

ROMANS AND VISIGOTHS

250 B.C. to 711

PUNIC WARS IN SPAIN TO MOORISH CONQUEST

Era Summary—Romans and Visigoths

Hispania—a Roman Province—The earliest recorded history of Spain dates from the third century B.C., when the Roman Republic was engaged in the [Punic Wars](#), a century long struggle between Rome and Carthage. The coastal regions of Hispania, which at the time were controlled mainly by Carthage, figured prominently in these wars, and when Rome succeeded in vanquishing Carthage, she inherited the Carthaginian Empire in Spain. These holdings, however, represented only a fraction of the Iberian Peninsula.



Most of the interior of Hispania was inhabited by semi-civilized Celts and Iberians. The first battles in the [Roman Conquest of Hispania](#) occurred around 210 B.C., but several regions of the interior of Hispania held out against Roman rule for nearly 200 years. By the turn of the millennium, however, Spain was solidly Roman, and for hundreds of years was one of the most important and stable provinces of the Roman Empire.

It is difficult to make broad generalizations regarding the [Roman Conquest of Hispania](#) because the country itself was highly diverse both in geography and also in the ethnic mix of the people. The coastal cities of Spain, including those on navigable rivers, were populated by relatively civilized and diverse peoples, including Carthaginians, Greeks, Turdetani, and Celt-Iberian. The inland regions were primarily Celt and Iberians but were broken up into autonomous tribes of varied ancestry. The Roman conquerors included both noble and admired leaders such as [Scipio Africanus](#) and [Sertorius](#), who treated the natives with great consideration, and treacherous butchers, such as [Lucullus](#) and [Cato \(the censor\)](#). Some of the more civilized regions submitted peacefully, while others, such as the Lusitanians and Celt-Iberians, under the great native chief [Viriathus](#), held out for years, and caused appalling casualties among the Romans. In some cases the native tribes submitted to Roman rule and in other cases, most spectacularly that of Numantia, they annihilated themselves rather than submit.

The conquest of Hispania was a difficult and highly contentious project that caused enormous political problems in Italy, and figured prominently in the decline of Republican Rome. Once Spain was finally conquered however, it became thoroughly Romanized, and therefore Christianized, and remained so even after the fall of the empire. For much of the era of the

Roman Empire, Spain was one of the most stable and prosperous regions of the empire, and it produced many famous Romans, including [Trajan](#), [Seneca](#), and [Martial](#).

Visigoth Spain—During the fifth century A.D., Spain was overrun by various tribes of Germanic Barbarians, including the Suevi, Alans, Franks, Visigoths, and Vandals. The Visigoths eventually emerged as the dominant tribe, but Spain remained relatively Romanized under their reign—the culture and language of the conquered was absorbed by the conquerors rather than vice versa. The Visigoths nobles, who were Arian Christians, eventually converted to the Roman Rite, which did much to help solidify the Catholic Church's influence in Western Europe.

The Visigothic reign in Spain lasted from the reign of [Ataulfus](#), in 410 to the Moorish conquest under [Roderic](#), almost exactly 300 years later. The Visigoth kings spent much of their time driving off other invaders. Led by king Theodoric, the Visigoths allied themselves with the Roman Empire in 451 in order to drive off [Attila the Hun](#). They later contended with the Suevis for control of territory in the mountains of Cantabria, and with the Franks for territories north of the Pyrenees.

The Visigoths kings reigned in Spain for 300 years, from the early 400's to 711. Instead of a strictly hereditary monarchy, however, their kings were elected from among the nobles. This method produced a few notable leaders including [Good King Wamba](#) and [Recared](#), but is blamed for the weakening the power of the Visigoth king, because he was beholden to factitious nobles. Contentious elections resulted in a number of damaging civil wars. [Roderic](#), the last king of the Visigoths assumed the throne during such a period of internal conflict and the resulting division resulted in the collapse of the Visigoth kingdom at the hands of the Moorish invaders.

During the early years of the Visigoth Empire, the ruling nobles were Arian Christians and most of the Roman-Iberian citizens were Catholics. King Recared's conversion to Catholicism, shortly after the fall of the Vandal kingdom in Africa, signaled the end of Arianism as a major threat to Catholic Orthodoxy. It also, however, resulted in a worsening of Visigoth relations with the Jews, since Spanish Jews had contentious relationships with Catholics. The Third Council of Toledo in 589 A.D. proscribed the Arian heresy, but put restrictions on Jews who held power over Christian subjects. The discontent of Spanish Jews under the Catholic Visigoth government was an important factor in the eventual overthrow of the Visigoth kingdom.

Characters—Romans and Visigoths

ROMAN HISPANIA

Hamilcar	d. 229 BC	Carthage's most able general in first Punic War; father of Hannibal.
Hannibal	247–182 BC	Carthaginian General, invaded and laid waste to Italy for sixteen years.
Cornelius Scipio	d. 211 BC	Tried to intercept Hannibal in Gaul, defeated at Ticino River and Trebbia.
Scipio Africanus	234–149 BC	Hero of Punic Wars in Spain and Africa. Defeated Hannibal at Zama.
Cato (the censor)	234–149 BC	Roman censor, urged destruction of Carthage before third Punic War.
Carus	d. 179 BC	Chief of the Belli tribe. Won defeated Romans at Caravis before being killed.
Viriathus	180–139 BC	Lusitanian chief who resisted Rome and incited other tribes to revolt.
Sertorius	122–72 BC	Led rebellion against Rome in Spain; held out for 8 years.

VISIGOTH SPAIN

Ulfilas	310–383	Arian Missionary, converted Goths, created Goth alphabet, translated Bible .
Ataulfus	d. 410	Brother-in-law of Alaric and founder of the Visigoth kingdom of Spain.
Theodoric I	d. 451	Son of Alaric, led the Visigoth army against Attila the Hun at Chalons.
Recared	d. 601	First Catholic King of the Visigoth Kingdom.
Good King Wamba	d. 687	Legendary King of the Visigoths, whose reign was peaceful and prosperous.
Roderic	d. 711	Last king of Visigoth Spain. Died at the <i>Battle of Guadalete</i> .
Pelistes	~ 711	Gothic Knight who defended Cordova after the fall of the Visigoths.
Theodomir	~ 711	Visigoth general, used a ruse to make peace with Moorish conquerors.
Tariq ibn Ziyad	d. 720	Berber general who led conquest of Visigoths at the <i>Battle of Gaudalete</i> .
Isidore of Seville	560–636	Catholic Bishop who converted Visigoths, presided at Council of Toledo.

Recommended Reading—Romans and Visigoths

CORE READING ASSIGNMENTS

- I Ober - [*History of Spain*](#) [*Ancient Iberia to A Kingdom of the Goths*](#) (4)
- I Horne - [*Greatest Nations - Spain*](#) [*The Beginnings of Spain*](#) (1)
- II Bonner - [*Child's History of Spain*](#) [*From the Beginning to The Moorish Conquest*](#) (3)

SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Abbott - [*Romance of Spanish History*](#) [*Early History of Spain*](#) to [*Roman and Gothic Spain*](#) (3)
- Morris - [*Historical Tales - Spanish*](#) [*The Good King Wamba*](#) to [*The Battle of Guadalete*](#) (4)

I: Introductory, II: Intermediate

Timeline—Romans and Visigoths

ANCIENT IBERIA

- 1000 (B.C.) Cadiz founded by Phoenician traders. Important ports of Spain controlled by Carthage.
- 264–241 [First Punic War](#) between Roman and Carthage.
- 236 [Hamilcar](#) makes Spain a Carthaginian province.
- 218 [Hannibal](#) captures Saguntum, a Roman ally; provokes the [Second Punic War](#).

ROMAN HISPANIA

- 206 Carthaginians driven out of Spain. Romans divide region into Hispania Citerior and Ulterior.
- 195 [Cato \(the censor\)](#) puts down Turdetani Uprising and other rebellions throughout Hispania.
- 154 The Lusitanians of Portugal, under Celtiberian hero [Viriathus](#) defeat the Romans.
- 139 Death of the Lusitan hero [Viriathus](#) by Roman treachery fails to end the rebellion.
- 133 [Scipio the Younger](#) destroys Numantia after costly siege..
- 105 Deadly invasion of Roman Hispania from the [Cimbri](#);—country saved by the Celt-iberi.
- 97 Celt-iberians under [Sertorius](#) rise against Rome.
- 71 Sertorius assassinated; [Pompey](#) reconquers Hispania for Rome.
- 61 [Julius Caesar](#) is governor of Hispania Citerior.
- 49–45 [Caesarean Civil War](#). Important battles at Massilia, Llerda and Munda in Spain.
- 22–19 Cantabrian War: [Augustus Caesar](#) wins decisive victories over the wild northern tribes.
- 19 [Roman conquest of Spain](#) complete; Divided into Tarraconensis, Baetica, and Lusitania.

VISIGOTH SPAIN

- 350 [Ulfilas](#), an Arian missionary, converts Goths, creates Gothic alphabet, translates Bible.
- 409 Waves of barbarians, including Suevi, Franks, and Vandals invade Roman Hispania.
- 414 [Ataulfus](#) leads the Visigoths into Hispania and settles there.
- 415 Wallia leads the Visigoths to victory over rival barbarians and founds the Visigoth Kingdom.
- 451 Visigoths under [Theodoric](#) fight alongside the Romans against [Attila the Hun](#) at Chalons.
- 466 Euric made Hispania independent of Rome and framed the Gothic Code.
- 506 [Alaric II](#) opposes Clovis, and loses Aquitaine to the Franks.
- 586 [Recared](#) renounces Arian Christian and embraces the Church of Rome.
- 589 Third council of Toledo denounces Arianism and puts restrictions on Spanish Jews.
- 672 [Good King Wamba](#) attempts important reforms of government, but is deposed.
- 711 Visigoths are overwhelmed by Moors at the Battle of Guadalete.