

Spanish Empire: 2. From 1580

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THE SPANISH EMPIRE 1580–1700

By 1580, the main political, administrative, and economic foundations of the Spanish Empire – established by Charles V – had been laid. The Spanish Empire (also known, especially with reference to the 16th and 17th centuries, as the Hispanic monarchy or the Catholic monarchy) was the part of the European, American, and Asian empire that Philip II inherited from his father Charles V in 1556: the Hispanic crowns of Castile and Aragon; the Italian territories of Naples, Sicily, Sardinia, and Milan; the Franche-Comté; the Low Countries; the northern African enclaves of Melilla, Oran, Bujia, and Tripoli; and the American viceroyalties of Peru and New Spain (which included the General Captaincy of the Philippine Islands in Southeast Asia). The “Austrian” or central European domains of Charles V’s empire were inherited by Philip II’s uncle, Ferdinand of Habsburg, who was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 1558.

From 1580 to 1700, the Spanish Empire was the composite monarchy of Europe *par excellence*. Most territories of the empire had been united to the monarchy under the *aeque principaliter* principle, according to which the different kingdoms, provinces, principalities, and republics retained their own status, laws, institutions, and privileges after being incorporated by the Spanish Empire. This convention determined the

characteristics of the empire’s political and administrative mechanisms. The jurisdictional fragmentation characteristic of these mechanisms lent stability throughout an enormous range of territories that were home to different traditions and legal frameworks. There were almost constant negotiations and rounds of compacts being drawn up between the crown and the ruling classes of the empire’s different areas. Inevitably, alterations arose; examples include the Aragonese revolt of 1591, the Catalan rebellion of 1640, the uprising (and independence) of Portugal in 1640, and the insurrection of Naples and Sicily during 1647–1648. In order to deal with the various regions and branches of administration, the crown created several *councils*. In the case of a given kingdom or province, its councilors were usually native inhabitants of the area. After 1580, the Council of Portugal (1582), the Council of Flanders (1588), and the Council of Finance (1593) were added to the existing Council of Castile, Council of Aragon, Council of State, Council of the Treasury, Council of Indies, and Council of Italy (among many others). The social and political structure of the Spanish Empire was complex. Its subjects took part in several social bodies – such as strata, manors, communities, corporations, and guilds – which were formalized through legal and/or family bonds. The aristocracy ended up governing the various state devices, especially in the second half of the 17th century, and this system was transferred to the American viceroyalties of Peru and New Spain. In the Americas, however, titled aristocracy was less powerful and social complexity was not only greater but also complicated by observed racial categories with legal consequences.

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The enormous machinery of the Spanish Empire suffered more years of war than of peace from 1580 to 1700. The year 1580 witnessed one of the most important events of the reign of Philip II (1556–1598). In that year, Philip II acceded to the crown of Portugal when Henry I of Portugal died, after which the Spanish Empire also annexed overseas territories of Portugal such as Brazil in the Americas, the Maluku Islands in Indonesia, Macao in China, and Diu and Goa in India. Nonetheless, following the logic of a composite monarchy, Castile and Portugal kept their overseas empires and administration separate. The cost of such an enormous empire was that Spain was immersed in war for more than a century: from 1580 (and earlier) to 1669.

In the late 16th century, Philip II concentrated the crown's strength in the Low Countries, which had rebelled under the Protestant umbrella in 1566. By 1585, Alexander Farnese – viceroy of the Low Countries since 1578 – had conquered Antwerp and the southern part of the Low Countries (present-day Belgium), which came back to the Catholic fold. Philip II planned then to attack and conquer England. However, Queen Elizabeth reacted strongly to what she considered a menace, and the Spanish Armada suffered a resounding maritime defeat in 1588. Thereafter, the Spanish crown concentrated its efforts in France. Philip II did not accept the ascent of Protestant-raised Henry IV to the French crown, claiming that his own daughter was the rightful heir. Spain invaded France in 1590, and a peace was signed between the two crowns in 1598 (by which time Henry IV had converted to Catholicism). Philip II died in that year.

The reign of Philip III (1598–1621) was marked by a less aggressive foreign policy. The Spanish and Dutch republics signed a truce that lasted from 1609 to 1621; even so, Hispanic fleets and galleons suffered

attacks by Dutch and English corsairs and pirates all over the world (and especially in the Caribbean) during the 17th century's early decades. The long reign of Philip IV (1621–1665) witnessed the Spanish Empire's progressive loss of hegemony in Europe and the rest of the world. After the start of the Thirty Years War in central Europe in 1618 and upon the expiration of its truce with the Dutch republic, the Spanish crown engaged in a war that was not strictly European but rather truly worldwide. Spanish imperial forces faced the Dutch republic not only in the Low Countries but also in the Americas, where Dutch forces concentrated on Brazil. In Asia, the Dutch ascendancy over Iberia's empires was evidenced by Holland's constant attacks and blockades against Manila and its taking of the southern part of Taiwan in 1624 as well as by the Japanese concession of Dejima to the Dutch East India Company (VOC), among other events. In 1632, the Spanish crown became directly involved in the Thirty Years War after signing an assistance treaty with the Holy Roman Empire. The outbreak in 1635 of war with France was disastrous for the Spanish crown. The Spanish army suffered a devastating defeat at Rocroi in 1643. These were years during which war and continuous financial shortages motivated the attempts of Philip IV and his favorite Don Gaspar de Guzmán y Pimentel, count-duke of Olivares, to concentrate power in the crown. This logic had been followed by the 1625 Union of Arms, according to which each kingdom of the empire must contribute to the empire's defense. In 1640, both the Catalan rebellion and the secession of Portugal were responses to those attempts to centralize the empire's devices and thereby secure more financial resources for the crown. After signing the peace of 1648, Philip IV recognized the independence of the Dutch Republic after 70 years of war. Yet war continued during Philip IV's

reign, and his struggle with France did not end until the Peace of the Pyrenees in 1659. Far from Europe, England definitely strengthened positions that had been under Spanish influence in the Caribbean Sea.

The reign of Charles II (1665–1700) confirmed the Spanish Empire's loss of hegemony in the world, although it was also a time of economic recovery and of reforms that aimed to lighten tributes, reduce bureaucratic expenses, and improve administration.

The beginning of the Spanish Empire's fall in the late 16th and early 17th centuries coincided with the Iberian economy's 17th-century crisis. The demography and agriculture of all Iberian territories, especially central Castile, suffered a depression from the late 16th century to about 1660. After growing in the 16th century, industry shrank during most of the 17th century; at the same time, some main internal commercial circuits of central Spain weakened. Iberian trade with other European markets fared somewhat better during this period, but the imbalance between exporting and importing – in favor of the latter – became more accentuated over the 17th century. Those years saw a displacement of the European center of gravity northward, a shift that reflected the Spanish Empire's decline and the rise of the Dutch and English empires.

Despite the 17th-century Iberian economic crisis just described and the Spanish Empire's concomitant decline, some of its territories were prospering. The American economy was practically the opposite of Iberia's economy, as most of the colonial economic indicators were positive. Furthermore, trans-Atlantic trade continued to grow during most of the 17th century – although, from about 1620, it was not only Iberians but also northern European commercial companies that benefited from the American trade. Trans-Pacific trade, represented by the Manila Galleon route (which connected the Americas with Asian

and especially Chinese trade), followed a trend similar to that of the trans-Atlantic trade. Thus emerged, during the 16th and 17th centuries, a new global economy based on international trade. The machinery of the Spanish Empire, which was based on multiple political and legal entities and markets, adapted poorly to this new economic reality.

The decline of the empire was not accompanied by cultural decadence. To the contrary, the period 1580–1650 is now viewed as the Golden Age of Spanish culture. Along with Baroque art, which was the most visible expression of the Catholic Church's power in the empire, painters like Diego Velázquez produced acclaimed works of art during the 17th century. The flowering of the arts was especially outstanding in the field of letters. Some of the most renowned works of the picaresque genre, and also the poems of Luis de Góngora and Francisco de Quevedo, were produced during the reigns of Philip II, Philip III, and Philip IV. Like the most outstanding novel of the Spanish culture, *Don Quijote de la Mancha* by Miguel de Cervantes (published in 1605 and 1615), these works faithfully reflect the Spanish society and worldview of that time. There was also more openness to popular expressions of culture, as is evident in the writings of Lope de Vega. This literary flowering extended beyond the Iberian Peninsula. The *fin de siècle* was the period in which the Peruvian Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, whose style was within Renaissance canons, and Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, who was born and raised in New Spain, produced their best histories and dramas.

THE SPANISH EMPIRE UNDER THE BOURBONS, 1700–1815

The year 1700 ushered in a new period of the Spanish Empire. Charles II died without issue, which triggered a European war for

the Spanish crown. In his will, Charles II had proclaimed his successor to be Philip of Bourbon, duke of Anjou and grandson of a sister of the Spanish queen. The archduke Charles, a son of the emperor Leopold von Habsburg and Eleonor von Neuburg (who was another sister of the Spanish queen), did not accept the will and considered himself to be the legitimate king of Spain. The main maritime powers of Europe – namely, England (United Kingdom from 1707) and Holland – backed the archduke, since their imperial interests would be damaged if Spain were dominated by France and Philippe XIV. England and Holland united with Austria in a Grand Alliance, which Savoy, Portugal, and other minor forces later joined. In the Iberian Peninsula, most ruling classes of the crown of Aragon (especially those from Valencia and Catalonia) supported the archduke, whereas most Castilian elites supported Philip of Bourbon (Philip V). A long war of succession, waged mainly in the Low Countries, Italy, and Spain, concluded with the Treaty of Utrecht-Rastatt (1713–1714). According to this treaty, Philip V was recognized as king of Spain and its American possessions; however, he had to relinquish the monarchy's European territories (i.e., Milan, Naples, Sardinia, and the Spanish Low Countries), which passed to Austria. Later, Philip V's son, Charles of Bourbon (the future Charles III), conquered Naples and was proclaimed king of the Two Sicilies in 1734. Britain, which took Minorca and Gibraltar during the war, kept them. France had to cede Hudson Bay, Newfoundland, and Acadia to Britain as well as a part of Guiana to Portuguese Brazil. In the Americas, Spain abandoned Sacramento to Portugal in 1715. Notwithstanding that treaty, the archduke Charles – who had been proclaimed Holy Roman Emperor in 1711 – did not accept that Philip V was king of Spain until the Treaty of Vienna was signed in 1725.

The triumph of the Bourbon king in Spain had consequences for the organization and administration of the empire. Although the Bourbon kings preserved the multiple titles of the diverse kingdoms integrated in the monarchy, they attempted to develop political centralization. Philip V approved the *Nueva Planta* decrees for Aragon, Catalonia, and Valencia, which became governed by the laws of Castile. Philip V and his successors preserved the councils, which had executive and judicial functions, but the Council of State no longer met. The Council of Castile, which in 1707 had extended its jurisdiction to the crown of Aragon, became the main administrative institution of the Spanish territories. Besides existing councils, the Crown created *juntas*, which consisted of members of several councils in charge of particular executive spheres of the state along with the Secretaries of State and *Despacho*, which were the embryonic form of what later became ministries. Councils and the Secretaries of State and *Despacho* co-existed, but the latter gained ground against the former during the 18th century. Despite these centralizing trends, the organization of territories was still a complex task. In Aragon, jurisdiction was in the hands of a general captain and the *Real Audiencia* court, the same as in Galicia. In Navarre, the figure of the viceroy was maintained. In Castile, jurisdiction was held by the *Chancillería* of Granada south to the Tajo River, by the *Chancillería* of Valladolid north to the Tajo River, and by the *Sala de Alcaldes de Casa y Corte* in Madrid. In South America, the new viceroyalty Nueva Granada was founded in 1717. Spain's establishment of the Secretary of the Navy took some competences previously handled by the Indies Council.

The Treaty of Utrecht-Rastatt and the Treaty of Vienna had been duly signed; even so, the international situation was unstable during the reign of Philip V (1700–1746)

and that of his son Louis I, who reigned for seven months in 1724 after the abdication of his father (who returned to the throne when Luis I died). Philip V's international policy was driven by his attempts to recover some of the lost territories (e.g., Sicily and Sardinia) and by the family interests of his second wife, Isabel de Farnesio (Farnese), in Italy. These were years during which Spain and France signed the first Family Compact (1733) in the context of the Polish War of Succession. Conflict with the British was constant on European and American seas, especially during the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739–1748). In the Americas, Britain – which, after Utrecht, became the most powerful overseas empire of Europe – stepped up its aggressions against the Spanish American coasts (Cartagena de Indias, Portobelo) and Manila. In Spain, Philip V's secretary José Patiño transformed the army by abandoning the system of infantry regiments (*tercios*), organizing a system of recruitment, and creating 33 regiments of provincial militias in Spain. He also modernized the Spanish navy.

The Spanish Empire underwent massive changes also in the first half of the 18th century. In line with mercantilist economic approaches and after the creation of state factories in Spain, the crown reformed its institutions related to trade in the Americas. The Council of Indies and the House of Trade were moved from Seville to Cadiz, which became the empire's main European port. The fleet system, which was based on annual sailings of fleets to the Americas, was replaced by the system of ship registers (*navíos de registro*), which favored the sailing of ships more regularly. Privileged trade companies were created, and new routes (e.g., to Río de la Plata) were opened. These changes favored the growth of Atlantic trade in the second half of the 18th century, which benefited industry in Spain.

The reign of Ferdinand VI (1746–1759) was a reign of transition to that of Charles III. The most important international event during Ferdinand's reign was the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748), whose signing was followed by a period of relative peace in Europe. These new circumstances enabled the Spanish crown to focus on improving the economy and the imperial army. Most ambitious was the tax system reform undertaken by the secretary of the Treasury, Marquis of Ensenada, who established a single tax in Castile through the creation of a land registry (*catastro*).

The reign of Charles III (1759–1788) is widely acknowledged as a representative example of reformism during the Enlightenment. The main figure during the first part of his reign was the Marquis of Esquilache, secretary of the Treasury and War. Influenced by physiocratic ideas, he sought to abolish the wheat valuation (*tasa del trigo*) by which authorities fixed the price of wheat. However, this change was instituted during a time of droughts and bad crops; hence it triggered a series of rebellions in the spring of 1765. Esquilache was then quickly relieved of his post, and the Count of Aranda was appointed as president of the Council of Castile. Alongside the expulsion from Spain of Jesuits by Charles III, the remaining years of his reign were distinguished by reforms of local administration, the army, university studies, and guilds as well as his creation of the first Spanish national bank in 1782. Deep reforms were made also in the empire's American territories. Following the French model, the Spanish crown developed a system of *intendencias* (administrative divisions). In America, however, the oligarchies viewed these reforms as a threat to their autonomy. The rebellion of Túpac Amaru in Peru (1780) occurred in response to such centralizing efforts. In 1776 a new viceroyalty, that of Río de la Plata, was established. The main change in trading was the

liberalization of exchanges within the Americas and between the Americas and Spain.

In the international arena, Spain allied with France against Britain in the Seven Years War (1756–1763). The Spanish crown lost not only Cuba but also the Philippines during that war (although both were returned by Britain upon signing the Treaty of Paris). Spain later participated in the American War of Independence (1779–1783) in support of the American rebels. During this war, the Spanish and British clashed in America, the Caribbean, the Atlantic, and the western Mediterranean. Following the Treaty of Versailles (1783), Spain recovered Minorca and Florida.

The crisis of the Old Regime in Spain during the reign of Charles IV (1788–1808) coincided with the definitive end of Spain as an imperial power. In fact, the two phenomena were related. The triumph of the French Revolution, which included the beheading of Louis XVI and the severance of French–British relations, led Charles IV to war with France. The result was a disaster for Spain. In 1795 the two countries signed the Treaty of Basilea, according to which Spain had to cede St. Domingue to France. Then Charles IV, urged on by his minister Manuel de Godoy, turned to forming an alliance with France – first with the Directory and then with Napoleon Bonaparte – against Britain. The British were the victors in this conflict, for which the resounding battle of Trafalgar (1805) was decisive. The chaos in the Spanish court after Trafalgar drove Napoleon to invade Spain and appoint his own brother, Joseph Bonaparte, king of Spain. The fall of the Old Regime institutions in Spain, the gap of imperial power in the Americas, and the formation of autonomous juntas in the Americas (and in Spain) all opened the way to Latin American independence. After 15 years of war from 1810 and 1825, the American colonies won their independence from Spain. The empire broke apart into

several nation-states, including the new American countries and Spain itself.

THE SPANISH EMPIRE IN THE MODERN ERA, 1821–1975

The Spanish Empire during the Modern era was but a shadow of its earlier self. Spain retained only Cuba and Puerto Rico in the Americas, the Philippine Islands and Guam in Asia, and some possessions in North Africa. After subsequently losing Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam in its 1898 war with the United States, Spain's imperial policy focused on Africa. Following the war of Morocco (1860) and the Conference of Berlin (1884), Spain had maintained protectorates in Sidi Ifni and Western Sahara. In 1912, Spain and France divided the sultanate of Morocco into two areas of influence; the area under Spanish control included a strip from Melilla to Larache through Ceuta. However, it was difficult to control that zone – as shown by the Spanish army's (1921) defeat at Annual – and Spain did not achieve full control of its protectorate in Morocco until 1926. The other main African colony of Spain in the 19th and 20th centuries was Guinea. Spaniards took over Malabo, on the northern coast of Bioko Island, in 1843 and claimed the inland area around the Muni River in 1885. Eventually, Spain accepted (in 1968) the independence of Equatorial Guinea.

After Morocco became independent in 1956, Spain kept Sidi Ifni, Tarfaya, and Western Sahara in North Africa. Yet these territories were not long in Spanish hands: in 1958 Spain lost Tarfaya after a brief war with Morocco; in 1969 Spain ceded Sidi Ifni to Morocco; and in 1975, Morocco occupied Western Sahara during the Green March (which took place only a few days before the death of dictator Francisco Franco). Present-day Melilla and Ceuta in North Africa, which the Spanish Empire

incorporated in (respectively) 1497 and 1640, are its oldest surviving remnants; currently both cities are integrated into the country as autonomous entities in Spain's pseudo-federal system of autonomous regions.

SEE ALSO: Holy Roman Empire; Portuguese Empire: 1. Origins and development; Portuguese Empire: 2. Africa; Portuguese Empire: 3. America; Portuguese Empire: 4. Asia; Spanish Empire: 1. Origins and organization; Spanish Empire: 3. The Americas

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