

Tribalism, Ethnicity, and Islamization in the Baixo Alentejo of Portugal: Preliminary results of investigation into transitional period (AD 550-850) rural settlements.

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Introduction

In the mid-1970s, Pierre Guichard presented a sustained and detailed argument against the prevailing "traditionalist" view of the Islamic period of the Iberian Peninsula as an ephemeral foreign occupation--a kind of "historical parenthesis"--without lasting cultural or demographic effects to the Hispano-Roman tradition (Guichard 1976:24, 27). Drawing on structural-functional theory in social anthropology, Guichard argued that the Islamic and Latin Christian civilizations were based on opposing

structural principles of organization in the domestic domain, reflected in differences in systems of descent (patrilineal vs. bilineal), the organization of kin groups (corporate descent groups vs. bilateral kindreds), marriage patterns, the public role of women, and in notions of honor (a more detailed account of this framework can be found in Goody 1984:10-13, who ultimately calls into question depth of the opposition between the two systems). Because the two systems were structurally opposed at a very basic

level, and because Arab and Berber principles of clan endogamy discouraged intermarriage with *indigenous* peoples, very little in the way of acculturation or syncretization must have occurred. Further, drawing on Murphy and Kasdan's (1959) analysis of Bedouin kinship and sociopolitical organization, Guichard argued that segmentary lineage organization facilitated the defense, expansion, and growth of these groups once they arrived in the Peninsula (1976: 257, ff.). Finally, he argued that the number of in-migrating Arabs and particularly North African Berbers was actually quite large, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, not the few tens of thousands envisioned by the traditionalists (Ibid., p. 456-7). Thus, over the two or three centuries following the first invasions, Arab and Berber Muslims became a demographic as well as a political and cultural majority in the Peninsula.

Guichard's work galvanized archaeological research into the Islamic period during the 1980s, culminating in the formulation and testing of the model in several regions of the eastern Peninsula (e.g. Bazzana, Cressier and Guichard 1988), and its value to our understanding of the period is unquestioned. Over the past decade, however, there has been a subtle shift in the characterization of the Islamic period from one which emphasizes the abrupt implantation of fundamentally opposed cultural and social principles set in motion by the Muslim invasions of AD 711 to one which emphasizes a more gradual process of "transition," a view that was partially inspired by Wickham's germinal 1984 article on the Medieval transition (e.g. Gutiérrez 1996:21-25). This transition was brought about by the decline and disappearance of Late Roman political and economic structures, increasing contact with the Islamic world brought about by the influx of Arab and Berber populations from North Africa and the

growing economic and political power of the Islamic world throughout the circum-Mediterranean region.

The "transitional" view embodies several important implications for our understanding of the Islamic period. First, it allows us pay more attention to what happened to the several million *indigenous* peoples who lived in the Peninsula at the beginning of the Islamic period (Glick 1979:35 estimates seven million), and how they figure into the subsequent development of medieval Iberian society. Second, it admits the possibility of variation in local and regional development during the period, involving gradations between tribal or segmentary organization (which I define as more or less autonomous social groupings based on communally based land tenure with individual use rights regulated by genealogical position within the group) and proto-feudal or feudal organization (private or individual land tenure, with access to land regulated by patron-client relationships). Throughout much of the debate, "segmentary" and "feudal" organization often appear to be conceptualized as if they were the result of the playing out of culturally specific mental structures which constitute inalienable characteristics of a cultural (for example, as in Guichard's "oriental" vs. "occidental" structures). These contrasting forms of organization might be more profitably seen in behavioral terms as variations on a more or less universal set of organizational strategies that are available to any human group, subject to the influence of various aspects of the local political, economic and environmental conditions. Such a perspective would admit the possibility that segmentary, tribal organization could have developed more or less independently among *indigenous* rural Iberian populations as well, partly in response to the collapse of Roman state control and its attendance system of land taxation, and partly through a process of cultural syncretization

resulting from contact with in-migrating Arab and Berber groups. This perspective in turn implies that issues of tribal vs. feudal organization, ethnicity and islamization *are potentially separate issues* rather than part and parcel of a single unitary mechanism of cultural change.

In previous publications (Boone 1994, 1996), I have argued for the appearance of autonomous, tribal organization in the BaixoAlentejo of Portugal, an area where settlement survey has revealed a remarkably dense distribution of Islamic period hamlets and villages beginning in the 7th century and which were abandoned by the 13th century. One of the key points of evidence for autonomous tribal organization was the high frequency of silver jewelry, including perforated silver coins, recovered from depositional contexts indicative of loss during use (i.e. while being worn) in late Islamic period village site of Alcaria Longa (Mértola, district of Beja). This relatively large (1.6 hectare) site now appears to have been occupied for about 150 to 200 years beginning in late 10th or early 11th centuries, and was probably abandoned by the late 12th century. I argued that such jewelry represents, among other things, a strategy by which agro-pastoralists converted surplus accumulated during good years into durable form (silver), and that this durable wealth was retained by the primary producers themselves rather than extracted in the form of rent by dominant landowners in some kind of seigniorial arrangement. This pattern of personal adornment resembles that observed among women of the tribally organized Berbers of Morocco and Algeria, where it constitutes a signal of a family's wealth and prosperity. It is not the kind of personal, publicly displayed wealth normally associated with dependent peasants of Medieval and post-Medieval Europe. That these villagers were Arabized is strongly suggested by an incised Arabic

inscription found on a locally produced rooftile recovered from one of the house compounds (Boone 1996: Fig. 8).

As to the source of this tribal organization, I further argued that the L- or U-shaped house compounds built around a private patio uncovered at Alcaria Longa (Boone 1993, 1994, 1996) were good examples of a North African Berber import into the Iberian Peninsula, and evidence of islamization of rural society in the Lower Alentejo. This type of household spatial organization is nearly identical with that of the Berber "Rifian courtyard" form described by Mikesell (1961:74), and which is also found in other areas around northern Morocco. Myers (1979; see also Redman, Boone and Myers 1982) argued that the L- or U-shaped compound is actually a rural permutation of the urban Islamic house, which is organized around a central interior courtyard, with food preparation and sleeping areas distinctly separate. Guests are entertained and food is served and eaten either in the courtyard or in one of the sleeping rooms, never in the kitchen. The separation between kitchen and food serving/sleeping areas indirectly reflects the strict separation of men and women activities in traditional Muslim society. Hence, the argument went: since the house compounds are similar to Berber houses, they must reflect immigration of groups from North Africa, who were tribally organized; the appearance of these groups in the Baixo Alentejo further explains the appearance of Muslim social and cultural practices as well. This is a good example of the problem of conflation of the issues of political organization, ethnicity, and islamization that I referred to above, and one which I want to explore in more detail below.

Since 1995, we have directed our archeological investigations towards village sites dating to the transitional

period between the Late Roman and early Islamic occupations in an attempt to better understand the origins of the social and cultural patterns uncovered at 11th and 12th century Alcaria Longa. This article presents a brief summary of the preliminary results; a monograph presenting these results in more detail is currently in progress. I will define the "Transitional" period here somewhat arbitrarily as the time between approximately AD 550-850. As the results below will show, this is a time period during which distinctively "medieval" hamlets and villages began to appear on the countryside of the Baixo Alentejo, replacing the previous system of Roman *villae rusticae*. It is also the time period during which political and cultural influence shifts from Byzantine and Visigothic to the Islamic world. I have chosen the term "Transitional" because it makes no *prior* assumptions about the ethnic identity of the people that lived there at that time, how they were organized, or where they came from.

This is an important period in the history of the Baixo Alentejo because it appears, from the results of a site survey conducted in 1992 (Boone 1994, 1996; refer to Figures 1, 2 and 3 in this article) that the rural settlement density during the Islamic period was higher during this period than at any time before or since. There is a nearly eightfold increase in both the number of sites and the total settlement area from the Roman to the Islamic period. Several questions remain about this preliminary finding: 1) were the 160 recorded Islamic period sites occupied contemporaneously or are they the result of frequent abandonment and relocation of settlements?; 2) does settlement growth begin before the Arab invasions of 711 and build up slowly or 3) do these settlements represent a rapid influx of Arab or Berber populations later in the Islamic period?

In addition to allowing us to monitor more closely the pace of settlement growth during the transition from Late

Antiquity to the Medieval Islamic period, the results of these investigations will also shed light on the degree of material culture continuity and change between the Late Roman and the Islamic period. A primary goal of these investigations has been to determine which kinds of material culture elements, such as houseforms, hearth types, pottery, and rooftiles pre-date the Islamic period (and would hence, be at least partially indigenous, hispano-roman elements) and which elements may have been introduced by Berber or Arab populations after the Muslim occupation. This would provide at least a preliminary indication of whether the observed increase in settlement density was due to population replacement by in migrating North African Berbers, or whether population growth was autochthonous, resulting from a cultural syncretization between *indigenous* Hispano-Romans and North Africans and Arabs.

Roman and transicional period settlement

Twenty four of the 160 sites recorded in the 1992 survey of a 64 square kilometer area west of Mértola contained Roman period materials—predominantly terra sigillatas, Roman commonwares, and *tegulae*. The location of these sites in the 1992 survey area is indicated in Figure 2. None of the Roman period sites has been excavated, but on the basis of surface materials and locational characteristics, they can be divided into four general categories.

The fortified villa (the site of Papa Leite) is one of 20 small fortified early Roman sites recorded in the Baixo Alentejo (Alarcão 1988:109-110). These fortified *villae* (sometimes referred to as *castellae*) were founded in the 1st century BC, apparently as part of an official colonization effort sponsored by Pompey or Julius Caesar to protect copper and silver mine routes that led



Figure 1
Map of Portugal showing location of survey area discussed in the text.

Figure 2
Map of 8 x 8 km survey area, showing location of Roman and Transitional period sites. Sites discussed in text are indicated in *italics*.

Figure 3
Map of survey area, showing Islamic period sites.



- Modern village
- △ Modern quinta
- Roman castellum
- Roman period hilltop site
- ▲ Roman villa or farmstead
- Transitional period site



- 1.7 to 4 ha (30 to 70 houses)
- 4 to 1.5 ha (8 to 30 houses)
- 250 m to 4 ha (1 to 8 houses)
- ▲ < 250 sq m (field houses)

to the Guadiana river port of Mértola. The fortifications appear to have fallen out of use by the end of the 1st century AD at the latest.

At least five unfortified hilltop sites containing small amounts of early Roman materials are somewhat problematic in their interpretation. Four of these sites contain Campanian wares and early *terra sigillatas* and may even predate (i.e. extend back to the 2nd century BC) the abovementioned fortified *villae*, and were probably abandoned by at least the 1st century AD. Coarse, thick commonwares made of local clays, and which resemble wares found in Iron Age sites were also found on the surface of these sites. There is fairly abundant building stone present, although much of it appears to have been collected on the surface and in stream beds, rather than quarried, as is more often the case in Roman and Islamic period construction. In some of the sites, burned clay possibly indicating wattle-and-daub construction was recovered. Tegulae and other rooftile are absent, suggesting that structures there had thatched roofs. Our current and somewhat tentative interpretation is of these sites is that they were occupied by *indigenous* Iron Age peoples engaged in trade or raid with the Roman colonists. Although the evidence at this point is highly tenuous, the apparent continuation of non-Roman/Roman period sites, and their continued coexistence with fortified *villae* may represent a kind of "Fort Apache" situation that extends into the 1st century AD (compare this with Fabião's [1993:222] comments regarding the fortified *villa* of Manuel Galo, located less than a kilometer south of the survey area). In other words, the Iron Age presence may have been greater and more prolonged in this area than is indicated in the existing Classical sources, a point to which I will return in the conclusion.

Four later Roman *villa* sites, which were

unfortified, were found in valley floor locations in the survey area, including one located adjacent to Papa Leite. Terra sigillatas found on the surface of these sites date from the 1st century to as late as the 5th or 6th centuries AD. Building stone and *tegulae* are also abundant. These sites contain no Islamic materials and were clearly abandoned by the 6th or 7th centuries AD, if not earlier. There is no evidence of continuous occupation of these sites into the Islamic period. These *villa* sites are quite modest in extent compared to the large *villae* found to the north in the vicinity of Beja and Vidiguera (for example, Pisões, S. Cucufate, and Monte Cegonha) or to the south in the Algarve (e.g. Vilamoura), and which in some cases do show continued occupation into the Islamic period.

A fifth hilltop site contains only Late Roman materials and *tegulae* and is also unfortified. One possibility is that this site represents a Late Roman period *ermida*, or hilltop chapel/ monastery; similar to those found at Nossa Senhora de Amparo and São Bartolomeu in the *concelho* of Mértola, and which are discussed in more detail below.

Sixteen remaining habitation sites with Late Roman period material contained occasional *tegulae* and late terra sigillata clara or late red-slipped ware sherds but also contained abundant *imbrex* rooftile forms, including tiles with thumb impressions and finger-impressed zig-zag designs—designs that now appear to date from the end of the Late Roman period through the Islamic period, as will be discussed in more detail below. The areal extent of building stone and tile fragments indicates these sites represent small hamlets of perhaps two to four house compounds. These sites have a distinctive spatial distribution in the survey area in that the *Carta dos Solos* indicates that they tend to be clustered on a patch of relatively good agricultural soils called *pardos mediterrânicos*, in contrast to the rest of

the survey area, which consists almost entirely of thin, rocky lithosols. These sites are also clustered in the vicinity of the largest Roman *villa* site in the survey area, Cerro da Loiça.

These Transitional period sites appear to be the earliest hamlet and village sites of a distinctly "medieval" character in the area, and they will be the focus of analysis in the remainder of this article.

Establishing a settlement chronology for the transicional period (AD 550-850)

A continuing problem with interpreting the Transitional period settlement pattern in the region was that we were initially able to assign sites only very generally to either the Roman or the Islamic periods. Islamic period sites were identified on the basis of surface ceramics, including *melados* and known Islamic commonwares, but the known types tend to date only to the mid-10th century onward, and they are present in such low frequencies that the absence of such wares on the surface does not necessarily indicate a pre- or post-Islamic period date for a particular site. The ceramic chronology for commonwares of the period between the 8th and the 10th century remains poorly understood. The most reliable surface indicator of Islamic period occupation is the presence of *imbrex* style rooftiles with finger-impressed, "zig-zag" designs on the dorsal surface. On the basis of excavations at Alcaria Longa and at the Alcáçova de Mértola, such tiles were known to date to the Islamic occupation of at least the 11th and 12th centuries. Early in the 1992 survey, we began to realize that there was some systematic temporal variation in the kinds of designs found on Islamic period rooftiles. It also became clear that "zig-zag" designs on *imbrex* tiles appeared already in the Late Roman period and thus seem to partially pre-date the Muslim invasion of AD 711

(in fact, identical zig-zag designs are sometimes found on Roman *tegulae*: see photograph in Fabião 1993: 252).

The key to distinguishing Transitional and early Islamic sites from later ones was discovered through work carried out in 1994 and 1995 at the tile kiln site of Pego Real. The site, located at the confluence of a small seasonal *arroyo* and the Ribeira de Carreiras, a seasonal tributary of the Rio Guadiana, was discovered during the 1992 site survey. Surface remains at Pego Real consisted of an eroded, roughly circular area 3 to 4 meters in diameter of reddened, intensely burned soil and clay and large quantities of burned tile fragments. The site was recognized as a tile kiln on the basis of comparison with an almost identical feature, which was known to be the former location of a tile kiln, located on the outskirts of the present-day village of Alcaria Longa (distinct from the archeological site of Alcaria Longa, which is located about 1 kilometer away). The Alcaria Longa tile kiln was said by an 87 year old resident of the village (in 1989) to have been used as recently as 50 to 60 years before.

The Pego Real tile kiln site was clearly much older, however, since it contained rooftiles with finger-impressed zig-zag designs similar to those found on Islamic period sites in the area. It also contained tiles with thumb-impressed designs along the lateral edges (see Figure 4). Below the plow zone, three distinguishable cultural layers, each presumably representing distinct tile making episodes, were identified. The top layer was distinguished by the presence of tiles with zig-zag surface treatment and thumb or finger-impressed lateral rims. A charcoal sample from this layer produced a calibrated two-sigma date that ranged between AD 670 and 980 (see below and Figure 6). The third, and lowest stratum contained fragmentary *tegulae* and very thick *imbrex* tiles without designs.

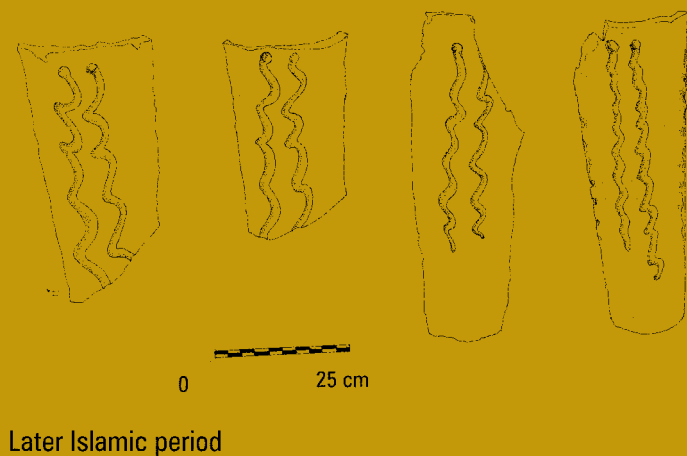
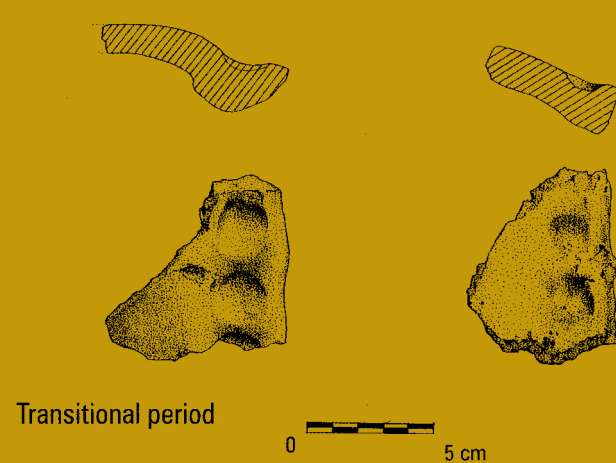
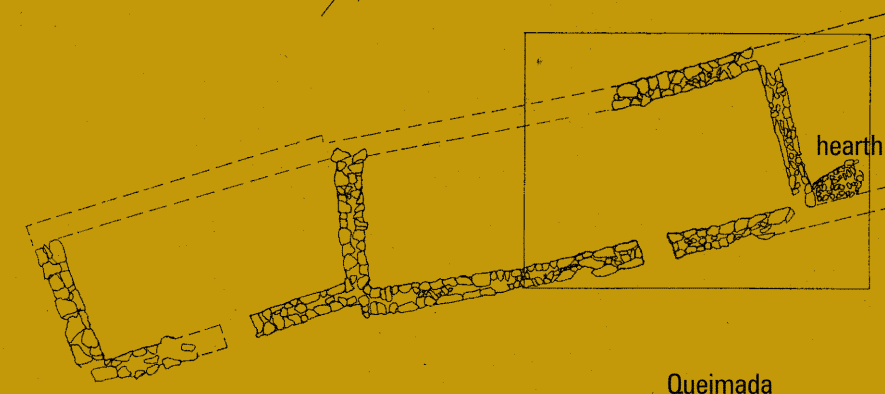
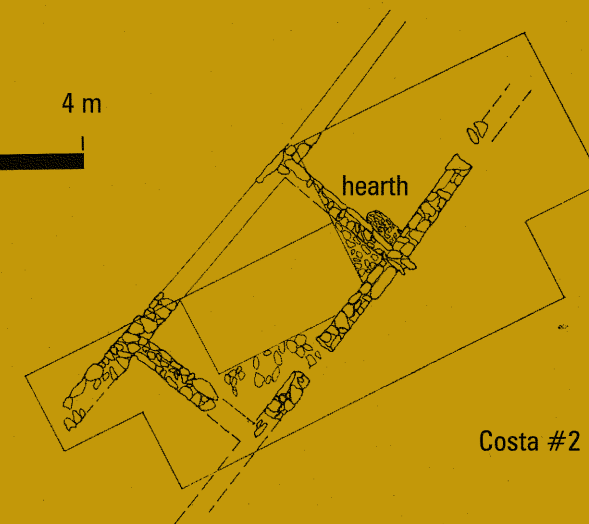
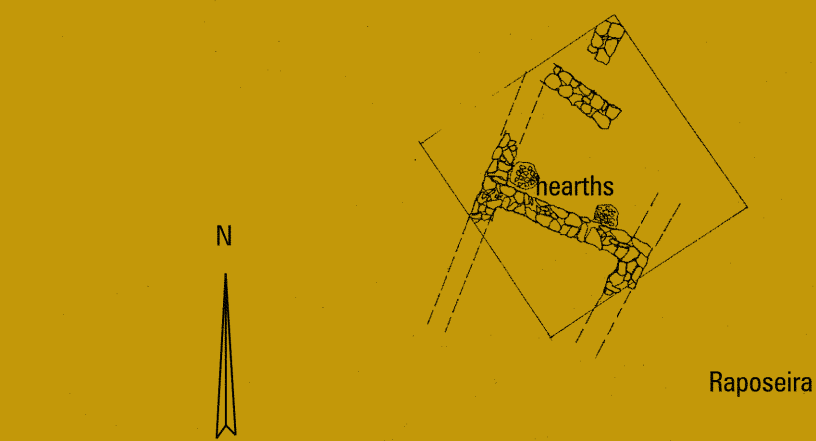


Figure 4
(Above) Transitional period roof tiles, with thumb-impressed designs along the lateral edges. (Below) Later Islamic period tiles from Alcaria Longa, showing zig-zag designs. The "pie-crust" design along the lateral edges of the tile on the right is distinct from the thumb-impressed designs from the earlier period, but may represent a later variant.

Figure 5
Plans of houses excavated in Transitional period sites of Raposeira, Costa #2, and Queimada.



These clearly date to sometime during the Roman period.

The thumb-impressed tiles found at Pego Real were particularly interesting, because of the thousands of decorated tiles recovered at Alcaria Longa, only one single thumb-impressed tile has been recovered, strongly suggesting that the use of thumb-impressions as designs on roof tiles had all but ceased by the time Alcaria Longa was occupied in the 11th and 12th centuries. Furthermore, similar thumb-impressed tiles had been found in the surface remains of sites of known Late Roman age: namely, occupation sites associated with the chapels at Nossa Senhora de Amparo and São Bartolomeu de Via Gloria in the eastern and southern parts of *concelho* of Mértola. These sites are thought to represent *ermidas* or small monasteries that date to the Late Roman/PaleoChristian periods. Carved stones incorporated into the present day chapel at São Bartolomeu seem to indicate that a PaleoChristian religious structure existed on that site in the Late Roman period. A small occupation site

adjacent to the chapel contains late terra sigillata or red-slipped sherds, as well as roof tiles with zig-zag designs and thumb-impressions. Similar tiles have been found in a buried occupation layer exposed by a road-cut adjacent to the present-day hilltop chapel of Nossa Senhora de Amparo. Hence, São Bartolomeu and probably Nossa Senhora de Amparo seem to have been religious sites in the Late Roman period and were again used as the sites of parochial churches with the formation of the parochial system in the area in 16th and 17th centuries. There is no indication of their continued use as religious structures during the 500 years Islamic period itself, suggesting either a remarkable locational coincidence or an equally remarkable continuity of cultural memory present in the area during the Medieval Islamic period.

To summarize, the evidence presented above indicates that: 1) the use of finger-impressed zig-zag designs on *imbrex* roof tiles begins in the Late Roman period and before the Muslim invasion, continues throughout the

Islamic period, and ceases with the Christian conquest of the area; and 2) roof tiles with thumb-impressions along the lateral edges (and which may or may not also have zig-zag designs) are restricted to the period between approximately AD 550-850, and can thus be considered to be reliable surface indicators of Transitional period and early Islamic period habitation sites. It was on the basis of these thumb-impressed tiles that Transitional period sites were initially distinguished from later Islamic period settlements.

1995 Excavations of three transicional sites: Queimada, Raposeira, and Costa #2

In 1995 three small habitation sites originally recorded in the 1992 survey and tentatively identified as dating to the Transitional period were selected for excavation. The three sites, named Queimada, Raposeira, and Costa #2, consisted of the surface remains of perhaps three or four households each. In each site, significant portions of dry-stone masonry house structures were uncovered, and in the case of

Queimada, virtually the entire outline of an 18 meter long structure was eventually excavated. These excavations allowed us to gain some idea of what houseforms were like during the Transitional period, such that they could be compared with houseforms uncovered at the later Islamic site (11th-12th century) of Alcaria Longa.

Radiocarbon Dating of the Sites. Two carbon samples from each of the excavated sites, as well as one sample from tile kiln of Pego Real, and two additional samples previously excavated from Alcaria Longa were submitted for dating using the Accelerator Mass Spectrometry method (AMS). The samples were analyzed at Geochron Laboratories in Cambridge, Massachusetts and calibrated. The results of the AMS dates are presented in the graph in Figure 6, arranged left to right in ascending chronological order. In the graph, the thin vertical lines indicate the 95% (2-sigma) confidence intervals for each date. The horizontal bars indicate the central date with the highest probability density. In the middle three dates, the open boxes indicate that in the calibration, more than one central date was calculated; in the Pego Real sample there were 4 possible central dates. The boxes on the graph enclose the earliest and latest central dates. Multiple central dates and the consequent wide ranges of error occur when the sample's actual date falls during periods of the Earth's atmospheric history characterized by rapid and severe fluctuations in ^{14}C concentrations. This is an unfortunate and currently unresolvable problem with radiocarbon dates that fall in the 8th and 9th centuries.

Note that the earliest dates from Queimada and Costa #2 in all likelihood predate AD 711. The three next oldest dates from Raposeira, Queimada, and the tile kiln Pego Real probably date somewhere between AD

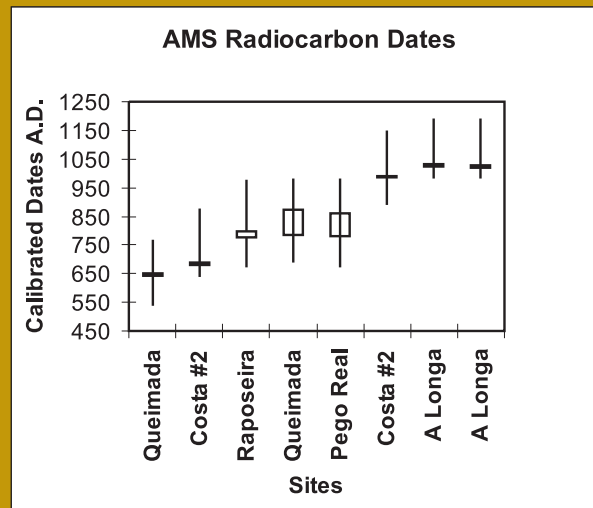


Figure 6
Calibrated AMS radiocarbon dates from sites discussed in the text.

750 and 850. In only one of the dates from the sites excavated in 1995 does the 95% error range extend beyond AD 1000. In contrast, the two dates from Alcaria Longa fall solidly within the 10th and 11th centuries AD. Hence, there is a clear chronological separation between the large site of Alcaria Longa and the three small sites of Queimada, Costa #2, and Raposeira, as well as the tile kiln of Pego Real.

Note also that there is a wide separation between the two dates at Queimada and especially Costa #2. In case of the Costa #2 dates, the 95% confidence intervals between the two barely overlap. One interpretation for this would be that the sites were occupied continuously for a very long time--in the case of Costa #2, nearly 500 years. However, the extreme scarcity of artifacts such as pottery argues against this--that is, it seems unlikely that the handful of sherds recovered from Costa #2 represent 500 years of occupation. An alternative explanation, and one which we think is more likely, is that these settlements were periodically abandoned and reoccupied. This interpretation causes us to rethink our previous interpretation (cf. Boone 1994) that the large number of sites present during the Islamic period is due to

higher population densities alone. Instead, if there was periodic abandonment and reoccupation of individual sites, only a portion of all the Transitional and Islamic period sites identified during the 1992 survey would have been occupied at the same time (Macías 1996:41 has previously made this point). Still, it is worth noting that the pattern of frequent abandonment and resettlement occurs only during the Transitional and Islamic periods. The location of settlements after the establishment of the parish system in the 15th and 16th centuries is remarkably stable; only two abandoned habitation sites from this period were found in the entire survey area.

In summary, we have a fairly clear separation between the small early sites such as Queimada and the larger, later Islamic period sites such as Alcaria Longa. On the basis of the radiocarbon dates, we can now hypothesize that many of the small sites (i.e., those consisting of three or four houses) in the survey area are probably Late Roman and Transitional in age, whereas larger, more aggregated sites (which contained eight to thirty houses), such as Alcaria Longa, formed much later, probably in the 11th and 12th centuries AD. These are the first Late Roman period rural sites that have been identified and excavated in southern Portugal that were clearly occupied by non-elite subsistence farmers--i.e. "peasants." All previous excavations from this period have been limited to Roman *villas*, basilicas, and related Roman elite structures. This site and others like it indicate that a non-elite, possibly *indigenous* agro-pastoralist population did indeed exist in the region during the Late Roman and early Islamic period. This further suggests that the high site densities observed during the Islamic period may not be entirely due to the influx of Arab or Berber populations after AD 711, but rather to *indigenous* population growth, stimulated perhaps by social, political

and economic conditions inherent in the development of Islamic Andalusian civilization.

Material Culture continuity and the change in the transitional period

Houseforms. One of the principal objectives of the excavations was to uncover enough of a house structure from each site to get a clear idea of how houses were spatially organized during the Transitional period, such that they could be compared with the house compounds excavated at the 11th and 12th century site of Alcaria Longa, discussed above. Evidence recovered at the three Transitional period sites presented below suggests at least the possibility that the "Moroccan" houseform may be a permutation of an *indigenous* houseform already present in the Late Roman period.

Figure 5 presents the completed excavation plans from portions of houses excavated at Queimada, Raposeira and Costa #2. Although these plans are highly fragmentary, due mainly to the fact that the structures were not buried very deeply and had been severely damaged by centuries of plowing and erosion, we were able to piece together a fairly reliable idea of what these houses were like in terms of spatial organization.

Based on the more complete plans of the houses at Queimada and Costa #2, the house compounds seem to consist of one long building divided into three separate sections, and oriented so that the room entrances face the south-southeast. Each room has a separate door to the outside and there is no passage inside between the rooms of the structure. In each structure, the central room appears to be the largest. The large central room was absent of interior features, although occasional river cobbles were used to pave the

floors of these rooms. A reasonable interpretation would be that these rooms were used for housing animals such as sheep or goats, or donkeys. The Northeast, or right-hand room was used for cooking, as evidenced by the presence of at least one prepared hearth. There were fragments of cooking pots on the surfaces of the hearths at Costa #2 and Raposeira. We were able to recover very little information about the interior characteristics of the Southwestern-most rooms due to poor preservation. These may have been sleeping rooms.

In summary, rural houses in the Transitional period differed from the house compounds uncovered at the 11th and 12th century site of Alcaria Longa in the sense that they did not form L- or U-shaped enclosed patio compounds. The enclosed L- or U-shaped patio houseplan appears chronologically to be a later Islamic period development. Whether this means that this type of house plan is a Berber import or whether it is an *indigenous* development is an interesting question that we cannot answer at this point. However, one possibility is that the two forms may not be all that different and that they are historically and functionally related. Specifically, the enclosed house compound plan may be a response to increased settlement size: as more and more houses are built in a village, the long, tripartite compound of the Transitional period simply "curls" around to form a private patio for household activities. In smaller hamlets of perhaps only two or three compounds, like the three described here, there would be no need for enclosing a private family space.

Figure 7 shows a hypothetical model of the "evolution" of rural house forms from the Transitional through the Islamic and post-Medieval period. To the right of each form is a diagram which schematizes the organization of space and patterns of access in each

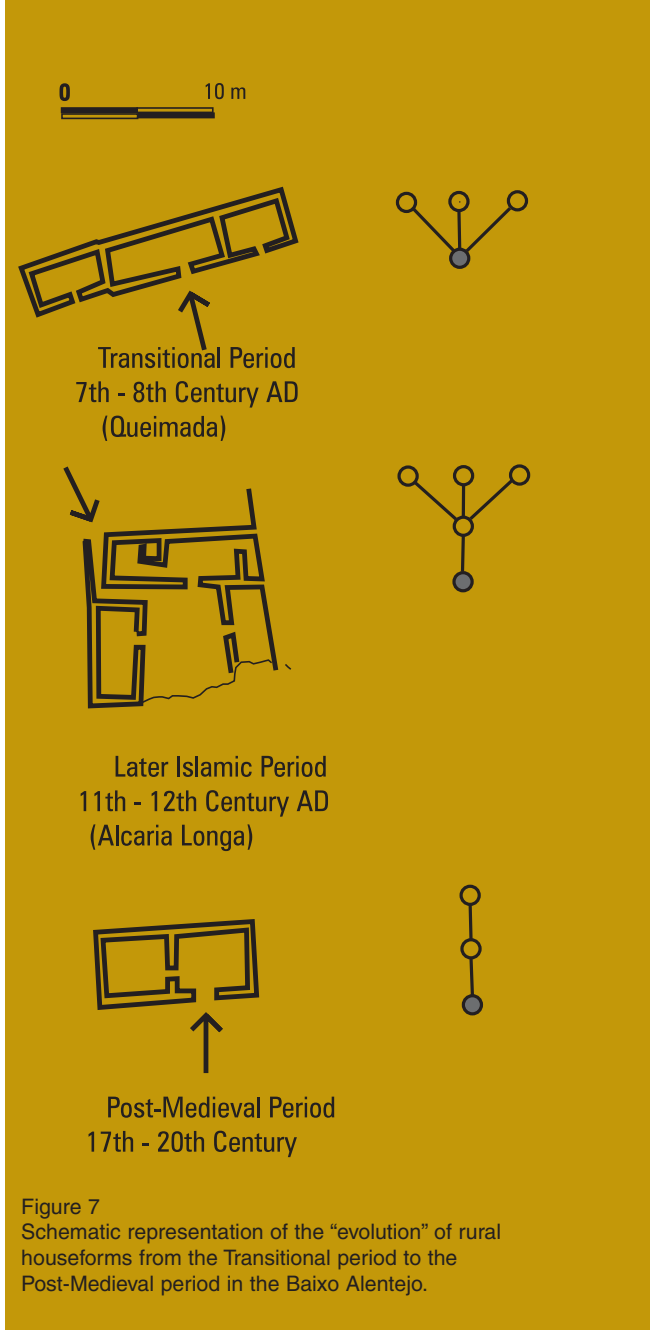


Figure 7
Schematic representation of the "evolution" of rural houseforms from the Transitional period to the Post-Medieval period in the Baixo Alentejo.

structure (based on the method described in Hillier and Hanson 1984). The dark circle represents point of entry, the open circles represent separate interior rooms or spaces, and the lines represent passages from one room to another. These diagrams indicate that the only real difference between the Transitional house form and the Islamic house form is that the Islamic form has some added depth in the form of an entry courtyard. Interestingly, the post-Medieval houseforms (based on contemporary rural houses in the area) do reflect a radical change in household organization: the house is entered through the kitchen, and the rest of the house is accessible only through the kitchen entrance. This latter

configuration resembles more closely the typical western European pattern, in which the hearth is the heart of the household, and the kitchen is not separated from other social and work activities.

Hearths. Delineation of changes in ceramic production and distribution patterns can also potentially shed light on the degree of cultural continuity or rupture between the Late Roman and Islamic period. Since islamization involved in many cases the influx of new populations into the Peninsula, one might expect new ceramic traditions to follow them. For example, traditional Berbers in North Africa have maintained a remarkably persistent and conservative tradition of household production of hand-formed ceramics (Balfet 1965; Redman and Myers 1981) for use in cooking and water storage which has been shown to extend back in time to before the Roman occupation, as evidenced by hand-formed wares recovered at the Roman provincial capital of Volubilis, and through the Arabization of the Maghreb, as evidenced by the occurrence of hand-formed wares at the early Islamic city of Basra (Benco 1987) and in medieval Islamic levels of Qsar es-Seghir (Myers 1984). This tradition has survived several waves of modernization beginning as early as the 18th century (when for example, the British style copper tea-pot was widely adopted). If North African Berbers indeed were responsible for much of the rural settlement of Iberia during the Islamic period, one might expect that they would have brought with them the tradition of household production of hand-formed pottery.

The picture that is emerging, however, is much more complex. An excellent review of early Islamic period ceramic production technology and distribution in the southeastern Peninsula has been presented by Gutiérrez Lloret (1988; 1996:31-70). Extensive studies of the

early Paleoandalusi sequence in southeastern Spain (Ación Almansa 1986, 1988; Gutiérrez Lloret 1988, 1992, 1996) have shown that by the end of the Late Roman period (450-711 AD), wheel-made pottery production had nearly ceased, and was only revived again later in the late 9th and the 10th centuries, during the consolidation of the Umayyad caliphate centered in Cordoba, perhaps as a response to conditions under which population densities had again increased and trade networks reformed to the point that such industries could be supported. In the Paleoandalusi period (711-c. 900 AD), hand-formed and slow-wheel (*torno lento*) industries are argued to be indicative of cultural continuity among Late Roman *indigenous* populations, not immigrating Berbers, since hand-formed wares appear to be absent in areas where Berber settlement is hypothesized to have occurred (Ación Almansa 1986). Elsewhere, Zozaya (1969) has argued that influx of Berber ceramic vessel forms and decorative styles is signaled by the appearance of buff-colored *jarritas* with red-painted designs-forms which are typically wheel-thrown rather than hand-formed. Why household based, hand-formed ceramic industries do not appear in Berber settlement areas in Iberia when it is such a persistent tradition among North African Berbers is an interesting question that has not really been addressed.

A total of 1178 pottery sherds were recovered at Queimada, Raposeira, and Costa #2 (Table 1). Ceramics on all three sites were thinly scattered and very fragmentary; no reconstructable vessels were recovered-but they give us a preliminary idea of the kinds of clays, manufacturing techniques, and vessel forms that were used in the Transitional period to compare with the 11th and 12th century ceramic assemblage recovered at Alcaria Longa.

	Coarse Red-Brown (Handmade)	Coarse Red-Brown (Wheel)	Orange Plainwares (Wheel)	Beige Plainwares (Wheel)	<i>melado</i>	terra sigilata (clara)	Sample Size (N sherds)
Queimada	31.4%	17.0%	47.5%	3.6%	0	N=1	223
Raposeira (Early)	12.3	77.1	10.1	0.002	0	N=2	741
Raposeira (Late)	0.0	21.3	77.6	0.9	N=1	0	103
Costa #2	0.0	18.0	80.1	1.8	0	0	111
Alcaria Longa	0.0	17.2	75.2	4.4	3.2%	0	5196

Table 1 – Proportional representation (based on sherd counts) of handmade and wheel-made pottery at Queimada, Raposeira, Costa #2, and Alcaria Longa.

All but four sherds were of utilitarian commonwares. The three *terra sigillata clara* sherds found at Queimada and Raposeira were from either subfloor deposits or from soil fill used to pack the dry stone masonry walls--none were found in floor contexts. The Caliphal period (as opposed the later "North African" period glaze form) *melado* sherd from Raposeira was from the floor of a later building period. The commonwares are divided into three visually distinguished fabric types: Coarse Red-Brown, Orange Plainwares, and Beige Plainwares. Coarse Red-Brown wares are dark red-brown clays which contain up to about 5% hornblende grains and appear to derive from the decomposition of diorites and other mafic volcanic rocks. The nearest known source of clays of this type is some 50 km to the north in Beja Formation, where pottery is still made from this kind of clay. Orange Plainwares are made from clays that now appear to derive from *flysch* sedimentary/low-grade metamorphic rock--a formation that covers virtually the entire Baixo Alentejo--that has been subjected to low to medium grade metamorphism to form red schists, phyllites and related metamorphic rock. Clays suitable for pottery making are distributed widely in the area in patches of what are called *barros encarnados*. Locally, these clays were used until quite recently to make rooftiles. The source for Beige Plainwares is not known, but they may represent a variant of the Orange Plainware material.

To summarize, the Coarse Red-Brown wares were almost certainly manufactured outside the area, up to 50 km away. The Orange Plainwares could have been made from clays that are available in the immediate vicinity of the sites. Currently, an extensive Neutron Activation Analysis is underway to compare pottery samples with locally collected clay samples. Experimental clay briquettes made from these clays are visually identical to the fabric types observed in the Alcaria Longa and Transitional site ceramics. Hence, there is strong continuity in the clay sources being used throughout the Transitional and Islamic periods.

The predominant vessel forms in the three sites are cooking pots and water jars. Cooking pots (identified by form and blackened exterior surfaces) are nearly always made of Coarse Red-Brown fabric, and water and other storage jars are more commonly made of Orange Plainwares. The same pattern was observed in the Alcaria Longa assemblage. Cooking pot forms are wide mouth jars with sloping, round sides and small flat bases.

There are two main differences between the Transitional assemblages and the Alcaria Longa assemblages, based on the preliminary evidence available. First, hand-formed vessels date entirely to the early part of the Transitional period. Of over 5000 sherds recovered at Alcaria Longa, only 5 hand-formed sherds have been identified. In contrast, at Queimada, 31% of the sherds were hand-made, and in the early levels of Raposeira, 12% were

hand-made. Secondly, it is only in later period that we see the appearance of distinctive wheel-made glazed vessel food serving vessel forms--conical bowls, platters, and pitchers, as well as the painted plainware *jarritas*. These vessels have been argued to signal the adoption of Islamic social practices, including the adoption of communal forms of food service and hospitality, in both urban and rural contexts (Gutierrez-Lloret 1992). While they may not constitute proof of islamization in all cases, they are clearly associated with medieval Islamic food preparation and serving practices.

Hearths. Another discovery made during the 1995 season was that the tile and clay lined hearths, which had previously been thought to have been an Islamic period introduction, probably predate the Muslim invasion, although they continue through the Islamic period. This type of hearth was first discovered and described at Alcaria Longa, a 11th and 12th century village, where fourteen such features were uncovered in three excavated house compounds (Boone 1993). Interestingly, this form of hearth has not been found in the Islamic period houses excavated in the Alcáçova de Mértola. Hence, it appears to be a distinctively rural form of hearth construction. In 1995, one such hearth was uncovered at Costa #2, one at Queimada, and two at Raposeira.

Subsequent literature searches have revealed that very similar hearths are found in the La Tène Period of France (Audouze and Büchsenschütz 1992:110), and in the Chalcolithic period of the Northern Meseta of the Iberian Peninsula (Delibes de Castro, *et al.* 1995:51). Hence, there is now some reason to believe that this particular type of hearth may indicate cultural continuity with the pre-Islamic *indigenous* people of the Baixo Alentejo.

Conclusions

The preliminary evidence presented above on the material culture of Transitional period (AD 550-850) rural habitation sites in the Baixo Alentejo of Portugal suggests that small hamlets and villages of a distinctly Medieval character were already appearing on the landscape *prior* to the Arab and Berber invasions of AD 711. Further, there are several relatively fundamental classes of material culture, including houseforms, rooftiles, pottery production techniques, and hearths, that show varying continuity from the pre-Islamic period. There are at least two possible interpretations of this evidence, neither of which is entirely mutually exclusive of the other.

One interpretation would be that the earliest inhabitants of the small hamlets of the Transitional period represent *indigenous* landholders freed from dependency on the Roman *villa* system and the land-tax system that supported the Late Roman state (cf. Wickham 1984). In *Passages From Antiquity to Feudalism*, Perry Anderson writes of the situation in Gaul: "The break-up of Roman rule undermined the stability of the basic instrument of Latin rural colonization, the *villa* system; there now reemerged from beneath it an older Celtic landscape, revealing primitive hamlets of huts and dwellings that had been overlaid by the Romanization of Gaul" (1978:123). Might a parallel situation have existed in the marginal areas of the Baixo Alentejo? (I am not, of course, suggesting that the Iron Age peoples here were necessarily "Celtic"). Under this scenario, we might imagine the resurgence of tribal organization based on previous Iron Age models--communal landholding with individual access to use rights determined by genealogical position in a descent group--*prior* to islamization, which occurred later, by perhaps the 9th or 10th and 11th centuries, under the

growing influence of Islamic rule and contact with immigrating Arab or Berber groups.

A second possible interpretation, and one suggested by the editors of this volume, is that North African Berber populations were present in the area in significant numbers *prior* to invasions of AD 711. Significant incursions into Baetica by *Mauris* from North Africa are documented to have occurred into the 2nd century AD (Fear 1996:34). It may be that their impact on the cultural landscape of southern and southwestern Peninsula was greater than is currently realized. Under this scenario, islamization would again have occurred later in the Islamic period, in a manner parallel with the islamization of Berber groups in North Africa. This would certainly explain the appearance of tribal organization in the area *prior* to islamization, as well as the appearance of "Rifian courtyard" houseforms. But it would not explain the continuity of the distinctive roof-tile designs, which do not occur, to my knowledge, in northern Morocco during the same period, nor of the hand-made pottery tradition, which has clear antecedents in the Late Roman period.

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