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Introduction

On 8 August 1064, after a gruelling six-month siege, the Muslim defenders of Coimbra surrendered to forces led by King Fernando I of León-Castile. This strategic riverbank city was to become the Portuguese capital for much of the medieval period, and its capture marked a critical juncture in the long struggle between Christendom and Islam for possession of the Iberian Peninsula – the *Reconquista* – which in Portugal came to an end with the fall of the last Muslim enclaves on the Algarve coast in 1250. The reconquest in Portugal has frequently been subsumed into more general accounts of the reconquest in Spain. Yet during the period between the mid-eleventh and mid-thirteenth century Portugal developed from a small, embattled county under the authority of the neighbouring monarch of León-Castile into an independent kingdom with stable borders that have remained largely unchanged until the present day. The successful prosecution of the reconquest appears to have been intricately interconnected with a process of national formation and the achievement of political independence from Spain. The Portuguese historian Joaquim Veríssimo Serrão thus reflected an opinion commonly held among his compatriots when he insisted: ‘Portugal was, above all, a product of the *reconquista*.’¹

The origins of the reconquest lie in the early decades of the eighth century – when an invading Arab and Berber army brought Islam forcibly into the Iberian Peninsula. The Christian Visigothic defenders were scattered at the decisive battle of Gaudalete River in 711, and the last Visigothic king, Roderick, was assumed killed in the melee. Organised opposition rapidly collapsed, and the remnants of Visigothic society either submitted to Muslim domination or fled into the distant north. These fugitives were eventually rallied by Pelayo, the first king of Asturias, who then confronted the all-conquering Muslim forces on a small hill known as Covadonga. Despite Muslim numerical superiority and the blandishments of Bishop Oppa, who spoke for those Christians willing to accept the domination of the invaders, Pelayo remained resolute.

2 *The Reconquest Kings of Portugal*

[The bishop began] ‘My son, I think you are not unaware that all Spain was formerly governed as one realm under the rule of the Goths and outshone all other lands in wisdom and learning. Also, as I said before, the whole of the Goths when gathered together were not strong enough to withstand the onrush of the Ishmailites [i.e. the Muslims]. How will you therefore be able to defend yourself...?’

To this Pelayo replied: ‘Have you not read in Holy Scripture that the Church of God can become as small as a grain of mustard and can then, by God’s grace, be made to grow again even larger?’

The bishop answered: ‘Indeed it is so written.’

Pelayo said: ‘Then Christ is our hope [that] Spain may be saved and the army of the Gothic people restored.’²

This stirring account from the anonymous *Crónica de Alfonso III* was accepted by later historians as a classic statement of the defeated Visigothic people’s desire to reclaim their usurped inheritance. The subsequent southern expansion of the kingdom of Asturias could then be represented as a reconquest of lost territory that followed directly from Pelayo’s original act of defiance. This connection neatly legitimised military aggression with both a divine mandate and an appeal to natural justice. For generations of Iberian historians the reconquest became the cornerstone of their perception of the past. Ramón Menéndez Pidal followed a long and illustrious historical tradition when he assured his readers: ‘The proposal to recover all the soil of the Fatherland, which never ceased to appeal to the mass of people... had been the united enterprise of all Spain.’³

Yet the concept of the reconquest, for all its political and patriotic utility, was more complicated than jingoistic interpretations might suggest. Despite exhaustive efforts by generations of Spanish historians, no physical evidence of the encounter at Covadonga, either archaeological, numismatic or documentary, has been brought to light. There are no eighth-century accounts of the battle, and almost two hundred years of silence lie between the event and the earliest extant descriptions of it. Nor were these tenth-century authors merely disinterested antiquarians. Behind the composition of this epic tale of defiant resistance was a clear agenda: to link their own monarch, Alfonso III of Asturias (866–910), to the long-defunct Visigothic kings. The aim was nothing less than (to borrow Peter Linehan’s forceful metaphor) the hijacking of a royal body and the theft of its identification papers!⁴ Even before the Arab invasions, the Asturias region does not seem to have been considered a part of the Visigothic kingdom; those few who took refuge there had no greater claim to the Visigothic heritage than did the many of their co-religionists who remained on their ancestral lands under Muslim authority. Nor is the uncertain pedigree of the Asturian kings the only factor undermining the traditional construction of the reconquest. For there is something inherently implausible, even contrary to human nature, in the

idea of an implacable sectarian animosity being maintained for centuries. Over time relations appear to have evolved beyond the simple, unremitting hostility attributed to Pelayo. Warfare, when it was waged, had concrete and limited aims. A culture of *convivencia*, or coexistence, gradually prevailed, in which economic, political and cultural links were maintained within an atmosphere of pragmatic tolerance and enlightened self-interest. During the tenth century faith-based antagonism was dwindling and many of the more strident expressions of sectarian fervour appear to have been the politically motivated interpolations of later generations. Certainly in Portugal this seems to have been the case. Large Muslim and Jewish communities lived in relative harmony under Christian rule. Effective relationships were maintained between cultures at all social levels. Only towards the end of the eleventh century is there evidence of resurgent sectarian animosity.⁵

This re-emergence in Iberia of an ideology of confrontation appears to have originated outside the peninsula. Portuguese leaders nevertheless chose to place themselves at the forefront of the resulting clash of cultures, and their efforts paid a handsome dividend in terms of territorial and political gain. Among the most significant of these gains was a papal bull, *Manifestis probatum*, issued on 23 May 1179 by Pope Alexander III (1159–1181). In this bull Pope Alexander formally recognised Afonso Henriques (1128–1185), the ruler and self-proclaimed king of Portugal, as monarch of a sovereign realm. ‘You have been an intrepid destroyer of the enemies of the name of Christ and a diligent supporter of the Christian faith,’ the pontiff approved, ‘leaving to posterity a praiseworthy name and an example to imitate.’⁶ The delivery of *Manifestis probatum* marked a climax in the long campaign by the ruling house of Portugal to establish an authority independent of the neighbouring Spanish monarchs. Pope Alexander made clear in his endorsement that a major factor in his support for Afonso’s royal pretensions was the Portuguese leader’s success as a warrior defending the frontier between Christendom and the Islamic world. What is less apparent, however, is the means by which the Portuguese ruling house was able to translate military success against Muslim forces to the south of Portugal into political independence from the Christian Spanish kingdoms to the east.

A clue to where part of the answer might lie is in the nature of *Manifestis probatum* itself. That Pope Alexander was in a position to determine the status of a Portuguese ruler is a striking demonstration of the pervasive influence European institutions had come to exert in the Iberian Peninsula. In his groundbreaking work *The Making of Europe* Robert Bartlett traced the formation during the medieval period of an aggressively expansive Latin Christian culture. This culture was created when a reform-minded Church, eager to impose ecclesiastic conformity on Christian society, found a convergence of interest with an adventurous, land-hungry and militarily proficient secular society.⁷ From the tenth century onwards, pressure from this expansionist Latin Christendom began to be felt throughout the Iberian

Peninsula. Encroaching foreign influence had many manifestations: the direct immigration of individuals and institutions; the development of commercial and social networks; and, perhaps most pervasively, the transfer of ideas and social mores. As a result of this increased communication there gradually emerged among European and Iberian Christians a sense of commonality, of an identity based on shared faith and through it a shared culture. But even as community identities widened to include peoples widely separated geographically, those of alternative faiths were correspondingly excluded. Crucially for the future direction of Portugal, Afonso Henriques personified the cultural dichotomy of his society: for he was the son of an Iberian princess, Infanta Teresa, and an immigrant Latin Christian nobleman, Count Henry of Burgundy. By virtue of this mixed ancestry Afonso – and subsequently the royal dynasty he founded – were well placed to take fullest advantage of the gradual reorientation of Portuguese society from a characteristically pluralistic Iberian culture into the south-western frontier of an uncompromisingly orthodox Latin Christendom.

This book is certainly not the first attempt to assess the impact of the reconquest on the development of Portugal. The debt owed to the body of work already directed towards these critical centuries will be immediately apparent from the footnotes presented. Nevertheless, over a period of time, significant gaps have opened between several different spheres of scholarly interest. Portuguese historians have built up an impressive tradition of research on the early history of their country, yet it is a historiography that is not always easily accessible to the non-Portuguese reader. Moreover, an underlying agenda for much of this scholarly effort has been to trace (and thus to justify) the achievement of political independence from Spain. Traditional Portuguese historiography of the reconquest period has, as Derek Lomax observed, ‘preferred to stress the individuality of Portugal as against the rest of the peninsula, and so [has] laid more emphasis on relations with the Leonese and Castilians than with the Muslims.’⁸ This focus on the local has similarly tended to marginalise the role of Latin Christian cultural influence during this decisive period in Portuguese history. On the other hand, scholars working outside the Iberian Peninsula have tended to concentrate their attention on Portugal’s larger neighbour, Spain. Although this approach is readily explained by factors such as the relative size of the two countries, the similarities in their historical development, and the often arbitrary geographical border between them, there is a danger that the very real distinctiveness of Portuguese development can be obscured.

The purpose of this book, therefore, is twofold. The initial aim is to provide for the Anglophone reader an entry point into a remarkable period in the history of a remarkable country. Yet Portugal did not develop in isolation. A secondary aim of this book is to highlight the pervasive and multifaceted nature of Latin Christian influence in the region during this formative historical phase. Admittedly, this focus on the strengthening links between

Portugal and Europe cannot help but marginalise a number of important internal historical processes – although references in the footnotes should allow those with special interests in these areas to pursue them further. The compensations, however, are many. As Robert Bartlett has observed, ‘the expansionary power of [Latin Christian] civilization sprang from its centres, even if it may be seen most starkly at its edges.’⁹ While this book is primarily intended as an introduction to the fascinating early history of one small kingdom, it approaches this history by examining the profound and ultimately decisive effects of the very forces that forged Latin Christian Europe as a whole.

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