

*access to history*

# Spain 1469–1598

JILL KILSBY

SECOND EDITION



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# Contents

<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	<b>Spain 1474–1598</b>	<b>1</b>
	1 The geographical background	2
	2 The historical background	4
	3 The institutions of Aragon and Castile	6
	4 Religion	7
	5 The growth of the Spanish Empire	8
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	<b>Ferdinand and Isabella: Castile and Aragon 1479–1516</b>	<b>14</b>
	1 Securing the throne 1469–79	15
	2 The Granada War 1482–92	19
	3 Government and administration under Isabella and Ferdinand	22
	4 Religion in the reigns of Isabella and Ferdinand	29
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	<b>Ferdinand and Isabella 1479–1516: Europe, the wider world and the end of the reign</b>	<b>39</b>
	1 Foreign policy	40
	2 The New World: discovery and settlement	50
	3 The closing years of the reign 1504–16	55
	4 Key debate	59
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	<b>Charles I: 1516–56</b>	<b>64</b>
	1 The succession to the Crowns of Aragon and Castile	65
	2 Revolts in Spain 1519–21	70
	3 Key debate	73
	4 Charles's return to Spain 1522	75
	5 The government of Spain	76
	6 Finance	83
	7 Religion and the Church in Spain	86
	8 Foreign policy	90
	9 The New World	96
	10 Spain in 1556	99
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<b>Spain in the sixteenth century: the price revolution and its effects</b>	<b>103</b>
	1 Evidence for inflation in sixteenth-century Spain	104
	2 Sixteenth-century explanations for inflation	105
	3 Modern interpretations for inflation in this period	108
	4 The social impact of inflation	112
	5 The impact of inflation on agriculture and industry	114

<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	<b>Philip II: 1556–98. Spain: the heart of government</b>	<b>119</b>
1	Philip's early life and character	120
2	The government of Spain	123
3	Finance	128
4	Religion and the Church	131
5	The revolts of Granada and Aragon	139
<b>CHAPTER 7</b>	<b>Philip II: foreign policy and the New World</b>	<b>149</b>
1	Philip's aims in ruling his empire	150
2	The foreign policy of Philip II	151
3	The New World	166
4	Key debate	169
5	Spain in 1598	170
	<b>Study guide</b>	<b>175</b>
	<b>Glossary of terms</b>	<b>203</b>
	<b>Further reading</b>	<b>206</b>
	<b>Index</b>	<b>208</b>

## Dedication

### Keith Randell (1943–2002)

The *Access to History* series was conceived and developed by Keith, who created a series to 'cater for students as they are, not as we might wish them to be'. He leaves a living legacy of a series that for over 20 years has provided a trusted, stimulating and well-loved accompaniment to post-16 study. Our aim with these new editions is to continue to offer students the best possible support for their studies.



# Spain 1474–1598

This chapter introduces the reader to some of the issues and problems that emerged during the years 1474–1598. It briefly presents information about how the physical geography of Spain influenced its development; its history before 1474; the way Aragon and Castile developed in different and distinct ways; the position of the three religious groups which lived in Spain in 1474; and how the empire's rapid expansion during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries posed unique challenges that the kings and queens needed to deal with. This is covered under the following headings:

- ★ The geographical background
- ★ The historical background
- ★ The institutions of Aragon and Castile
- ★ Religion
- ★ The growth of the Spanish Empire

## Key dates

<b>711</b>	Islamic conquest of Spain	<b>1516</b>	Charles I King of Castile and Aragon
<b>c.720</b>	Start of the Reconquest in Spain by Christians	<b>1519</b>	Charles I became Holy Roman Emperor as Charles V
<b>1469</b>	Marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile	<b>1520–66</b>	Suleiman the Magnificent became Sultan of the Ottoman Empire
<b>1477</b>	The Habsburg Maximilian I married Mary of Burgundy	<b>1529</b>	Armies of Suleiman stopped outside Vienna
<b>1478</b>	Maximilian became Holy Roman Emperor	<b>1556</b>	Philip II became King of Castile and Aragon
<b>1496</b>	Marriage alliances between Spanish and Habsburg families		

## 1 The geographical background

► *How did the geographical features of Spain influence the way it developed as a country?*

### KEY TERMS

**Iberian Peninsula** The land mass occupied by today's Spain and Portugal. It is separated from France by the Pyrenees Mountains and from Africa by the Strait of Gibraltar.

**Meseta** The vast highland plateau that occupies the interior of Spain at an average elevation of 600 metres.

**Castile** In the mid-fifteenth century the Crown of Castile occupied the area from Burgos in the north to Toledo in the south, equivalent to the modern-day provinces of León, Madrid and La Mancha.

When we think of Spain today, we tend to picture that part of the coast that borders the Mediterranean and which many seek for its 'sun, sand and sea'. This, however, is only one part of Spain. Another coast borders the Atlantic Ocean. One land frontier is marked by the Pyrenees, and the other by modern-day Portugal. Together Spain and Portugal make up the **Iberian Peninsula**. Although a part of continental Europe, it is very much a distinct unit. There are no easy channels of communication with the other countries of Europe. On the other hand, only 19 kilometres separate it from the coast of north Africa. The peninsula is therefore at a crossroads, between the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic, and between the mainland of Europe and Africa.

This is not to say that the peninsula enjoys close links with the world beyond. Geographical factors prevent this being so (see Figure 1.1, page 5). Around the edge is a narrow coastal plain. But a short journey into the interior quickly reveals rivers, valleys and, in particular, mountains. Spain is Europe's most mountainous country after Switzerland. Over one-sixth of the country is more than 1000 metres above sea level. The most important geographical feature in the interior is the **Meseta**, the enormous plateau at its centre. This is almost completely surrounded by high mountain ranges and is therefore remote from both the sea and the neighbouring countries of Portugal and France.

The **Meseta** is an area of extreme climate. Its long, hard winters are followed by short periods of intense heat – what some Spaniards of today refer to as 'nine months of winter and three of hell'. The areas near the Pyrenees are, in contrast, much wetter with no extremes of temperature. The east and south coasts are different again. Here it is very hot with little in the way of a winter, but the area suffers from a lack of rain.

### Spain, a country shaped by its geography

Such conditions make for a country in which food cannot easily be grown. In almost every part of Spain, apart from the river valleys and the narrow coastal plains, there are many areas where crop yields are too poor to provide enough food to sustain a large population. It is not surprising therefore, as the Spanish historian Pierre Vilar (1977) has shown, that so many of the maritime areas of Spain have sought to build up trade overseas – across the Mediterranean, over to Africa, or towards the Atlantic – rather than with the less productive central area.

The geography of the peninsula partly explains the way in which the political units in the area came to be formed as they did. Three main divisions can be distinguished: the area forming Portugal, that making **Castile**, and those

## SOURCE A



How far does Source A reflect the way geographical features affected Spain's history?



The plateau landscape (*Meseta*) in central Spain.

regions which comprised the Crown of **Aragon**. However, there was no kingdom of Spain as there was a kingdom of Portugal. The word 'Spain' was not widely used by those living in the peninsula in the mid-fifteenth century, although there may have been some who referred to themselves as 'Spanish'. Certainly, many foreigners called the people who lived in the Iberian Peninsula by this name. But most of the population thought of themselves as coming from particular parts of the peninsula, identifying first with Castile, Aragon, Catalonia, the **Basque countries** or Portugal. They called themselves not Spanish but Castilians, Aragonese, Catalans, Basque or Portuguese. It was not, however, just geographical factors which led to these groupings. The political history of the various regions also contributed.



### KEY TERMS

**Aragon** In the mid-fifteenth century, the Crown of Aragon consisted of three kingdoms, Aragon, Catalonia and Valencia. In this book the term 'Crown of Aragon' is used to mean all three kingdoms. References to the kingdoms of Aragon, Catalonia or Valencia mean the individual kingdoms.

**Basque countries** Consisted of Vizcaya, Guipuzcoa, Alava and Navarre and were in the western end of the Pyrenees. In the mid-fifteenth century Navarre, the main Basque country, was partly in Spain and partly in France.



## 2 The historical background

► *What were the reasons for Castile becoming more important than Aragon by the mid-fifteenth century?*

The only time the Iberian Peninsula had been a single political unit was when it was a province of the Roman Empire – Roman Hispania. It was during this period that it became Christianised. However, in the eighth century, Muslims from north Africa crossed to the peninsula and conquered it. Two centuries later, the Christians recaptured part of the north of Spain, and from the eleventh century onwards began to move south on a slow but definite **Reconquest**. By the end of the thirteenth century, only the kingdom of Granada remained under Muslim rulers.

The Reconquest had partly been a desire to re-establish Christian rule. At the same time, increases in population among Christians in the north, and subsequent pressure on food supplies, had led to a need to expand and acquire more land.

### The kingdoms of the peninsula

By the end of the thirteenth century, three major Christian areas had formed in the peninsula. Castile and León had come under one Christian king as the kingdom of Castile; Portugal had become an independent kingdom, and the Pyrenean kingdoms of Catalonia, Aragon and Valencia had become the Crown of Aragon. The small kingdom of Navarre mainly governed itself, although in some matters it was subject to Castile. At the same time, even within these units, there remained great varieties of customs and laws.

The warlike existence of the kingdoms had meant that the nobility, which provided the military leadership in each, held a position of importance. This was true of Castile in particular. The nobles there were **frontiersmen** who fought and won large areas of land from the Muslims. To help in the struggle, three **religious orders of knights** had been formed in the twelfth century – Calatrava, Alcántara and Santiago – whose task was to defend the frontier bordering Muslim territory.

### The expansion of Aragon

While most of Castile's interests had been involved in the Reconquest, from the twelfth century, Aragon had begun to direct its energies beyond the peninsula and into the Mediterranean. Majorca and all the Balearic Islands had been conquered. Further conquests had followed over the next two centuries. The most important of these were Sicily, Sardinia and Naples (see Figure 3.1, page 41). Aragon had also taken control of a number of fortified towns in north Africa. Barcelona, in Catalonia, became one of the most important ports in the

#### KEY TERMS

**Reconquest** (*Reconquista* in Spanish.) A succession of military campaigns to reclaim Iberian lands from Muslim occupiers. The Reconquest started in the eighth century and ended in 1492 with the capture of Granada.

**Frontiersmen** Christian men who lived on the frontier of Christian and Muslim Spain; they had to fight to defend and extend Christian lands.

**Religious orders of knights** Christian military monastic organisations formed to defend and expand the Christian lands of Spain against the Muslims.



**Figure 1.1** The Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

western Mediterranean. The first Spanish overseas empire had been founded and Spanish interest in Italy had been established.

## Differences between Castile and Aragon in the mid-fifteenth century

Aragon's power did not last. By the middle of the fifteenth century it was clear that Castile would be the more important in the future. There were several reasons for this:

- Castile was four times larger in size than Aragon. Its population was also greater, possibly 5 million people in contrast to Aragon's 1 million.
- Castile was more unified. It possessed only one **Cortes** (or parliament), one language, one coinage and one administration.
- The Castilian economy had begun to thrive. Trade was mainly in raw materials, above all wool. The wool trade was controlled by the *Mesta*, which was a group of all the producers of wool in Castile. Exports were sent to the markets of northern Europe, particularly Flanders in the Netherlands, where Castilian merchants played a leading role. Castilian ports through which such exports were sent also co-operated with each other.

### KEY TERM

**Cortes** The parliament in each of the kingdoms in Castile and Aragon (called *Corts* in Catalonia).

- In the Crown of Aragon, in contrast, there was no such economic unity. Towns even competed against each other for trade as much as against any rivals outside Aragon. Much economic damage was done to Aragon by a lengthy civil war. In addition, its major port, Barcelona, in the kingdom of Catalonia, was hit by an economic crisis which affected most of the Mediterranean ports after 1350, and which led to bankruptcies and unemployment.

### 3 The institutions of Aragon and Castile

► *In what ways did the institutions of Aragon and Castile differ?*

Just as Aragon and Castile had developed in different ways, so were the institutions within the two realms different. The Crown of Aragon consisted mainly of the three separate kingdoms of Catalonia, Aragon and Valencia. Each was governed independently, and had its own laws and its own *Cortes*. In contrast, Castile consisted of a number of former kingdoms which held their institutions in common. There were, however, even in Castile, areas which had a great deal of independence. Although the Basque provinces recognised the sovereignty of the King of Castile, their geographic isolation meant that they were virtually independent from the rest of the peninsula. Asturias and Galicia had their own regional governments. In other parts of Castile there were local privileges, particularly those held by the nobility.

#### The *Cortes*

The *Cortes* was the means by which the political views of the important people in the country were heard. However, the powers held by the *Cortes* in each of the kingdoms were very different. In Aragon, the various *Cortes* sometimes met at the same time and in the same city (*Cortes generales*). More frequently they met separately in their own kingdoms. All laws in the Crown of Aragon (meaning all the kingdoms in Aragon) had to be approved by the individual *Cortes*. The monarch's powers for administering justice, imposing taxes or raising armies were all severely limited by the **fueros** (the laws and privileges possessed by these kingdoms). These were defended by the **justicia** – a law officer with wide powers, who could not be removed from office by the king. In Castile, in contrast, the *Cortes* was weak, and had few powers to prevent a ruler from doing as he or she wished. The Crown here had the right to make and unmake laws without the consent of the *Cortes*.



#### KEY TERMS

**Fueros** Aragonese laws and privileges.

**Justicia** Aragonese law officer in charge of courts and justice, appointed by the Crown for life.

## 4 Religion

► *What factors contributed to the growing hostility towards Jews and Muslims by the late fifteenth century?*

By the mid-fifteenth century the main religion in the peninsula was Christianity, although there were large communities of both Muslims and Jews. All three felt that they had to coexist if they were to survive economically. At times of peace during the Reconquest, it had been common for Muslims and Christians to visit each other, to trade and even to intermarry.

The historian Henry Kamen (2005) quotes from a Czech traveller in 1466, who was astonished to find that in the household of the Count of Haro there were ‘Christians, **Moors** and Jews, and he lets them all live in peace in their faith’.

Within the Christian territories Jews mainly lived in the towns. They were often leading financiers, lending to both the kings of Aragon and Castile. One king of Aragon claimed that, ‘our predecessors have tolerated and suffered the Jews in their territories because these Jews are the strong box and treasury of the kings’. Many Jews were important in trade and in professions such as medicine. The Muslims, on the other hand, resided mainly in the countryside, working on the lands of the nobility.

The Christian victories of the Reconquest altered the relationship between the three religious groupings. Although the rulers might continue to show support for Jews and Muslims, there was a general hostility towards them, particularly during times of economic depression and epidemics. Most Jews suffered increasingly during the fourteenth century from **pogroms** (organised massacres). Many were forcibly converted to Christianity. They were then known as **conversos** or ‘new’ Christians to distinguish them from those who had been Christians for many generations – the ‘old’ Christians.

### KEY TERMS

**Moors** Muslims who invaded in the eighth century and established a rule that lasted until the fifteenth century in Andalusia.

**Pogrom** The officially ordered persecution and massacre of a minority group, especially Jews.

**Conversos** Jews who converted to Christianity, many forcibly, to avoid persecution or expulsion from Spain or Portugal.

### Religion in Spain

- *Catholicism (Christianity).* The Catholic Church in the mid-fifteenth century was in need of reform. Its leader was the pope who, in theory, had complete power over the Church from his base in Rome. Many of the popes during this period were more interested in secular rather than spiritual matters. There were frequent complaints about a number of abuses in the Church and the poor education and low standards of many of the clergy.
- *Protestantism (Christianity).* A religion that had splintered off from Catholicism. Up to the early sixteenth century there was only one accepted Christian faith in Europe: Roman Catholicism. In 1517 a German monk called Martin Luther produced a list of complaints of abuses in the Catholic Church. Followers of Luther believed that many of the doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church were unnecessary and ‘faith’ alone was all that was necessary in one’s belief. His ideas spread quickly and Luther’s

followers became known as ‘Protestants’ – a general term referring to anyone who ‘protested’ against the Catholic Church. The Lutherans were the first of these Protestant Churches. Later others formed such as the Calvinists. Luther and the Protestant German princes who supported his movement were to become a great problem for Charles V (Charles I of Spain). In the reign of Philip II it was the Protestants in the Netherlands who were to be the major problem.

- *Islam*. A follower of Islam is called a Muslim. There were different groups of Muslims in the mid-fifteenth century. The Muslims who lived in Spain were called Moors. In the east was the vast Ottoman Empire, also referred to as the Turkish Empire or Turkey. The Ottomans had overthrown the Byzantine Empire in 1453 when they had conquered Constantinople (present-day Istanbul). During the sixteenth century this powerful empire, under Suleiman the Magnificent, controlled vast areas, including much of southeast Europe, west Asia and north Africa. It struck fear into the heart of most of Christian western Europe.
- *Judaism*. A follower of Judaism is called a Jew. Many Christians in Europe considered Jews to be anti-Christian. By the mid-fifteenth century in Spain they were often treated as scapegoats for any wrongs in society. From time to time this led to massacres and forcible conversions to Christianity.

5

## The growth of the Spanish Empire

► *Why did the Spanish Empire grow and what problems developed as a result?*

By the middle of the fifteenth century Castile was in a position from which it could become an important power in Europe. The marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile in 1469 brought most of the peninsula under the same rulers. Other marriages were to further extend the Spanish Empire, or Monarchy, as it was called to distinguish it from the Holy Roman Empire (a collection of hundreds of states in the lands which today make up Germany and beyond). In 1496 two portentous marriages were arranged: those of two children of Ferdinand and Isabella with two children of the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian.

### The Habsburg connection

Maximilian was the head of the Habsburg family, whose lands lay mainly in Austria. In 1438 a member of this family had become Holy Roman Emperor and from then on members of the family were to hold the title continuously. However, although the title brought prestige, it brought little influence. Power came from the lands the Habsburgs had acquired through a series of



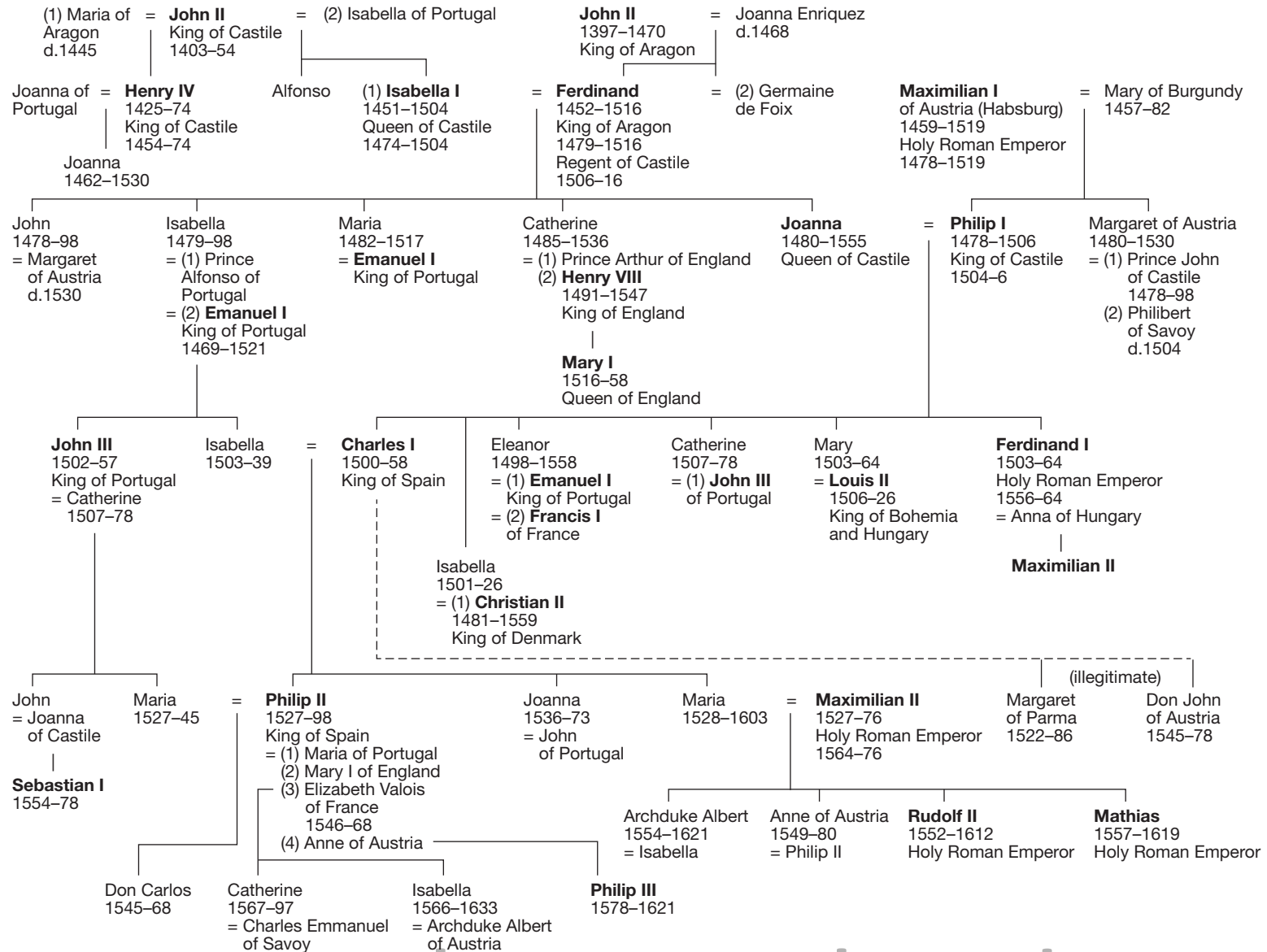


Figure 1.2 A family tree of the rulers of Spain.

advantageous marriage alliances. In 1477 Maximilian had married Mary of Burgundy. As a result, he had obtained much additional land, including Artois, Franche-Comté and the Netherlands.

The marriages of two of the Habsburg children to two of those of Ferdinand and Isabella were eventually to bring a Habsburg to the thrones of Aragon and Castile in the person of Charles I, who was also to inherit the Habsburg lands in northern and central Europe and thereby not only extended his empire considerably but also brought Spanish involvement in the affairs of northern Europe.



## KEY TERMS

**New World** A name for the Americas, especially during the time of first exploration and colonisation of the region by Europeans; also called the Indies in contemporary sources.

**Patrimony** An inheritance or legacy handed down to someone.

? What does Source B show of the extent of Spanish power by the end of the sixteenth century?

## The inheritance of Philip II

Charles's son, Philip II, was to inherit the Habsburg lands in Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Spain's empire in the **New World**, which had been discovered during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, and had grown considerably in size by the mid-sixteenth century. In addition, he became ruler of Portugal and acquired the vast Portuguese Empire in the east. Writers of the time commented on the vast extent of the Spanish Empire by the end of the sixteenth century (see Source B).

### SOURCE B

#### A Castilian's view, written in 1620, of the vast number of lands held by Philip.

*Now that to the Crown of Spain there have been added Aragon, Portugal, Navarre, and all that is beautiful and splendid in Italy, Flanders, Lombardy, the East and the West Indies, such that with its land and its sea it lies along the whole path of the sun and the sun is scarcely lost to view from this monarchy, now that it is superior in Territories, in riches, unequalled by those of Antiquity, superior in valour, loyalty, and the troth it keeps with its princes, and in firm religion and unswerving devotion to the church ... the Ambassador of Spain has a patent claim everywhere and always to lay claim to precedence.*

## The problems created by Spain's empire

The sheer size of the lands over which Charles and his successors ruled was to lead to difficulties. The increased power which it gave them led to the Habsburg name being feared and envied throughout this period by the other powers of Europe, particularly France. All countries in western Europe feared a Habsburg takeover. France felt particularly vulnerable as it was almost entirely surrounded by countries which were under Habsburg control. To the northeast were the Netherlands, to the east Franche-Comté and to the south-west Spain itself.

If the other European powers feared Habsburg domination, the Habsburg rulers felt it a matter of pride that they should not lose any of their **patrimony**. At all costs, the lands that they had inherited had to be held on to, and handed to their successors intact.

## Charles I of Spain becomes Holy Roman Emperor

Charles I had not just acquired territorial power. He had also become Holy Roman Emperor as Charles V. This had brought him the responsibility of defending the Roman Catholic religion both against the threat of Islam and against the growing threat of Protestantism even within the very lands over which he ruled.

The duty to defend the Roman Catholic religion against Islam, especially the **Ottoman Empire** ruled over by the Turks, was to have serious repercussions on the ability of the Habsburgs to defend their lands against other Christian rulers and against the Protestant threat. From the fourteenth century, the Ottoman Empire had expanded from Anatolia, into Europe via the Balkans, and into the Middle East via Palestine. In the early sixteenth century, under **Suleiman** the Magnificent, the Turks took the island of Rhodes. Control of the eastern Mediterranean was then theirs. On land they conquered part of Hungary and also controlled north Africa. On all sides the Habsburgs were therefore to feel the Islamic threat. The safety of their lands as well as the defence of the Roman Catholic religion demanded Habsburg action against both the followers of Islam and those of a growing Protestantism.

## Defending the faith against Protestantism

At the same time, the growth of Protestantism forced the Habsburgs to strive for the purity of the faith within their own lands. Protection of that faith was a prime consideration in dealing with the component parts that made up their empire and failure to compromise led to long and costly struggles. As a result, the Habsburgs were involved in almost continuous warfare throughout the sixteenth century.

## The importance of the army and navy

Defence of Habsburg territories and religion required an effective army and navy. The Habsburgs were generally fortunate in this respect. During the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella the 'Great Captain', Gonzalo de Córdoba, had created a professional army based on the infantry. At the core of this army were the Spanish troops who were to dominate warfare in Europe for much of the sixteenth century, under the skilled leadership of such commanders as the Duke of Alba, Don John of Austria and Alexander Farnese, Duke of Parma. Spain also made a major contribution to the navy, with the Netherlands and the Habsburg states in Italy, in particular Genoa, after contributing additional vessels.



### KEY TERM

#### **Ottoman Empire**

The former Turkish (and largely Muslim) Empire in Europe, Asia and Africa, which lasted from the late thirteenth century until the end of the First World War.



### KEY FIGURE

#### **Suleiman I (1494–1566)**

Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1520, was known as 'the Magnificent' in the west and 'the Lawgiver' in the east. His armies attacked Hungary, Belgrade and Rhodes before being stopped outside Vienna in 1529; his fleet dominated the eastern Mediterranean. Much of north Africa came under his rule.

## The individual nature of each part of the empire

It must be remembered that the empire was never a Spanish one. Each realm considered itself an equal among the others and worthy of equal esteem from its ruler. For the people in each realm, the ruler was their king, their count or their duke. They were not interested in the wider aspects of his rule beyond their realm. Each part of the empire had a different history. Each part had developed different methods of government and had different rights and privileges in relation to its ruler. Their only common elements were loyalty to the ruler and loyalty to the Roman Catholic faith.

## At the centre: Castile

In practice, the base of the Spanish Empire became Castile, which was to become under Charles I the most loyal and obedient province in the empire. From the time of Philip II, Madrid became the centre of Habsburg rule and the king was rarely to leave the city. Castile alone bore the high cost of the royal court. Its economic position meant that it could, at least in the sixteenth century, provide much of the financial support needed by the Crown. It was also able until the end of the century to provide much of the manpower needed for the army and navy. The cost to Castile was high. In return, it gained the expensive symbols of royalty – fine buildings, works of art and the elaborate ceremony of the court; and the pride that it was at the heart of one of the greatest empires ever known.

**Summary diagram: Keys to understanding Spain 1474–1598**

<b>Geography</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Borders on the Pyrenees and Portugal</li> <li>• Mountainous country with different climates</li> <li>• Limit to the areas that can be cultivated for food crops</li> <li>• Tradition of maritime trade</li> </ul>
<b>History</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Roman province</li> <li>• Conquered by Muslims in the eighth century</li> <li>• Gradual north-to-south <i>Reconquista</i> by Christians, starting in the tenth century</li> <li>• By the thirteenth century, only Granada remained under Muslim rule</li> <li>• Aragon developed a small empire in the Mediterranean</li> </ul>
<b>Religion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the mid-fifteenth century Christianity, Judaism and Islam coexisted (<i>convivencia</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Politics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crown of Castile was unified (one <i>Cortes</i>, one language, one coinage, administration and economy)</li> <li>• Crown of Aragon was made up of three separate kingdoms. Aragon, Catalonia and Valencia each had their own laws, <i>Cortes</i>, <i>fueros</i> and economies</li> </ul>
<b>Events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1469 – Isabella of Castile married Ferdinand of Aragon</li> <li>• 1474 and 1479 – each became monarch of their respective, separate, realms</li> <li>• Castile and Aragon united by the inheritance of the Habsburg Charles I but remain separate realms</li> </ul>
<b>Growth of the Spanish Empire: fifteenth and sixteenth centuries</b>	<p><b>Added during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella (1474–1516):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Granada 1492</li> <li>• New World discoveries 1492 onwards</li> <li>• Cerdagne and Roussillon 1493</li> <li>• Navarre 1515</li> </ul> <p><b>Added during the reign of Charles I (1516–56):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Habsburg lands: north and central Europe, including the Netherlands</li> </ul> <p><b>During the reign of Philip II (1556–98), consisting of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spain, Italy, Netherlands, New World</li> <li>• Portugal and its empire 1581</li> </ul>

**Refresher questions**

- 1 What geographical features of Spain would have an effect on its history?
- 2 What was the Reconquest?
- 3 By the mid-fifteenth century what did Aragon's overseas empire consist of?
- 4 What were the *Cortes*, and how were they different in Aragon and in Castile?
- 5 What territories are included under the umbrella term 'Crown of Aragon'?
- 6 What three religious groups were established in Spain in the mid-fifteenth century?
- 7 Why did many Christians become hostile to Jews and Muslims?
- 8 Who were the *conversos* or 'new' Christians?
- 9 Who were the Habsburgs? How extensive was their power in Europe?
- 10 What was significant about a Habsburg becoming King of Spain?
- 11 How much unity was there within the Spanish Empire in the mid-fifteenth century?



# Ferdinand and Isabella: Castile and Aragon 1479–1516

From the time of her marriage to Ferdinand in 1469, Isabella strove to ensure that she would be recognised as heir to the Crown of Castile. On the death of her half-brother Henry IV in 1474 she proclaimed herself queen. Ferdinand himself became King of Aragon in 1475. The two monarchs were able to secure the throne of Castile for Isabella against attempts to overthrow her and then laid a firm groundwork for establishing their rule. For many Spaniards then and now, it was a 'golden age' in Spanish history. The chapter first considers the marriage and succession to the throne of Castile of Isabella and then considers the problems that Isabella and her husband Ferdinand met and how successfully they dealt with them – in government and administration, finance and religious policies. The chapter examines these themes under the following headings:

- ★ Securing the throne 1469–79
- ★ The Granada War 1482–92
- ★ Government and administration under Isabella and Ferdinand
- ★ Religion in the reigns of Isabella and Ferdinand

## Key dates

<b>1462–72</b>	Revolt in the kingdom of Catalonia	<b>1478</b>	Establishment of Spanish Inquisition
<b>1468</b>	Ferdinand became King of Sicily in his own right (as Ferdinand II)		Ferdinand became King of Aragon on his father's death
<b>1469</b>	Isabella, half-sister and heir to King of Castile, married Ferdinand, son and heir to King of Aragon	<b>1482–92</b>	Granada War
<b>1474</b>	Death of King Henry IV of Castile Isabella proclaimed herself Queen of Castile War of Succession between Isabella and Joanna, daughter of King Henry IV of Castile	<b>1492</b>	Expulsion or conversion of all the Jews in Castile and Aragon
<b>1475</b>	Ferdinand defeated the King of Portugal in Battle of Toro	<b>1499</b>	Muslims in Granada had to convert or leave
<b>1478</b>	Birth of only son John to Isabella and Ferdinand	<b>1502</b>	Muslims in Castile had to convert or leave
		<b>1504</b>	Death of Isabella Joanna Queen of Castile and Archduke Philip of Austria ruled Castile
		<b>1506</b>	Death of Philip
		<b>1507</b>	Ferdinand returned to Castile and became regent

## 1 Securing the throne 1469–79

- ▶ *How united were Aragon and Castile at the time of Isabella and Ferdinand's marriage in 1469?*
- ▶ *How did Isabella manage to secure the throne of Castile?*

### The marriage between Isabella and Ferdinand of Aragon

On 19 October 1469, the eighteen-year-old Isabella, half-sister and heir to the King of Castile, secretly married her cousin, the seventeen-year-old Ferdinand, son and heir to the King of Aragon. The events leading to the marriage read like something from a novel – Ferdinand making his way in disguise with only a small escort to Valladolid, where the marriage was to take place; Isabella acting against her half-brother Henry's wishes, in arranging her marriage with Ferdinand. This is not to imply it was a love match. The two had never met before. Both must have felt that the marriage would bolster their chances of becoming rulers in Castile and Aragon, respectively.

The marriage contract between Isabella and Ferdinand was important. It stated how they each would play a part in the government of the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile. Ferdinand's authority in Castile had clear limits:

- He was to respect the customs of Castile; all appointments and decisions were to be in accordance with Isabella's wishes.
- He was to live in Castile and support the policy of reconquering land from the Moors.
- All public decisions were to bear the signatures of both partners.

The contract aimed to dispel fears that an Aragonese was taking over in Castile and would use the kingdom's money and resources to finance Aragonese, rather than Castilian, interests. In fact, after Isabella's coronation in 1474 the terms were slightly modified to make Ferdinand more of an equal in Castile:

- The two monarchs were to dispense justice jointly.
- In 1475 Isabella granted Ferdinand power to act without her in Castile, as though she was present.

Isabella retained considerable powers for herself, however. She alone could grant gifts and favours to the nobles and towns and cities in Castile. She alone was responsible for the administration of Castile and its territories. Isabella needed Ferdinand to secure her rule in Castile, but she was determined that his role would not overshadow her own there.