another is through the deliberate disfiguring or destruction of buildings. Explicitly Christian graffiti, mostly crosses, have been recorded carved on to the sides of abandoned Muslim mosques, baths and fortifications, seemingly as a form of exorcism.²⁷ A process of desecration also took place when mosques were converted. This happened twice in Ambel, firstly when the original mosque site was converted into a church and then again in the 16th century when the later mosque was taken over by the Hospitallers and used as a storage barn before being remodelled into a house. Thus, the religious conversion of the Muslim population was paralleled in the architectural conversion of their most important religious monument. Both transformations were equally superficial.

²⁶ Glick, *op. cit.* in note 6, 148.

²⁷ P. Cressier, 'Graffiti cristianos sobre monumentos musulmanes de la Andalucía Oriental', 121-48 in P. Cressier (ed.), *Estudios de Arqueología de la Andalucía Oriental* (Almería, 1992).

JUSTICE AND CEREMONY

Administration of the *aljama*, the Muslim community, was carried out according to Islamic law and, in theory, this preserved their autonomy and religious cohesion. In practice, these rights were not enshrined in law; they were granted by the King and could be revoked at will. Conditions therefore varied from place to place but in general there was a gradual erosion of rights after the 13th century. In Ambel civil and criminal jurisdiction was dispensed by the commander of the preceptory outside the main door of the preceptory with the aid of three jurors from the village elected on 1 November of each year.²⁸ Unsurprisingly, given that the jurors posts had to be approved by the commander,²⁹ there were occasional accusations of abuses of power by the Order.³⁰ However, resistance of this kind rarely emerges from the documents because the Order controlled both the procedure and the recording of the event.

A further responsibility of the Order was to look after the church and provide for it. Accordingly, payments were made to the church for wafers, the salaries of the sacristan and organist, for cleaning the church robes, for oil for the bells and to those who washed the feet of the poor on the Thursday before Easter. Charitable gifts were also important. At Easter the poor were taken up to the great hall of the preceptory and fed sweet pastries and wine, alms were given every Sunday at the door of the palace, and at Christmas there were presents of white *turrón* and mulled wine.³¹ In small ways all these ceremonies strengthened the wider sense of Christian community and by structuring the principal events of the ecclesiastical calendar through the precinct the whole complex became a public extension of the church.

When a new commander was appointed he was met by the priest, an employee of the preceptory, together with the mayor and a number of villagers at the entrance to the village, taken by the hand in an act of homage, and officially given 'peaceful possession' of the village. The procession continued to the church where, following an oration at the high altar, the doors of the church were opened and closed, the sacristy visited and the main seat in the church re-occupied. Thereafter the procession visited the bread ovens and finally the palace or castle where each room was visited and the doors and windows again opened and closed.³² Acts of ceremony like this deliberately stressed status, religion and key spaces in the village by mapping out feudal links on the ground.

DAILY LIFE, ARTEFACTS AND GRAFFITI

By the mid-15th century so little was understood of written Arabic that Islamic laws had to be summarized in Castilian for the Muslim population. By this date many Muslim documents were already written in *aljamiado*, a romance language which combined Castilian spelling and Arabic characters. Ambel documents show

²⁸ 1612; AHN OO MM, Leg. 8162.

²⁹ 1612; AHN OO MM, libros 8160-64.

³⁰ 1335; AHN OO MM, Carpeta 629, 34.

³¹ Op. cit. in note 29.

³² 1778; AHN OO MM, Leg. 8161, 7.

Muslims speaking Castilian with sufficient fluency to insult their Christian neighbours in the street,³³ yet Arabic could continue to be used as a mark of identity. Local tiles and plasterwork have Arabic graffiti on them³⁴ and the recent chance discovery of an Islamic amulet, intended to be hung around the neck or hidden amongst the clothing, contained three talismanic scripts with Koranic invocations complete with magic signs and symbols.³⁵ These finds indicate a defence of Islamic identity preserved at the popular level in hybrid beliefs and Arabic lettering.

Differences in Muslim dress, jewellery, hair styles and lengths of beards were repeatedly ordered in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries. The very frequency of these edicts may hint at how little they were observed but it is clear that the role of appearance in classifying others was well appreciated and that the forcing of ethnic stereotypes served to reinforce Christian political authority, even to help justify negative relations.³⁶ Hospitallers, for example, dressed in a plain habit held together by the simple copper-alloy wire pins which have been recovered from excavations; only the commander and any other knights³⁷ would have been distinguished by their Hospitallers' black habit with white cross. A sense of Christian community was doubtless strengthened through this uniformity in dress code and lack of individual expression. There is an agenda for archaeology here in examining questions of identity through dress accessories and the chronology and extent of cultural assimilation or marginalization, which doubtless differed from place to place.

While systematic study has scarcely begun on dietary differences and comparisons of bone assemblages for *mudéjar* and *morisco* populations, cooking habits and cuisine are reflected in tablewares. On Muslim tables large bowls dominated the centre of the table and were used for communal eating with the fingers, individual place settings were a rarity.³⁸ In contrast, at the preceptory in Ambel the 14th-century assemblage of a Christian household consisted largely of local coarseware cooking pots and individual plates and bowls, themselves mostly products of local Muslim workshops adapted to the demands of the dominantly Christian society which surrounded them. Many specifically Muslim pottery forms, such as ceramic incense burners or trivets, had been abandoned after the

³³ For laws see M. A. Ladero Quesada, 'Los mudéjares de Castilla en la Baja Edad Media', 349–90 in *I Simposio Internacional de Mudéjarismo (15–17 Septiembre 1975)* (Madrid, 1981). For a local 16th-century household account from Torrellas see A. Labarta, 'Una página aljamiada hallada en Torrellas (Tarazona)', *Turiso*, 3 (1982), 225–33.

³⁴ Graffiti beneath the late 15th-century mudéjar staircase at the Ambel preceptory are illegible but a tile from nearby Novallas is incised with a Koranic phrase: J. A. García Serrano, 'Inscripción arábiga en una teja del ayuntamiento de Novallas (Zaragoza)', *Turiso*, 7 (1987), 277–79.

³⁵ M. J. Cervera Frías, 'Los talismanes árabes de Tórtoles', *Turiso*, 7 (1987), 225–74.

³⁶ For law codes on styles of dress, titles, sexual relations, meat consumption etc., see M. A. Ladero Quesada, *Los mudéjares de Castilla y otros estudios de Historia Medieval Andaluza* (Granada, 1989), 62–75.

³⁷ A. J. Forey, *The Military Orders from the Twelfth to the Early Fourteenth Centuries*, (London, 1992), 177.

³⁸ G. Rosselló Bordoy, 'Observaciones sobre la cerámica común nazari: continente y contenido', 133–43 in *Arte islámico en Granada. Propuesta para un Museo de la Alhambra* (Granada, 1995), 138; A. Sesma Muñoz, 'Aproximación al estudio del régimen alimentario del reino de Aragón en los siglos XI y XII', 55–78 in *Homenaje a Don José María Lacarra de Miguel*, Vol. II (Zaragoza, 1977).

Reconquest³⁹ and, because of this, it is differences in the frequencies of tablewares between households rather than the presence or absence of particular forms which provide clues to ethnic attribution. In other words, there is no simple correspondence between material culture and ethnic groups. It is the structure of archaeological assemblages which provides the key to differentiation.

At Ambel the 16th-century pattern of pottery consumption inside the preceptory is conspicuous in its range and quality. There are sets of plain white and decorated tin-glazed tableware, including Portuguese and non-local imports, glass goblets, ornate buckles and buttons set with glass beads. A 16th-century book clasp may once have held shut an intellectually stimulating text, possibly a Bible, but it also decorated a room and need not actually have been read. This archaeological evidence is also supported by details from probate inventories of commanders which note books, clothes and furniture to be returned to the Order.⁴⁰ These collections were housed in newly modified 'palaces' like Ambel; enterprises which were becoming increasingly profitable in the course of the 16th century.⁴¹ To what extent the luxury of this material culture served to express 'dominant ideology' on behalf of the Order is unclear: it may have served far more use in persuading social equals of their ranking.

There is no archaeological evidence from Aragon with which to assess differences in household artefact assemblages between Muslim and Christian villagers. Contemporary chronicles are rare⁴² and studies of Muslim house inventories from Aragon are few and late.⁴³ However, where studies have been undertaken near Valencia it is clear that Muslim houses contained fewer tables, benches and chairs and that these were substituted by brightly covered mattresses and pillows placed directly on the floor.⁴⁴ A more promising area with signatures in the archaeological record is surviving evidence for domestic industry and crafts. Muslim communities feature strongly in activities such as the preparation of dried fruits and sweet pastries which might be carried out in the home and ceramic sugar moulds, for example, will survive in the archaeological record. Other documented Muslim occupations such as iron-working and pottery production⁴⁵ were carried out at workshops, perhaps on the fringes of residential areas. In Ambel a medieval smithy has been excavated immediately adjacent to the preceptory and is probably

³⁹ J. Martí and J. Pascual, 'Tradicón e innovación en el repertorio formal de la cerámica valenciana bajomedieval', 159-75 in C. M. Gerrard, A. Gutiérrez and A. Vince (eds.), *Spanish Medieval Ceramics in Spain and the British Isles*, British Archaeol. Rep. Int. Ser. 610 (Oxford, 1995).

⁴⁰ 1787; AHN OO MM, Leg. 8165, no. 30.

⁴¹ G. Colás Latorre and J. A. Salas Ausens, *Aragón en el siglo XVI: Alteraciones sociales y conflictos políticos* (Zaragoza, 1982), 39.

⁴² Cf. J. Munzer, *Viaje por España y Portugal (1494-1495)* (Madrid, 1991), 289-301. The role of the 'morisco' in contemporary literature is discussed in M. S. Carrasco Urgoiti, 'Reflejos de la vida de los moriscos en la novela picaresca', *En la España medieval*, IV (1984), 183-224.

⁴³ See appraisal in M. L. Ledesma Rubio, 'Los mudéjares aragoneses y su aportación a la economía del reino. Estado actual de nuestros conocimientos y vías para su estudio', 91-111 in *IV Simposio Internacional de Mudejarismo: Economía* (Madrid, 1987); I. Alvaro, 1985, 'Inventario de dos casas de moriscos de Villafeliche en 1609; su condición social, localización de las viviendas, tipología y distribución interior, y ajuar', *Artigrama*, 2 (1985), 95-110.

⁴⁴ J. Guiral, *Valencia. Puerto mediterráneo en el siglo XV (1410-1525)* (Valencia, 1989), 600-01.

⁴⁵ García Marco, op. cit. in note 6, 171-87.

that granted to Maoma Exiarc, a Muslim blacksmith, in 1380.⁴⁶ Specialization of this kind might logically be expected to strengthen ethnic cohesion but commercial interests also cut across boundaries. The Hospitallers at Ambel are known to have been keen participants in trade in iron during the medieval period,⁴⁷ though the archaeological evidence, which includes a balance with mother of pearl counterweights, suggests a more administrative and commercial role. Relaxation and pastimes are hinted at by the finding of two late 14th-century bone dice.⁴⁸

A much more direct route to perceptions of identity is through the study of graffiti. Precisely because they are not officially sanctioned, graffiti can be of greatest interest in probing individual concerns. In the preceptory at Ambel a particular theme was agriculture and both quantities, varieties and dates of cereals, oil and wine are all tallied. A remarkable group of eleven phrases dated 1589–1850 also records extreme climatic conditions such as snow on the mountains in summer, great storms and flooding. Religious themes are represented by the stations of the cross and the Crucifixion while military graffiti commemorate new Grand Masters of the Order, depict posturing musketeers, and, most notably, include a scene which probably represents the siege of Malta (Fig. 5). While crudely drawn for the most part, these graffiti reminded the viewer of military deeds and the continuing fight against Islam, subjects which would also have been familiar from the recounting of tales and legends.⁴⁹

Such intellectual allegiances can be detected too in a very special group of artefacts, the religious images and relics. St Michael's church contained at least one altar-piece painted with the image of St John the Baptist, patron saint of the Hospitallers, holding the Lamb of God on an open Bible.⁵⁰ Links with other preceptories were strengthened by the exchange of relics. Ambel accumulated four pieces of the Cross, for example, two of which were given by other preceptories.⁵¹ Relics like these were effective publicity for the Order's military campaigns, reassured patrons and reinforced religious ties. The 16th century was a time of mixed fortunes for the Military Orders. Members of the preceptory participated in both sieges at Rhodes and Malta and one unfortunate commander, apparently killed during the siege of Malta, had his head returned to Ambel where it remains to this day in a chapel at the base of the 16th-century Montserrat tower.⁵² Though gruesome to modern eyes, no more effective report of military activity could be imagined.

⁴⁶ Gerrard, *op. cit.* in note 4, doc 9. For a discussion of *exarics*, Muslim peasant farmers, see C. Stalls, *Possessing the Land: Aragon's Expansion into Islam's Ebro Frontier under Alfonso the Battler 1104–1134* (Leiden, 1995).

⁴⁷ Tax on iron from Ambel is mentioned in 1245: A. Huici, *Crónica de Jaime I* (Zaragoza, 1976), doc. 410, 200.

⁴⁸ Gaming pieces are known from a number of excavated sites, including South Witham (Lincs.) and Temple Bruer (Lincs.) in England: Gilchrist, *op. cit.* in note 17, 81–85.

⁴⁹ Colás Latorre and Sala Ausens, *op. cit.* in note 41, 72–80.

⁵⁰ The remarkable 14th-century polychrome frescoes in the hermitage at nearby Cabañas depict mounted knights as well as heraldic shields.

⁵¹ M. Caballu Albiac, *La Vera Cruz de Caspe* (Zaragoza, 1995).

⁵² Brothers from Ambel known to have been killed are Rogerio Duries in 1418 at Rhodes, Bonet Donato, *op. cit.* in note 2, 187, and Melchior de Monserrat who was killed by a Turkish musket shot at St Elmo, Malta, in 1565: E. Bradford, *The Great Siege, Malta* (London, 1965), 132.

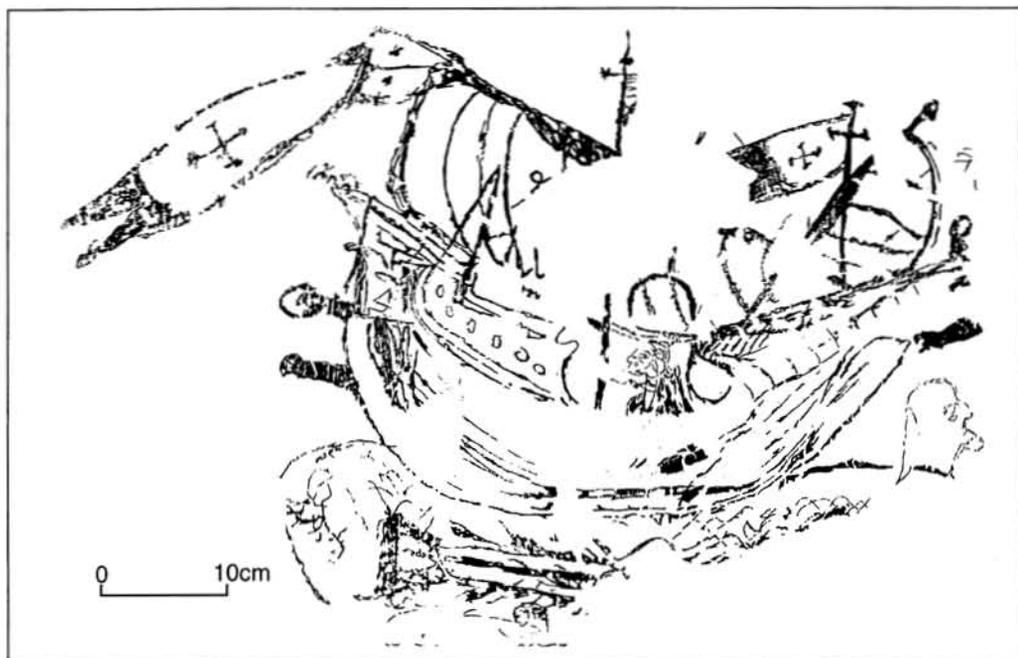


FIG. 5

Amongst the military graffiti at Ambel there are assault towers, Turkish weapons such as scimitars and arquebuses, rowing ships and standard galleys with pointed bows, lateen sails and oarsmen below deck. This example is a Mediterranean carrack, possibly at the siege of Malta in 1565 where Melchior de Monserrat, commander of the Ambel preceptory, took an important role in the defence of St Elmo.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that there was continual contact between the Muslims and Christians in Ambel as elsewhere and especially in agriculture, construction, pottery-making and iron production, where the Muslims made vital economic and artistic contributions whose influence has endured. A common language was the basis of these co-operative commercial ventures and many aspects of related material culture seem to have been little exploited to express or reinforce ethnic boundaries. Indeed, the material culture of the two polarized ethnic groups is, in some respects, remarkably similar. To take one example, it would not be possible to identify the boundaries of ethnic groups on the basis of the presence or absence of Islamic architectural motifs.

However, Ambel was far from being a multi-cultural 'melting pot', and in almost all other respects this was a segregated community in which ethnic and religious divides were inscribed into the very shape and fabric of the village and its buildings. Differences were visible in many aspects of material culture, from styles of food preparation, serving and diet to household furnishings and dress-accessories. Though considerably more work is needed in all of these fields, it was perhaps in the home where Muslims most resisted integration of their Islamic

heritage. Possibly gender was an influential factor, it could be argued that female-related activities show less evidence for acculturation and alteration. This deserves further consideration, though gender roles should not be assumed too readily.

Relations between the two groups were sometimes tense. In 1263, the Christian inhabitants of the village attacked and plundered the Muslim quarter, killing five.⁵³ At the other end of the period, in 1608, 80 years after Muslim religion had officially ceased to exist in Aragon and the Ambel mosque converted to a granary barn, the Muslims there elected their own Pope, from whom other Muslims could buy new privileges. These included marrying up to seven women, on the strict condition that they could be 'properly maintained'.⁵⁴ Such antagonisms aside the two communities existed side-by-side in a state of mutual tolerance.

These two tiny parallel worlds came to an end in 1526 when Islam was officially abolished in Aragon and a policy of 'uniformity' was introduced. The failure of this new edict can be measured in the almost total lack of any assimilation of the Muslim population into Christian society after that date. It can be quantified through the records of births, deaths and marriages between 1526 and the final expulsion of the Muslims in 1610. At nearby Torrellas, for example, the few 'converted' Muslims did not feel sufficiently strongly about their new faith to take confession on their death beds or to have Mass said in their name. Ecclesiastical enquiries intended to reveal the identity of converts and save them from expulsion heard evidence to the effect that they had 'lived and were living in their own sect'. Likewise, at nearby Novallas the priest confirmed that former Muslims had shown no voluntary interest in the Church and that some had even resisted confession on their death beds. The priest at Santa Cruz claimed that there were no good Christians among his former Muslim community and that he suspected that they ate meat on days of abstinence. There is little doubt that Muslim religious traditions and customs were faithfully maintained long after they had officially ceased to exist.⁵⁵

There are numerous good reasons why ethnic boundaries might have endured. First, there was little overlap in the activities of Christian and Muslim villagers, particularly in household traditions and little opportunity for integration while ethnic and religious ghettos were maintained. Second, before the changes of the 16th century, the Military Orders exhibited an apparent uniformity of values and tradition such as is typical in well structured institutions. Evidence from surviving graffiti, iconography and architecture shows these values to have little tendency towards integration. Third, boundaries will endure and strengthen when a powerful group increases its attempts to absorb a smaller group, which responds by recoiling and seeking to strengthen its own identity. Such was the reaction of Muslims after 1526 when material culture, such as writing and texts, was actively engaged in creating resistance to Christian ideologies. A culture of resistance enabled them to survive under oppression. Fourth, degrees in disparity in the

⁵³ AHN OO MM, Leg. 8163, no. 16.

⁵⁴ V. de la Fuente, *España Sagrada* (Madrid, 1865), Vol. 49, 258.

⁵⁵ J. Vallejo Zamora, 'Los moriscos de Torellas entre 1495-1610: consideraciones demográficas', *Turiaco*, 7 (1987), 281-324.

distribution of power and wealth affect the strength of ethnic and social boundaries. The overwhelming balance of political and social power inflicted through ceremony and jurisdiction in favour of the Military Orders may have firmly impeded any acculturation. Politically the small Muslim communities remained part of Christian Aragon after the 12th century; spiritually they always remained part of the wider Islamic community.

Towards the end of the 16th century a series of drastic measures was considered to force cultural assimilation between Muslims and Christians. Two favoured remedies were to keep all the Muslim children in Spain, give them a Christian education, but expel all the adults; another was to split the Muslim communities up and implant converted families in Christian areas. Eventually, these two ideas were rejected in favour of deportation, and the final 'Expulsion of the Moors' took place in 1610 when around 300,000 Muslims of a population of 8 million were forcibly expelled.⁵⁶ Its immediate effects must have been felt keenly in Aragon, where 20% of the population departed for the valleys to the south and west of Tunis, and in particular amongst the lowland villages of the Ebro basin where whole settlements were left abandoned overnight. It is said that the new settlements constructed by the new arrivals in North Africa were copies of those they had left behind and that it was well into the 18th century before their Aragonese dialects and romance language disappeared.

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⁵⁶ Braudel, *op. cit.* in note 3; Corral and Peña, *op. cit.* in note 12, 129–33.