

# Moorish Spain

711 to 1492

BATTLE OF GUADALETE TO FALL OF GRANADA

## Era Summary—Moorish Spain

**The Moors of Spain**—In 623 the followers of Mohammed began a campaign of conquest, and within sixty years were masters of Arabia, Palestine, Syria, Persia, Egypt, and all of North Africa. In many of these formerly Christian regions the people converted to Islam, and the Umayyad dynasty, based in Damascus, held sway.

By 710, when [Roderic](#) came to the throne of the Visigoths as the result of a civil war, the region of North Africa directly across from Spain was held by [Musa bin Nusair](#), an Arab general. Several Visigoth refugees, who had fled to North Africa, asked Musa to help them overthrow Roderic, so he sent an army under [Tariq ibn Ziyad](#). A great battle was fought at the Guadalete River, and the Moors won an overwhelming victory against the divided Visigoths. Although several towns held out against the Moslems, there was no organized resistance, and within a few years the Moslems had captured almost all of the Peninsula and were working their way into Gaul. Their advance was checked, not by the Visigoths, but by the Franks, at the [battle of Tours](#).

The only region of the Spanish peninsula that held off the Moslem hordes was a mountainous region in the Northwest called Asturias, founded by [Pelayo of Asturias](#), a Visigoth noble. The population of Asturias was not Visigoth however, but a collection of Roman Spaniards, Visigoths, Franks, and Suevis who fled from the Moslem persecutions.

Forty years after the first establishment of the Moorish empire in Spain, there was a great civil war involving the leadership of the Caliphate of Damascus. In the East, the Abbysid dynasty overthrew the Umayyad, but an Umayyad Prince, [Abderrahman I](#), escaped the massacre and was declared Emir of Hispania, and governed independently from the Abbysid Dynasty. He set up his capital in Cordoba and for over two hundred years that city was a leading center of commerce and culture. These were the golden years of Moorish Spain, and although there was some division and infighting among the royal family, the outward show of unity was largely preserved.

The Christian state of Asturias also grew during this period, and split into the kingdoms of Leon, Aragon, and Castile. For the first three hundred years of Moorish rule, however, they lived in relative peace. There were a great many Christians and Jews living under Moorish rule during this time, and although non-Moslems were excluded from power and made to pay special taxes, there was a reasonable degree of toleration between Christians, Jews and Moslems in the early years of the Caliphate of Cordova.

**Almanzor, Almoravids, and Almohads**—As the authority of the Caliphate waned over the centuries, due largely to a series of decadent and irresponsible Caliphs, a great Moorish general by the name of [Almanzor](#) arose. He consolidated Moslem influence and pressed the borders of the kingdoms in the north back to the Pyrenees. During his period of influence, from 970 to

1002 A. D., the extent of Moorish power reached its greatest extent. Because of the common threat, the Christian kingdoms united and successfully opposed him at the battle of Calatanazor. When Almanzor died without anyone to succeed him in influence, Moslem unity, which had been strained by his usurpation of power, broke down altogether. The eleventh century, therefore, was an era during which the Christian kingdoms made significant gains in territory. The Umayyad caliphate of Cordova collapsed in 1031, and in the following generation, the Christians took the great city of Toledo.

In the mid-eleventh century, during the reign of [Alfonso VI](#) of Castile, the Christian kingdoms of northern Spain, made such great gains against the Moors that some of the Moorish princes called upon the Almoravid dynasty in North Africa to help them resist their Christian enemies. Great armies of Berbers crossed the strait of Gibraltar, and resisted the Christian incursions, but they never really unified the Moslem princes under their dominion. During this period Christian vs. Moslem wars were common, but so were palace insurrections and civil war, so the intrigues of various factions are difficult to follow. Rival claimants to power in both Christian and Moslem kingdoms would frequently align themselves with the *infidel* enemies of their king in hopes of improving their own situation. Overall, however, the tide was in favor of the Christians. It was during this era that the great Christian hero [El Cid](#) lived, and his conquest of Valencia, one of the great Moslem cities on the Mediterranean coast of Spain, was one of the turning points in the struggle.

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw even more dramatic losses in Moorish territory to the Christians. The Almohads replaced the Almoravids as the ruling dynasty, and they set up their capital in Seville, but never succeeded in uniting the Moorish kingdoms or opposing the Christian powers. The Almohads brought in an enormous army of over 500,000 Berbers from Africa, but were utterly routed on the plain of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212. After this disaster the Moors were everywhere on the defensive, and in the years following, the Christians gained nearly the whole Peninsula.

**The Fall of Granada** —In the early 13th century the kingdom of Granada, along the southern coast of Spain, became a vassal state of Castile. In 1236 a Moslem prince, Mohammed Alhamar, came to power and founded a dynasty that was to remain the last stronghold of Moorish Spain for the next two hundred and fifty years. Although within a few generations the ruling family of Granada became divided, the political situation in Castile was even worse, and all of Europe suffered under the Black Plague. These disruptions delayed the fall of Granada for several hundred years, and during this period, Moorish culture continued to thrive. It was not until after Castile and Aragon were integrated under [Isabel](#) and [Ferdinand I](#) that the Spaniards were united enough to tackle the fortified kingdom of Granada. Once Ferdinand and Isabella had committed to driving the last vestige of Moors from Spain, however, they approached their task systematically, and in 1492, [Boabdil](#), the last king of Granada, surrendered the city to the Spanish monarchs.

# Characters—Moorish Spain

## MOORISH CONQUEST

<u>Musa bin Nusair</u>	640–716	Umayyad governor of North Africa who instigated the Moslem invasion of Spain.
<u>Tariq ibn Ziyad</u>	d. 720	Berber general who defeated the Visigoths at the <i>Battle of Gaudalete</i> .
<u>Exilona</u>	~ 711	Christian wife of Visigoth king Roderick who later married son of Moorish governor.
<u>Abdul Aziz</u>	d. 716	Son of Musa. Ruled in Andalusia until murdered for marrying Exilona.
<u>Charles Martel</u>	686–741	Frankish King who defeated the Moors at the <i>Battle of Tours</i> .
<u>Charlemagne</u>	742–814	First Holy Roman Emperor. Unified most of Western Europe into a Frankish Empire.

## CORDOBA CALIPHATE

<u>Abderrahman I</u>	731–788	Last surviving Umayyad prince, escaped to Spain, became Emir of Cordova.
<u>Abderrahman III</u>	912–961	Powerful, long serving Emir of Cordova who declared himself Caliph .
<u>Almanzor</u>	938–1002	Renowned Moorish general. Leader of Muslim Spain at the height of its power.

## ALMORAVIDS AND ALMOHADS

<u>Yussef</u>	d. 1184	Almohad Caliph of Africa who invaded Moorish Spain, set up a kingdom in Seville.
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## GRANADA

<u>Mohammed Alhamar</u>	1191–1273	Founder of the Nasrid dynasty in Granada. Made Granada a vassal state of Castile.
<u>Muley Abdul Hussan</u>	1440–1490	Last Sultan of Granada. Fierce opponent of Christians, but lost control of Granada.
<u>Boabdil</u>	1460–1527	Replaced his father on the throne of Granada before surrendering to Ferdinand.
<u>Aben Humeya</u>	1520–1568	Moorish prince who escaped from Granada, led the Morisco Revolt.

# Recommended Reading—Moorish Spain

## CORE READING ASSIGNMENTS

- I Ober - *History of Spain*                      *The Invasion from Africa* to *Decline of the Moors* (4)
- I Horne - *Greatest Nations - Spain*                      *Spain Under the Moors* (1)
- II Bonner - *Child's History of Spain*                      *The Moorish Conquest* to *The Great Vizier* (8)

## SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Abbott - *Romance of Spanish History*                      *The Moorish Invasion* to *The Moors and Christians* (4)
  - Morris - *Historical Tales - Spanish*                      *The Battle of Guadalete* to *Adventures of a Fugitive Prince* (7)
  - Florian - *The Moors in Spain*                      *entire book*
  - Irving - *Irving's Alhambra*                      *entire book*
- I: Introductory, II: Intermediate

# Timeline—Moorish Spain

## MOORISH CONQUEST

- 711 The Saracens, under [Tarig ibn Ziyad](#), overthrow the Visigoth kingdom at the *Battle of Guadalete*.
- 718 The [Pelayo of Asturias](#) founded Christian kingdom of Asturias following the *Battle of Covadonga*.
- 732 The Saracens defeated at Tours by [Charles Martel](#); retreat of the Moors to southern Spain.

## CALIPHATE OF CORDOVA

- 755 **Caliphate of Cordova** established by [Abderrahman I](#), last surviving Umayyad prince.
- 778 First Frankish raid into Moorish Spain by [Charlemagne](#) and his F.
- 800 Charlemagne returns to Spain, Franks gain control of Barcelona, later Catalonia.
- 824 Franks defeated at by treachery at Roncevalles Pass, subject of Song of [Roland](#).
- 859 Eulogius, Perfectus and other Martyrs of Cordoba executed for professing Christian faith.
- 912 [Abderrahman III](#) becomes Emir of Cordoba, leads Moorish armies against Christians.
- 939 Ramiro II of Leon defeats [Abderrahman III](#), temporarily takes after the *Battle of Simancas*.
- 976 First conquest of [Almanzor](#), who mastered nearly all of Spain; ruled until 1002.
- 1002 Death of Almanzor at the *Battle of Calatanazor*.
- 1010 Beginning of Civil War between rival claimants to the Caliphate of Cordova.
- 1031 After 20 years of war, the Moorish empire breaks up into numerous "tarifs" (Taifas).

## ALMORAVIDS AND ALMOHADS

- 1085 [Alfonso VI](#) of Castile captures Toledo.
- 1086 **Almoravid Berbers arrive in Spain** and prevail against the Christians at *Battle of Zalaka*.
- 1094 Almoravids defeat Moorish princes, consolidate power and set up a dynasty at Cordova.
- 1095 [El Cid](#) captures Valencia; rules over both Moorish, Christian subjects.
- 1139 [Afonso Henriques](#) defeats [Yussef](#) at *Battle of Ourique*, establishes kingdom of Portugal.
- 1147 Moors lose Lisbon to Afonso I; Fall of the Almoravid dynasty in Africa.
- 1184 **Almohads defeat last of the Almoravids, make their capital at Seville.**
- 1212 Overwhelming victory of the Christians at *Las Navas de Tolosa* decides the fate of Spain.
- 1236 [Ferdinand III of Castile](#) captures Cordova. It stays permanently in Christian hands.
- 1248 [Ferdinand III of Castile](#) captures Seville; Fall of the Almohads of Iberia.

## KINGDOM OF GRANADA

- 1238 **Kingdom of Granada established by [Mohammed Alhamar](#).**
- 1340 Army of Spaniards defeats invading army of African Moors at the battle of Rio Salado.
- 1482 [Ferdinand I](#) commences a war against Granada. Marches against the Moors at Alhama.
- 1492 Moorish capital of Granada captured; [Boabdil](#) gives up the city to [Isabel](#) and Ferdinand.