

SPANISH EMPIRE—RECONQUISTA

711 to 1516

KINGDOM OF ASTURIAS TO DEATH OF FERDINAND

Era Summary—Reconquista

Rise of the Christian Kingdoms—Several Christian kingdoms arose in the north of Spain in the centuries after the Moorish conquest, but they were of little importance until after the fall of the Cordova Caliphate in 1031 A.D. The legendary leader of the band of exiles that fled to the Cantabrian Mountains after the battle of Guadalete was [Pelayo](#), a Visigoth prince. However, the kingdom of Asturias that he established was not Visigoth but rather it was a combination of indigenous Basques and Celt-Iberians, and exiles and refugees from various regions, including Spaniards, Visigoths, Suevi, and Franks.

In the earliest years of its existence, the kingdom of Asturias was not recognized as an independent kingdom. The dominant Christian power in the region was the Franks, who successfully drove the Moors out of Gaul and under [Charlemagne](#) even crossed the Pyrenees to give battle to the Mohammedans on the peninsula. But in 778 the Franks retreated, leaving Asturias as the predominant Christian kingdom in the region.



During the early years of the Moorish empire, there was a large population of Christians still living within its bounds and paying special taxes while being denied full rights of citizenship. Considering the large population of tax-paying Christians in their realm and the ferocious Franks immediately to their north, the Cordova Caliphate was not inclined to take aggressive measures against the small and seemingly insignificant independent mountain kingdom.

The region immediately south of Asturias was Leon, and Christians gained tentative control of this strategic region early on. The territory of Asturias-Leon expanded in the 9th and 10th centuries as a result of Christian victories against the regional Moors, and also due to migration from Moorish domains into Christian territory. In 910 the king of Asturias moved his capital to Leon. The kingdom of Castile, which was originally a duchy of Asturias was declared independent by Fernan Gonsalez in 932, but continued to be overshadowed by Leon until the reign of [Alfonso VI](#), several generations hence.

Other Christian kingdoms in the region were Navarre in the Pyrenees, which became independent of the Frankish empire in 837, and Aragon, which split from Navarre in 1035 and expanded its borders to the south. Far to the west were Galicia and Portugal, vassal kingdoms of Leon that achieved a certain degree of independence. The Christian kingdoms of Leon, Castile, Navarre, Aragon, Galicia and Portugal together controlled all of Northern Spain, and for several hundred years warred with each other as well as the Moors. The wars between the Christian kingdoms are generally known as the [Castilian Wars](#), because Castile was of central importance and came to be the dominant kingdom on the Peninsula.

The Christians kingdoms were able to gain significant territory and autonomy during the ninth and tenth centuries while the power of the Cordova Caliphate was at its height, mainly because

the regions they dominated were poor and sparsely populated. The Moors controlled the cosmopolitan and prosperous regions along the Mediterranean coasts. Al-Andalus was the center of Moorish commerce and culture and the poor, remote Christian territories to the north seemed of little significance. In the late 900's, the Moslem general Almanzor briefly retook Christian territory, but the Cordova caliphate collapsed several years after his death and the empire became divided into fiefdoms (called Taifas) of warring Moslem princes.

Victories against the Moors—The eleventh century was a critical one for the rising Christian kingdoms. Soon afterward the breakup of the Cordova caliphate, Ferdinand I of Leon united Galicia and Castile under the crown of Leon. He split his kingdom among his sons upon his death, but this only resulted in years of civil war during which [Alfonso VI](#) regained control of all three kingdoms. It was during this period that the famous [El Cid](#), a knight loyal to Alfonso's brother, was banished from Castile and took Valencia, a prosperous Moorish trading city on the Western coast of Spain. Eventually Cid and Alfonso were reconciled and in 1085 they reconquered the old Visigoth capital of Toledo.

As a result of the Christian conquest of Toledo several Moorish princes invited the Almoravids of Morocco to help them regain their territory, a move they soon regretted. The Almoravids were of little help in reconquering Christian territory, but they deposed many of the Taifa rulers, most of whom had become luxurious and decadent. The Almoravids, like the Alhomads who followed them, were desert warriors of a stern faith, who despised the cultured and religiously indifferent Moorish nobles, and Al-Andalus declined greatly under the new leadership.

The Christian victories against the Moors continued during the twelfth century, especially under the kings of Aragon and Castile. [James I](#) added the prosperous coastal region of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands to the domain of Aragon during his reign, and the kingdom of Portugal rose to prominence under Afonso Henriques. The greatest twelfth century Christian warrior of all, however, was [Ferdinand III of Castile](#), also known as St. Ferdinand, who conquered Seville and Cordoba, and brought Dominican and Franciscan orders to Al-Andalusa to help re-Christianize southern Spain.

The Moors, now under the rule of the fierce Alhomads, continued to lose territory until 1212 at which time they were utterly defeated at the terrific battle of Las Navas de Tolosa. In this key battle, the united Christian armies defeated and nearly annihilated a combined army of Spanish Moors and African Berbers. This effectively destroyed the power of the Moors, and by 1300 the Spaniards controlled the entire Iberian Peninsula, save only the vassal state of Granada. The conquest of Granada however, was delayed for nearly 200 years, due to the Black Plague and continued wars among the Christian Kingdoms.

Rise of the Trastamaras and Conquest of Granada—The late fourteenth century was a sorry one for all of Europe and it produced some unfortunate tyrants in Spain, including Pedro of Castile. He murdered a number of family members, instigated civil wars and impoverished his country, but was eventually overthrown by his illegitimate half-brother [Henry II of Castile](#). It was several generations before a worthy successor rose to power in Castile, in the form of [Isabel](#), a princess who descended from both the Trastamara and legitimate kingly lines. Her marriage to [Ferdinand the Catholic](#) the Catholic united the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, and under their competent leadership the united Christians were able to drive the last Moorish kingdom from the peninsula. These monarchs, who reigned for over forty years, ruled competently, paid off debts, put down a rebellion in Portugal and brought stability, unity, and prestige to their kingdom.

One of the most far-reaching of Isabel's policies in Spain was to fund the voyage of [Christopher Columbus](#) and lay Spanish claim to the New World. These stories of Spanish/Portuguese exploration were so important to world history that they are dealt with in a separate section.

Characters—Reconquista

EARLY CHRISTIAN HEROES

<u>Pelayo of Asturias</u>	690–737	Visigoth hero, survived Moorish conquest, founded the kingdom of Asturias.
<u>Theodomir</u>	~ 711	Visigoth general who used a ruse to make peace with the Moorish conquerors.
<u>Pelistes</u>	~ 711	Gothic Knight who defended Cordova after the fall of the Visigoths at Guadalete.
<u>Bernardo del Carpio</u>	~ 800	Legendary hero during the era of Charlemagne. Battled both Moors and Franks.

GROWTH OF CHRISTIAN KINGDOMS

<u>Alfonso VI</u>	1040–1109	King of Castile, who with El Cid, reconquered Toledo from the Moors.
<u>El Cid</u>	1040–1099	Legendary hero of chivalry. Served Alfonso VI. Conquered Valencia.
<u>Afonso Henriques</u>	1109–1185	Founder of Portugal. Defeated Moors. Declared Portugal independent from Leon.
<u>Alfonso VIII</u>	1155–1214	Led the victorious Christians against the Saracens at <i>Battle of Navas de Tolosa</i> .
<u>Saint Dominic</u>	1170–1221	Founded Dominican Order of scholars, theologians, and teachers.
<u>James I of Aragon</u>	1208–1276	Crusader king who conquered the Balearic Islands and Valencia for Aragon..
<u>Ferdinand III of Castile</u>	1199–1252	Sainted King. Conquered Seville and Cordoba. Brought Franciscans to Spain.
<u>Pedro of Castile</u>	1334–1369	Dishonorable, murderous tyrant. Deposed by half-brother Henry Trastamara.
<u>Henry II of Castile</u>	1334–1379	Illegitimate son of Alfonso XI who deposed his half-brother Peter the Cruel.
<u>Henry IV of Castile</u>	1425–1474	Infirm and degenerate king of Castile, older brother of Isabella I.

UNITED SPAIN

<u>Isabel</u>	1451–1504	Pious and stalwart queen of Spain, unified diverse kingdoms, reformed finances, conquered Granada, financed Columbus.
<u>Ferdinand the Catholic</u>	1452–1516	King of Aragon, ruled united Spain with Isabel. Drove the Moors out of Granada.
<u>Torquemada</u>	1420–1498	Dominican priest. Confessor of Isabel. Established the Spanish Inquisition.
<u>Hernan Perez del Pulgar</u>	1451–1531	Spanish knight who gained fame during the Reconquista for daring exploits.
<u>Gonsalvo de Cordova</u>	1453–1515	General who fought in Granada and Italy; pioneered modern tactics of warfare.
<u>Cardinal Ximenes</u>	1436–1517	Spanish Cardinal at court of Ferdinand. Reformed Church & government.

Recommended Reading—Reconquista

CORE READING ASSIGNMENTS

I	Ober - <u><i>History of Spain</i></u>	<u><i>Spain's Heroic Age</i></u> to <u><i>A Memorable Reign</i></u> (7)
I	Horne - <u><i>Greatest Nations - Spain</i></u>	<u><i>Rise of the Christian Kingdoms</i></u> to <u><i>Ferdinand and Isabella</i></u> (2)
II	Bonner - <u><i>Child's History of Spain</i></u>	<u><i>The Christians of Northern Spain</i></u> to <u><i>The End of Ferdinand and Isabella</i></u> (15)

SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Abbott - <u><i>Romance of Spanish History</i></u>	<u><i>Spain a Battle-field</i></u> to <u><i>Domestic Sorrows</i></u> (9)
Morris - <u><i>Historical Tales - Spanish</i></u>	<u><i>Bernardo del Carpio</i></u> to <u><i>The Great Captain</i></u> (11)
Howard - <u><i>Isabella of Castile</i></u>	<i>entire book</i>
Wilson - <u><i>Story of the Cid</i></u>	<i>entire book</i>

I: [Introductory](#), II: [Intermediate](#)

Timeline—Reconquista

720 [Pelayo](#) defeats Moors at *Battle of Covadonga*, founds Christian kingdom of Asturias.

CORDOVA CALIPHATE

837 Kingdom of Navarre in the Pyrenees gains its independence from the Franks.

910 Leon is united with Asturias and becomes the predominant Christian kingdom in Spain.

932 Fernan Gonsalez asserts the independence of Castile.

976 First conquest of [Almanzor](#), who mastered nearly all of Spain; ruled until 1002.

1031 After 20 years of Civil war, Moorish empire breaks up into "tarifs" (Taifas).

1035 Ramirez I establishes the Kingdom of Aragon.

1072 [Alfonso VI](#) becomes king of both Leon and Castile. He quarrels with [El Cid](#).

1085 [Alfonso VI](#) captures the Moorish stronghold of Toledo.

ALMORAVIDS AND ALMOHADS

1095 [El Cid](#) captures Valencia; rules justly over Moorish and Christians.

1137 Catalonia united permanently to the Crown of Aragon, under Ramon and Petronilla of Aragon.

1144 Alfonso of Leon defeated the Moors; dynasty of the Almohads at Cordova.

1212 Victory of Christians over Moors at *Las Navas de Tolosa* decided the fate of Spain.

1228 James of Aragon captures the Balearic Isles.

1235 [Ferdinand III of Castile](#) captured Cordova.

1248 Ferdinand III. captured Seville; work on the Alhambra begun.

GRANADA

1367 *Battle of Navarrete* saves [Pedro of Castile](#).

1369 Pedro of Castile overthrown by half-brother [Henry II of Castile](#) .

1469 Marriage of [Ferdinand the Catholic](#) and [Isabel](#) united the Christian dominions of Spain.

1481 Establishment of the Inquisition.

1492 Granada captured. Voyage of Columbus sets forth.

1504 Death of Isabella.

1512 Ferdinand conquered the greater part of Navarre.

1516 Death of Ferdinand; Hapsburg grandson [Charles V](#) inherits throne of Spain.