

Islam in Spain after the Reconquista

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On January 2, 1492, the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabela captured Granada and dethroned the Nasrids, the last surviving Muslim monarchy in Iberia. The fall of Granada was the culmination of the Reconquista (Reconquest), the Latin kingdoms' centuries-old struggle to end Muslims' political hegemony on the Peninsula. It can be said that the Reconquista began in the late eleventh century with the recapture of Toledo, the traditional Visigoth capital in 1085. The twelfth century witnessed nearly constant warfare, but the decisive victories were to be won in the first half of the thirteenth century.

The Christians advanced along three main points: the Castilians in central Spain, the Aragonese in Catalonia and Valencia in the east, and the Portuguese in the west. In 1212, the defeat of the Muslim armies at the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa gave the Latin kingdoms control of all of central Spain. What had traditionally been the main Muslim capitals, Cordoba and Seville, were taken in 1236 and 1248. The Treaty of Jaén in 1246 between Fernando III of Castile and the Nasrid ruler of Granada gave the Muslims a rest for about two centuries, but hostilities resumed their former hectic pace in the latter half of the fifteenth century, with Gibraltar falling in 1462. The alliance between the two great Christian kingdoms of Spain, Castile and Aragon, symbolically sealed by the marriage of the Catholic Sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabela, spelled the end of Muslim rule in Iberia. A well-known account has it that Isabela vowed she would wear the same clothes until the Muslims were completely conquered.

In 1492, three or four years later, her wish came true, and she could finally change her clothes! The Muslims no longer had a state of their own, and the political climate in Spain was calling for an end to religious diversity. The phenomenon of Morisco communities and their plight is a direct result of the Reconquista.

Ferdinand and Isabela's rule is famous not only for recapturing the Iberian Peninsula, but for supporting Christopher Columbus' voyage of discovery to the New World. It also marked the beginning of the Inquisition. The Inquisition was a network of tribunals organized by the Catholic Church in the Iberian Peninsula intended to search out, identify, prosecute, punish, and correct heretics. The Inquisition tended to focus its efforts on recent converts to Christianity from Judaism and Islam. These new Christians were under constant scrutiny and suspicion of maintaining the practices and beliefs of their former religions while outwardly adhering to Christianity.

The Inquisition was particularly strict on the Moriscos, the Muslims who remained in the Iberian Peninsula under Christian rule after the Reconquista. The term is somewhat ambiguous because it may refer on the one hand to sincere converts from Islam to Christianity or on the other hand to crypto-Muslims, people who were sincere in their Islamic faith but had been forced to convert and were obliged to adhere in their daily lives to Christian practices. The suspect status of the Moriscos and their Jewish counterparts may be seen in the practice of labeling them new Christians to distinguish them from old Christians, who were presumably more steadfast in their faith. Both groups were in danger of being denounced to the Inquisition as heretics and consequently had to hide their true beliefs and religious practices from outsiders. The term for Jews who remained in the Peninsula is Marranos, literally Chestnuts.

Some of the Moriscos practiced *taqiyya*. *Taqiyya* is an Arabic word literally meaning caution. It came to be used as a technical term in Islamic law meaning dissimulation. It is a type of legal dispensation which allows the Muslim believer to deny his or her faith or commit otherwise illegal or blasphemous acts when in danger of losing life, limb, or property. The Islamic principle became very important in Spain in the course of the sixteenth century, as the Muslims of Granada, Castile, Aragon, Valencia, and Navarre were forced to convert to Christianity and then became crypto-Muslims, practicing Islam only in secret. Below, you will read a *fatwa*, or legal responsum, which a Muslim jurist in Algeria issued allowing Muslims in Spain to make extensive use of *taqiyya* in order to maintain their faith despite the strict restrictions placed on them by Christian authorities.

While these provisions were made to try to protect the Muslims who stayed behind, the Reconquista produced a Morisco diaspora, as many Muslims, like the Jews, were forced to choose between conversion and exile. Most of the expelled Moriscos settled in North Africa, including modern Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Certain cities in these regions, such as Fez in Morocco and Tlemecen in Algeria maintain Andalusian traditions, particularly in music, dress, and cuisine. You can still hear today what is called Granadan music in weddings all over Morocco, and many of the songs still sung are reputed to be Andalusian poems.

The term Mudejar is used to refer to Muslims who lived under Christian rule but enjoyed a special, protected status. They were free to practice their religion, but had to remain loyal to the state and were subject to a number of restrictions, such as a prohibition of the right to bear arms.

Some Moriscos held out hope that the Ottoman rulers would save them from their dire straits. The Ottoman Turks became a major power in the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean in the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Their control extended from Algeria in the West to the Persian Gulf in the East. In Europe they controlled what are now Greece, Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and Hungary for centuries. They advanced very far into Europe and even besieged Vienna, the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in

1529 and 1683, both times unsuccessfully. In the Mediterranean they were engaged in an ongoing struggle with the European powers, particularly the Spanish. The towering Spanish literary figure, Cervantes, author of *Don Quixote*, lost an arm in a naval battle against Ottoman forces.

After the Reconquista and the forced conversions of Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula, the Moriscos looked to the Ottomans as their potential saviors, sending them numbers of requests for aid and military intervention. This was particularly the case after 1517, when the Ottoman armies overran the Mamluk Empire centered in Egypt and became the focus of nearly all Moriscos pleas for help. In a translation below, you will read a poem sent by the Moriscos of Granada to the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II (1481-1512) circa 1501 asking for him to intercede on their behalf. Unfortunately for the Moriscos, the Ottomans already had their hands full fighting on two fronts. In the Balkans, they were fighting against the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Russia, and in the East, they were fighting against the Safavid Empire of Iran. They did little to help their Muslim brothers in distress in Spain.