

**THE CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF THE ORIGINS  
AND EARLY HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH MORRIS**

by

Roy Dommett, Friend of the Morris Federation

The performing arts are ephemeral, needing to be constantly recreated.

The morris is about performance not history.

You can believe what you like, unless it affects your behaviour and decisions that impinge on other people.

## RECEIVED HISTORY

A few well educated middle and upper class English men and women rescued and preserved priceless jewels of English folk dance and music from degeneration and disappearance; they were able to collect and teach these jewels with unique accuracy; and they did so selflessly, without motives of personal advancement or support for particular political and social ideologies.

Sharp and other revivalists found intellectual support in the theory of primitive "survivals in Culture" developed by E Tylor, long discarded by scholars, but not by the revival itself.

The collectors were deeply involved and active in their own societies. Their attitudes had critical impacts, for example, the morris should be rural and male. The role of women was unrepresented and in the revival marginalised, trivialised or ignored. There was a right wing bias until well after WWII.

Stephen Corrsin

EARLY MORRIS is PRE 1800 before oral evidence

COTSWOLD	(ALES AND CLUBS)
PROCESSIONAL	(RUSHCARTS)
BORDER	(MID WINTER SLACK TIME)
MOLLY	
LONG SWORD	
STAVE	(FRIENDLY SOCIETY ANNUAL WALK)
RAPPER	(PUB TOURS)
SEASONAL PLAYS	

ALL DYING IN 19TH CENTURY,  
SOME REAPPEARED IN DEPRESSION,  
SOME CHANGED FORM, IE CARNIVAL MORRIS,  
AND SOME "REVIVED" IN A NEW ENVIRONMENT

## EXTRAPOLATION BACKWARDS

### COTSWOLD - KEITH CHANDLER'S PUBLICATIONS

continuity back to 1700 but no long lived teams

depended on patronage, ales, clubs (from late 18th C)

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| MOLLY, STAVE | - mid to late 19th C, country dance like |
| SALISBURY    | - occasional morris                      |
| LONG SWORD   | - European analogues                     |
| RAPPER       | - needed spring steel                    |
| BORDER       | - not very country dance like            |

## MASKING

FALSE HEAD	(MIDDLE AGES)
FACE MASK	(TUDOR)
EYE MASK	(HIGHWAYMEN)
FACE PAINTING	
BLACKING UP	(1731 ACT)

100

## UK EXPERIENCE OF COLOUR

DARK SKINNED ITALIANS (CHARLES II) & SPANISH  
MOORS IN SPAIN AND AS PIRATES

SUB SAHARAN PEOPLES & WEST COUNTRY HORSES  
MINSTRELSY

EXOTIC - Ethiopian, Nubian, Nigerian, Gold Coast

SATANS in Basque and French/Spanish customs

COLOUR PREJUDICE IN ENGLAND

Saracens, Turks, what's in a name?

## THE HARD EVIDENCE

HEANEY AND FORREST EARLY MORRIS ANNALS

THREE DANCE FORMATIONS

CHAIN, CIRCLE, TWO BY TWO

MATACHINS - with sticks

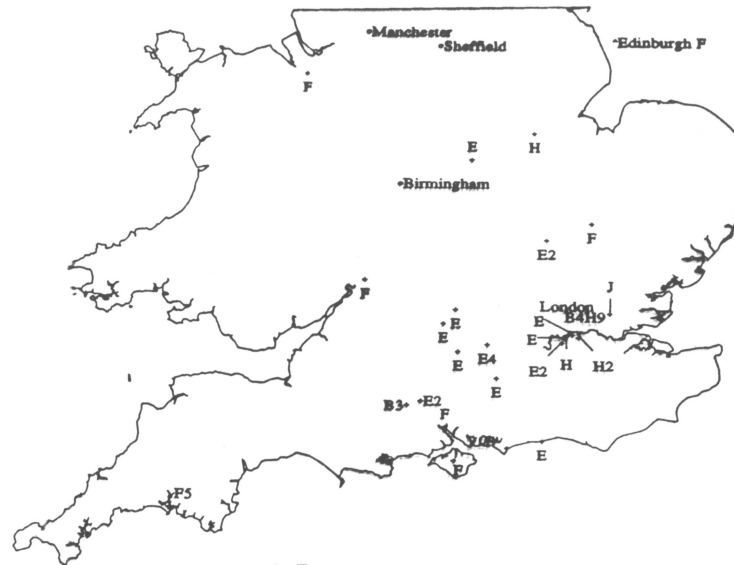
STICKS, BLACKING, NAPKINS

SPANISH TRANSMISSION IN NORTH AMERICA

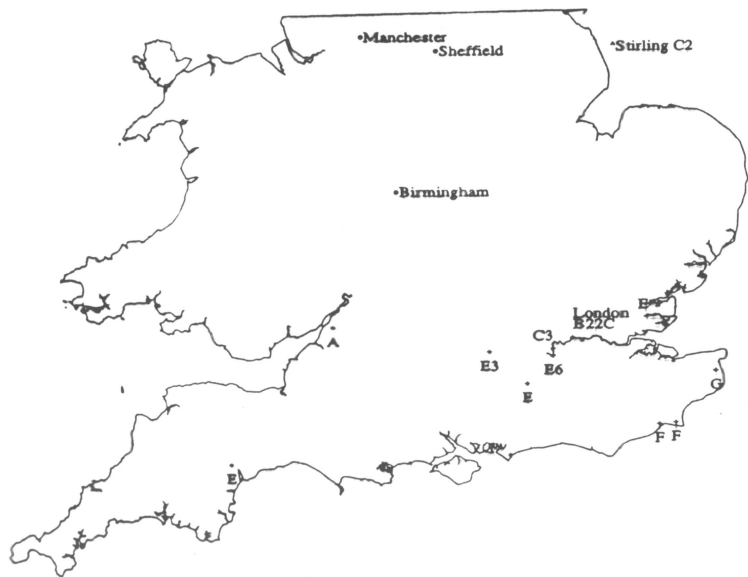
CUSTOMS BEFORE 1800 IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF  
COUNTRY



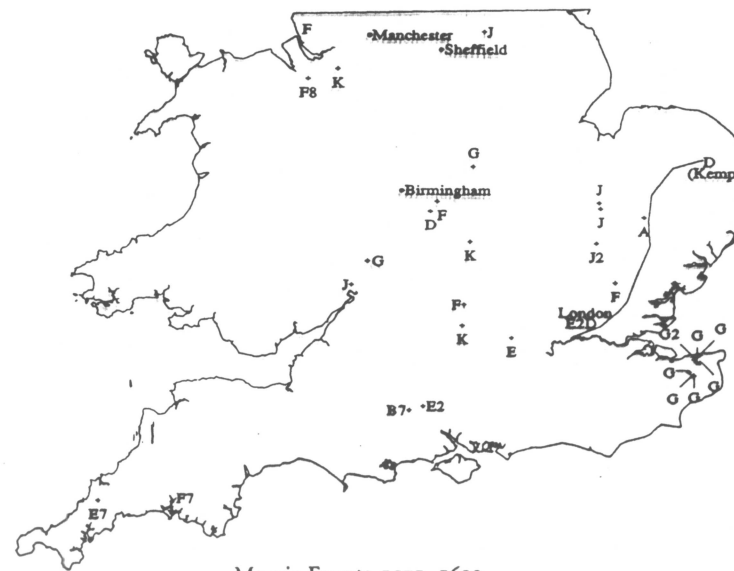
Morris Events 1466-1510



Morris Events 1541-1570

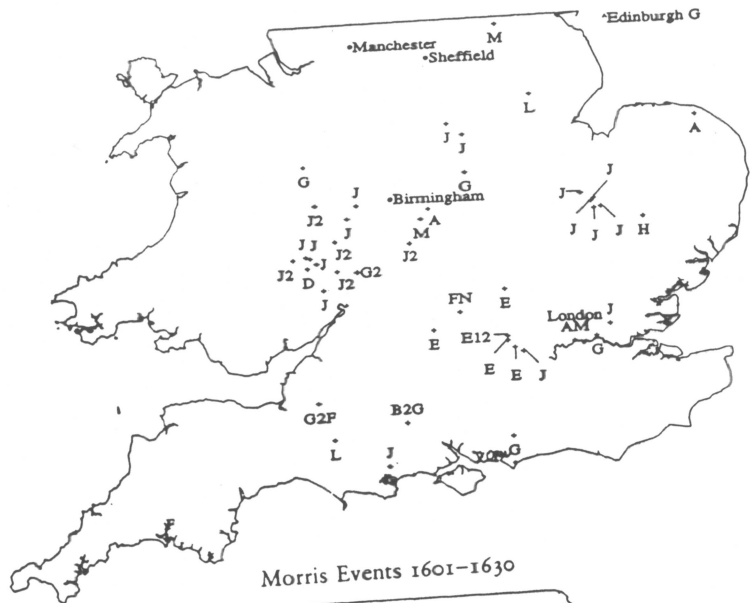


Morris Events 1511-1540

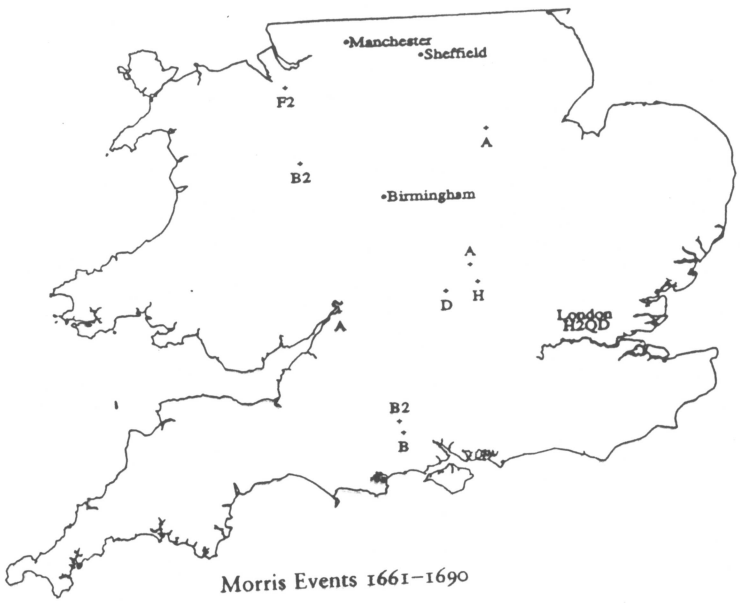


Morris Events 1571-1600





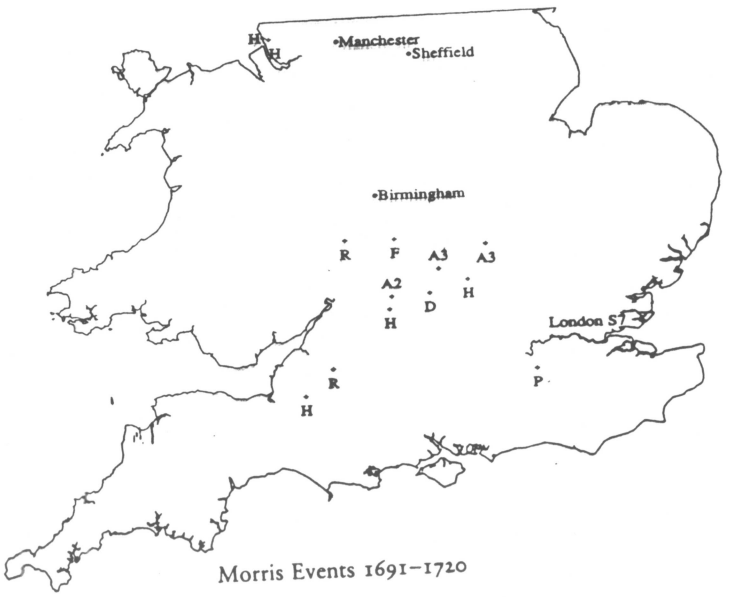
Morris Events 1601-1630



Morris Events 1661-1690

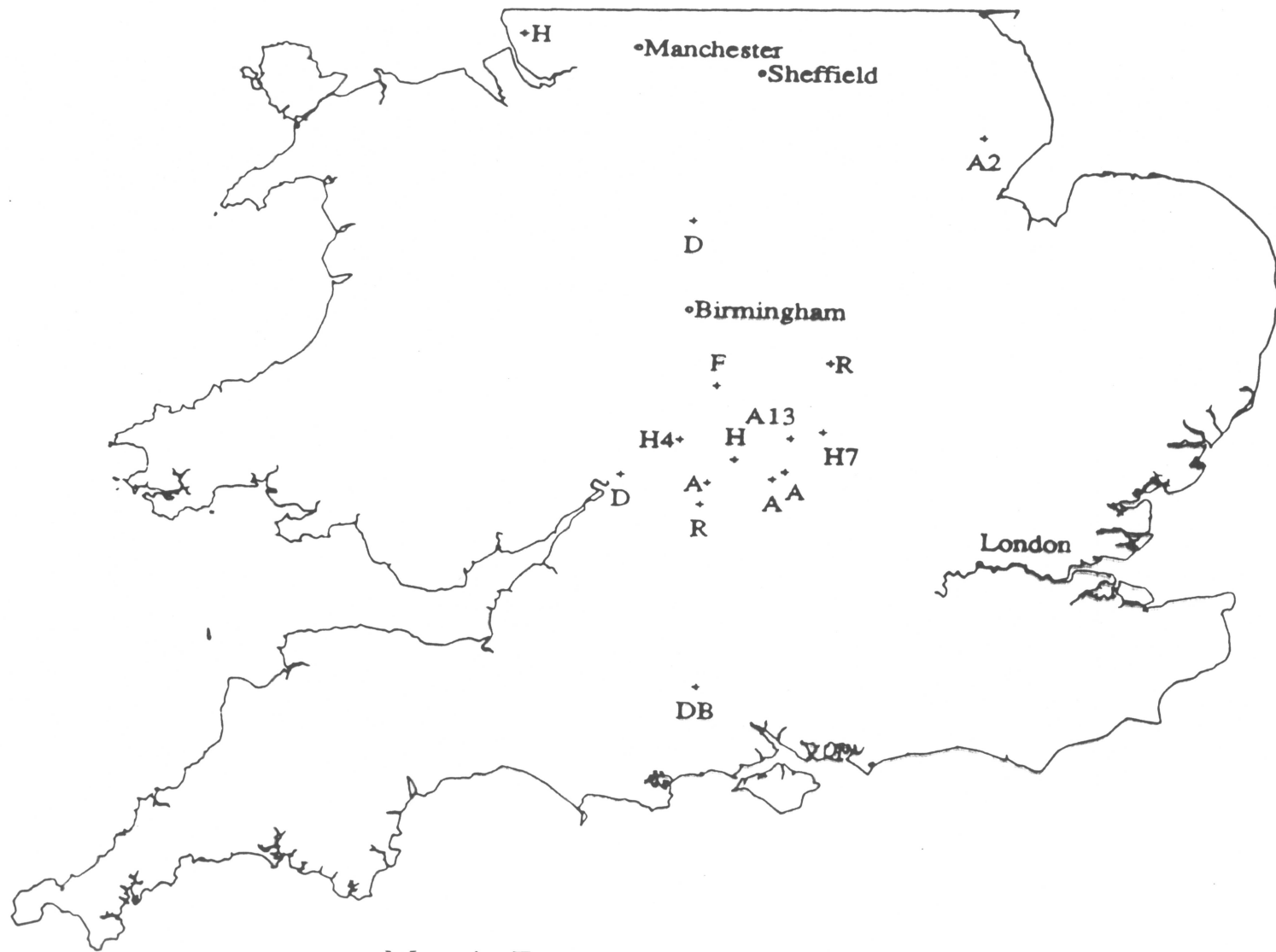


Morris Events 1631-1660



Morris Events 1691-1720

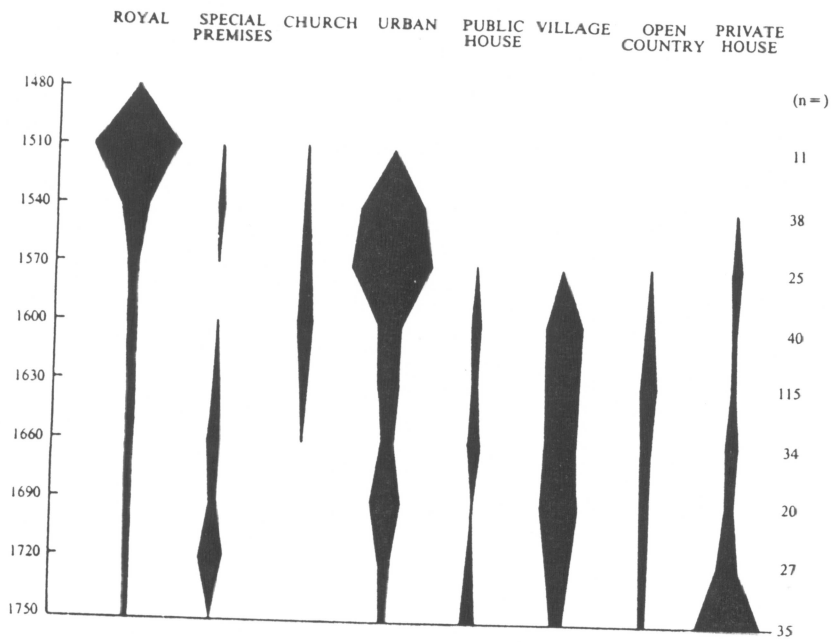
107



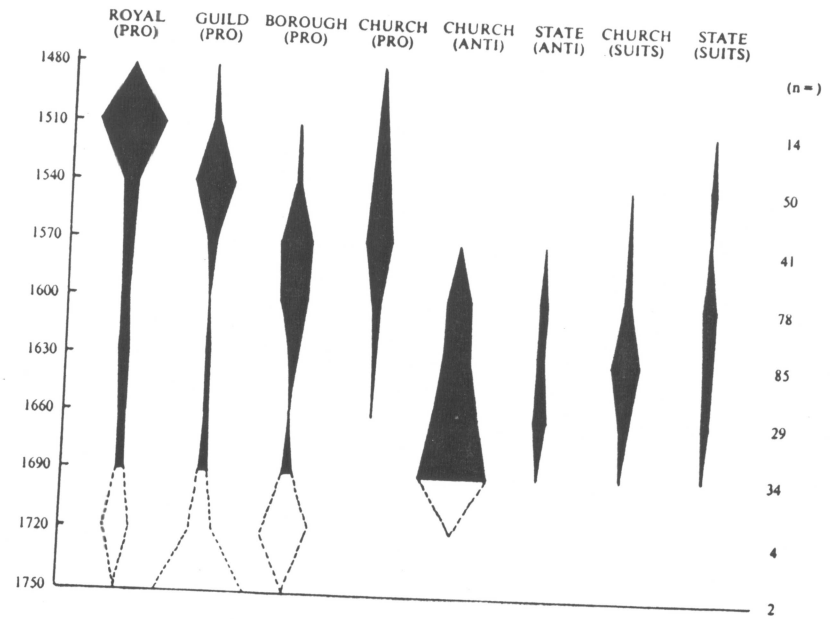
Morris Events 1721-1750

1721

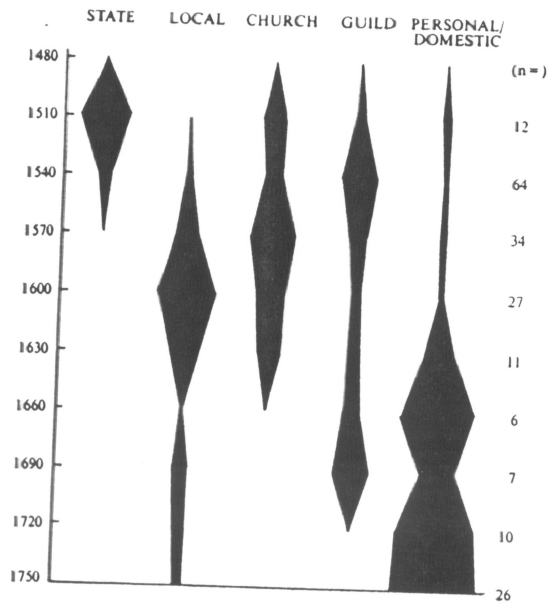
1750



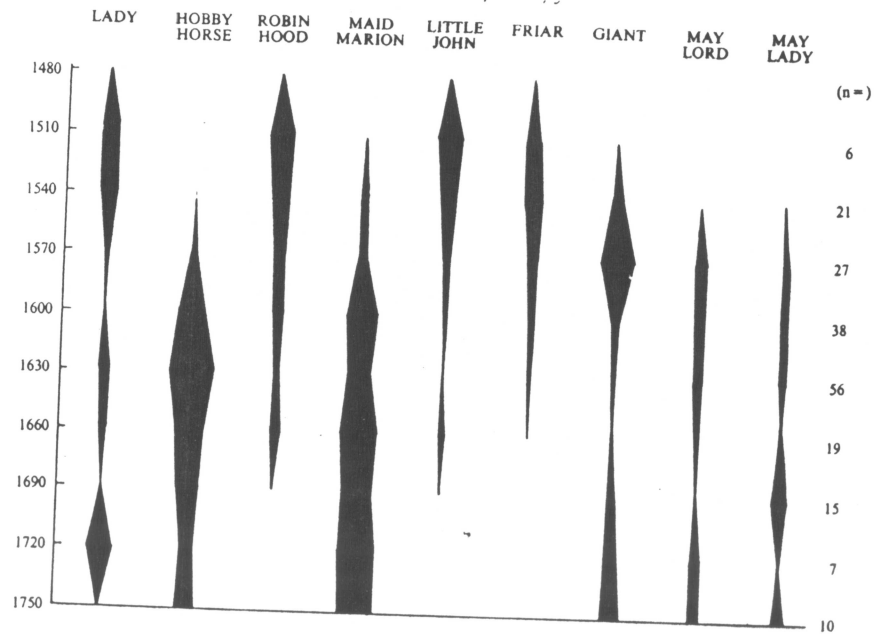
Seriation Curves of Venue



Seriation Curves of Official Actions



Seriation Curves of Financial Support



Seriation Curves of Characters of the Dance

## PERSISTANCE

Lucy Broadwood's last Sussex Morris Man

Puttenham under the Hog's Back

Children's chain movements - French farandole

Basque Sauts

Quakers in pairs story

## INTERNAL EVIDENCE

Cotswold - steps, figures, galley, tunes

The English Country Dance

PLAYFORD - Foot-up, Half-gip, Whole-gip pattern

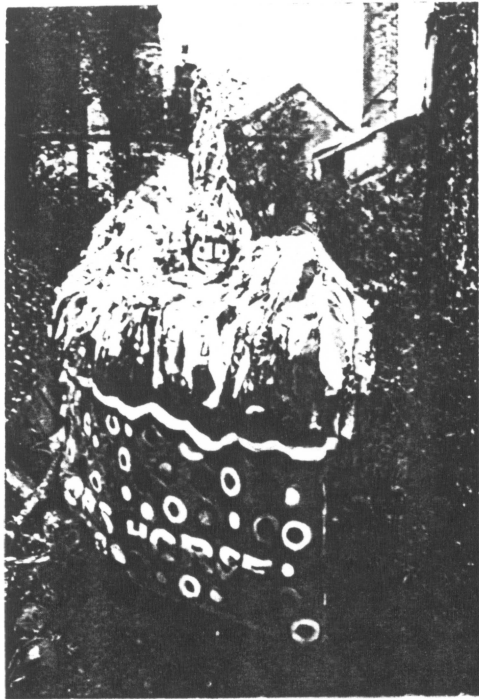
# HOME GROWN THREADS

FERTILITY

SEASONS & CALENDAR

USED WHAT THEY KNEW

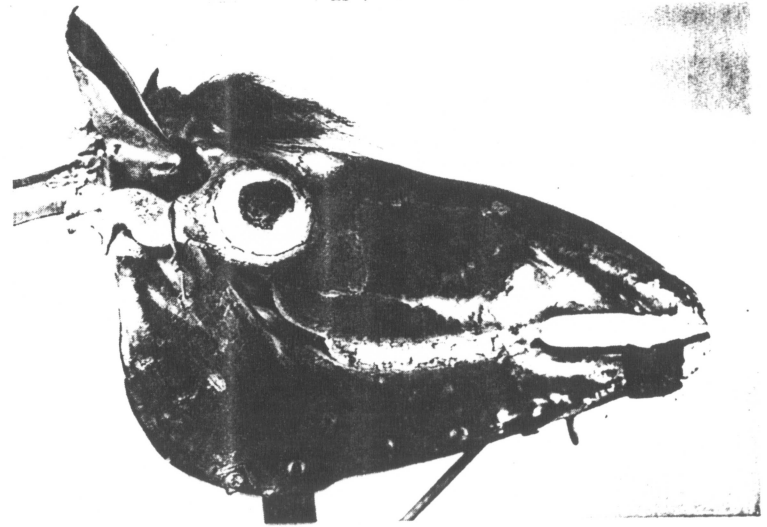
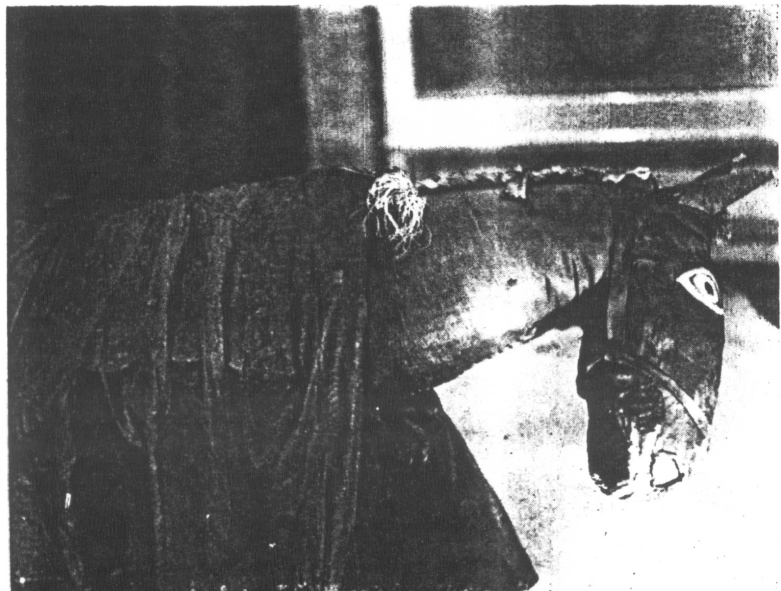
WHAT SOCIETY DOES A MORRIS NEED?



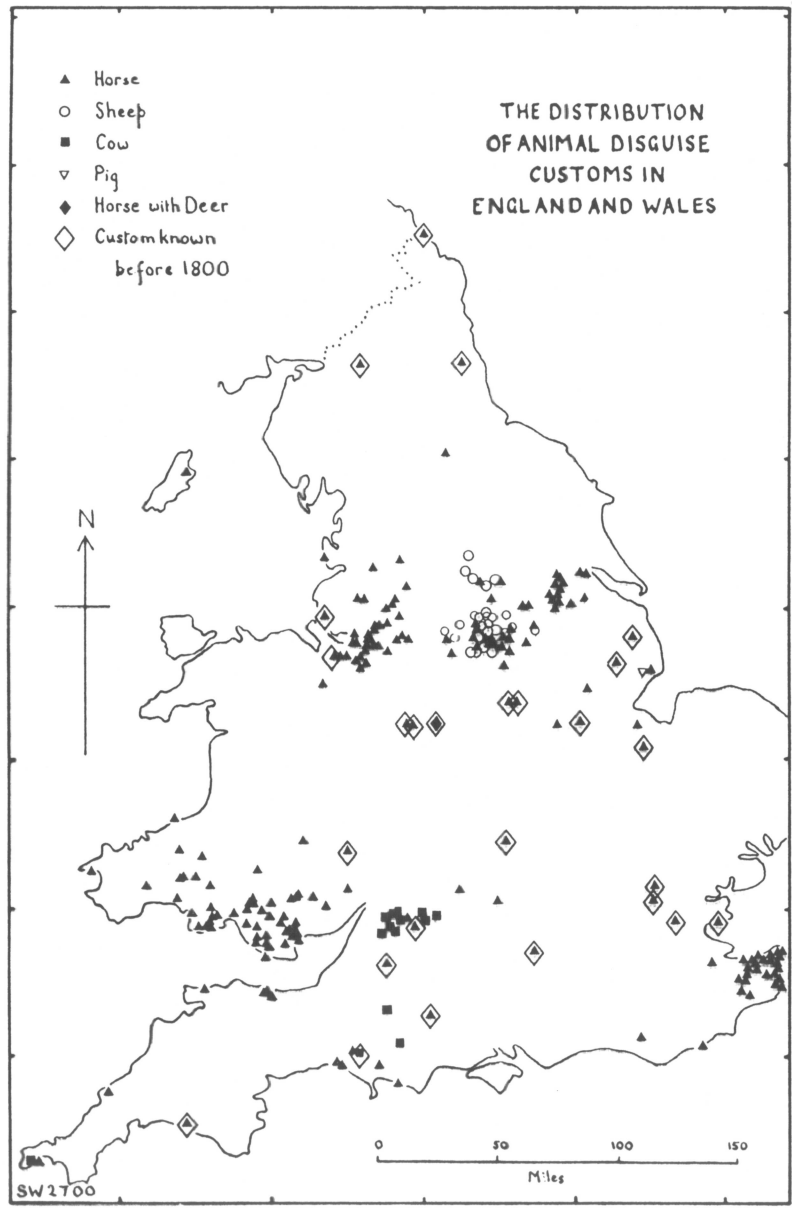
The Minehead Sailors' Horse, at Dunster Castle, Somerset (*above left*)  
The Mari Lwyd, of Wales (*above right*)  
The stuffed Hobby of Yardley Gobion, Northamptonshire (*below*)



Abbots Bromley Horn Dancers, with Hobby



The Wild Horse-skull Hobby of Higher Whitley, Cheshire



REYKJAVIK



A sketch map showing the types of animal masks found in each country of Europe.



W. Pamell 1911





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GREEK

117.

THE GAMES

KING

MAY

ROBIN HOOD

AT THE BREAK UP OF THE MIDDLE AGES  
WITH THE GROWTH OF SECULAR  
ENTERTAINMENT

## NATURE OF EVIDENCE

QUANTITY REDUCES FURTHER BACK

RECORDING LESS MATURE

INTERESTS SIMPLER

COMPLAINTS BY CHURCH

MEDIEVAL CHURCH WALL PAINTING



## ANTECEDENTS

DID NOT APPEAR OUT OF THE BLUE  
IMPORTATIONS?

BERENGARIA

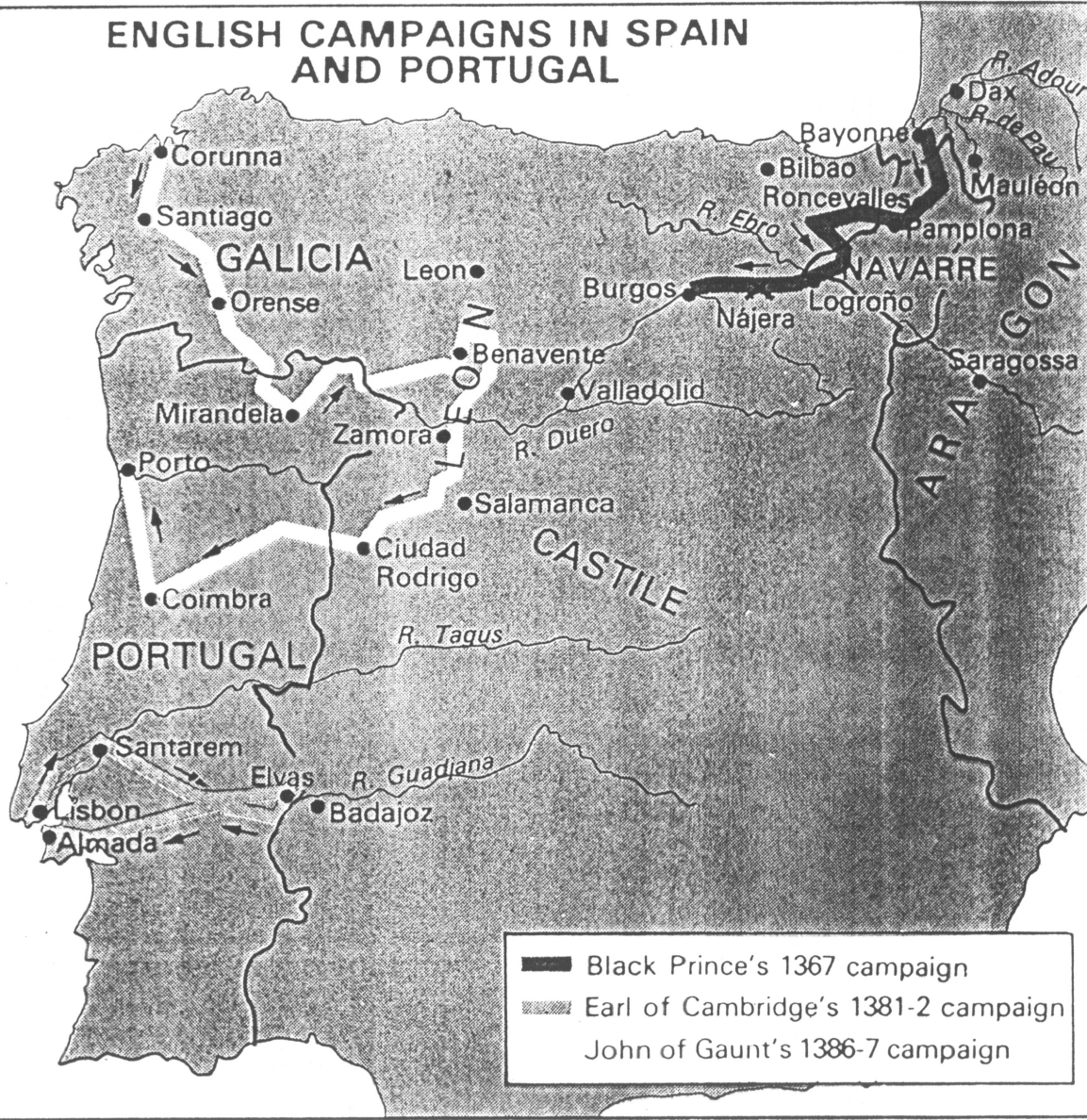
ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE

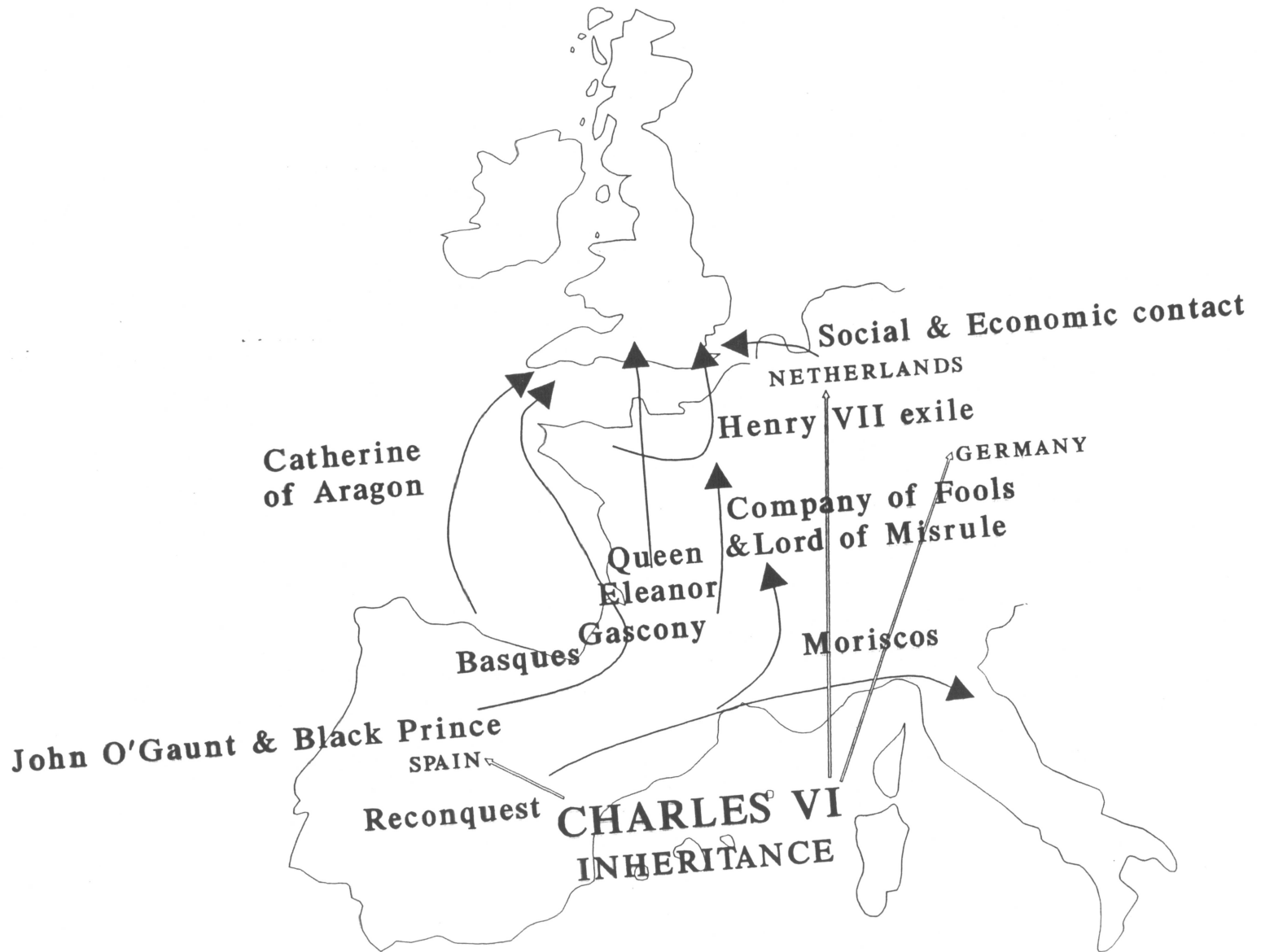
BLACK PRINCE AND JOHN OF GAUNT

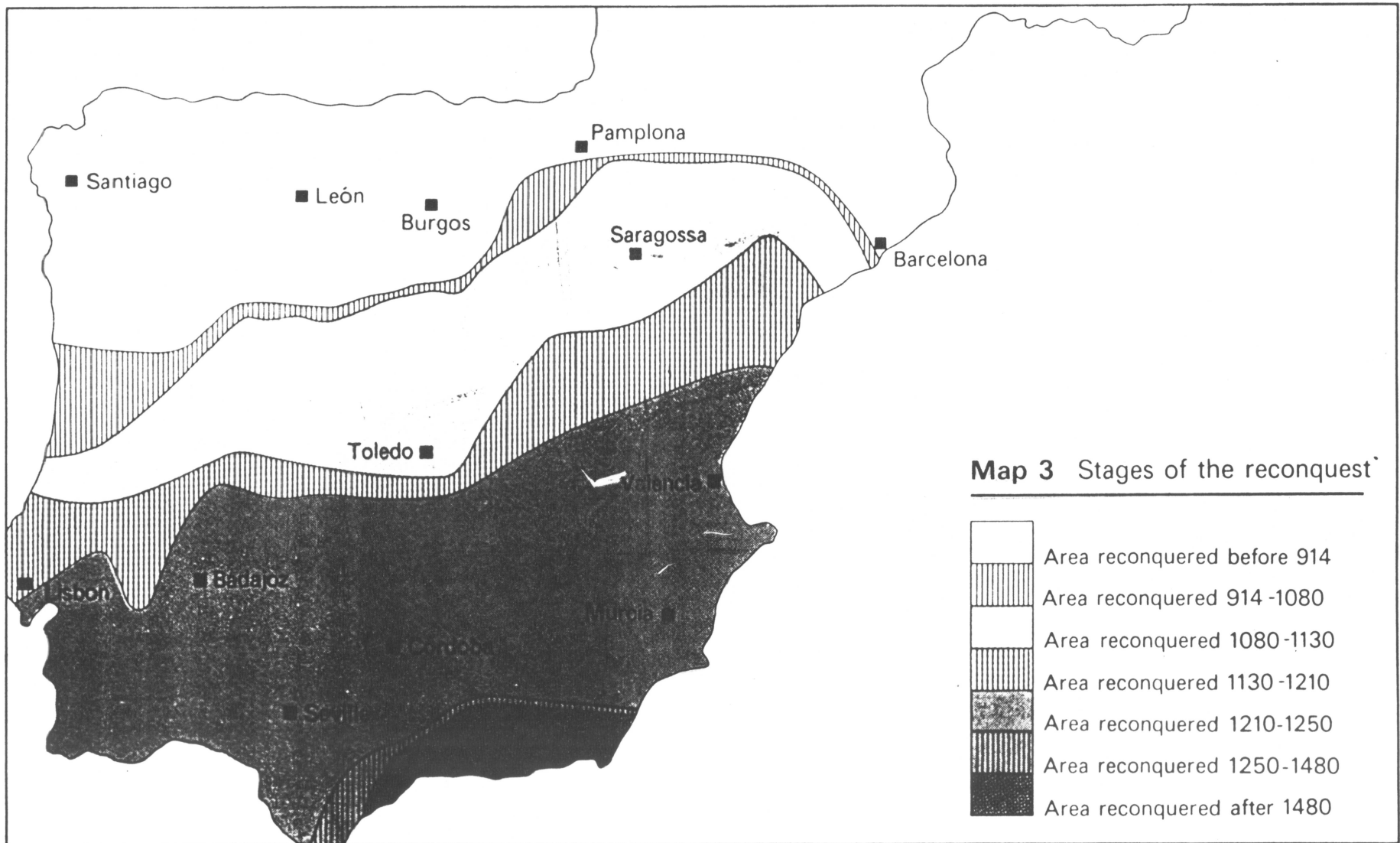
HENRY VII

CATHERINE OF ARAGON

# ENGLISH CAMPAIGNS IN SPAIN AND PORTUGAL







**Map 3** Stages of the reconquest

- Area reconquered before 914
- Area reconquered 914-1080
- Area reconquered 1080-1130
- Area reconquered 1130-1210
- Area reconquered 1210-1250
- Area reconquered 1250-1480
- Area reconquered after 1480



# EUROPEAN ANALOGUES

SPAIN

FRANCE - BURGUNDY

BASQUES

ITALY - TUSCANY

RUMANIANS

NIGERIANS

DUTCH



### **CHRISTIANS AND MOORS**

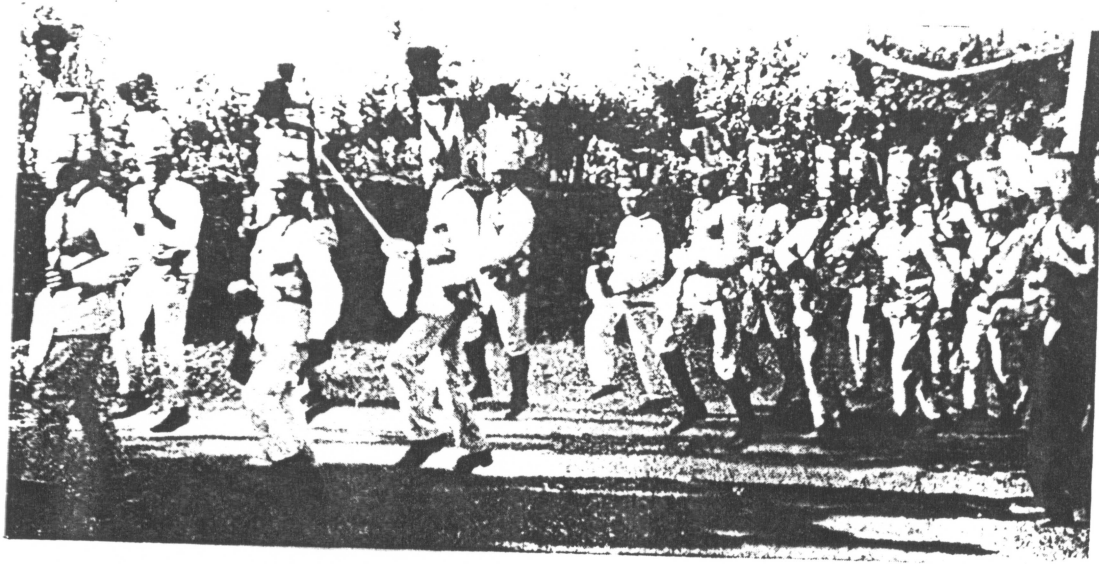
*In the Penedes region (eastern Spain), the Christians and Moors are not represented as Giants, as in other parts of the Peninsula. Two lines of dancers – eight or nine – dance as if riding on horseback, they meet, strike sword against shield, separate, dance round again, meet once more, strike again, and so on – but it is always the Christians who win in the end. Sometimes they ride hobby-horses. At times the Moors do not possess swords, just shields. They represent Evil (the black) against Good (the white), or the New Year fighting off the Old Year.*



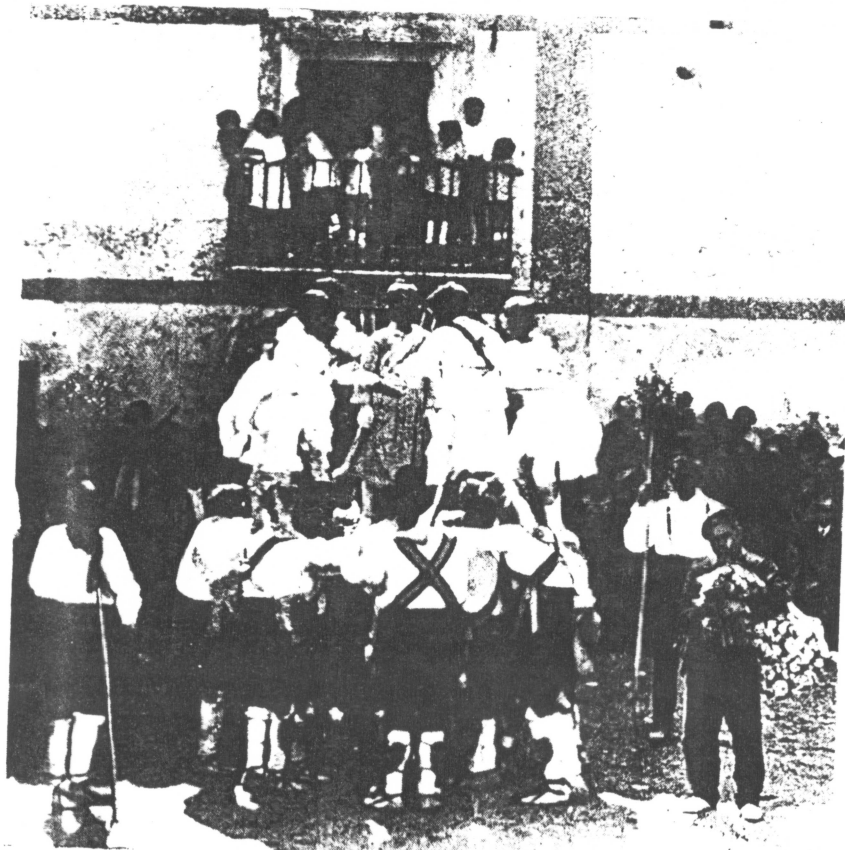
Perth Morris  
COSTUME



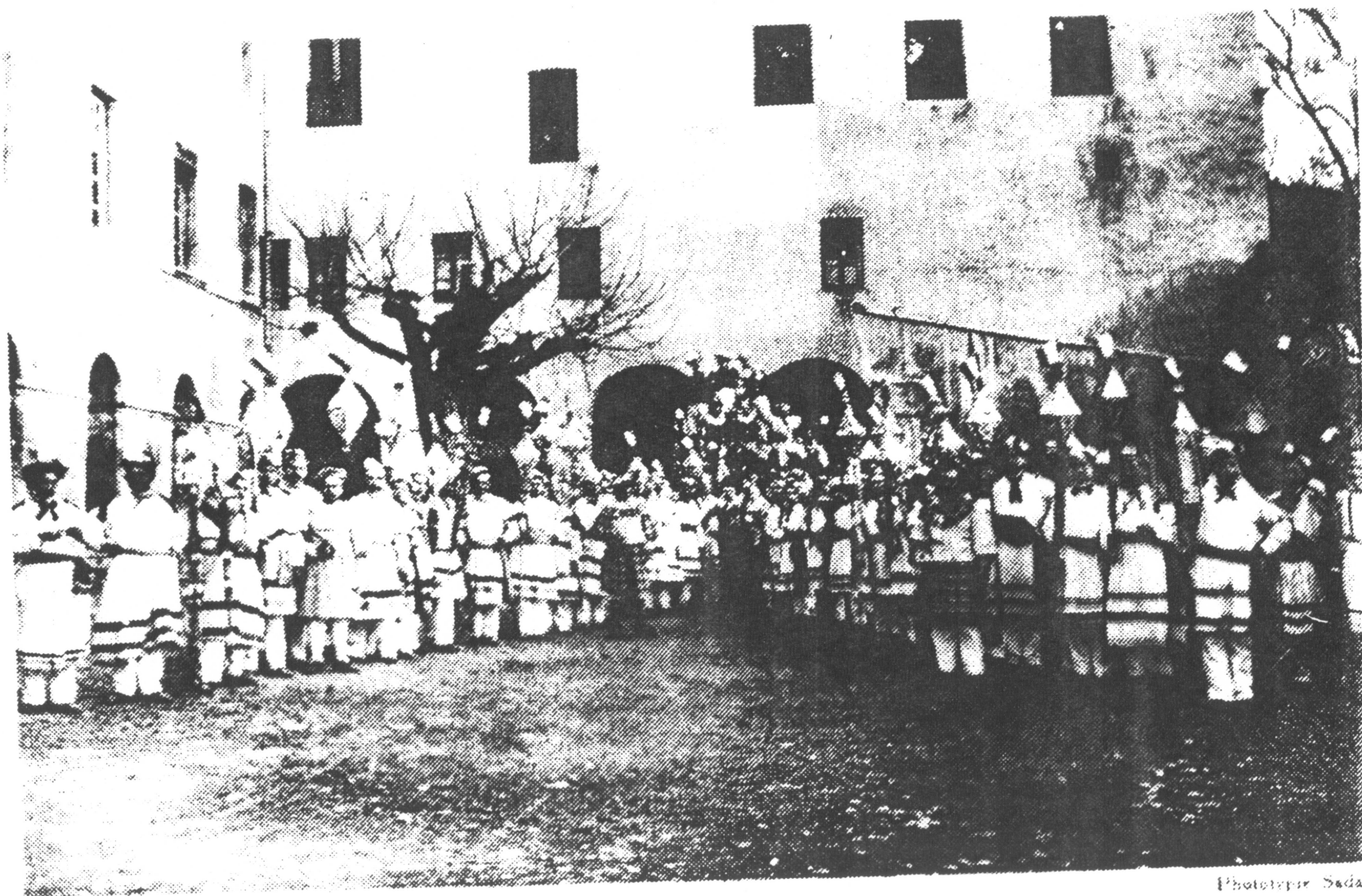
FRENCH  
c1750



PORTUGUESE  
MOURISCOS  
AT SOBRADO



EL DANCE  
AT SENA,



Phototypie Sadag

Les Fileuses au Carnaval de 1893

PROVENCE,

HUNGARY



29a, b Paired Stick Dance. Nyírvasvári, Szabolcs-Szatmár County, 1956



30a, b Threesome Stick Dance. Nyírvasvári, Szabolcs-Szatmár County, 1956





*Dancing to the  
missionaries' tune. A Jesuit  
priest taught these  
Rhodesian youngsters the  
morris dance. Their own  
dancing was forbidden as  
pagan, and morris*

1930



## WICCA

NO CONTINUITY

NO HISTORICAL STATEMENTS  
SUGGESTING MORRIS

IT IS BASICIALLY A DELUSION

GOOD CARING AND LIVING STYLE

SYMPATHETIC AND HOMOEPATHIC MAGIC

**'To make a girl dance naked**

Write on virgin parchment the character of *Fruitimiere* with the blood of a bat. Then cut it on a blessed stone over which a Mass has been said. After this, place the character under the sill of a door which she must pass. When she comes past, she will come in. She will undress, and will dance unceasingly until death, if one does not remove the character.'

## MIDDLE AGES

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

DEVELOPED RELIGIOUS LIFE

MASSIVE BUILDINGS

DECORATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS

CONCEPT OF NATIONS

DEVELOPMENT OF PRIVACY AND COMMERCE

BLACK DEATH

## THE CHURCH

ANALYSIS OF CHURCH WARDEN ACCOUNTS

ANALYSIS OF CHANGES IN LANGUAGE AND TOPICS

CHANGES IN ATTITUDES

SWITCH TO CIVIL SERVICE

WE SEE CHURCH AS OPPOSED - PROTESTANT VIEW

ENGLAND LAGGED ITALY BY UP TO TWO CENTURIES

LINK FOLK TO MEDIEVAL PRACTICES RECOGNISED  
IN 1725

## THE GUILDS

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF MERCHANT OR TRADE  
GUILDS WAS RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES AND  
ONLY SECONDARY WAS REGULATION

DRESSING UP - EXPENSIVE COSTUMES

FUNDS - AS DISPLAYS NEEDED PATRONAGE

PAID MUSICIANS

BEFORE ALL THIS - THE PAGANS

DARK AGES ARE BETTER UNDERSTOOD

SAXONS WENT FOR ETHNIC CLEANSING

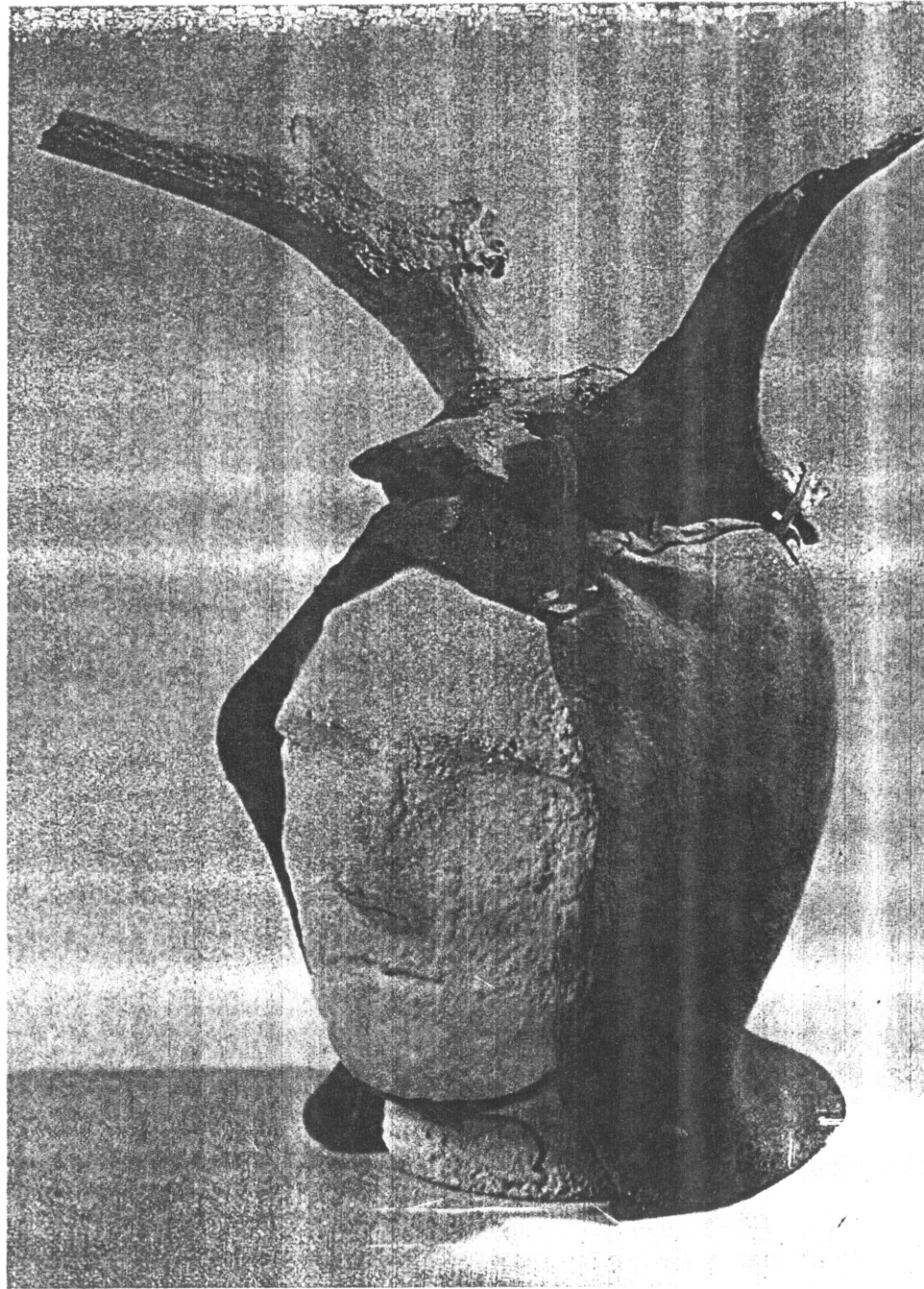
SURVIVALS WOULD HAVE BEEN WIDER SPREAD?

CHRISTIAN FAITH DOMINATED LIFE

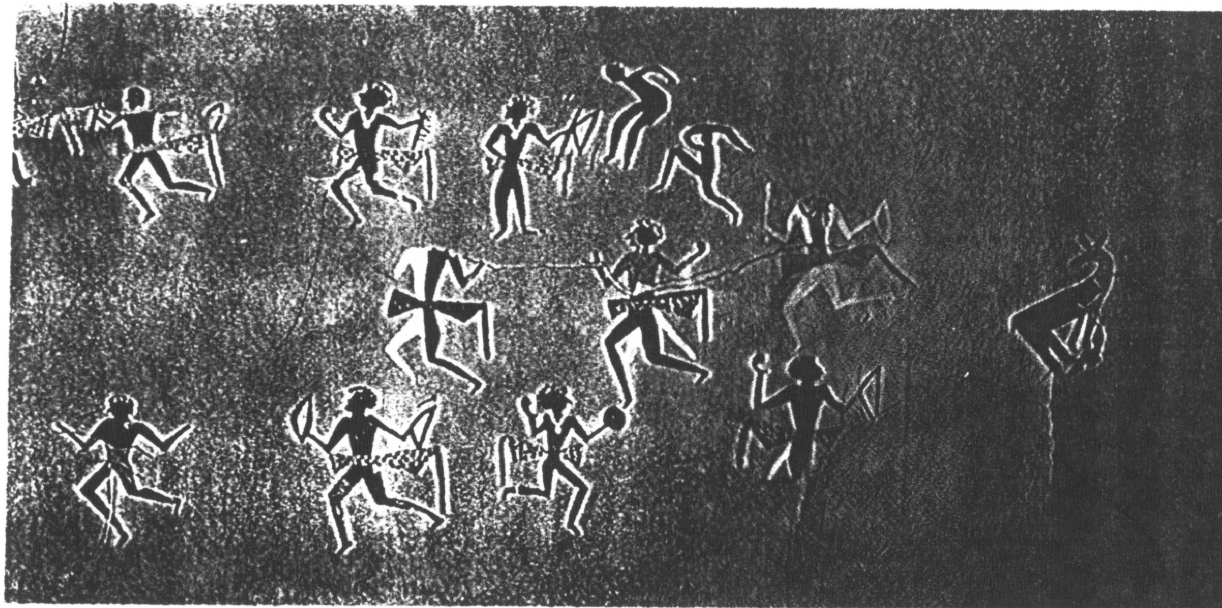
CHURCH LED

DRAMATISATION OF SERVICES, MYSTERY PLAYS

ILLUSTRATIONS IN STONE

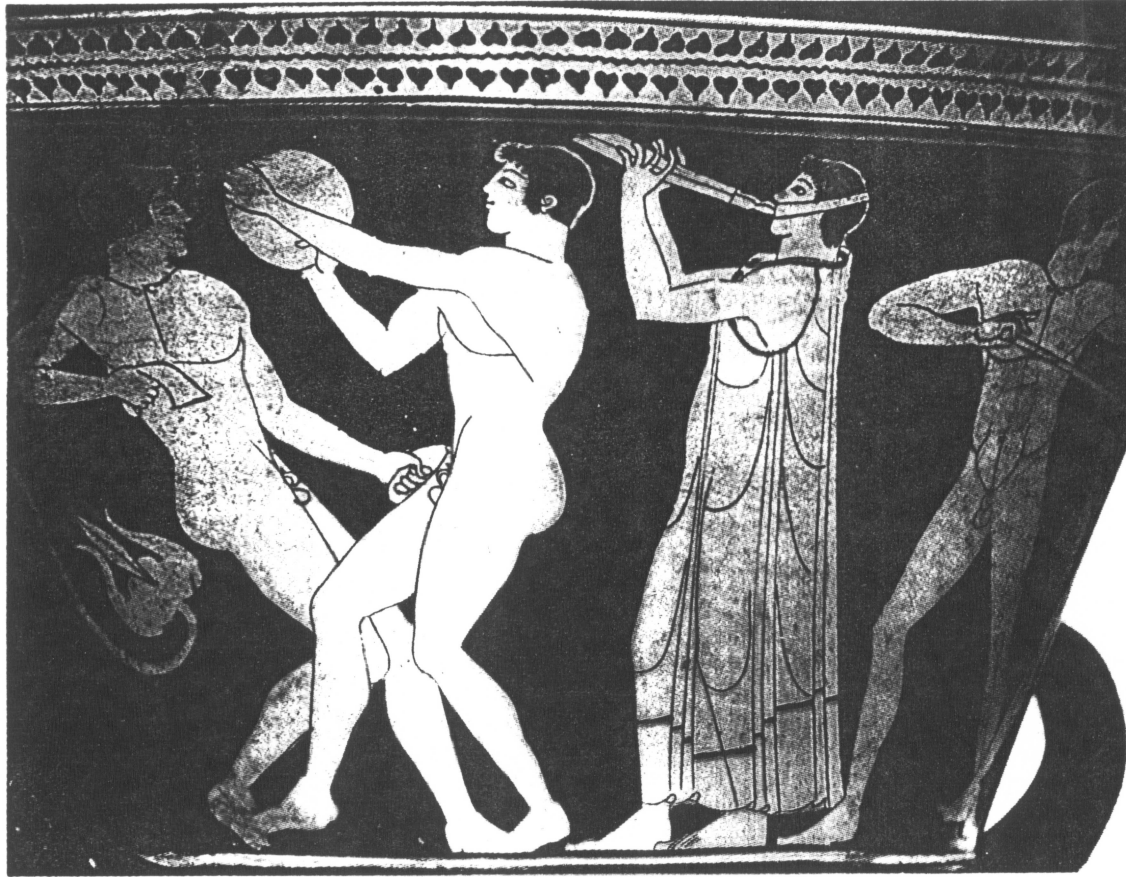


11 *This reconstructed 'head-piece' from Star Carr in Yorkshire shows how these antler frontlets could have been both hunting decoys and also the 'horns' of witch-doctors in the Middle Stone Age around 7500 bc*



*Left:  
Dance scene from a ceremony of  
Neolithic hunters. Men are dressed  
in skirts and caps of leopard skin and  
carry bows or boomerangs. One  
marks the rhythm with a little drum.  
Two naked figures jump or run.  
Çatal Hüyük, 6th millennium B.C.*





Greek vase

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## CONCLUSIONS

ALL THE TODAY'S MORRIS HAS BEEN REVIVED  
WHAT IS PRESERVED IS UNKNOWABLE  
THE OLD FORMS PREDATE MODERN SPORTS  
MOST ARE LINKED TO SIMPLE COUNTRY DANCES  
TUDOR MORRIS PROBABLY UNRECOGNISABLE  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR MORRIS EVENTS GREW OUT OF  
CHANGE FROM MEDIEVAL TO EARLY MODERN WORLD  
HUGE GAP STILL TO PAGAN TIMES  
SUPERFICIAL SIMILARITIES IN COSTUME NO GUIDE TO  
CHOREOGRAPHY