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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE FESTIVAL OF MOORS AND CHRISTIANS OF VILLENA (SPAIN): A CURRENT EXAMPLE OF TOLERANCE AND OTHERNESS AMONG DIFFERENT CULTURES

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Abstract

The festivals of Moors and Christians are very old and important celebrations which are held in most of the countries belonging to the old Spanish empire. Its origin is in the Middle Age, and they spread throughout Spain, Portugal and the old Spanish and Portuguese empires in the Modern Age (Latin America and Philippines, mainly). Although in ancient times they represented the confrontation between Muslims and Christians in Spain during the Middle Age, nowadays they have become festivals of a tolerance and friendly nature, which simply commemorate a period in the History of Spain in which two cultures and two religions lived together. Festival participants and people in general sympathize with the Moorish side and participate in it with pleasure, in such a way that the festival has become an exaltation of the Arab culture in medieval Spain. The objective of the present research work is doing a holistic study of the Moors and Christians celebrations of a specific town, such as Villena, analyzing all aspects of these festivals from all possible points of view. It is, therefore, a multidisciplinary study, which is based fundamentally on the method of historical research, but which will also take into account other aspects of the festivities, such as statistical or literary studies. This article summarizes a much deeper investigation on this subject and exposes the most important conclusions of it.

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Introduction:-

The Festivals of Moors and Christians have been little and insufficient studied until thirty years ago all over the World. A. Warman (1972) studied the Moors and Christians dances in Mexico and several authors have studied them in Spain, the most interesting of which was the book by A. Salvà (1958). The books by J. L. Mansanet (1981), J. L. Bernabeu (1981), M. S. Carrasco (1989, 1996) and González (1999) and the articles by D. Brisset (1993, 1997, 2001) have also been important, and the congresses held about the Festivals of Moors and Christians very interesting (Ponce, 2017). The Valencian type is the most developed and has been studied more deeply, but in a superficial way until the last years (Domene, 2015). It was necessary to study them in a more scientific way, and that is what has been done now in one of the cities where they are celebrated with more importance. The Festival of Villena are very old and where people participate more massively, but they has been little and insufficient studied. J. Zapater published the book *Historia de la Imagen de Ntra. Sra. de las Virtudes* (1884), J. M. Soler published important articles about the Festival of Villena (1976, 1997), and finally J. F. Domene published several books (Domene, 1989, 2008, 2013, 2014) and many articles about this subject (Domene, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c,

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2000d, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2002d, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2012, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e, 2018), for instance. The objective of this research work has been to write a definitive dissertation about the Festival of Moors and Christian of Villena, a doctoral thesis about it (Domene, University of Alicante, Spain, 2018), and this article summarizes it.

(This research article has been translated into English by María Mercedes Molina Morales).

History of the Moors and Christians Festival of Villena:

In Villena, the Moors and Christians Festival is celebrated from the 4th to the 9th of September every year, in honour of Our Lady of the Virtues, Patroness of the town. Its origin is in 1476, when Our Lady of the Virtues was proclaimed Patroness of the town and protector against the Plague. Its statue was placed in a Shrine distant 4 miles from the town. To this Shrine citizens went in pilgrimage twice a year, to ask for Our Lady's protection. The festival is the result of the transformation of the old soldadesca (soldiery), the urban militia or popular army created in 1497, 1562 and finally in 1609, which accompanied the statue of Our Lady of the Virtues in the processions to the shrine firing arquebuses. In Villena there are documents that prove that the soldiery already existed in 1586, and in 1638 it participated in the processions. At the beginning of the 19th Century the "Embassies" (theatrical performances) were added and the primitive company of the soldiery became the group of Christians, appearing the group of Moors at the same time. The characteristic elements of the old militia were preserved, such as the military roles of Captain, Ensign and Corporal, the arquebuses and the firing of arquebuses, and the rolling of flags. The first castle for the Embassies was built with wood at the beginning of the 19th Century, so that the two oldest groups (Moors and Christians) had a place to fight. After each of the two Embassies, there was a "battle" with arquebuses, the first of which was won by the Moors, and the second one was won by the Christians. In a third performance, the Moorish Ambassador converted to Christianity, before the citizens. All the components of the groups participated in the procession. In 1838 the Effigy of Mohammed was already brought from the neighbouring village of Biar, and it was placed on top of the castle for Embassies, after the Moors had won the first battle. The effigy was removed from the castle after the Christians won the second battle. Also in 1838 the statue of Our Lady started to be brought to the town every September, instead of the people going to the Shrine. On April 18th, 1839, Our Lady Association was created to organize the religious activities of the Feast. The Festival was restructured from one day, to five days (September 6th-10th). In a document from 1845 the feast appears under the name of "fiestas de moros y cristianos" (Moors and Christians Festival) and in 1848 the structure of the festival was fixed from September 6th until 9th and it has been kept almost unchanged until now. In the mid 1800s the parades of the Reveille and the Retreat appeared, as well as the oldest great parade of the festival, the Entrada (the Entrance), whose primary purpose was that every group went to meet the statue of Our Lady, at the town's outskirts, firing the arquebuses. Four groups existed in 1863 (Moors, Christians, Romans and Students), which were only three in 1863 (Moors, Christians and Romans) and they had increased to nine in 1884, but it was not until 1967 when the number was established definitively in 14 groups that exist today. Seven of them belong to the Moorish band: Moros Viejos (Ancient Moors), Moros Nuevos (New Moors), Bando Marroquí (Moroccan Band), Moros Realistas (Royalist Moors), Moros Nazaríes (Nazarite Moors), Moros Bereberes (Berber Moors), and Piratas (Pirates). The other seven belong to the Christian band: Estudiantes (Students), Marinos Corsarios (Corsair Sailors), Andaluces (Andalusians), Labradores (Farmers), Ballesteros (Crossbowmen), Almogávares (Mercenaries) and Cristianos (Christians). In 1955 it appeared the great nocturnal parade known as the Cabalgata (Cavalcade). In the following years they created special squads inside each group, which change dress every year. The Central Association of the Festival of Moors and Christians was created on January 2nd, 1970, adding to Our Lady Association. In the 1970s and 80s the number of participants increased massively, reaching 10 000 in the 90s and 11.506 in 2011, mainly after the participation of women since 1988. In 2014, the number of participants was 10.695. Because of this, the Moors and Christians Festival of Villena is the most participative in Spain and even all over the world.

The more interesting events of the Moors and Christians Festival of Villena:

May 12th:

Welcome to the Effigy: The Effigy is brought to Villena from the neighbour village of Biar to be welcomed and accompanied in a procession by the members of the 14 Groups, firing their arquebuses, rotating their flags, and enjoying a special ancient music composition (El Baile de los Espías) the Municipal Band of Villena plays for the welcome event.

Last Sunday of August:

In the morning, at 10:00 a.m.: Parade composed by the members of the 14 groups firing their arquebuses.

In the afternoon, at 6:00 p.m.: There is a Procession to bring Our Lady of the Virtues from the Sanctuary of the Virtues, to the city of Villena. It is the oldest act in the Feast; it has been celebrated since the end of the 15th Century. The Welcome of the Virgin "La Morenica": Members of the 14 groups meet together firing their arquebuses to welcome Our Lady of the Virtues while the Second Lieutenants are rotating the flags that each Group has, and the Municipal Band of Villena plays the national anthem; then, fireworks set pieces are being displayed to welcome her.

Later on, they accompany Our Lady of the Virtues in a Procession from Salesianos' Church to Saint James' Church (15th century). The Virgin "La Morenica" will stay there to be visited by everyone until the 9th September.

When the Procession finishes at Saint James' Square, Our Lady of the Virtues is welcomed by the members of the 14 groups firing their arquebuses and rotating the flags each group has while She is being carried into the Church. It is a ritual that has remained the same since the 17th Century. Right afterwards, a cloister procession takes place inside the Church of Saint James, in which the image of the Virgin is carried up by hand, on the shoulders of the people, through the side aisles and around the ambulatory of the church, to be finally raised to Her beautiful throne, placed in the main altar, by a mechanism that has been in use since 1752. This ritual has mainly remained unchanged since the 17th Century, when the Soldiery (la soldadesca) started doing it that way, and it is a clear example of the Feast celebrated during the Baroque period where there was a great solemnity in each act.

September 4th:

At 7 p.m.: Concert being offered by the Municipal Band of Villena in the Chapí Theatre. It originally used to be offered at the esplanade placed outside the Chapí Theatre, and it used to be organized by the "Círculo Agrícola Mercantil" since the day of its foundation back in 1923 until the eighties. Right after the concert people go to celebrate the 4th September Dinner in the headquarters every Group has.

All night along: open air dancing at the headquarters of the groups.

September 5th:

At noon: Announcement of the beginning of the Moors and Christians Festival proclaimed by the town crier (pregonero o pregonera) from the balcony of the City Hall at Saint James' square; afterwards, there is the celebration of the Paso Doble Feast Parade formed by all music bands that will participate in each parade that year.

In the afternoon, at 4:00 p.m.: The Entrance Parade. It is a great parade, grandiose and impressive; it is the oldest in town where the 14 groups of Moors and Christians, 100 music bands and around 10000 participants, wearing beautiful and luxurious costumes, parade for 7 continued hours from "La Losilla" to "El Portón" hence to welcome the Patroness, Our Lady of the Virtues. Until 2003, there was a pilgrimage at the same time, from the Sanctuary of the Virtues, where people gathered at this local shrine to bring on pilgrimage Our Lady of the Virtues to the city and then all the groups of Moors and Christians welcomed the Virgin.

This parade, the Entrance, is the most waited and loved by all participants and people from Villena. One of its main characteristics is that the Moorish Groups start parading first, right before the Christian Groups, opposite to what happens in all other towns where people parade the other way, in the other direction. Villena parades the way the groups used to parade on 8th September because the Christians were the oldest from all the groups that parade and the direct inheritors of the oldest Soldiery (Soldadesca), thus they had the privilege and honour to parade right in front of Our Lady of the Virtues.

All night along: open air dancing at the headquarters of the groups.

September 6th:

In the morning, at 7:00 a.m.: Reveille Parade: It is a parade that starts at sunrise. It comes from a military origin. The Reveille Parade was added to the Moors and Christians Festival at the end of the 19th Century.

At 10:00 a.m.: Mass and The children's Conversion.

At noon: Children's Parade for Hope. This parade started back in 1970.

At 5:00 p.m.: Celebration of the first Embassy in the Atalaya Castle (12th Century) and a battle of arquebuses. The Moors win and put the Effigy on a tower of the Castle.

In the evening, at 9:00 p.m.: Celebration of the Great Night Parade known as the Cavalcade. It is the best of all the Moors and Christians Festivals, with the participation of all 14 groups of Moors and Christians: around 10 000

participants wearing beautiful and luxurious costumes, with 40 Special Squads and 100 music bands, all parading for 7 continued hours.

All night along: open air dancing at the headquarters of the groups.

September 7th

In the morning, at 7:00 a.m.: Reveille Parade. It is a parade that starts at sunrise. It comes from a military origin. It is the same parade than the one celebrated the previous day, but now they parade in an opposite order.

At noon: The Offering Parade. All participants within it offer to Our Lady of the Virtues flowers and products from the country. This parade has been celebrated since 1955.

At 10:00 p.m.: The Retreat Parade. It is a comic and joyful parade than comes from a military origin, dating from the 19th Century. Nowadays it has become an authentic joyful Carnival parade where its participants use critics to make people laugh and the public accept these critics so well.

At 1:00 a.m.: The Reveille Act in Saint James' Square to announce the Feast day of Our Lady of the Virtues, it is an impressive and beautiful Act where the image of Our Lady of the Virtues is brought right at the entrance of Saint James' Church; then the Municipal Band of Villena plays the "Paso doble" composition "La Morenica" while people sing it and the Second Lieutenants from all the groups rotate their flags.

The image of the Virgin is illuminated for a few seconds as a way to illuminate the good path to all people in Villena.

1:30 a.m.: Fireworks. There is a spectacular display of magnificent fireworks from the Atalaya Castle of Villena. It is so wonderful, a fascinating event, a delight for everyone so rich in colours to bring instants of happiness, a gift from Villena to everyone for a happy and contented life.

All night along: open air dancing at the headquarters of the groups.

September 8th

This is the Feast day of Our Lady of the Virtues.

In the morning, at 7:00 a.m.: Reveille Parade. It is a parade that starts at sunrise. It comes from a military origin.

At noon, celebration of the Second Embassy in the Atalaya Castle and the battle of arquebuses, where the Christians win and give the Effigy back to the neighbour village of Biar.

At 6:00 p.m.: The Conversion of the Moorish Ambassador to Christianity, performed inside Saint James' Church, since 1972.

At 6:30 p.m.: The Great and Solemn Procession.

When the Conversion finishes, then it starts the Great and Solemn Procession of Our Lady of the Virtues with the 14 groups of Moors and Christians participating in it. Now the music bands play religious music compositions and solemn marches. The procession finishes at Saint James' Square, where Our Lady of the Virtues is welcomed by all members of the 14 groups firing their arquebuses while the Second Lieutenants are rotating the flags of their groups, and Our Lady of the Virtues is carried back into the Church. This ritual is mainly the same as it happened during the 17th Century. Right afterwards, a cloister procession takes place inside the Church of Saint James, in which the image of the Virgin is carried up by hand, on the shoulders of the people, through the side aisles and around the ambulatory of the church to be finally raised up to Her beautiful throne, placed in the main altar, using a mechanism that has been in use since 1752. This ritual belongs to the Baroque period and has mainly remained unchanged since the 17th Century.

All night along: open air dancing at the headquarters of the groups.

September 9th

At 7:00 a.m.: the Farewell Procession. The members of the 14 Groups of Moors and Christians accompany Our Lady of the Virtues in a procession while firing their arquebuses. Afterwards, in the outskirts of the town, it takes place the Farewell Act where arquebusiers from all the 14 Groups fire their arquebuses, their Second Lieutenants rotate their flags, and the music bands play the national anthem. Then, it commences a pilgrimage to the Sanctuary

with people carrying the statue of Our Lady of the Virtues to its Shrine, at the Sanctuary of the Virtues. Once there, a Mass is being offered and the Conversion of the Moorish Ambassador to Christianity is performed again, but now inside the Church, which is the place where this act was traditionally performed since its origins.

At 5:00 p.m.: The New Captains and Second Lieutenants Parade. This Act is similar to the Entrance Parade Act. When it finishes, the name of the new Captains, Second Lieutenants, "Regidoras" and "Madrinas" for the next year, for the 14 Moors and Christians Groups are designated and proclaimed loud in Saint James' Square. The place becomes very crowded. There is a lecture too of all the awards that all the participant groups receive, and then the Festival concludes.

All night along: open air dancing at the headquarters of the groups.

The Parades: the Entrance and the Cavalcade:

The great spectacle of the festival of Villena are their parades, which are an explosion of joy, color and music, among them The Entrance and, above all, The Cavalcade. The most peculiar feature of the parades of Villena, which distinguishes them from other populations, is how to march in blocks consisting of several squares and with only one corporal. This makes possible that more than eleven thousand participants (11,506 in 2011) need each year no more than about 100 bands and just 125 corporals to parade, and do so in a total time of seven hours, at an average of about two thousand participants per hour. Also highlights the brilliance of special squads, whose costumes are designed, made and premiered each year in Villena, and the pace and dynamism which printed the festive and magnificent corporals, who in Villena are artists. Another peculiar feature of the parades of Villena is that the three oldest groups of Moors that appeared before the moorish marches, maintain the tradition of parading with pasodoble, as all the groups in Sax. Of all the parades of Villena, the most spectacular parade is undoubtedly the Cabalcade, which takes place on September 6 at 9 pm. It lasts seven hours and ends at 5 am, averaging no less than 2,000 participants per hour.

Embassies and Warfare:

In Villena, embassies and warfare are made from early XIXth century, since according to Jose Zapater was in the first third of the nineteenth century when the first castle embassy was built, and the text of which was written between 1810 and 1815, modeled on the original text of Onil, which was replaced by the current of the town in 1848. In 1868 the embassies were described how they then were performed, erroneously naming Farmers Group to Christians Group because of "usual attire of the farmers" that bigan been used since the early nineteenth century. The same document also cites the Covenant Alliance, held on 6th from 1848 until it disappeared in 1953. The description of embassies, 1868 is as follows:

"The first day garrison this castle a group of farmers linked to another dressed in the Roman manner. The second day the Moors attack the fortress, assault and positioned in it, and placed in its battlements a statue [...]. And the third day the Christians attack again the castle, take hold of him and hit fire to the statue, whose head is full of gunpowder and explodes, jumping the bits quite a distance. In the three days before the attacks there are embassies, which communicate loudly and in a gesture of performance between the castle and the besiegers".

The primitive wooden castle was burned in 1952 in order to replace it with another and the following year, in 1953, the new castle embassies was built by Antonio Navarro Santa Fe and placing in the Almansa Gate until 1969 and in the Santiago Square until 1976. Finally, in 1977 the scene of the embassies moved to Atalaya Castle, which is where they currently are performed.

The Moor Conversion to Christianity:

The Moor Conversion to Christianity is documented for the first time in the chronicle of Constable Don Miguel Lucas de Iranzo, which is about the Moors and Christians held in Jaén in 1463. The performance ended with the conversion and baptism of "king of Morocco" to Christianity, having been defeated by the Christians in the game of reeds. Already appears in Villena, in the program of the festival of 1886, and then was recited in the courtyard of the Shrine after Mass on September the 9th. However, it is much older because in the program of 1901 is called "the old Moor Conversion ". The ancient text of the Conversion of Villena is a comedy of Moors and Christians, which should perform in most of the towns and cities where Moors and Christians were held during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which were numerous in the whole Iberian Peninsula. This comedy should be written in the first half of the seventeenth century, and was entitle "Colloquium to the Holy Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ between

a Moor and a Christian". Fortunately, we know the name of its author, because it figures in the last stanza, as was customary at the time:

Where, of the many faults
all we ask forgiveness
and who is to be granted
will be Diego de Ornedillo,
who was the author who wrote
this short syllogism.

It was published in the eighteenth century, preserved in the National Library of Madrid and is exactly the same text as the Conversion of Villena which was published in 1915, although already with the addition of part of the new text of the Conversion which had been written in the early nineteenth century. That same ancient original text is preserved today in the Moors and Christians Festivals in places far from Villena, as in Campillo de Arenas and Carchelejo (Jaén). In the early nineteenth century, during the War of Independence (1808-1813), the author of the text of the Embassies of Villena wrote a new text for the Conversion, which in the nineteenth century replaced the old in Villena, and is contained in the manuscript of 1889. But in the early twentieth century, in 1903, this modern text was partially added to the original one, and so appears in the edition of 1915. This new text has been used in the Conversion of Banyeres de Mariola in Bocairent, called "Booty" since the nineteenth century, and the date on which it was written is readily apparent from the clear allusion to King Joseph Bonaparte and his wife set out in the last stanza of the Villena text:

And later, all with me,
sing to her with sweet voices:
José Sovereign Live!
Live his wife Queen!
Live this Holy Image,
Jesus and His Holy Church!

This king José can only be Joseph Bonaparte, who ruled Spain between 1808 and 1813, and the proof is that the two verses referring to him and his wife were removed later in Banyeres de Mariola and Bocairent due to its anachronism.

Since 2010, the performance of Conversion is accompanied by the symphonic poem The Conversion of Villena, composed by Gaspar Ángel Tortosa Urrea and performed by the Symphony Orchestra of the Chapí Theatre.

The Rolling of Flags and the Volley of Arquebusery:

While the elements of the old soldiers have been preserved virtually in all towns celebrating traditional Moors and Christians, the rolling of flags has been preserved in very few, and Villena is one of them. This rolling of flags or colours is made by ensigns of the groups, in the presence of the Patroness and as a tribute to her, when she is received and during her farewell, while volleys of arquebuses are made and the national anthem is played, all this constituting a ritual that is moving and spectacular. This ritual was once the protocol that was received or sent away the important personalities who visited the city and also the patroness, Our Lady of Virtues, and was spread throughout the Iberian Peninsula. Volleys of arquebuses are conserved, but not the rolling of flags, in towns that celebrate traditional Moors and Christians and also in the "trabucaires" of Catalonia and the soldiery festivals of Guipúzcoa, specifically in Anzuola, Irun and Hondarribia although here the old arquebuses were replaced by guns. The rolling of flags has been preserved in a much smaller area, concretely in Villena, Sax, Caudete, Castalla and Onil. Its origin is very old. In 1505 the Royal Guard was created and its first chief, Don Gonzalo de Ayora, requires to the aspiring knights to Ensign an "arrogant poise and handling flag gracefully", where we find a clear allusion to the game with flags, not only on the battlefield, but also as a movement of what is now called closed order.

The groups:

In Villena, there are 14 groups, 7 of Moors and 7 other in the Christian side. The three oldest groups of Moors are unique in parade using pasodoble, instead of moorish march, because they preserve the tradition about the music that began parading since they were founded, as the first moorish march was composed in 1907 and, therefore, after those 3 groups had appeared. A Captain and a Second Lieutenant act as festive offices in each group, already

documented in 1638, and the “Regidora” and “Madrinas”, since 1955. In Villena, as a particularity, they are indistinguishable from the rest of the members of their groups rather than the band and sabre, in the case of the captain, and the band and the flag, in the case of the ensign.

1. **Ancient Moors:**

Its foundation year is unknown, but they are already documented in 1843 and its origin is in the early nineteenth century.

2. **New Moors:**

Its foundation year is unknown, but could be probably in 1860, though they are not documented until 1884. This group appeared as the result of the influence of the group of La Llana of Alcoy, ought to the carriers who were engaged in transporting wool and fabrics between Alcoy and La Mancha.

3. **Moroccan Band:**

It was founded in 1866 according to oral tradition, as a result of the War of Morocco (1859-1860). In 1869 was founded the group of Moroccan of Bocarent under the influence of Villena.

4. **Royalist Moors:**

It was founded in 1928 and paraded for the first time in 1929, influenced by the group of Royalists of Alcoy.

5. **Nazarite Moors:**

It paraded for the first time in 1955 and is originally from Villena.

6. **Berber Moors:**

It paraded for the first time in 1956 and is originally from Villena.

7. **Pirates:**

It paraded for the first time in 1939 and is originally from Villena.

8. **Students:**

Its foundation year is unknown, but this group is documented in 1849, in the Spanish press of that year. After stop parading in the following years, reappeared in 1875.

9. **Corsair Sailors:**

The foundation year is unknown, but is documented as early as 1884. It was probably the result of the influence of the missing group of Sailors of Columbus of Alcoy.

10. **Andalusian:**

It paraded for the first time in 1923, influenced by the group of Smugglers of Alcoy.

11. **Farmers:**

It paraded for the first time in 1926, influenced by the group of Farmers (Maseros) of Alcoy.

12. **Ballesteros:**

It paraded for the first time in 1966 and is originally from Villena, being the successor of the group of Arab (1960-1965) and American (1928-1959), which appeared in 1928 influenced by the silent film.

13. **Mercenaries:**

It paraded for the first time in 1954 and is the continuation of the group of Romans, which is documented in 1849, in the Spanish press.

14. **Christians:**

It's the heir of the soldiery, which is documented already in Villena in 1586 and in 1638 participated in the pilgrimages to the Shrine. In the early nineteenth century he changed his suit “to the old Spanish way” for “the usual costume of farmers”, but at the end of the century it back, using it until 1964 when it was replaced by the current.

Ancient Moors:

It is unknown the year of its foundation; however, it has been stated that in 1838 the Effigy had been already brought from Biar to Villena. The first existing document that relates to it dates from 1846, but it refers to the festival that had been celebrated in 1845. In 1863 and 1868 it was simply denominated Group of Moors; nonetheless, the nickname "Ancient" became popular in order to differentiate them from the new group of Moors that appeared, that were named "New Moors". The costume of the “Ancient Moors” has been the same from the time that it appeared: a "Turkish style" costume that was a replica of the typical Turkish costume of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The “Ancient Moors” carry a backpack, a pick and a brown leather apron due to the influence of the military “Gastadores” who used to wear these three elements until 1859. The pick is a weapon that the “Ancient Moors” always carry on their right arm, as the Spanish Army used to carry it in the same way, until 1850. They also wear a black feather in their turbans as well as a false beard and a wristband on their sleeves, as an influence of the way the military “Gastadores” used to dress back in mid-nineteenth century. The costume of the Squad of “Gastadores” has remained the same until today; the only thing that has been replaced is its primitive cloth.

The old costume remains the same as in the Squad of “Gastadores”, except in the group of arquebusiers. This group has preserved the authentic military way of parading; they parade by the rhythm of “pasodoble”. During the last quarter of the mid-nineteenth century and earlier twentieth century, the members of the group of the “Ancient Moors” were likely farmers. A captain, a second lieutenant, and a corporal with a small squadron that were around ten persons formed the group that paraded.

New Moors:

The Group of the New Moors upholds that it was founded back in 1854, according to the oral tradition. In 1884, it appears documented for first time; nonetheless, it does not appear in the biography of Joaquín M^a López written by Fermín Caballero in 1857, neither in the documents of the Town Hall which date from 1863 and 1868. In those sources, the only group of Moors who marched is merely named Moors, indicating that there was no other group of Moors. However, there is an arquebus, which forms part of a group of another seven that in 1860 were ordered by Juan Menor y Menor to be manufactured, because he became the captain of the group of the New Moors. The arquebus has on it an inscription engraved in silver which states: "Made by Pedro Aranguren. Our Lady of the Virtues, venerated in the city of Villena. Eibar 1860". Therefore, it is supposed that the group of New Moors already existed back in 1860. They must have been into existence on that date due to the fact that seven arquebuses had been ordered in a time where the Entrance did not exist yet, and where the arquebuses were an essential part in all of the parades, in order to participate in these festivities. The Group of the New Moors carry a backpack, a pick, and wear a black leather apron as an influence from the military “Gastadores”, who used to wear these three elements until 1859; furthermore, they always carry the weapon in his left arm because that is the way that soldiers from the Spanish Army used to carry it back in 1850. Regarding their costume, the use of the black apron is due to the influence that Alcoy has played on the group of Villena, although the Military “Gastadores” stopped wearing it in 1818. However, this group has only preserved the suit from the Squad of “Gastadores”, but not the dress that arquebusiers used to wear then. In 1967, they brought into the Cavalcade, the XVI US Air Force, from Torrejón de Ardoz; in 1968 they invited the Majorettes from Avignon; and in 1970, the Majorettes from Barcelona arrived. Later on, in 1991, it was built a new Cábila, a large hall for the festive nights.

Moroccan Group:

According to the oral tradition, the Group of Moroccans said that it was founded back in 1866. Its original name is the Moroccans of the Rif Group or just Moroccans, but soon they were popularly named "Morocco", as stated in the first documented reference that exists about them that dates from 1884, where it appears in brackets the popular name "Morocco" written besides their official name "Moroccans". Regarding their origins, the same as other groups of Moroccans from different towns, the group of Moroccans in Villena appeared as a result of the Morocco's war, which began in the late 1859 and ended up in April 1860 with the victory of the Spanish Army. In fact, according to the oral tradition, this group commenced in 1866, and it came to a reality due to the reason that the “Moroccans' Group” from Bocarment was formed as a result from a trip that two of its main founders made to Villena during festivities, where they paraded for the first time, few years later, in 1869. Right after the trip they had made to Villena, it may be deduced that the Moroccans from Villena had been for a few years into existence. Regarding their costume, they carry a backpack, an arquebus and wear a yellow leather apron as an influence of the military “Gastadores”, who used to wear these three elements until 1859. They also carry a gun in his left arm, because that is the way the Spanish Army in 1850 started carrying it on. And the yellow apron is due to the fact that, from 1850, the dark color (brown or black) on the apron was replaced by a light color (white or yellow). This group has also preserved other military elements and garments from the costume of the “Gastadores” (wristbands on their sleeves, false beards, pockets with the crescent shape); plus, it is the only known group that has preserved the two sections within all the groups in the first half of the nineteenth century: In one place, there is a section with the members of the group who carry a backpack, that corresponds to the old section of the “Gastadores”, and maintains the authentic military way of marching by the using of the “pasodoble” for the parades. And in other place, there is a section of the ones who wear a white cape, which corresponds to the old military troops that parade at the rhythm of Moorish marches. The section of the members of the group who use a white cape, are as older as the other section whose members carry a backpack. Until the thirties, all of the members of the section who wore a white cape, at the “Entrada” during Fiestas, they used to march on top of a horse, located behind the music band. The only changes made in their costume, consisted of replacing the material of the old cloth for a different material: silk. Furthermore, during the fifties of the last century, they incorporated in their dress a waistcoat. In 1957, Rafael Martínez Coll composed a “pasodoble” titled Morocco of Villena, just for them.

Royalist Moors:

The Royalist Moors Group was founded in 1928 and paraded for the first time in 1929, being influenced by the Royalist Filà (Rank) from Alcoy. They were the first ones in Villena who adopted the Moorish march during festivities. Four members of the Group of the "Third of Flanders": Joaquín Cortés, Enrique Guillén, and two other men from Alcoy who were workers at the José Molina's machinery's factory, gathered at the "Bar Benjamín" located at "Paseo Chapí", and decided to form a new group, according to the solicitude sent on 4th August 1928, a petition that later on was conceded by the Town Hall of the City of Villena. Therefore, the 9th of September of that same year, at the Act where Captains and Second Lieutenants celebrated their entry for the following year, around "Zarralamala Street", the man nicknamed "Canaletas" acting as the Capitan of the Group, and Enrique Guillén, acting as the Second Lieutenant of the Group, both dressed up for the first time in Villena, for the event, wearing such clothing. In 1929, there were 21 members parading at the Royalist Moors Group. Pepe "Calabaza", who was appointed out to be the corporal of the Group, died before the 5th of September, so Pepe Cortés substituted him. The Royalist Moor costume, which design came from Alcoy, broke down with the previous established norms from the three different Groups already existing at that moment. Each dress cost 130 "pesetas" plus 15 "pesetas" for the embroidery. The fabric was bought at a store named "Carrera", who gave a flag as a present, though the mast was donated by Salvador Pi, an Arts' reporter. The first "weapon" used during the parades was the lance (spear), which soon after was replaced by a Moorish musket. In 1978, on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the group, a new Moorish march was composed and released by the great musician and composer from Cocentaina José Pérez Vilaplana, which led to Luis Hernandez, author of the previous Moorish march that existed before, to change the name of the title of the previous one for "Agadir". Among the different acts celebrated by the Group, there is a dinner that takes place on 7th September, next to the castle of Embassies. This dinner started on to take place right after the civil war; during the 1969-1976 periods, and coincided on the Plaza of Santiago with the Students Group. Since 1977, the Embassy is taking place at the Atalaya Castle, and the dinner is being celebrated too in this place.

Nazarite Moors:

The Nazarite Moors paraded for the first time in 1955 and it is originally from Villena. The group of Nazarite Moors became into form as a result of a split of the group of New Moors, due to the problems that Paco Seguí had, who was not allowed to participate as a corporal in the parades. In a mannequin at Gallardo's House, in "Calle Mayor", was made a trial for the color in order to design a suitable costume with all its elements and garments. The archaeologist and historian José M^a Soler was commissioned to find an appropriate name for such group, coming up with that of Arab Nazarites or "Nazaríes", choosing the second one as its official name. The first parade took place the 5th of September of 1955, acting as Corporal Francisco Seguí Hernández "Panadero"; acting as Captain José Luis Navarro Bravo; and acting as Second Lieutenant Rafael Garcia Ferriz "Rateta" and the Sultan was Enrique Seguí Vicent "Panadero". Mainly, since the beginning, a remarkable characteristic of the parade was the Nazarite float they exhibited, simulating the Alhambra. The incorporation of women took place in de Cavalcade Parade of 1987, a year before other groups, and the enlisting of women within this group of Nazarite Moors became huge. They are very proud to be the first group in Villena where women participated.

Berbers Moors:

The group of Berbers Moors is originally from Villena, and they paraded for the first time in 1956. The idea of forming a new group arises from 1955, dealing with the idea about resurrecting the Knights of Flanders. Not surprisingly, the first president of the Berbers group, Francisco Abellán Valdés, was a former member of that disappeared group. At that time, the Moors and Christians Festival was going throughout a period of renewal and adjustment, and the Town Hall's Festival Committee was trying to remove anachronisms. The new members heard about a petition for creating a group of Moors, because they only had six groups; thus, in order to adjust the number with the Christian side, who had seven. The name of this new Group, Berbers Moors, was chosen by Miguel Hernández Ferri. But ten years later, in 1965, difficulties arose and the group could not march-past. In 1967, its members thought about the dissolution of the group of Berbers. But right that same year, the Berbers went to "La Losilla" with 22 members, after being two years without going there. In 1968, the new costume designed by Vicente Rodes Amorós was put on and showed off for the first time, and the group was awarded with an Honorable Mention by the Town Hall's Festival Committee.

Pirates:

The Pirates Group paraded for the first time in 1939. This Group is originally from Villena and parades at the end of the Moors Groups because the Pirates originally belonged to the Christian side. Joaquín López Llácer was the first corporal of the squad, and the Music Band from Cañada was the first music band that accompanied the few

members, only 23, the Pirates Group had associated at that time. A year later, most of their members had to finish their military service; therefore, many of them could not participate during that year; thus, in 1940 new members got enrolled; and these new participants were the ones who continued the work of their predecessors. For eight years then, the Pirates Group were included in the Christian side, marching behind the Students, and in 1947 they moved into the Moors Groups, marching at the end of the Moors Groups, right before the Group of Students. It was in 1949 when the members of the group chose a new design for their official costume, with a red shirt instead of the black one they used to wear; they designed a dress that was almost the same as the dress they wear at the present, except for the boots, which are different. Pepe Serrano and Antonio Valiente were the ones in charge for the dress; until that moment, the dresses of the Pirates were entirely in black colour; furthermore, they also added a cape on the dress. The fifties finally arrived, and a vertiginous increase in their members occurred. In 1950 there were 36 members; in 1955 there were 340; in 1968 they enjoyed 402 members; in 1978 they presumed 714 members, and today, they have more than 2,100 members. In 1973, eight arquebusiers from the Pirates Group, in the morning of 9th September, for the first time went on a pilgrimage to the Sanctuary located at "Las Virtudes" and they gathered at this local shrine to welcome the Patroness. This idea about going on a pilgrimage to welcome the Patroness came from José López Sánchez and the directive of the Pirates received it with a great pleasure.

Students:

The group of Students upholds that it was founded in 1845, according to the oral tradition. It is the oldest Group around all existing Groups of Students in the Moors and Christians festivals. It has been first documented in 1849, because it is mentioned that same year in an article of a newspaper named *The Catholic* (the Group of Students from Alcoy is from 1852). Notwithstanding, the Group of Students of Villena stopped participating during the "Fiestas" for a while. This fact can be proved throughout the later published or archived documents, because the Group was not mentioned in the biography of the politician Joaquín M^a López (who was born in Villena) written by Fermín Caballero in 1857, neither mentioned in the documents dated from 1863 and 1868 at the Municipal Archive of Villena. Thanks to the text of the Alliance's Pact from 1892, it is known that it was the 18th year that the Group of Students was participating in it; therefore, it is known that the Group returned back in 1875. The text of the Alliance's Pact from 1892 between the Christian Ambassador and the Student Ambassador, written by Pepe "El Chinto" begins saying: "Already another year has passed, / within this [year] we already count eighteen. / So, life goes on, / and we are aging..." Therefore, the Group of Students started participating in the Alliance's Pact in 1875, and returned that same year, in 1875. The next documented reference that exists about the Group of Students has been found out in the book written by Zapater, which was published in 1884. The members of the Group of Students of Villena, when they parade, they carry their "weapon", a big white spoon, on their left arm, just as the New Moors and Moroccans carry them, because the Group of Students returned right after 1850; nonetheless, Christians and Ancient Moors carry their weapons on their right arm because they were established before that year. The only change in the student costume that has been made, it was in 1925 and consisted about the addition of a gorge, white laces on the jacket, and some trouser white tassels. From 1926 to 1946 they used to carry big pencils, but they were eradicated in 1946. In 1951, Miguel Ibáñez was the person who definitely eradicated the use of big pencils and uniformed the big white spoon as the only "weapon" for the parade. In the sixties, before the hard time it had been experienced back in 1958, it commenced to be an increase of the number of its members, who were scarce until then. In 1973, with the acquisition of the present Hall "La Troya", the increase of its members became quite significant, surpassing the 1900 members they had at the beginning of the present century. The Group of Students is the only one who has never had special squads parading, thus maintaining the uniformity in their costume for every one of its members, including the corporals as well, who have only replaced the spoon by an ancient big pen imitating a feather plume. This group holds and celebrates its own functions, some of these functions are as old as the same Group itself: the Sardine Dinner on 7th September, right before the Retreat starts; the Alliance's Pact between the groups of Christians and Students on 8th September, since 1875, according to the text from 1892 written by Pepe "El Chinto"; the accompaniment of the Group of Students to the "Madrina" on 8th September, from the "Main Street" to her home, right after the end of the Procession's Parade; the presentation of the "Madrina", the Captain and the Second Lieutenant, for the following year, to the Group of Students, at the Hall of "La Troya" on 9th September; and the Act of Confirmation of the "Madrina" that will be representing the Group of Students during that year, on 3rd September, at the Hall of "La Troya".

Corsair Sailors:

The foundation year of the Corsair Sailors Group is unknown, but information about this Group is documented from 1884, under the name of Mariners. It was probably the result of the influence exerted by the missing Group from Alcoy named Sailors of Columbus. Its original name was Mariners, which was preserved until 1960. Then, the

Group returned back in 1963, adopting the name they currently use. The first documented reference about the Sailors is cited in the book written by Zapater, from 1884, the same as it happens with another eight groups also named in the book; nonetheless, there is no evidence to suggest that they had appeared long before that date. Hence, it is obvious that they must have established a few years before 1884 and right after 1868, due to the reason that the name of this Group does not appear cited on the document of that year. In 1925 differences arose within the Group of Sailors, leaving the mythical member nicknamed "Botella" in front of the Mariners, while other member surnamed "Conejero" put together some of the members within the Marines Group, in order to recuperate and bring back into the parade the ancient Group of the Knights of Flanders. In 1942, a group of young enthusiasts led by D. Miguel Ibern, senior manager of VAY (Villena-Alcoy-Yecla Railway), with the help of the ancient Mariners, reorganized the group. But this boom lasted only two years: 1943 and 1944, since the Group disappeared for six years, soon afterwards. The third stage the Group of Mariners went through had two different periods: from 1951 to 1956, where the Group of Sailors continued as such; however, from 1957 to 1959 they paraded dressing as Admirals. In 1957 a more luxurious dress was approved; it was a replica of the official costume of the Spanish Navy. This new dress was adorned with the same stripes as the official dress that Admirals wear. In 1959, the deputy mayor José García Galbis, banned the use of any costume related to the official dress Admirals wore, and banned the dress of the Americans as well. In 1963 they changed its ancient name of Mariners by the name they currently use, and they did the same with their clothing. The Corsair Sailors Group paraded for the first time in 1963 thanks to the tenacity shown by a man named Joaquín Marruenda Amorós, who in 1960 asked the City Hall of Villena to excuse the Group from their participation during celebrations because they were going throughout a crisis due to the change of their name and their dress, thus they had to restart again from zero. The tenacity of the Group prevailed, and in 1963, the Corsair Sailors became the third group at the Festival of Moors and Christians of Villena, having a total of 160 members enrolled in the Group.

Andalusians:

The Group of Andalusians paraded for the first time in 1923, being influenced by the Contraband Group from Alcoy. Antonio Ibáñez Abad, from Alcoy, based in Villena since 1921, was the person who brought the Andalusian Group to Villena, thanks to the efficient collaboration that Joaquin Clement gave to the Group. Although, in 1922, the Group had not requested permission to participate in the celebrations for the following year, because in 1923 it was going to be celebrated the Coronation of the Virgin, they requested then a dispensation in order to be integrated into the Festival without any delay, and it was granted. Therefore, the Group of Andalusians paraded on the streets at the Entrance celebrated in 1923, wearing some costumes they had rented from Alcoy. From 1923 to 1930 the weekly fee ranged from 1 "peseta" to 1.50 "pesetas" Some innate characteristics within the Group of Andalusians were the participation of horses-drawn carriages and horses riding behind the music band during parades, and the creation of a special squad: The Squad of Calabresses that extraordinarily participated in the parades, in 1928. That year, the group had 36 full members; in 1942 there were 38; in 1961, there was a slow but steady upwards trend, achieving 54, and in 1973 the number of members enrolled within the Group of Andalusians reached 85, a number that became double in just a decade, exceeding in the late eighties the 170 members. Since 1988, the incorporation of women in the Group of Andalusians was massive; now the Group has more than a thousand and five hundred members in total.

The Contraband Act is a typical characteristic of this Group since its foundation. This Act used to take place between two Groups: Andalusians and Sailors. On the evening of 7th September (right after the Bullfight) both met towards the middle of "calle Ancha". When the Contraband Group arrived there, they were stopped by a sentry from the Mariners, who let himself to be bribed by the Contraband Group in order to open the passage, allowing then their way through. After reciting the Contraband verses, the Mariners discovered the collection of smuggling goods that had previously been hidden by the Andalusians; thereby reaching the climax when all of the goods are being distributed among the spectators. The Contraband Act was performed until 1942, and even though they tried to bring it back during the seventies, it was buried away mainly due to economic problems. In 1988, Tomás Pérez Azorín was the President of the Group of Andalusians and he brought back the Contraband Act into the programme of events.

Farmers:

The Group of Farmers was founded in 1925 by the New Moor named Pedro Galipienzo, right after a gathering held by Joaquín Oliva Ruescas at the bar "Perico el Cafetero" due to the influence that the good work of the homonymous namesake Group from Alcoy had transmitted them. The "Maseros", as they are popularly known, paraded for the first time in "La Entrada" in 1926. Some weeks earlier, during summer, they had been practicing the

different steps and way of marching for the parades in a country lot that belonged to a well known person nicknamed "El Lancero". The costumes for the Group of Farmers were rented at first from Alcoy and Muro de Alcoy. From their first year of creation, they brought out a float into the Parade. That same year, right after the end of the Fiestas, they celebrated a "gazpachá" at the Sanctuary of the Virtues; this act became a popular traditional event for the following years and it is an act that has prevailed until today; sooner, all the Groups in Villena started participating in this act as well. The man José López, nicknamed "Panchana" was the corporal of the Group of Farmers; in Villena he became a myth. The title of the "pasodoble" of the Group of Farmers was named after him by the composer Manuel Carrascosa: "Panchana and his Maseros." In 1928 "Panchana" was the corporal of the Group, and from 1949 to 1963, he became the President of the Group of Farmers. In 1939, just after the Civil War, the Festival was renewed again and there were around 25 to 30 members enrolled within the Group; then an increase in the number of its members occurred during the presidency held by "Panchana" who had changed the design of the costume replacing, among other things, the "zaragüelles" (baggy trousers that form part of the traditional dress of Valencia and Murcia) for a pair of long black breeches. Since 1980, the growth in the number of its members started increasing, doubling in a few years their number. The Group of Farmers or "Maseros" is profoundly attached to the popular traditions and is profoundly devoted to the Patroness of Villena. During the fifties, they have been characteristically renowned by the resurgence of new acts, and have been distinguished too for its praiseworthy work in every one of their Parades and Offering Acts celebrated. Before the establishment of some new rules that restricted the use of floats during Parades, the Group of Farmer was characterized for the enormous row of horses riding at the end of the Group, while distributing leaflets to the crowd with some critical comments written on them, that people enjoyed very much.

Crossbowmen:

The Group of Crossbowmen paraded for the first time in 1966. This Group is originally from Villena, being the successor of the Group of Arabs (1960-1965) and the Group of Americans (1928-1959). The Group of Americans was founded back in 1927 and paraded for the first time in 1928, marching behind de Third of Flanders Group (who were, at the same time, marching behind the Group of Farmers). The reason given to the Group of Americans to appear in 1928 was due to the influence exerted from the cow-boy films that were being projected on the Chapí Theatre since 1925 year of its inauguration. In 1966, the Group of Crossbowmen went throughout an evolution in order to become the way they are now. Since 1928 until 1959 they were called the Group of Americans, and in a short period of time, from 1960 to 1965, they became the Group of Arabs. Finally, the current Group of Crossbowmen that we see now, it emerged back in 1966. Since the year of its foundation to the present day, some changes have been made within their official costume; in 1987 a new outfit was designed: a new shirt and a new frock coat. Inside the Group of Crossbowmen, it appeared a new Group named "Atalayense". This new Group created a prize for the best float being presented in parades. A special act celebrated within the Crossbowmen Group is the popular "Leftovers Dinner" that they share together the night on 9th September.

Almogavars:

The Group of Almogavars (the soldiers of the Infantry storm-troop of the Aragonese Crown Army) paraded for the first time in 1954 and is the continuation of the Group of Romans; the information about the Group of Romans is well known because it is sufficiently documented, as it is mentioned for the first time in 1849 and, later it is cited too in the biography of Joaquín M^a López written by his friend Fermín Caballero, in 1857; it also cited in the documents from 1863 and 1868, and in the book written by Zapater in 1884. Fermín Caballero gathered up together all the information that the politician from Villena had told him about his town, before his death in 1855. It is evident that this Group emerged being influenced by the Holy Week, and its former components were, for sure, the same as the ones who used to participate at the Holy Week Processions. This Group is the one that has changed more times, related to its position, because for some years they had stopped parading during Fiestas: There has not been found out any written information about them between 1884 and 1897, and between 1898 and 1915. They paraded in front of the Group of Moroccans from 1915 to 1919; they paraded before the Group of Students during 1920 and 1921; and they paraded before the Group of Christians from 1922 until its official disappearance in 1949, which successors, the Almogavars, inherited this latter position from the Group of Romans. The Group of Almogavars was founded in 1953 and went out to parade for the first time in 1954. Around 1960, appeared a new Group named "Los Rogerianos" that were a variant from the Almogavars, characterized by their costume: a winged helmet and a long wig, a red coat and a pair of gray trousers; they wore a remarkable and outstanding costume that was very well accepted among them and it was a great success, which converted this Group in a short time, in one of the largest groups in the Festival of Moors and Christians of Villena, with a number of 170 members that participated into the parades. The man named Regino Cerdán was the person who introduced the above named innovation ("Los

Rogerianos”). But, right after the creation of the Central Association for the Moors and Christian Festival (Junta Central de Fiestas) in 1970, this Institution urged the Group to chose only one particular dress to become the official costume for the Group of Almogavars, having then to ignore the previous dress. Hence, this originated the beginning of a crisis among them. Both, the sketch of the new dress that was going to replace the previous one, and the disappearance of the Group of “Los Rogerianos” didn’t succeed among its members, mainly because it was uncomfortable; therefore, many of its members started leaving off parading. The third reform returned the use of the grilled helmet that their founders used to wear before, and finally, in 1988, the fourth reform was the definitive and more important one.

Christians:

The Group of Christians is the direct inheritor of the Old Militia that used to participate in both religious and civilian Festivals since the 17th Century. The Soldiery was the company of soldiers that formed the General Militia of the Kingdom, created back in 1609 after the failure of the Provincial Militia. These Militias had been created on May 21th, 1562 by Philip II in order to replace the Old Reserve Militia, which had been already created by the Catholic Monarchs back in 1496. The order dates from August 15th, 1609 and a copy of it has been kept in the Town-Hall Archives of Villena and Sax. This General Militia of the Kingdom started participating in the Festivities of the Patroness during the 17th Century; information about the participation of the Militia can be found out in documents from Villena, where there is a request to the Virgin, a rogation or plea that dates from 1638, that due to the enormous drought suffered by the town, the Militia appeared next to the people accompanying the Patroness praying for raining. This Militia Group was formed by a company of arquebusiers and sometimes were being accompanied too by a rifle company, as in 1710, commanded each one of these companies by a Captain, a Second Lieutenant and a Sergeant-major, ranks that were always appointed by the Town-Hall. They wore their costume (a la española) in a typical Spanish style of the epoch, and they were firing arquebuses placed in pairs, marching-past right in front of the Patroness during the procession. But, Embassies and warfare were added to the Patroness Festival in the first third of the 19th Century and, consequently, a Group of Moors was created in order to fight against the Christians. In reality, this new Group was the old company of arquebusiers that had formed part from the General Militia of the Kingdom, commonly named Soldiery (Soldadesca) who became the Group of Christians of Villena, retaining among them all the elements and characteristics of the ancient Militia, such as their military costume, the military ranks such as Captain, Second Lieutenant, Sergeant-Major and Corporal. In some places like in Villena, the position where the Group of Christians used to parade was preserved, all were arranged situated in the last place within the procession, and in other parades they were also placed at the end in order to preserve the privilege of parading in front of the Patroness, as the early Soldiery did as well. In the beginning of the 19th Century, the members of the Soldiery (Soldadesca) “adopted the costume that farmers usually wore”, as they did in Caudete, Sax, and Yecla too. But only in Villena, in the late 19th Century, not earlier than 1868, it was recuperated the costume (a la española) in a typical Spanish style of the epoch, remaining in this way until 1963, when the old costume of the Sapper Squad (Escuadra de Gastadores) was replaced by the current one they usually wear. They carry the weapon in their right arm because that was the way that the Spanish Army used to carry it on until 1850. Until 1963, they used to carry a backpack and a peak, holding the pick with their right hand. They only maintained the costume from the Sapper Squad, indeed. In the long history of the Group of Christians, the names of its presidents are known since 1900; and also the name of Corporals, which until 1904 coincided with the Presidents of the moment, and the ambassadors as well. Before the Civil War, the Group of Christians was one of the main ones, the number of its participants during the Fiestas doubled that of many others groups, but from 1950 they started going throughout a difficult period, so many of them left the group. One of the traditions was that the Christian ambassadors had to be members of the Group of Christians, and another tradition was to let out sweet buns in the Offering Parade on 7th September, a habit that has survived and has never ceased to develop throughout time.

The Virgin of the Virtues:

Our Lady of the Virtues was proclaimed Patroness of Villena and Advocate against the plague in 1474, according to legend, although there isn’t any documentary record of it. In 1474, according to tradition, the residents of Villena fled to the Black Poplar Fountain during an epidemic of plague and there proclaimed the Virgin of the Virtues as new patroness of Villena and “lawyer against the plague” in place of the Virgin of the Snow or the Castle, which was the old patroness linked to the hated Marquis of Villena. The reason for this proclamation was that the Virgin interceded with God so that He finished the plague which had driven the people from Villena to the Black Poplar Fountain, where the Shrine we know today was built. But in 1474 there was no plague. This took place two years later, in 1476, coinciding with the revolt against the Marquis of Villena, and it is properly documented. This means that the proclamation of Our Lady of the Virtues as Patroness of Villena could not be in 1474, but in 1476, because

it was in this last year when the plague that motivated it really took place. The coincidence with the revolt against the Marquis of Villena explained that a new patroness was chosen although already there was another, the Virgin of the Snow or the Castle. Since this was the patron of the hated Marquis of Villena and had his hermitage within the castle walls, it became necessary to find a new patroness that had nothing to do with him. Soon after, a chapel, which is already documented in an order of the Catholic Monarchs dated 30.07.1490, in which the neighbors fled back to there because of another epidemic of plague occurred in the town, was built. Since the first outbreak of plague and as Thanksgiving, residents of Villena vowed to make two annual pilgrimages to this chapel, once next Sunday to Sunday Easter and the other on September 8th, which are widely documented. In them, other entertaining activities that contributed to attract people from Villena and surrounding villages were performed, as occurs in the pilgrimages of any part of the country. The duration of the holidays, therefore, was only a day, and the scene, the Shrine and its surroundings.

The Festive Posts:

The festive posts that exist in Villena correspond to each of the groups and come from the former militia or soldiery who accompanied the pilgrimages and processions since the seventeenth century. Thus, the posts of captain, lieutenant and sergeant are firstly documented in 1638 in a prayer by drought, and led the company of arquebusers that was the soldiery. The military posts in the seventeenth century were captain (which was distinguished by a cross-chest band), Ensign (carrying the flag), Sergeant (carrying a halberd) and Corporal (usually four per company). Ensign sometimes hired someone else to carry the weight of the flag and was called flag bearer. In the early eighteenth century, Felipe V created the post of lieutenant, who wasn't already added to the soldiery participating in the festivities. In the early nineteenth century this company of arquebusers became the group of Christians and another of Moors also appeared, preserving both groups the posts of captain and lieutenant, and other elements of the old militia. Corporals also participated in parades leading the groups. On 9th September each year in the afternoon, the posts for following year were named and paraded through the streets of Villena on the Entry of New Captains and Lieutenants. In 1955, the City Council created the post of Queen of the Festival, and the following year this new post was renamed Regidora because a Councilman considered that the only Queen of the Festival of Villena was the Virgin of the Virtues. By imitating the *madrinas* (matrons) of student *tunas*, the post of *madrina* (matron) of each group was created. In the seventies, the corresponding infant posts were created as well.

The traditional costumes of Villena:

In Villena there are two female traditional costumes, the one of summer and the one of winter. The one of summer is due to Valencian influence, while the one of the winter is belongs to the same type as the ones of La Mancha, as the only male traditional costume of Villena. The two winter costumes, man and woman, date from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the male was used in the early nineteenth as the costume of the militia or soldiery replacing the traditional old Spanish style costume.

Special Squads:

What better identifies the Festival of Villena within the current development of Moors and Christians are the Special Squads, which beautify and are an important part of the holidays, because their costumes are designed, made and premiered each year in Villena, unlike what happens in other towns. They parade each year approximately forty special squads and their number is limited within each group to a squad per hundred participants, so that the traditional costumes of the groups are sufficiently represented.

The interest in the historicity of the festive costumes has occurred through the proliferation of so-called special squads, a phenomenon that has widespread in the second half of the twentieth century and has acquired a special significance in Villena. Aided by the economic boom, the phenomenon is widespread in the seventies and especially in the eighties to the point of completely disappearing traditional costumes in the parades of the festivals of some towns. In Villena, however, the number of special squads has been limited to one per hundred participants, in order to preserve traditional costumes in the parades, and the costumes are worn for the first time every year on the day of the Entrance parade. In Villena, they are designed and made in the same city and the by same squads that later will wear for the first time, and later they rent them to other squads of other towns to amortize them. Because of this, there is a real industry making festive costumes from the seventies, having being created many jobs and for this purpose is celebrated the fair named *Expofiesta* in Villena in 1982 and 1983 and later in IFA from 1994. Note that costumes of special squads are comparable in price to *Las Fallas* in Valencia special category monuments and to the most expensive monuments of *Les Fogueres* of Alicante.

Music composed for the Moors and Christians Festival of Villena:

Already in 1547, the Council of Villena hired musicians to participate in the pilgrimage of September and they participated in the fiesta at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Virtues. According to J. M. Soler, in 1547, the trumpet Gayanos, resident in Murcia, made a spending of five reals in the inn with his company and beasts on September 8 and was paid for it. Ruperto Chapí included a primitive moorish march and what can be termed as the precedent of the Christian march in his first major work, *The Court of Granada*, premiered for band in 1873 and for symphony orchestra in 1879. The first part, called "March to the Tournament", can be considered as a true Christian March, and has been adapted as such by the composer from Villena Gaspar Á. Tortosa. Quintín Esquembre composed the pasodoble *The Entrance* to be premiered at the Entrance parade in 1922 by the Municipal Band of Villena led by Francisco Bravo, who was the one who commissioned it. Manuel Carrascosa composed classic pasodobles as *La Morenica* (1940), *Panchana and his Farmers* o *Bien por los Nazaríes*, others more recent as *150 years of Ancient Moors* (1992) and moorish marches as *Marrocans from Villena*, to name just a few. But we must also appoint a high-flying composer of symphonic music, like Luis Hernández, with the moorish march *Agadir* and the pasodoble *Pirates Anthem* (the latter composed by José María Soler in 1939 and completed and implemented by Luis Hernández in 1961); and also Antonio Ferriz, with pasodobles as *The Streets of my Villena* or the more recent *The corporals of Villena* (pasodoble-moorish march) or *The Berbers arrive*; Sebastián Rubio with the pasodoble *El Tito* (which was more successful in other towns than in his own one); Antonio Milan or Gaspar Á. Tortosa Urrea, whose pasodobles *75th anniversary of the Andalusians* (1998) and *75th anniversary of Farmers*, his moorish march *Blas Gisbert* and, above all, the symphonic poem *The Conversion of Villena* (2010), used every year in the performance of the Conversion of the Moor to Christianity, can be highlighted. Moorish marches were adopted after the war and by one group, Realistic Moors, later also used by the Berbers Moors, Nazarite Moors and the block of capes of the Moroccan Band. The tradition of pasodoble has remained in the three oldest groups of Moors, the Ancient Moors, the New Moors (alternating with moorish marches) and the block of backpacks of the Moroccan Band.

History of the Festival Central Association of Villena:

The Festival Central Association, after its foundation in 1970, began to organize the Festival delegated by the City Council and introduced some new features. The Parade of Hopeness or children parade appeared in 1970, the Festive Ecuador began to be celebrated like the Mig Any of Alcoy, and the bulletin Four day that it was started to be editing. Embassies and guerrillas were held in Santiago Square in 1969 and in 1972 was banned that the festive participants shot in the New Captains and Second Lieutenants Entrance, and in 1974, also the top officials. In 1974 (from August 31 to September 2) was held in Villena the First National Congress of Moors and Christians, which can be regarded as a milestone in the history of the celebrations of Villena. Despite the problems and vicissitudes that occurred during its preparation, and no official involvement of a city as important as Alcoy, his organization was perfect and both work sessions as the Brotherhood Parade of all participating towns, were developed with all brilliance, to the point that was mythologized and remembered for decades by all people who participated in it. To conclude that historic year, on September 7 afternoon Spanish Television broadcasts the Tourist Special Drawing and the expressly parade that was organized in the Chapí Promenade. At this stage, ultimately, some new events were created, but especially were enhanced the existing ones: The Cavalcade ranks in importance to the Entrance and parades in general increase largely the number of participants.

In the following years, large number of events was enhanced and modified partially, such as embassies, which change its scenario to the Watchtower Castle in 1977. But the fundamental characteristic of this stage was the mass popularization of the festival and the increase in participants, why the festival requires making changes in some acts that had remained unchanged for centuries. The route of the procession was changed in 1979, removing the sections of the district of San Antón and the Malvas Square; the Retreat also was changed (1981 and 1986) by deleting the section of the street Navarro Santafé, and several variations are introduced into Pilgrimage of the 5th September, which is delayed increasingly due to the longer duration of the Entrance. Finally, in 2004, the statue of the Virgin began to be brought the last Sunday in August, celebrating on the same day the firing parade in the morning and the welcome procession in the afternoon. With that, the stronger tradition of the Festival of Villena was changed after one and a half century (1848) without breaks, although the participation in the bringing pilgrim of the Virgin increases considerably.

In 1981, the Festival Central Association bought the house of the Mergelina's family, in the Santiago Square, that was the official seat of the institution. Given the refusal of some extras for purchase, the president of the Festival Central Association, Francisco Navarro González (Valeriano), said that, if this Association wouldn't bought the house, he would buy it for his groupe. Then, the groups agreed and the house was purchased, inaugurated in May

1981 and on the second floor was settled the festive museum. In 1983, following disagreements with the Town Hall, this institution charged the Festival Central Association the amount of copies of the magazine Villena that the Association needed, and it decided to create a new magazine itself by producing an extraordinary number of newsletter Day Four it was, that came on August. Thus was born the festival magazine, which was gaining in importance and number of pages during that decade and the next, until it became what it is today.

The arrival of democracy and the 1978 Constitution, which protects equality between the sexes, encouraged the participation of women, who got involved in the celebrations of Villena in 1988 after a long wait, a lawsuit in district court Villena, prosecution and judgment given on 12.11.1987. It was also established the form of participation of women. It should be with a female and different from men costume, but inspired on it, and they should participate in parades in different squads and battalions than those of men. Also at that time, it was arranged the yard of the Festivalman House, which could start being used since then for various activities and shows. At the end of the decade, the Festivalman House was reformed, arranging the roof and solving problems it had. Audiovisual room was created on the first floor, preparing a large indoor room that was in the house and one of the four rooms facing the Santiago Square.

Conclusions:-

The antiquity of the Festival of Moors and Christians of Villena has been demonstrated therefore. It began to be celebrated in the 15th century as a religious Festivity, the military Festival (the soldiery) was added in the 17th and in the early 19th century it was transformed into a festival of Moors and Christians. The Festival has developed since then, and it has become an example of tolerance, friendship and otherness, because it is an exaltation of the Arab culture in medieval Spain and participating people, and people in general, sympathize as with the Moors as with the Christians. This is manifested mainly in the parades of the Festival, which is when the Moors are more attractive and protagonists due to the beautiful and luxurious costumes they wear, the music at whose pace they parade and the dances they perform during the parades.

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