

chapter 4

Europe to 1618



The sixteenth century was a chaotic time in Europe. At the beginning of the century, monarchies were largely hereditary estates with monarchs who had to be constantly on the alert for assassination or invasion—either from within, by local rivals, or from without, by hostile neighboring countries. By the end of the era, most nations had taken important steps toward achieving modern centralized governments. Some nations succeeded much better than others.

The landowner of a hereditary estate could run his property as he pleased, with no interference from others. In the same way, the early monarchs believed that they had the absolute right to rule over their much larger properties—their kingdoms. However, monarchs had to maintain the loyalty of their subjects if they wanted to remain on their thrones. The nobility wanted privileges and power, the advisers and court officials wanted influence over policy, the courts wanted control over the justice system, the military wanted to fight, and the people wanted the monarch's protection and a healthy economy in which they could support their families. Balancing all these elements called for skills in diplomacy and realism; if the monarch did not possess such skills, the kingdom could not be a dominant power.

CHAPTER 4 OBJECTIVES

- Explain the goals of Ferdinand and Isabel of Spain and how they achieved them.
- Describe the reigns of Queens Mary and Elizabeth of England.
- Describe the results of Charles V's division of Hapsburg lands between his heirs.

Chapter 4 Time Line

- 1469 Crowns of Aragon and Castile are politically united
- 1478 Establishment of Spanish Inquisition
- 1492 Expulsion of Jews from Spain
- 1499 Expulsion of Muslims from Spain
- 1497 Juana marries Philip the Handsome of Ghent
- 1500 Birth of Charles of Ghent; will become Charles I of Spain in 1516 and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1519
- 1509 Catherine of Aragon marries Henry VIII of England
- 1553 Mary Tudor becomes Queen of England
- 1558 Elizabeth Tudor becomes Queen of England
- 1588 Defeat of the Spanish Armada
- 1603 Death of Elizabeth I

Spain

North African Muslims invaded the Iberian Peninsula in the early 700s and controlled much of the territory for more than seven hundred years. It was only toward the end of the Middle Ages that Christian armies began to drive them from power. During the 1400s, the expansion of the Spanish military led to success in this venture. This retaking of the lands that would eventually become the nations of Portugal and Spain is known as the *Reconquista*.

At this time, Spain was not a unified nation but a collection of principalities. The two strongest were Aragon in western Spain and Castile in eastern Spain. Each of these provinces had annexed others until they achieved the status of kingdoms. In 1469, Ferdinand of Aragon married Isabel of Castile, uniting the crowns and consolidating Spanish power. Both were monarchs in their own right, but there was no European tradition of female monarchs; therefore, Isabel considered it politically expedient to share some of her authority with Ferdinand. Isabel was queen of Castile, where Ferdinand had limited authority but could not act without her counsel and consent. Ferdinand was king of Aragon, where Isabel had no power or authority except as his consort.

The major goal of the Spanish monarchs can be summed up in one word: control. Control over the nobility would make their position on the throne secure. Control over the population would prevent any threats of uprising or civil war. Control over the other Spanish provinces would unite the kingdom and give the monarchs greater power and authority in Europe.

Control of the Nobility

Relations between the Spanish monarchy and the aristocracy were based on an exchange of favors for loyalty. The monarch needed to control the hereditary nobles, quelling any desire they might have to depose, assassinate, or rise up against royal authority; on their side, the nobles depended on the monarch for privileges. Isabel and Ferdinand offered the nobles major privileges: salaried offices and the titles that accompanied them, substantial rewards for military service, and grants of land that they could pass on to their heirs. In exchange, the Spanish nobles were remarkably loyal to the throne; as was usual in an absolute monarchy, the nobles were conservative, with no incentive to alter a system that brought them rich rewards in return for relatively little effort.

Control of the People

In 1478, Isabel and Ferdinand established the Spanish Inquisition, which reported directly to the monarch rather than operating under the authority of the Church. Although the Muslims had been driven from power, many Muslims still lived in Spain; the peninsula also had a substantial Jewish population. The monarchs believed that for the good of the state, the people should all have the same faith. This would prevent civil unrest, conflicts, and possible uprisings. A homogeneous nation, according to the monarchs' way of thinking, would be more peaceful.

Jews and Muslims were faced with three choices: convert to Christianity by choice, convert by force, or leave the country. In 1492, all Jews were ordered to convert or leave Spain; in 1499, the same order was issued against Muslims.

Naturally, many Jews and Muslims chose to convert, not wishing to give up home, friends, livelihood, and family. They remained objects of suspicion in the eyes of the Inquisition, which questioned the sincerity of their conversions; by Spanish law, it was a crime to practice any non-Christian religion, even in the privacy of one's home. If someone observed that the Jewish converts next door never ate pork, for example, the neighbor could denounce the family to the Inquisition on suspicion of practicing Judaism. The Inquisition would arrest such people, then use a variety of interrogation techniques to find the facts. In cases of high crimes, the Inquisitors used torture, which had been standard under the Roman laws on which the Inquisition was based. The Inquisition was an enormously effective royal tool for maintaining control by means of fear.

Control of the Lands

In 1492, the Spanish army completed the *Reconquista* by capturing Granada, the last Muslim stronghold. With the war over, Isabel could turn her attention to her longstanding interest in establishing a viable sea route to Asia. Her sponsorship of the first voyage of Christopher Columbus marked the beginning of the cultural exchange between Europe and the Americas (see Chapter 7). After Isabel's death, Ferdinand continued to acquire more land; he annexed provinces in Italy and France and even expanded as far as Oran in North Africa.

Isabel and Ferdinand cemented or established important foreign alliances by arranging dynastic marriages for their children. Princess Catherine of Aragon married Arthur of England; when he died, she married his younger brother Henry, who would rule as Henry VIII. Princess Juana married Philip of Ghent (sometimes called "Philip the Handsome"), son of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I. By birth, Philip would inherit all the considerable Hapsburg lands in central Europe; he was also the likely successor to his father as Holy Roman Emperor.

Spain in the 1500s

Queen Isabel died in 1504; although Juana inherited the throne of Castile, she was not mentally or emotionally stable enough to perform her duties. Knowing of her daughter's condition, Isabel had arranged for Ferdinand to serve as regent until Juana's son Charles of Ghent, born in 1500, was old enough to rule.

Ferdinand died in 1516; on his grandfather's death, Charles of Ghent inherited both Castile and Aragon and was crowned King Charles I of Spain. He also inherited all Hapsburg lands in central Europe, which put him in possession of more territory than any one individual had ever ruled in Europe. At first, Charles was much more interested in the Holy Roman Empire than in Spain; his Spanish subjects interpreted his long absences as disrespect, and rebelled. Once his loyal supporters had put down the rebellion, Charles agreed to reform his habits. He returned to Spain and remained there for the balance of his life, overseeing his responsibilities as his subjects had expected.

Charles had several sisters, all of whom married heirs to various thrones in Denmark, Hungary, Portugal, and France. These marriages solidified alliances between Spain and these European states. In 1519, he was elected Holy Roman Emperor, making him Charles I of Spain and Charles V of Germany.

A devout Catholic like all the Spanish monarchs, Charles engaged in a series of wars to try to wipe out Protestantism and reunite Europe under the Catholic faith. These efforts were costly, time-consuming, and ultimately unsuccessful. With the Peace of Augsburg of 1555, which established that each elector in the empire could choose the religion of his own state, Charles abdicated. He turned the Holy Roman Empire over to his brother Ferdinand and abdicated the throne of Spain in favor of his son Philip, who would rule as Philip II.

Philip II and the Fall of Spain

Philip II inherited perhaps the most prosperous and powerful kingdom in Europe. By the 1550s, Spain boasted a thriving wool industry, a powerful navy, a stable aristocracy, religious unity (albeit enforced), and great wealth coming in from the American colonies. In addition, Philip's close family ties to several rulers in Austria and central Europe created strong national alliances for Spain.

By the time Philip inherited the throne, Spain had reaped tremendous profits from trade with its American colonies. Spain had always been a shipping economy, since it had long stretches of coastline and its ships were accustomed to navigating the Mediterranean as well as the Atlantic. This high degree of maritime skill was one reason Spain had been the first nation to sponsor transatlantic voyages.

Philip established Spain's first national capital in the city of Madrid. Until his accession to the throne, the royal court had traveled throughout the provinces, settling first in one city, then another. Philip, whose natural bent was for

administration rather than war, preferred a stable working environment and thus a stationary court. He chose Madrid because it had two advantages. First, it was centrally located in the realm. Second, it was an insignificant town at the time; by choosing Madrid, Philip did not create regional rivalry among the more established centers of learning, industry, and culture. Had he chosen a city such as Seville, it might have created resentment among the wealthy residents of the cities he rejected.

Like all the Spanish monarchs, Philip was a devout Catholic. Unlike Henry IV of France, who had converted for reasons of political expediency, Philip had no religious tolerance in his nature. He refused to allow the practice of any religion except Catholicism anywhere in his realms, including the distant American colonies.

The Holy Roman Empire

As you read earlier, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V was also King Charles I of Spain. Charles divided his Spanish and central European lands between two family members. His brother Ferdinand would rule the empire as Ferdinand I. Although the formal transfer of power did not take place until 1556, Ferdinand had already been ruling the Austrian Hapsburg lands for thirty years.

Ferdinand's major foreign-policy goal was to withstand the constant threat of Turkish invasion. In 1529, the Turks under Suleiman the Magnificent laid siege to Vienna. The next seventeen years saw repeated Turkish invasions that the Austrians managed to repel; however, the Turks could always be counted on to come back and try again. In 1547, a peace treaty divided Hungary into three zones: Royal Hungary under Ferdinand's rule, Transylvania under its own rule, and the rest—the largest share—under Turkish control.

As Holy Roman Emperor and also king of both Bohemia and Hungary, Ferdinand ruled over a diverse population that included ethnic Germans, Czechs, Poles, and Hungarians. His subjects were also religiously mixed, including both Lutherans and Catholics. Ferdinand believed that the only way to manage such a varied population was to maintain a centrally controlled, efficient civil service. He established three councils of government: one executive, one administrative, and one judicial. He retained the loyalty and cooperation of the great landlords by allowing them most of the responsibility for day-to-day government at the local level. He also allowed his subjects freedom of worship; as a Catholic, Ferdinand would have preferred to rule a Catholic realm, and as

Holy Roman Emperor he was obliged to favor the Catholic cause. However, his attempts to do so involved persuasion rather than force, and he certainly preferred Lutheranism to the Islam practiced by the Turks. Like other successful monarchs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Ferdinand realized that no government would ultimately succeed in dictating the personal faith of its subjects.

Ferdinand I had laid the foundations of a united Austrian state. Although he divided his lands among his sons on his death in 1564, Austria would emerge from the Thirty Years' War as a relatively strong, unified empire. (See Chapter 5.)

England and the Triumph of Protestantism

In 1553, Mary Tudor inherited the throne of England, succeeding her half-brother Edward VI. Like her Spanish mother, Catherine of Aragon, Mary was a Catholic; on assuming the throne, she restored Catholicism as the state religion. In 1554 she married Philip, her cousin and fellow Catholic and then-heir to the throne of Spain. The marriage was highly unpopular in England, because Philip was Catholic, foreign, and father to a son from a previous marriage; the English did not welcome the idea of a foreign and Catholic heir (at age thirty-seven, Mary seemed unlikely to bear healthy children of her own). The marriage was purely an affair of state on Philip's side; occupied with military strategy and administrative tasks in Spain, he spent almost no time in England.

Mary was given the nickname "Bloody Mary" for the number of Protestants who were executed during her reign. By her order, between 250 and 300 Protestants were executed or burned at the stake; however, due process of English law was observed in all these cases. The accused were tried in court and executed.

Mary reigned for only a short time; she was well past her youth when she became queen, and she was not physically robust. She died childless in 1558 and was succeeded by her half-sister Elizabeth, daughter of Anne Boleyn.

Queen Elizabeth

Elizabeth I had a thoroughly pragmatic attitude toward religion and, in fact, toward almost every affair of state. Elizabeth was hardly likely to profess or practice Catholicism, since the Church had excommunicated her father for

marrying her mother (see Chapter 2). However, she was tolerant for a monarch of her era. She restored Anglicanism as the state religion, but believed that faith was a personal matter and should not be dictated by the crown. Elizabeth felt far more interest in managing affairs of state than in waging religious warfare.

One important aspect of Elizabeth's realistic attitude toward ruling was her belief in the importance of personal popularity. It is clear from her actions and her writings that Elizabeth believed firmly in the divine right of kings (and queens); she considered herself an absolute monarch. However, she also knew that absolute monarchs could be overthrown or assassinated, and she knew that England's only other experience with a female monarch, under Mary, had not inspired confidence in a woman's ability to govern. Elizabeth's goal as monarch was to rule a peaceful and prosperous realm. She understood that she would be able to achieve much more with a loyal population of subjects, and therefore cultivated popular goodwill as a matter of policy. She was highly successful: two of her people's nicknames for her were "Gloriana" and "Good Queen Bess."

Another aspect of Elizabeth's pragmatism was her refusal to marry. Since she was a woman, she would have had to share her power with whatever prince she married, just as Isabel of Castile had recognized the wisdom of sharing her authority with Ferdinand. Elizabeth was only twenty-five when she became queen; therefore, it seemed quite likely that she would marry. In fact, she received several proposals, including one from Mary's widower, Philip II of Spain, and another from Henry III of France. Any nation considering a matrimonial alliance with Elizabeth had to maintain good relations with England; therefore her single status, especially during her childbearing years, was very useful to her as a diplomatic tool. In fact, she never married. When she died in 1603, the Tudor dynasty ended and the crown passed to her cousin James Stuart, king of Scotland.

The period from about 1550 to 1650 is often known as the Elizabethan era. It is also called "the English Renaissance" due to a great flowering of music, visual art, poetry, and drama. Playwright and poet William Shakespeare (c. 1564–1616), who can safely be called the most important English-language writer in history, was active in London theater during Elizabeth's reign. His colleagues included Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, John Webster, and John Ford. Poets John Donne and John Milton, organist and composer Henry Purcell, and painter Hans Holbein (who had been active under Henry VIII and painted a number of the most famous images of the Tudors) were other notable creative artists of the era.

The Defeat of the Armada

During the 1500s, England realized that Spain was beginning to reap enormous profits from the New World. The Spanish galleons carried home considerable prizes in money, jewels, and other treasures. This led to the beginnings of piracy on the high seas. An English ship would attack a homebound Spanish vessel, murder or capture its crew, and commandeer the treasure for the queen. The pirates were rewarded for their exploits with a fixed share of the proceeds. Elizabeth even knighted the fearless pirate Captain Francis Drake as a reward for his many successful ventures.

Hostility had existed between England and Spain for some time. After Queen Mary's death, Philip had attempted to arrange a marriage with her younger sister, but Elizabeth rejected his offer. As a Catholic, Philip was a natural enemy of any Protestant nation; additionally, he resented Elizabeth's support of Protestant uprisings in France and the Netherlands. On Elizabeth's side, she was displeased over Philip's support of Mary Queen of Scots, who had attempted to wrest the throne of England from her royal cousin. The queen's encouragement of piracy against Spanish ships was what finally persuaded Philip to attack England and wipe out its navy.

In 1588, the Spanish armed fleet, called the Armada, sailed toward the English Channel. The Armada consisted of 130 ships and thousands of soldiers. The fleet looked very impressive and intimidating, but the English navy was more technologically advanced, with ships that were smaller, lighter, better armed, and easier to maneuver.

The English had set aside a number of ships that were no longer seaworthy, loaded them with explosives, and manned them with skeleton crews. In the darkness, the few sailors on board steered each of these ships directly toward the Armada, setting them on fire along the way, and only jumping overboard once the course was set and the ship was well alight. When the Spaniards saw these burning ships bearing down on them, apparently by magic, they panicked. The formation of the Armada descended into chaos and disorder as each captain ordered his crew to turn the ship and run away. When a fierce storm then came up, the English knew they had won. This battle marked the end of Spanish supremacy in European history.

QUIZ

- _____ marked the end of a period in which Spain was a dominant European power.
 - The conquest of Granada
 - The death of Queen Mary
 - The defeat of the Armada
 - The marriage of Ferdinand and Isabel
- Juana was unable to rule as queen of Castile because
 - she was a woman.
 - she was too old.
 - she was unmarried.
 - she was mentally unstable.
- The officials of the Spanish Inquisition reported directly to
 - the Church in Rome.
 - the military.
 - the monarch.
 - the civil courts.
- What was one practical reason for the Spanish government to insist that all the people must practice the same religious faith?
 - to avoid the need for popular elections
 - to avoid the possibility of domestic conflict
 - to keep the monarchs more securely on their thrones
 - to maintain the union of Aragon and Castile
- The term *Reconquista* refers to the Spanish takeover of
 - the Holy Roman Empire.
 - colonies in the Americas.
 - provinces in France and Italy.
 - the Iberian peninsula.
- _____ is still considered the greatest English writer who ever lived.
 - John Donne
 - Hans Holbein
 - John Milton
 - William Shakespeare