

## **VI. European History 2.0**

### A. Learning about a Cultural Block of Many Parts

1. Our studies so far have focused on a Europe that revolves around a Franco-German core. The Frankish Union united France and Germany, and its failure led to their separate evolution until Napoleon tried to re-unite them. After his failure, Germany rose to primacy and tried to overwhelm France in two world wars. That catastrophe pushed them to lead the partnership of the European Union today.
2. The European Union is more than France & Germany, of course. It is a cultural block of 27 countries (out of 43 in Europe), with all its members accepting *supranationalism* in their own way and making their own contribution to the union. Learning about the EU's other participants is important in order to understand how important the cultural block is as a whole and to judge its ability to weather the storm of the Russian-Ukrainian War and the energy crisis the war has brought with it.
3. Since the study of 27 countries is more than we can undertake, we have to be careful about adding pieces to the puzzle that are helpful in giving us a more complete picture without overly complicating our efforts.
4. Since it is the Western European nations that did the most to shape the wider world as they arose, and it was they who established the European Union in the first place, our efforts are best served by focussing on them. In addition to France & Germany, our main goal will be to grasp the roles of England, Iberia (Spain & Portugal), and Italy on the rise of Europe.

### B. The Triumph of Catholic Christianity over Arian Belief

1. One of the features of the complex patchwork of Europe as it emerged was a common belief in the Catholic form of Christianity.
2. As we saw in our study of the ancient world, it was the Roman emperors Constantine and Theodosius who established Catholic Christianity in Rome itself, while the Arian believers went out to convert the barbarian tribes outside of Rome.
3. This has a strange result at first: Rome was sacked by Visigoths, who were Arians, and after the complete collapse of the empire, Italy was occupied by two tribes—the Ostrogoths and Lombards, one after the other—both of which were Arian believers as well.
4. Iberia and Italy nonetheless became Catholic over time, because the Catholic Church was the most civilized and bureaucratic organization in all of Europe, with a literate, educated priesthood, and a kind of religious aristocracy of bishops and cardinals, who maintained a kind of religious monarchy, by electing a pope to serve as the religious leader of all Catholics, and promoting the belief that the organized and bureaucratic Catholic church was the designated representative of the Christian God on Earth, and through whom believers would be granted “salvation” and “everlasting life” after death.

- While the Visigoths eventually chose to convert to Catholic Christianity, it took the triumph of the Franks (led by Charlemagne) over the Lombards to force the conversion of Italy to Catholic belief.

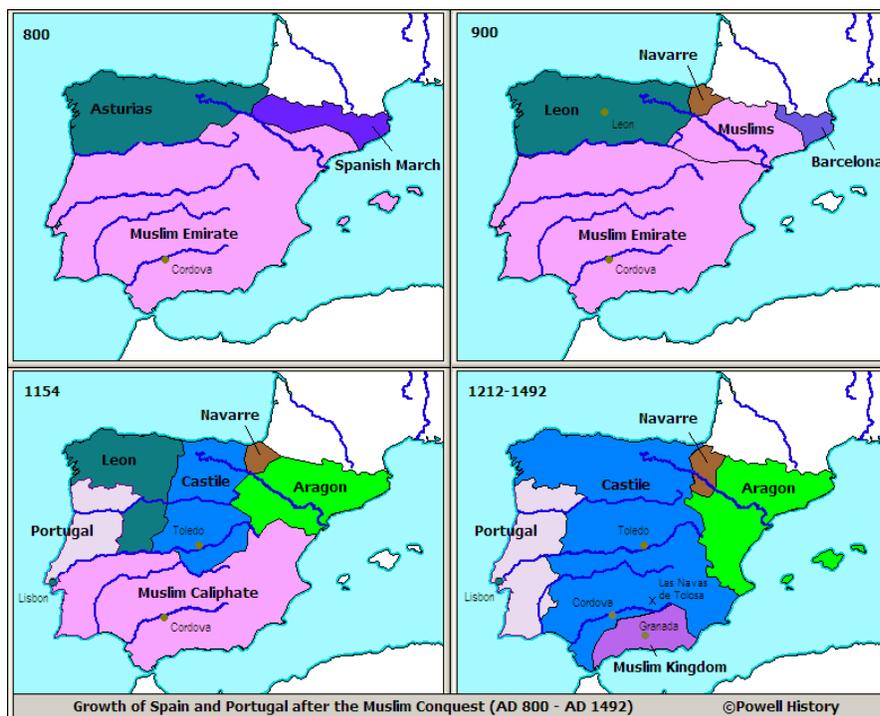
C. The Reconquista (711-1492) and the formation of Spain and Portugal

- After the conversion of the Visigoths to Catholic belief, Iberia was invaded by a new enemy that arrived across the Strait of Gibraltar from Africa. This new enemy—imperial Islamic civilization—would permanently shape the fate of the region:



The Growth of the Muslim empire—the Caliphate—from the time of Muhammad’s death (c. 632 AD) to the penetration of Iberia in the West and India in the East (c.711 AD).

- The Christians of Iberia were either conquered by the invading Muslims or pushed up into the northwest corner of the peninsula (see map below).
- From there, the Christians gradually fought to reclaim their land. The Spanish word for “reconquest” is “reconquista,” thus this long torturous period of the rise of the nations of Spain and Portugal is called *the* Reconquista (711-1492).



4. The first of the two modern countries to form during this extended series of wars was Portugal, when one of the leaders in the war effort named Afonso, the Count of Portugal, declared his county an independent kingdom. The other Christian kingdoms could not dislodge him from power while also managing their own affairs and fighting to expand further into Iberia, thus permitting the small country of Portugal to develop side-by-side with its neighbors and over the centuries to become the modern *nation* that it is.
5. Meanwhile, the area we think of today as Spain continued to be split by a shifting patchwork of kingdoms, with its two main kingdoms Castile and Aragon finally united by the marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile.
6. The unity of Spain made possible the final push against Muslim-held Granada in the south of Spain, which was finally conquered in 1492.



*The Conquest of Granada*, by Francisco Pradilla Ortiz depicts Ferdinand (in red) and Isabella (on the white horse) receiving the final submission of the Muslims in 1492.

7. The essential historical significance of the *Reconquista* is that it indelibly shaped the culture of the nations of Spain and Portugal. Nations are countries with unique histories and traditions that bind them together—and usually with a common enemy, as is too clear in this case: a nearly 800-year war to expel a conqueror of a different religion naturally led the Spanish and Portuguese to strongly identify as Catholic Christians.