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8. The National State in Spain

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8. The National State in Spain

Abstract

The third national state and strong monarchy to be established by the end of the fifteenth century was in Spain. Separated from the rest of the Continent by the lofty and forbidding Pyrenees, Spanish culture developed in relative isolation from the main currents of Europe. The Iberian peninsula had a semi-arid climate, poor soil, and a scarcity of mineral resources. Only when they exploited the mines of Mexico and Peru, or those European lands gained through inheritance or marriage, were Spanish kings wealthy. The country's poverty obstructed the rise of commerce and industry, limited the cosmopolitanism that accompanied them elsewhere, and hampered the rise of a middle class in Spanish society. The national state that developed in Spain, therefore, never threw off feudal traditions to the degree that occurred in England and France. Throughout the Middle Ages Spanish history was dominated by the Reconquista, the name given to the perennial crusade against the Muslim population which inhabited the peninsula. The centuries of struggle against Islam produced a race of soldiers filled with religious zeal and perhaps explain why Spanish national feeling had intense religious overtones. Very early in Spain there arose the notion that national unity was predicated upon religious orthodoxy. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Contemporary Civilization, Spain, nationhood, Reconquista

Disciplines

European History | European Languages and Societies | History | Medieval History | Military History | Political History

Comments

This is a part of [Section V: The Rise of Capitalism and the National State to 1500](#). The [Contemporary Civilization](#) page lists all additional sections of *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, as well as the [Table of Contents](#) for both volumes.

More About Contemporary Civilization:

From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of "introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages."

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called *An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems*. A second edition, retitled *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker '66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

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The Christian reconquest of the peninsula got under way in the eleventh century. By the end of the twelfth century most of the reconquered land was divided among four independent kingdoms -- Portugal, Leon, Castile, and Aragon. From this time until 1500 the political history of the land is a story of interminable squabbles between rival princes for territory. Not until 1469, through the marriage between Isabella, heiress to the kingdom of Castile, and Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Aragon, was a unified Spanish rule made possible. Isabella became queen of Castile in 1474 and when Ferdinand succeeded to the throne of Aragon in 1479 the two kingdoms were joined in a personal union as the nucleus of the Spanish state.

To implement their policy of territorial unification and political consolidation Ferdinand (1479-1516) and Isabella embarked on two courses. First, they crushed the remnants of feudal independence and reduced the influence of the Spanish provincial parliaments. The sovereign pair employed methods similar to those of their celebrated contemporary, Louis XI of France. In order that the Church would be subservient to the monarchy, Ferdinand made the Inquisition an instrument of state policy and forced himself on the various religious orders as their grand master. Their second task was to establish religious conformity. This they accomplished by conquering Granada, the remaining Moslem territory on the peninsula, and by expelling some 200,000 Jews from Spain. By 1492 Granada had fallen to the Christian armies and those Jews and Moors who remained were forcibly Christianized under the aegis of the Inquisition. In the end Spain became the sixteenth century's most powerful European state and later Spanish kings were able to rule absolutely although not always wisely.

Cortes - ruling body