

and wealth, deeming it acceptable in the sight of the Lord." Over the course of the next four centuries, other Christian princes followed Alfonso's lead. In these years, warfare shaped all aspects of Iberian society. The priests who proclaimed the *reconquista* a holy struggle against the Moorish infidel and the soldiers who waged such wars were elevated to positions of prestige. The surest path to wealth and honor lay in plunder and conquest.

By the time the Italian-born Christopher Columbus arrived in Spain in 1485, the Muslim rulers had been ejected from the entire peninsula, except Granada. The 1469 marriage of Isabel, princess of Castile, and her cousin Ferdinand, prince of Aragon, had unified the heart of what would soon be the nation of Spain. Although Isabel was only 18 when she married (and her husband a year younger), she had already shown herself to be a woman of boldness and determination, and because Castile was more powerful than Aragon, she was able to dictate the terms of the marriage contract. Together, she and Ferdinand launched a final campaign against the Moors. In 1492, Isabel and Ferdinand defeated the Muslim ruler at Granada. Muslims who chose to remain in Spain had to convert to Christianity. The noblemen surrounding Ferdinand and Isabel then insisted that the monarchs banish the roughly 150,000 Jews living in Spain. Jews could depart, convert, or face public execution.

The Age of Exploration

The same energy that fueled the *reconquista* animated many Europeans in this era to attempt to expand their power. Some organized the Crusades; some expanded militarily into Ireland and others into the region around the Baltic Sea. Merchants and ambitious princes dreamed of finding a way to circumvent the Muslim traders who were the middlemen in a thriving trade with the Far East. Europe's nobility and prosperous urban peoples desired the East's sugar, spices, fabrics, jewels, and precious metals. They were dazzled by the Italian Marco Polo's accounts of his journeys between 1275 and 1292 to the cities of China. So it was that European explorers set off in search of new routes to Asia.

In the fifteenth century, for the first time, Europeans had the necessary technology to be able to travel far from home in numbers. While Norsemen had briefly established a settlement in Newfoundland in about the year 1000, it had remained an isolated event. Now times had changed. The printing press, invented by Johannes Gutenberg in the middle of the century, allowed the rapid spread of information—like Marco Polo's text, as well as valuable maps. Through the traditional international trade routes, Europeans had gleaned gunpowder (originally from China) and navigational tools such as the compass (from the Arabs). They took the cannons they had originally learned of in the East and mounted them on ships so that they might make demands of people they encountered. The seafaring Portuguese absorbed all they had seen of other people's boats and designed the caravel, a ship that could sail faster than any previous vessel, making it possible to go farther with limited food and water.

Indeed, throughout the fifteenth century, having expelled the Muslims from their territory more rapidly than the Spaniards, the Portuguese had been gradually exploring the hitherto unknown coast of Africa. Prince Henry the Navigator encouraged many of these expeditions. By the 1470s, the Portuguese had discovered the kingdom of Benin (where Nigeria now is), and by the 1480s, they had rounded the southern tip of Africa at a point they named the Cape of Good Hope. This left them prepared to sail on to Asia and establish trading posts.