

1

The Early Years

It seems that the gypsies were born into the world solely in order to be thieves: they are born of thieving parents, they are brought up with thieves, they study how to be thieves, and, in the end, they emerge thieves through and through. Stealing and the urge to steal are part and parcel of their very being, and are eradicated only when they go to the grave.

So begins Cervantes's novella *La gitanilla* (*The Little Gypsy Girl*), the tale chosen by its author to open his 1613 collection of *Novelas ejemplares*.¹ The passage's seven insistent references to theft famously epitomize the common stereotype of the gypsy that had long since come to enjoy widespread currency across Europe. In Spain, the continual attribution to gypsies throughout the early modern period of transgressions ranging from highway robbery and worse by the men, to sorcery, petty theft, and various forms of deception by gypsy women, continued to fuel their unenviable reputation. But a vicious circle was also at work. At least part of the blame for the stubborn persistence of gypsy criminality there must lie with the very instruments repeatedly invoked to control it. As draconian legislation increasingly demanded that the gypsies abandon not just their few traditional occupations, but also in many cases even their homes, what began as a response to specific, delinquent behaviours quickly translated into wholesale stigmatization and economic emasculation. Framed by men of the centre with little real knowledge of those at the outermost margins of society against whom they were directed, the laws unsurprisingly reflected the shortcomings of the simplistic, demonizing stereotype of the gypsy on which they drew, and which, of course, they further reinforced. As they did

2 *The Gypsies of Early Modern Spain, 1425–1783*

so, the few economic options available to gypsies became ever more limited, the crown eventually demanding that they work only as agricultural labourers, as casual employees, that is to say, of non-gypsy landowners. Little wonder, then, that many continued to resort – or reverted – to the very behaviours the legislators had set out in the first place to curb. Yet even the universal assumption that gypsies could be relied upon to be inveterate thieves seems hardly sufficient in itself to explain the disproportionately prominent place they eventually came to occupy in certain Spanish minds of the period.² For most Spaniards, the spectre of the thieving gypsy owed at least as much to hearsay and demonizing myth as it did to direct experience. Yet by the early seventeenth century, this otherwise distinctly marginal figure had come, for some Spaniards at least, centrally to represent many of the ills that now beset the nation. The facile pathological displacement of Spain's perceived woes onto this despised pariah group reflected the acute crisis of confidence that had by now begun to affect important sections of the nation's intellectual and religious élite. After a series of debilitating setbacks, Spain, or more properly in this context Castile, the very heart of a vast empire that now stretched half-way across the world, had, it was feared, at last begun to falter. Unless appropriate remedies could be found, some now saw decline as inevitable. How and why all of this came about and how, in particular, such fears were to impact on Spain's gypsies will be central concerns of this book, as will the role played by the institutions, society, and culture of an early modern Spain that now seems more complex, more pluralistic, in some ways more dysfunctional, and yet in others more robust than has sometimes been allowed. As to the gypsies, or *gitanos* the word is a corrupt version of the Castilian term *egipcianos* (Egyptians) – marginal they may have been, yet by the time Cervantes was writing they were well established in Spain. In fact, some two hundred years had passed since the first groups to penetrate south of the Pyrenees had crossed what nowadays represents Spain's northern border. As we shall see, the first contacts with these newcomers were far from being marked by the official hostility later to be visited upon them in their adopted land. Indeed, in what must qualify as one of history's smaller ironies, among the very earliest historical documents we possess relating to Spain's *gitanos* is an order dated 26 May 1425 and issued by King Alfonso V of Aragon – Alfonso the Magnanimous, as he was known. In it, he instructs the townsfolk of Alagón, near Zaragoza, to return to 'Count Thomas of Egypt' two dogs, a mastiff and a greyhound, which they had stolen from him.³

Newcomers in western Europe

The earliest reliable reports of the arrival in western Europe of gypsies date to the second decade of the fifteenth century. An anonymous German chronicle recorded the presence of these strange newcomers at Augsburg in late 1417. It also made the astonishing claim that they had come equipped with letters authorizing them to steal from anyone refusing them charity.⁴ Improbable enough, one might think; yet a number of remarkably similar claims were reported elsewhere. At Bologna, an Italian chronicle recorded the arrival on 18 July 1422 of some one hundred gypsies led by a 'Duke Andrea'. They carried with them an order issued, so they said, by the king of Hungary which authorized them to steal with impunity during the seven-year term of the 'pilgrimage' on which they insisted they had embarked some five years earlier.⁵ The king, their story went, had confiscated Duke Andrea's territories as a punishment for his apostasy, and, when he and his followers subsequently accepted baptism and returned to the Christian faith, had exiled them to wander the Earth for seven years to expiate their sin before presenting themselves to the Pope in Rome. Certainly, if the Italian chronicle is to be believed, they seem to have taken full advantage of the king of Hungary's vicarious (and presumably invented) largesse. It reports that the gypsy women in particular busied themselves stealing anything on which they could lay their hands in Bologna before the group finally left two weeks later in the direction of Rome, despite one of them having given birth to a child in the market-place just three days earlier.⁶ As to the letters they presented, whatever their provenance, and however they were obtained, it is worth noting that the Emperor of Germany, Sigismund, who had been king of Hungary since 1387, is known to have been at Konstanz in 1417 and 1418, not far from Lindau where the letters seem to have originated.⁷

Numerous other encounters with gypsy groups are mentioned in chronicles of the period, at Lübeck, Rostock, and other north German towns in 1417, Colmar in Alsace and Berne in Switzerland in 1418, St Laurent near Mâcon in 1419, Brussels in 1420, Bruges in 1421, Tournai and Basle in 1422, Regensburg in Bavaria in 1424, and Paris and Amiens in 1427. As well as recording various versions of the story of the seven-year pilgrimage, now ordered by the king, now by the pope, many of these reports also coincided in other ways in their descriptions of these foreign arrivals: they noted the gypsies' habit of travelling in groups of between ten and a hundred or more, each led by its 'count' or 'duke', or sometimes both; their encampments

set in open country; their dark-skinned, unkempt, and unappealing appearance; the ear-rings worn by both women and children; their fortune-telling; their claim to have originated in 'Egypt' or, as several reports had it, 'Little Egypt'; and, not least, their marked propensity for thieving. It is significant, too, that on at least two occasions, 1422 in Tournai and 1424 at Regensburg, reference is made to their claim to privileges giving those who led them the exclusive right to administer justice among their own kind.⁸ However implausible they might seem now, the stories they told, repeated time and again in this place or that across western Europe, must have helped these roaming groups to subsist. Certainly the distinguished Dutch historian Johan Huizinga long ago thought it perfectly likely that the tale told by the gypsies who arrived outside Paris in 1427 would have fallen on credulous, even sympathetic ears:

The familiar image of Fortune's wheel from which kings are falling with their crowns and their sceptres took a living shape in the person of many an expelled prince, roaming from court to court without means [. . .]. It is not surprising that the people of Paris should have believed in the tale of the Gypsies, who presented themselves in 1427, 'a duke and a count and ten men, all on horseback', while others, to the number of 120, had to stay outside the town. They had come from Egypt, they said; the pope had ordered them, by way of penance for their apostasy, to wander for seven years, without sleeping in a bed; there had been 1,200 of them, but their king, their queen, and all the others had died on the way.⁹

One notes, though, that having thus enlisted the pope, the gypsies were quick to extract the maximum advantage, adding that he had also ordered 'that every bishop and abbot was to give them ten pounds *tournois*', to help alleviate their sufferings.

Into Iberia

The earliest document indisputably to indicate the presence of gypsies south of the Pyrenees is a letter of safe-conduct issued in Zaragoza on 12 January 1425, once again by Alfonso V, to 'Don Johan of Little Egypt' ('Egipte Menor'), as he is described.¹⁰ The letter does not refer to him as a count or a duke, but the use at that date of the honorific *don*, derived from the Latin *dominus*, nevertheless suggests that his noble status was taken for granted.¹¹ Valid for three months, the letter required

that he be allowed to travel unmolested through different parts of the kingdom of Aragon along with 'those accompanying him, with all their mounts, clothing, possessions, gold, silver, saddlebags and any other items they might be carrying with them'.¹² There is no indication of how many people were travelling with him, but the strangers seem to have been received amicably enough by their Aragonese hosts, who treated them as pilgrims. As far as the fifteenth century is concerned, the rather sparse documentation relating to gypsies in Spanish state archives consists primarily of such royal safe-conducts, some 30 of them in all. Many of these, like those presented elsewhere in Europe, refer to the gypsy leaders as 'counts' or 'dukes' of 'Egypt' or 'Little Egypt'. Often, like the three issued at Seville in March 1491 to the gypsies Jácomo, Felipo, and Luis, respectively, the letters noted that the latter were intending to journey along with those accompanying them to the shrine of the apostle St James at Santiago de Compostela as a penance.¹³ In an age of faith when the provision of assistance to pilgrims was regarded as a Christian duty, the claim by these groups of exotic foreigners to be undertaking such a pilgrimage would have served the gypsies well, not just as a means of obtaining food and perhaps shelter, but also as a way of explaining their presence in the peninsula (the Spanish word for a pilgrim, *peregrino* itself derives directly from the Latin *peregrinus*, 'foreign' or 'strange'). More importantly, it would also have served to disguise and familiarize a nomadic habit otherwise likely to arouse suspicion or even outright hostility among the settled indigenous population. Similarly, the translation of their traditional respect for and allegiance to male clan elders into terms likely to be more readily accepted by their hosts – into the vocabulary, that is to say, of a hierarchical, and patriarchal European social formation in which status meant nobility – would have represented a similarly sensible stratagem. They may have been helped, too, in their attempts to achieve some degree of chameleon adaptation to the larger environment through which they were moving by the fact that in the fifteenth century a new breed of foreign travellers, typically men of noble blood, had taken to plying the traditional pilgrim routes. Often accompanied by sizeable retinues of armed men, these men used pilgrimage largely as a pretext to sample foreign courts, display their prowess abroad, and otherwise seek adventure.¹⁴ We have no way of knowing how the gypsies' embassies to the rulers from whom they sought favour were conducted, though it has been suggested that money may have changed hands between gypsies and court officials during such transactions.¹⁵ Such suspicions belong, though, to the realm of conjecture, and such evidence as there is suggests that gypsy leaders

were for much of the fifteenth century accorded by their aristocratic Castilian and Aragonese hosts a treatment generally in keeping with their frequently reiterated claims to noble blood.

Certainly, this was the experience of the earliest groups of gypsies to arrive in Andalusia. When Thomas and Martin, ‘two Counts of Little Egypt’, along with ‘up to a hundred women and children, their compatriots and vassals’, arrived in Jaén on 22 November 1462, they were accorded a magnificent welcome there by no less a figure than the Constable of Castile, Don Miguel Lucas de Iranzo. The one-time favourite of Henry IV of Castile, it had been rumoured four years earlier, when he was first appointed to this high office, that he might also be awarded the militarily and financially powerful role of the mastership of the Military Order of Santiago.¹⁶ Don Miguel, who was also governor of the northern Andalusian town, proceeded with his wife Teresa de Torres to entertain his guests in the lavish, indeed pointedly courtly style that was the hallmark of the ambitious aristocrat of his day.¹⁷ They stayed with him for ‘fifteen or twenty days’, and were provided with ‘bread, wine, meat, poultry, fish, fruit, straw and barley in abundance’.¹⁸ The gypsies, for their part, claimed to be penitents, re-cycling the old tale of pilgrimage ordered by the pope and adding that their sin had been to deny the faith after being conquered by the Turk. When they eventually left, amply provisioned by their host with clothing and other goods for their journey, Don Miguel honoured them further by accompanying them for half a league before finally bidding them farewell. Similar events occurred in 1470 at the Constable’s residence in nearby Andújar. This time he entertained ‘Count Jacob’ of ‘Little Egypt’, ‘his wife the Countess, whom they called Loaysa’, and 50 or so persons travelling with them.¹⁹ They stayed in Andújar for five or six days and, just over two weeks later, were replaced by one ‘Duke Paul’ and company, also of ‘Little Egypt’. Paul arrived bearing letters ‘from our lord the king and from the king of France and other dukes and great lords, as he was travelling the world as a pilgrim and penitent’ (his travels would eventually take him in May of 1471 to Murcia, where the town council granted him 1000 *maravedís* to help him on his long journey home).²⁰ Once again, the Constable displayed considerable largesse towards his guests, ‘demonstrating that generosity which he never denied to anyone’, as his chronicle put it.²¹ As centuries to come would show, he would not be the last member of Spain’s nobility to adopt a liberal, even protective attitude towards the gypsies.

Yet Don Miguel’s generosity may also have been his undoing. In what was to prove an ominous sign of the times, he met his death just three

years later on 21 March 1473, the feast of San Benito. He was murdered by a hooded assassin who, using the butt of a crossbow, dealt him a fatal blow to the head as he knelt at prayer in Jaén cathedral. It is likely that he was killed because of his support for and protection of *conversos* there. These were Spaniards of Jewish blood who had converted, often under pressure, to Christianity, but who continued to be regarded with deep suspicion, jealousy, or worse by many of their neighbours. That year and the next saw outbreaks of anti-*converso* rioting, first in Córdoba, then in Jaén, Seville and elsewhere.²² The widespread urban unrest was sparked initially by the soaring food price inflation of the preceding four years and then fuelled, as the humanist chronicler Alonso de Palencia pointed out, by simmering resentment of the relative wealth of many of Spain's Jewish community.²³ The question of racial origins and religious affiliation was one that had cast its shadow intermittently over the peninsula for centuries, erupting periodically in outbreaks of extreme violence, as in the massacres of Jews carried out in the summer of 1391 in Seville, Toledo, Burgos, Logroño, Valencia, Girona, Barcelona and a number of other towns.²⁴ Then of course there was the question of the affront to Christendom represented by continuing Muslim rule in the Nasrid emirate of Granada; and then, too, there were the suspicions nursed by many about the *mudéjares* (the word derives from the Arabic for 'tributaries'), free men and women of Moorish origin who had chosen to remain and live under Christian rule in those territories which had been re-occupied as the Christians pushed south. For over a century now, internal strife and the virtual collapse of public order had preoccupied Castile's rulers as they struggled to contain the ambitions of a turbulent nobility who at times seemed bent on anarchy. True, cross-border skirmishes with Muslims continued sporadically to occur in the south-east: but final completion of the long project of the *Reconquista* had for many years now not been pursued with the vigour or focus that such an enterprise demanded. No doubt the continuing payments of tribute, the *parias*, extracted by Castile's monarchs from Granada's Muslim rulers served very considerably to sweeten this otherwise bitter pill:²⁵ but now, as the fifteenth century wore on, times were about to change, and questions of race and religion soon looked set to take centre stage once again.

As to the gypsies, few in number in both relative and absolute terms they may have been, but they too were soon to feel the effects of the gathering change in climate. Many Spaniards, like other Europeans, continued for almost two centuries to assume that the gypsies' ultimate origins lay in Egypt, as the earliest arrivals in western Europe had

themselves so often claimed. In his *Examen de ingenios (Examination of Wits)* of 1575, the physician Huarte de San Juan, setting the date of their arrival in Spain some 50 years earlier than had actually been the case, observed that over the ‘more than two hundred years since the first gypsies [*gitanos*] came from Egypt to Spain, their descendants have not yet lost the sharp wits and cunning their forebears brought out of Egypt, nor their tanned colour’.²⁶ Nor were such assumptions in the least discouraged by what one writer has described as ‘the protoracism inherent in Christian biblical genealogies’:²⁷ thus the gypsies had been condemned to roam the earth as a punishment for their refusal to aid the Holy Family during the flight into Egypt, as the Franciscan Melchor de Huélamo insisted in 1607;²⁸ or they might be Ezekiel’s Egyptians, scattered by God among the nations; or perhaps they were the remnants of Pharaoh’s hosts who had expelled the Hebrews from Egypt. In 1619, Sancho de Moncada, professor of theology at the University of Toledo, added that ‘most people believe they came with the Moors, when Spain was lost’ – in the year 711, that is to say, – though no evidence beyond the assumed north African connection spiced with malicious rumour was ever adduced to support such claims.²⁹ In his *Memorial de el hecho de los gitanos (Report on the Gypsy Question)*, written a year or so earlier and addressed to Philip III, the genealogist and chronicler Pedro Salazar de Mendoza rejected such notions, observing that no mention of this had ever been made in the histories of Spain. For Salazar the gypsies themselves lacked even the crudest sense of their own history, and he asked rhetorically, ‘what other misfortune could be like that of a people who do not know their own origin or homeland?’ Widespread the belief in an Egyptian origin may have been, but there was no shortage of authorities prepared to venture a different view. Salazar went on to enumerate the various hypotheses advanced by those who had written of such matters: Pope Pius II had thought the gypsies to be from the Caucasus; the Erasmian humanist, Juan Lorenzo Palmireno, in *El estudioso cortesano* (1573) had argued that they had come from Bohemia, as had Sebastian Münster in his *Cosmographia universalis* (1550), and others, including Andrea Alciato, Francisco Fernández de Córdoba, Aldo Manuzio, and the lexicographer Sebastián de Covarrubias, had variously identified them as of Chaldean, Syrian, Turkish, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Walachian, Circassian, Nubian, or Tunisian origin. An uncharacteristically sceptical and matter-of-fact Salazar noted, finally, that the gypsies themselves, ‘in line with traditions handed down by their elders, say that some of them are from Egypt, and others from Greece: and that is why they are called Greeks and Egyptians’. Just a few lines earlier, after

citing Palmireno, he added almost as an afterthought that the latter had pointed out that the gypsies 'speak the Greek of the Morea, and do not understand the Egyptian vernacular'.³⁰

In fact, the 'Little Egypt' so frequently mentioned in the gypsies' earliest letters of safe-conduct across Europe, and which was interpreted in England in the early sixteenth century as gesturing imprecisely towards Asia Minor,³¹ seems rather more likely to have referred to certain parts of Greece, and perhaps specifically to part of the southern Peloponnese – known in the medieval period as the Morea – where gypsies spent some considerable time on their centuries-long journey westwards from the Indian sub-continent.³² The port of Modon in the south-western Peloponnese, half-way between Venice and Jaffa, was a popular staging point for pilgrims bound for the Holy Land. As such, it would have provided a regular supply of travellers upon whom the gypsies – reported by a number of pilgrims from as early as 1384 to be present there outside the city walls – could exercise their particular talents.³³ Perhaps, too, as Fraser has suggested, these contacts, which continued through the fifteenth century, may have suggested to the gypsies the likely advantages of adopting a pilgrim identity as they moved through the Balkans and into western Europe. Given the widespread acceptance in fifteenth-century Europe of the legend of their Egyptian origins, it is even possible that the name 'Little Egypt' may first have been coined by Europeans passing through Modon, and only then adopted by groups of gypsies moving west, rather than the other way round.³⁴

But whatever the truth of such matters, what can be said with certainty, at least as far as the Iberian peninsula is concerned, is that from the late 1480s a second wave of newcomers arrived there, this time declaring themselves to be Greeks, not Egyptians, and presenting themselves from the outset both as pilgrims and as refugees in flight from the Turk. Both waves, the earlier 'Egyptians' and now the 'Greeks', arrived speaking Romaní, albeit thoroughly mixed with many words from other countries through which they had travelled.³⁵ Thirty years earlier, in 1453, the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II had finally overrun Christian Constantinople, and, in an ominous gesture of intent, had immediately declared its great church of Hagia Sophia a mosque.³⁶ By 1461 the Turks had occupied Serbia and the Peloponnese, before seizing Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1463. Other Turkish successes in the Balkans followed, and, as Ottoman pressure continued to build, the threat to western Europe – and to Christendom itself – now became palpable.

Of *convivencia* and conflict

Any attempt to describe the society the gypsies found in Spain during their first seven decades there must inevitably engage with certain fundamental problems attaching to Spanish historiography. The term *convivencia* (co-existence) has sometimes been used to describe the relative racial and religious tolerance that characterized relations between Spain's Christians, Moors (as Spain's Muslims were known), and Jews during certain periods of the middle ages. As one might expect, the degree of *convivencia* varied significantly from place to place, and from century to century, as did the population mix. In Aragon and Valencia, for example, by the fifteenth century *mudéjares* comprised over a quarter of the population, while in parts of Navarre the figure exceeded 50 per cent. In Aragon, the *mudéjares* enjoyed royal protection, the right to rule their own communities, the freedom to take up the trade or profession of their choice, and, on the whole, peaceful relations with their Christian counterparts, at least until the later sixteenth century when economic tensions between lowland *moriscos* and the 'Old Christians' of the mountainous areas finally erupted in violence.³⁷ Navarre's numerous *mudéjares* enjoyed a similarly wide range of privileges. Those in Valencia, on the other hand, unlike those of Aragon, spoke Arabic, by far the most telling mark of their unassimilated status – and one that helps to explain the sack of the *mudéjar* quarter there by a Christian mob in 1455. Nor was this an isolated event. In the late thirteenth century, a number of other towns there had also seen rioting directed against the *mudéjares*. Yet there were other places where relations approached the cordial. In Castellón de la Plana, for instance, *mudéjares* were actively, even eagerly encouraged to settle in the town by its Christian inhabitants.³⁸ And in Murcia, although Alfonso X of Castile had ordered a wall to be constructed in the thirteenth century to separate *mudéjares* from Christians, this signally failed to prevent them forming a joint Brotherhood or *Hermandad* in the fourteenth.³⁹ By the fifteenth century, Muslim jugglers and musicians were accepted as routine participants in Christian religious festivities there.⁴⁰ And of course the earlier legacy of *mudéjar* architecture in Christian churches built by *mudéjar* craftsmen, churches with decorations that sometimes even incorporated Arabic script, bears eloquent witness to the spirit of tolerance and real appreciation that had once existed. By the later decades of the fifteenth century, however, tensions were once again on the rise. In Castile itself, the *mudéjares* had always been much less numerous and more widely dispersed than in Navarre, Aragon or Valencia. Indeed, of

their approximately 120 communities, only seven could boast of more than one hundred households. Ever more restrictive legislation there, intended primarily to regulate the kingdom's Jews, who were increasingly the butt of popular vitriol and resentment, inevitably touched the lives of its *mudéjares*, too, notwithstanding the dispensations repeatedly granted to them by the crown. Almost everywhere some degree of discrimination was the norm: *mudéjares* were taxed more heavily than their Christian counterparts; and they, like the Jews, were usually held to be officially ineligible for public office, though *conversos*, Jews who had converted to Catholicism, often came to occupy positions of very considerable influence; and contacts, beyond those required for the intercommunal trade in which most *mudéjares* were permitted to engage, were generally discouraged.⁴¹ In frontier towns, unsurprisingly, cross-cultural interactions were rather more common, both Jews and Muslims sometimes attending Masses and, on occasion, *mudéjar* musicians even being contracted to play in the churches, much to the consternation of the Church authorities.⁴² Meanwhile, the counterparts of the *mudéjares* on the other side of the frontier, the *mozárabes*, Christians living under Muslim rule, also enjoyed considerable freedoms, as did the Jews. Indeed, in the mid-fifteenth century, Alonso Fajardo, one of the Christian nobles to whom border campaigning had largely been left by the crown, could even chide Henry IV of Castile, threatening to change sides, hand over the territories he held to Granada's Muslims, and, having metamorphosed into a vassal of the Emir, 'live as a Christian there as others do'.⁴³

But it is what has been made subsequently of the fact that any *modus vivendi* existed at all that goes to the heart of a centuries-old historical anxiety. In its modern form, this dates to the mid-twentieth century and, broadly speaking, concerns attempts to appropriate Spain's always historiographically unpredictable past to one or other of two, essentially mythopoeic narratives. The peculiar intensity of the debate is explained by the fact that one of the main issues at stake was (and is) the energetically contested notion of 'Spanishness' itself. The first line of argument was set out by the literary historian Américo Castro in 1948 in his *España en su historia: cristianos, moros y judíos*:⁴⁴ the second, which repudiated Castro's interpretation, was expounded in Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz's *España: un enigma histórico*, published eight years later.⁴⁵ Both have attracted their supporters. Castro advanced the view that the Moorish invasion of 711 represented in effect a paradigm shift in the evolutionary history of Spanish culture, which, together with the splendid contribution provided by its Jews, especially evident

in literature, had marked the nation's cultural identity in the most profound and enduring way. He used the term *convivencia* to encompass the acculturative processes, both mimetic and contradistinctive, which, he argued, had inexorably served to forge a unique Spanish identity after the arrival of the Moors. But while Castro accepted that reaction *against* Muslim influences had an important part to play, it is worth pointing out that the term *convivencia* is itself positively inflected, suggesting quite distinctly, as the most authoritative of Spanish dictionaries puts it, as 'people living together in considerable harmony' ('buena armonía').⁴⁶ One does not therefore have to disagree with Castro's conclusion to suspect that it may nevertheless always have tended to precede his argument. As it was, the more obvious, if relatively prosaic examples of lasting intercultural influence, such as the many Arabisms that entered the Spanish language from the eighth century on, seem to have interested Castro rather less than necessarily more speculative notions. He thus suggested that Castilians' preoccupation with purity of blood, especially evident from about the mid-sixteenth century, shadowed Hebrew preoccupations with genealogy and endogamous marriage, or, to take another example, that Spain's martial Catholicism represented a mimetic institutionalization of Islamic religious militancy.⁴⁷

Sánchez-Albornoz, on the other hand, preferred to stress unity, seamless, indeed occasionally invisible continuity, and the allegedly unwavering, teleological character of Iberian resolve to recover the peninsula exclusively for the banner of Christendom. Some of his arguments are rather reminiscent of those advanced around the turn of the twentieth century by members of the so-called 'Generation of 98', and especially of Miguel de Unamuno's notion of *intrahistoria*. Thus Sánchez-Albornoz's assertion of an uninterrupted, if periodically latent substratum of inherited and unchanging Spanish temperament stretching back to the Hispano-Romans and Visigoths inevitably recalls Unamuno's image of history – especially where this involved events inimical to the idea of Spain he wished to imagine – as merely waves rolling across the surface of an ocean in whose undisturbed depths could be found the eternal verities of Spanishness (*casticismo*). Collapsing the diachronic into an 'eternal' present, Unamuno asserted that it is in the 'depths of the sea, beneath history, where the true, eternal tradition lives, in the present, not in the past'.⁴⁸ As Hillgarth has pointed out, while neither Castro's nor Sánchez-Albornoz's views can be said to be innocent of myth, Castro's seems at least to approximate more closely to the complex realities of Spanish history (the line he

cites in what follows is from Sánchez-Albornoz's *España*, volume II, p. 366):

Myth for myth, the myth that Spain was created by the *convivencia*, the productive tension, of three religions, is undeniably truer to the facts than the idea that the Islamic conquest of 711 represented no more than 'a step backwards — unparalleled in the West — in the progress of an historical community towards its national unity'.⁴⁹

Hillgarth concludes that,

Despite many outbreaks of intolerance and the extent to which fusion was always incomplete, Christians, Jews, and Muslims did coexist for centuries in Spain – unlike the rest of Western Europe – and the Islamic model, according to which Jews and Christians were subject but tolerated communities ruled by their own authorities, was largely (though imperfectly) adopted in Spain down to 1492.⁵⁰

As the fifteenth century advanced, whatever interracial and interfaith tolerance had existed previously had begun to break down. Growing anti-Jewish sentiment in Spain was essentially based on a volatile mix of religious zeal – often, ironically enough, articulated in its most vituperative forms by *conversos* eager to demonstrate publicly the sincerity of their faith – and popular envy of Jewish financial successes coupled with deep resentment of some of their accustomed roles as money-lenders, rent collectors, and tax-farmers. The situation was not helped by the kind of power struggles between influential *conversos* and Old Christians which in 1449 provoked disturbances in Toledo amid bitter accusations that King John II's favourite, Álvaro de Luna, himself of *converso* origin, had shown intolerable bias towards Jews.⁵¹ Attitudes towards the *mudéjares* and Granada's Muslims, on the other hand, had rather more to do with fear. The Turkish advances in the eastern Mediterranean in the mid-century had by now given a new urgency to persistent concerns that Spain might once again be vulnerable to attack from North Africa, especially since continuing Muslim control of Granada seemed to offer an open door into the peninsula for any such attempted incursion. In this gathering atmosphere, some inevitably saw the *mudéjares*, too, as representing a potentially dangerous enemy within.⁵² Yet such suspicions only represented part of the story. Despite the fluctuating religious and cultural tensions, pragmatic considerations, not least in respect of

commercial exchanges, must in many places still have ensured a certain level of civility in intercommunal relations at the local level. After all, both Muslims and Jews had an important economic role to play, the Muslims as labourers, especially on the land, and the Jews as physicians, artisans, textile producers and financial agents.⁵³ However uncompromising the rhetoric of intolerance, it is hard to believe that ordinary human sympathies would not frequently have made themselves felt across racial and faith barriers in such day-to-day contacts between the communities.

This, briefly then, was the culturally complex and increasingly turbulent fifteenth-century society through which gypsies, too, were now moving, still, one should add, with relative ease. Indeed, I argue, as have others of the relations between the *moriscos* and their Old Christian neighbours,⁵⁴ that throughout the early modern period local relations between gypsies and non-gypsies were on the whole characterized, especially in the south, not so much by hostility as by a form of *convivencia*, intermittent, geographically patchy, and sometimes distinctly uneasy, but *convivencia* nevertheless.⁵⁵ But one must be careful. What has been described by a number of commentators as a honeymoon period for the gypsies in the early years after their arrival was in fact far from devoid of signs of conflicts to come.⁵⁶ Indeed, the claim by later arrivals to be ‘Greeks’, their leaders usually now demoting themselves to ‘captain’ or ‘gentleman’ rather than count or duke, may have been designed to deflect aggression directed towards them by Spaniards who had by now become increasingly antagonistic towards their ‘Egyptian’ forerunners.⁵⁷ A safe-conduct issued at Valladolid in 1489 to ‘Greek merchants’ who had arrived from Sicily having earlier abandoned Negropont (now Khalkis) in the Euboea with the Turkish onslaught of 1470, as had other gypsies arriving in Spain,⁵⁸ suggests that the stratagem was not always effective, since the local populace immediately took them for Egyptians and abused them anyway.⁵⁹ In Lérida on 30 September 1482, the ‘Bohemians’ ‘Johan Gil’, ‘Nicholau’, and ‘Antoni’ were denounced to the authorities by one Pere Soldevila, who accused them of relieving him under threat of death of the money he was carrying. The three were captured when local people, hearing the victim’s cries, came to his help. Despite their subsequent attempts to place the blame on a woman and an old man, presumably in the hope of eliciting a token sentence, they were judged guilty, condemned to 100 lashes each, and then expelled from the area. Two years later, on 2 September 1484, the authorities in Castellón also ordered ‘Bohemians’ there to leave forthwith, noting that

they were responsible for 'great damage in the town and surrounding area', and adding that force should be used to expel them if necessary.⁶⁰

But some of the friction was internal. Even before the arrival of travellers calling themselves 'Greeks', a safe-conduct granted by John II of Aragon and Navarre on 16 September 1476 at Logroño to 'Count Juan of Little Egypt' to enable him to travel to Santiago had also revealed the enmity existing between him and Counts Martín, Miguel, and Jaime, from all of whom he required physical protection.⁶¹ In a letter dated 1 July, a year later in Barcelona, the same monarch ordered the punishment of Juan Fetó 'from the said land of Little Egypt', who four years earlier as the group passed through Tortosa, had knifed and killed Jorge Serpa, another gypsy, the assailant taking refuge thereafter in that town's castle. The letter was written at the request of 'Don Martín, Count of Little Egypt'.⁶² Another document dated 23 April 1484 in Toledo contains a pardon granted to Givio, 'a native of the kingdom of Greece' for having occasioned the death of Lucas Nantel, another 'Greek'.⁶³ But the gypsies also had their own, traditional ways of arbitrating disputes, a fact acknowledged in the early seventeenth century by Salazar de Mendoza, who noted that 'the gypsies have their count, to whom they go with their disputes, not recognizing any other superior'.⁶⁴ Indeed, some of the safe-conducts issued by John II between 1460 and 1476 contained passages conceding to gypsy leaders the right to administer justice within their own communities. The studiously convoluted vagueness of the Latin wording suggests, however, that the invitation to police themselves should not be read as extending to any formal relinquishment by the king of his own royal prerogatives in the matter.⁶⁵ It is not difficult to see the potential advantages of such an arrangement for the monarch, when attempts to enforce his will were regularly frustrated as those accused went to ground, claiming sanctuary with a range of more than willing protectors. Indeed, in 1480 in Toledo, Ferdinand and Isabella found it necessary to reiterate legislation first enacted by his father John II in order to address precisely this problem. It ordered anyone sheltering malefactors or debtors fleeing their creditors to hand them over to the authorities, regardless of whether they had found sanctuary in 'fortresses, or castles, or noble residences, or villages under seigneurial or abbatial jurisdiction', and notwithstanding historical privileges or previous custom and practice.⁶⁶

Internecine strife among gypsies is not uncommon; but related in particular to their traditional social formation and way of life are kinship-reinforcing 'blood feuds' and occasional territorial disputes.⁶⁷

While it is true that rural society in early modern Spain cannot properly be described as wholly sedentary, since economic pressures, marriage, and housing needs ensured that migration into and out of the village was common,⁶⁸ most people's lives were nevertheless bound up in cycles of production of one kind or another. The gypsies, though, almost constantly on the move, produced relatively little of their own. They almost certainly engaged opportunistically in the kinds of marginal, traditional occupations often associated with nomadic or semi-nomadic groups, such as basket-weaving, blacksmithing, and livestock trading, shearing or clipping, all of them trades typically associated with gypsies right up to the modern era. And, as we shall see, some were occasionally contracted as performers. But they clearly also relied, in Spain as elsewhere, on begging, fortune-telling, and, as their many accusers were quick to attest, theft. If one thinks of these as forms of predation on what was an at least relatively settled indigenous population – gypsies were commonly compared to wolves or raptors⁶⁹ – a predatory habit requires sufficient space to allow a prey-to-predator ratio, or, to put it another way, potential market share sufficiently favourable to ensure on average a reasonable chance of success. As the numbers of gypsies increased to levels sufficiently troubling to encourage the crown to legislate to curb their activities (as it soon did), so too, then, may territorial tensions between different gypsy patrigrups (*razas*), especially where the latter happened to coincide on their travels in smaller settlements offering limited resources to exploit. Even in recent decades, such tensions have been identified as a source of friction between gypsy kinship groups.⁷⁰ One must add, though, that as far as fifteenth-century Spain is concerned this must remain conjecture: little or nothing in the sparse documentation that has so far come to light can be adduced to support it, not least because quantitative data is conspicuous by its complete absence.

The question of gypsy numbers may be unanswerable – though one assumes they were still relatively low – but it does nevertheless raise another important issue. By the 1470s, the first glimmer of evidence was beginning to emerge of just how slippery a term 'Egyptian' or *gitano* was eventually to become. Writing almost a century and a half later, Pedro Salazar de Mendoza sought to draw some distinction between the 'Egyptians' and the 'Greeks':

The Greeks, for the most part, are blacksmiths, and they rely on deception using language and trickery more than on theft. The Egyptians

are idle, and fond of travelling on horseback, and they rely more on theft than on deception and fraud.⁷¹

But for Salazar and his contemporaries they were all, first and foremost, gypsies, and he was quick to add that ‘what all writers are agreed on, without exception, is that the gypsies are people of wicked and abominable ways’. For by the time he was writing, the whole notion of who or what a gypsy might be said to be had become problematic. Even the early evidence suggests that it was already believed that others – outsiders – were from at least the 1470s, and for reasons unspecified, beginning to join the gypsy groups roaming Spain.⁷² And, as later chapters will show, the widespread and abiding conviction that this was the case would be an important factor contributing to the increasing stigmatization of gypsies during the early modern period proper.

However, as with the *mudéjares* and Jews, whilst relations between gypsies and non-gypsies had certainly deteriorated during the fifteenth century, the picture nevertheless remained mixed. In 1484, for example, the municipal council of Madrid awarded a visiting ‘gypsy count’, whose name has not come down to us, a not inconsiderable grant of 1000 *maravedis*. And in 1445, when the gypsies Martín, Luis, and Felipe complained to Prince Henry of Aragon, Lieutenant-General of Catalonia and the Balearics, known as ‘Prince Fortune’, that the local population was reluctant to provide them with anything other than the most miserly assistance, frequently humiliating them into the bargain, he took them under his wing and offered them protection.⁷³ But one of the earliest and certainly best-known examples of the favour extended to gypsies by certain members of the ruling class concerns Don Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, third Duke of the Infantado. Don Diego, who was born in 1461, was, as Luis Astrana Marín put it, ‘a man of excellent taste and very noble qualities’, but one who ‘nevertheless lacked the will, even when old and ailing, to overcome the appetites of the flesh’.⁷⁴ Of his seven or more illegitimate children, one, Martín, was the result of an amorous liaison between the twenty-eight year-old Don Diego – at that time still Count of Saldaña – and María Cabrera, one of a troop of gypsies who had danced in Guadalajara, the ducal seat, for the Corpus Christi celebrations of 1488. Don Diego later provided María with a home, ‘so that she might live without travelling as a pilgrim’, as the contemporary source cited by Astrana Marín put it, adding that the gypsies of her group would for many years thereafter return to visit the ducal palace.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, Martín de Mendoza, ‘el gitano’, as he was dubbed, was destined by his father for a career in the Church. After some

ducal intercession, including a successful 1514 appeal to the Queen, Doña Juana, requesting that his son be recognized and thus eligible to obtain ecclesiastical benefices and enjoy the other fruits of legitimacy,⁷⁶ Martín went on to occupy a range of ecclesiastical posts, accumulating some wealth in the process. These culminated, just after his twentieth birthday on 22 December 1509, in his appointment as Archdeacon of Guadalajara, a role whose higher purpose nevertheless failed to deter him from embarking on an affair in 1529 with María, the daughter of an official, Juan de Cervantes, who had been appointed two years earlier to the Duke's council.⁷⁷ The result of their union was a daughter, Martina. Many years later, Juan de Cervantes's grandson, Miguel, would never refer directly in his writings to this remote family connection to Spain's gypsies via his cousin Martina.⁷⁸ Indeed, one cannot even be quite certain that he knew about it, though it is possible that his novella *The Little Gypsy Girl*, discussed briefly in Chapter 4, owes at least something to this attenuated family link between Spain's nobility, its gypsies, and its greatest writer.

Of course, to write of Spain's gypsies at all in the late medieval period is a form of shorthand, a convenient enough device, to be sure, but one which is strictly speaking quite inaccurate. The Iberian peninsula of the early fifteenth century in fact comprised a number of independent kingdoms: Aragon, Castile, Portugal, Navarre, and, in the south east, the Muslim emirate of Granada, the last foothold of the Moors in the peninsula they had all but overrun some seven hundred years earlier. Castile, by far the most extensive of these realms, included not only today's Castilla-La Mancha and Castilla y León, but also the whole of northern Spain from the western Pyrenees to Cape Finisterre in Galicia, as well as most of western, southern, and northern Andalusia. The Kingdom of Aragon, roughly a third of the size of Castile, included all of present-day Catalonia and the region of Valencia as well as Mallorca, Sardinia, and Sicily. But before a nation even beginning remotely to resemble modern Spain would finally come into existence, a number of changes would first be necessary: the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella in 1469; the accession of Isabella to the contested throne of Castile in 1474 amid a civil war which even then lasted another five years; the dynastic union of the Crowns of Castile and Aragon in 1479 with the death of Ferdinand's father; the monarchs' subsequent expulsion of the Moors from Granada in 1492; and, finally, the annexation of the Kingdom of Navarre 20 years later. Even then, Spanish officials would continue for two centuries and more carefully to refer in documents of state to 'these Kingdoms'. But for the peninsula's minorities, its Moors, Jews, and now its gypsies, the

reality was that the Catholic Monarchs' determination to impose their authority on their kingdoms and restore order in Castile was to leave little room for difference, little space for those who could not or would not fit the newly exclusionist religious and cultural template that was being forged. It is to these developments that I now turn, and in particular to a brief excursus on those institutions which for almost three centuries to come would impinge directly to one degree or another on the lives of Spain's gypsies.