

The effect of spanish reconquista in history



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Spain has actually always been a melting pot of ethnicity and culture. From the Celts and Visigoths that originated from the north to the Africans and Arabs from the south to the Romans from the East, empires, kingdoms, and tribes all over the world have acknowledged and attempted to take benefit of the advantages of Spain. War, conquest, and reconquest are frequent throughout the whole history of Spain, and the history of Moors in Spain is no exception. It started in the year 711 when the Moors initially crossed over to the Iberian Peninsula, until their expulsion from Granada in 1492 which marks completion of the Reconquista, they influenced the native Iberians in numerous ways including culture and faith.

The Moors were people of Berber, Black African, and Arab descent from North Africa. In 711 they invaded Spain. Led by Tariq Ibn Ziyad, an African general, around 7,000 soldiers, primarily Berbers, crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and overthrew the Visigoth's. The Moorish soldiers managed an easy defeat over the Visigoth's who had controlled Spain given that the end of the fifth century.

The Visigoth kingdom of Spain was no match for the a great deal of unforeseen soldiers and as a result the kingdom eventually was up to the hands of the Moor's. The General declared his troops victories at the base of a popular limestone mountain that to this day bears his name "The rock of Gibraltar". Their objective was to conquer the world and spread Islam to all individuals. By 1200 A. D around 5.6 million of the 7 million occupants of the Iberian Peninsula were Muslims. The majority of the conversions were required by either war or "treaties". When the attacking Moors captured a

city they would decimate the male population consisting of infants and would take the widows and daughters as courtesans.

Once General Ziyad, his soldiers and other Moor's who continued to arrive got settled in this new land they created the territory of Al-Andalus. As with many lasting invasions the Moors had an incredible influence on all aspects of Spain, which not all of them were negative. Even today, their influence is seen throughout Spain. One area of lasting influence is apparent in Spanish cuisine. Olives, peppers, dates, almonds, lemons and oranges are just a few of the natural foods first cultivated on the Iberian Peninsula by the Moors. They also introduced kebabs and skewers to the native Spaniards. Today Spanish dishes are often seasoned with cumin and saffron among other exotic spices and seasonings which were brought to Spain by the Moors. The Moorish influence could also be seen in architecture, they constructed numerous mosques many of which still stand, the most well known one is the Mosque at Cordoba the capitol of the Spanish-Muslim dynasty. Prior to it being a mosque it was a christian church that was dedicated to St. Vincent. Waterways and irrigation systems were greatly improved by the Moors. Their knowledge of water management expanded Spain's agricultural production many times beyond what the Romans had achieved. Due to these new water systems, the Spanish were able to grow rice, which had also been introduced to them by the Moors.

In addition to foods, the Moors introduced a social system that was unique in medieval Europe. While in other countries and kingdoms you were born and died in the same social status, in Spain, an individual could easily intermarry or convert to Islam as a way to acquire a higher social status. In fact, social

statuses in Moorish Spain were determined by an individual's occupation alone. Although social status is determined by an individual's occupation, the trades taken up by people were usually based on their religion. For example, the Moors fulfilled the roles of architects, engineers, and artists, the highest esteemed trades of the time. Next were the Christians, who generally were farmers, fishermen, and manual workers. Finally were the Jews, who were usually traders and pharmacists.

In the end the goal of the Moors was to set out for world domination of the Islamic religion, the forced conversions and "rape and pillage" mentality forced people to resist. Christians and Jews were heavily taxed for the right to practice their own religions. Those who converted to Islam, however, paid lesser taxes and had more privileges.

Around 718, Pelagius, a Visigoth nobleman, established an independent Christian state in opposition to the Moorish dominance in Spain. Due to his opposition of Muslim control, Pelagius and a group of 30-some men were exiled and lived in a cave, refusing to pay taxes and harassing the Moors. Between 718 and 722, Pelagius and his small band of warriors fought and triumphed against the Moors at the Battle of Covadonga. This is considered the beginning of the Spanish Reconquista. The Reconquista was a period of around 774 years where the Christian kings reclaimed the Iberian Peninsula from the Islamic Moors. The Reconquista was not carried out by the Spanish alone, however. King Charlemagne of France reclaimed the western Pyrenees and formed the Marca Hispanica to defend the border between the Frankish Kingdom and the Muslims. Christians from all over

Europe traveled to the Iberian Peninsula to participate in the reclaiming of Spain in the name of God.

The Reconquista was not all war and conquest, but also the re-population of Christians on the peninsula. As the Berbers abandoned towns and fortresses, the Christian kings took their people and re-inhabited those areas. In some places, Christian peasants, monks, and nobles were granted lands by their king or lord to cultivate for horticultural purposes as a way to stimulate the economy. They served their ruler as they inhabited new areas. Others would take up residency in areas prone to attack by the Moors. These were mainly on the border between Moorish and Christian territories. They did this so they would be capable of defending the borders, mostly in the Douro Basin, the high Ebro Valley, and central Catalonia.

While under Moorish rule, Christians and Jews were permitted to practice their own beliefs for a higher tax than Muslims had to pay. However, after Christians began reconquering Spain, all non-Christians were subjected to paying higher taxes, and were given nominal rights, but only in heavily Islamic regions such as Granada. This was put into effect to encourage the conversion from Islam to Christianity. In 1496, under Archbishop Hernando de Talavera, all Muslims were forcibly converted to Christianity, even in Granada, which was a highly Muslim city. In 1502, the king and queen declared submission to Catholicism compulsory in the Castilian domains, as did Emperor Charles V in 1526 for the kingdom of Aragon.

Most of the descendents of the Muslims and Jews who were forcibly converted to Christianity were later expelled from the Iberian Peninsula when

the Inquisition was at its height around 1492. This was carried out more severely in Eastern Spain due to local hostility towards Muslims where they were seen as economic rivals by the citizens. In 1568, a major Moorish revolt occurred, and the Moors were officially expelled in 1609 and 1610.

The Reconquista was facilitated due to the death of of the last Umayya family members who had controlled Al-Andalus. The result of this was the breaking up of the territory into smaller fragmentation's called taifa's. This fragmentation marked the end of Muslim military superiority and allowed the Christians from the northern territories to challenge they're invaders. The military technology available to the Spanish was also a factor, the military organization of Christian Spain evolved a great deal in tactics, weapons and siege strategies. Heavily fortified knights and the cross-bow were important to the success of the Reconquista as were the swords which evolved from being iron made to steel.

The bow's the Moorish armies used were light and somewhat ineffective when used against a formation of heavily armored knights, whose chain mail reached down to their knees. The riding style had also changed from a bent knee position known as " alajineta" whose emphasize was speed and maneuverability to a straight leg position that emerged in France. The straight leg riding style was favored due to the stability when wearing heavy armor and mail coats on the horses. When arranged in solid columns these Spanish knights would have been the equivalent of a modern day tank. Knights using heavy armor and tight formations were extremely well suited for smashing against Muslim light cavalry and infantry, even if the knights were out numbered they held an advantage.

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While the reconquista is on its finishing stages an ambitious sailor by the name of Christopher Columbus is attempting to find a water route to east Asia. At the time the Italian's had a strong hold on eastern trade. The Italians had bases in the east and held treaties with the Ottoman Empire that gave them access to silks and spices that no one else had access to. In order to pay for his voyage, and to gain the fame and power he desired, Columbus needed to find support from the royal court of a European nation, In 1483 Columbus approached the royal court of Portugal and presented his idea to King John II. King John rejected Columbus, having met with other explorers, sailors and mariners who claimed that the idea he had was unrealistic. Christopher Columbus attempted a second time to have King John back him in 1488, again it was rejected because recently Bartolomeo Diaz, a Portugese explorer had just returned to Portugal following a successful trip to the southern tip of Africa.

With a sea route under its control King John was no longer interested in trailblazing a western ocean route. Rejected Columbus sought out the King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain. The first attempt to convince Ferdinand and Isabella of his intended journey left them with too many questions. They did not however reject his proposal. He then attempted to secure financial backing from England and France but due to his faulty math, where he estimated the trip would be about 2, 600 miles to Asia Christopher Columbus was once again rejected. Lucky for Columbus the King and Queen of Spain strongly desired a chance to catch up in the maritime world, and Columbus's plan if successful offered the royals this chance. They soon agreed to finance and support his expedition. After years of attempting to

secure financing for his explorations Christopher Columbus had finally convinced a nation to support his journey across the Atlantic ocean.

King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella must have been quite desperate because Columbus's expedition did not come at a cheap price. In his contract he demanded excessive payments for his services. He asked for one tenth of all the wealth Spain would receive from the lands which he visited, that included gold, spices, textiles, slaves, etc. He asked that he receive this money for all trips made by Spain to the new lands for all time. He wanted to secure a financial gain not only for himself, but for his heirs as well. On top of this he requested that he be named Viceroy, kind of a governor of the lands he discovered in the name of Spain. He also requested to have the title of "Admiral of the Ocean seas". It is no wonder why the other less desperate monarchs continuously denied to finance him. After much negotiation King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain agreed to his terms. In April of 1492 Columbus signed the contract with the monarch's of Spain guaranteeing him all that he desired, setting in motion the first steps toward the "New World".

Christopher Columbus departed Spain from the Spanish port of Palos on August the 3rd 1492. He departed on 3 vessels with only 90 men. The vessels were quite small by modern standards averaging about 60 feet in length and not more than 30 feet wide. The three ships were La Nina, La Pinta and the La Santa Maria, the Santa Maria being the largest had a crew of 40 men, the Pinta 26 and the Nina 24. On the morning of October 12th land was finally sighted and a landing party arrived on an island in the Bahamas and was named San Salvador. Only thirty three days since the "fleet" had left the Canary Islands off the Atlantic coast of Africa, a

resupplying port for Spain. Over the next few weeks landings were also made on Cuba which was named Juana by Columbus and Hispaniola now shared by the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Before setting sail to return to Spain he left a group of about 40 sailors of the northern coast of Haiti, they built a fortress built from the wreckage of the Santa Maria in an attempt to establish a permanent settlement. Christopher Columbus departed Spain on the 25th of September of 1493 for his second voyage to the Americas, which he still believed to be islands off the eastern coast of Asia. His second voyage was better funded and equipped he had 17 ships and over 1200 men in the attempt to establish a permanent Spanish colony. When he arrived off the northern coast of Haiti, about 2 months after departing he found the fortress burned and all the men killed by the fierce Carib Indians who were known to raid coastal settlements.

On his third trip Columbus left the port of Sanlucar in southern Spain on May 1498 with 6 ships. The fleet then split into two groups after resupplying in the Canary Islands, three vessels to sail straight to Hispaniola with supplies for the colonist who had remained behind and the other three to further explore south of the known islands. In this third trip he discovers the Island of modern day Trinidad and Tobago which he named Trinidad because of 3 distinctive hills that reminded him of the holy trinity. The crew on his third trip was the first European crew to set foot on South America.

Christopher Columbus made his fourth and final trip to the Americas in 1502. He had four ships and his mission was to explore uncharted lands to the west of the Caribbean in an attempt to finally find a passage west to the Orient.

Columbus did get to explore areas of central America, but his ships were damaged by a combination of termites and hurricanes, the ship fell apart while exploring, Columbus and his men were stranded in Jamaica for a year before being rescued. Columbus and his crew returned to Spain late 1504. Christopher Columbus's discovery of the Americas opened the flood gates for exploration into the "New World".

In the year 1496 an Italian by the name of Giovanni Caboto known to us as John Cabot obtained permission from King Henry of England for a voyage of exploration. In the summer of 1497, he crossed the Atlantic and reached the mainland of North America. On this achievement was based the claim of England to North America. Over the years explorer's came to America to explore and plunder its land. It wasn't until 1607 that the founding of Jamestown took place, making it the first English colony to be founded.

In closing, if it had not been for the domino effect that the Moorish invasion of Spain had on the world the discovery of the "New World" might be very different. As technological advances take place there is no doubt in my mind that eventually the Americas would be stumbled upon, but if Spain had not been rushed to find a safe passage to Asia and if England had not felt pressure from Spain to explore the "New World" this continent we know it to be could in fact be very different. At the time there were five major European nations racing for supremacy, Spain, Italy, Portugal, France and England it is quite possible that we could be speaking another language other than English had things played out differently in the Reconquista.