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This is a comprehensive history of the Iberian peninsula to the end of the fifteenth century, beginning with the arrival of the Visigoths before 507 and ending with the period of expansion towards the islands off the coast of west Africa and the four journeys of Christopher Columbus (1492–1504). Herbers presents the history of Spain as a microcosm of European unity on the one hand and cultural diversity on the other, culminating ultimately in the admission of Spain to the European Economic Community in 1986. Herbers is particularly interested in questions surrounding the emergence in the course of the Middle Ages of notions of nationhood and national consciousness built on cultural diversity and on the changing perceptions and connotations of what the Romans called »Hispania« and the late Middle Ages termed »Espanas«.

The study is divided into six parts preceded by an Introduction outlining the interpretive positions of Spanish twentieth-century historiographers, emerging towards the end of the Franco regime, in which Herbers notes the importance of the theme of regionalism and the diversity of cultural traditions in the peninsula. Herbers raises too the question of the cultural influence of Spain in Africa, usually ignored in favour of convivencia (cultural co-existence between Christian, Muslim, and Jewish societies) in Spain itself. The study is however far from monolithic, paying close attention to the nuances of friendly and hostile relations among the different ethnic groups residing in the peninsula, their links to the broader European scene through Spain’s participation in the Crusading movement and in the rôle of the papacy, as well as the preservation of Arab learning which made an essential contribution to European thought as a whole. The changing dynamics of acceptance and rejection, peace and war, isolation and centralization within the sub-groups of the peninsula and in their several relations to the broader European and African scenes are studied here with sophistication and subtlety. Herbers is not afraid to raise questions and present alternative interpretive scenarios. His view of history is one of questioning received opinion and revisionist stances, of reliance on primary sources and on presenting a broad view of cultural and social manifestation and on interpretations of all levels of interchange in the multi-cultural society that was medieval Spain in relation to all of its neighbours, particularly those in North Africa.

Section I traces the Romanization of Iberia, its early Christianisation from Africa, to the arrival of the Goths in the early 6th century, preceded by the Suevi in Galicia and Portugal and the Vandals and Alans. Section 2 treats the Visigothic kingdom from 507 to the Islamic invasion of 711. Careful attention is paid to changes in the church, from Arianism to Catholicism in the late 6th century, reinforced by the series of
Councils of Toledo in the course of the 6th and 7th centuries. Herbers references the important primary sources – Isidore, Julian of Toledo, John of Biclaro and others, together with the *Lex Visigothorum*, the *Codex Eucianus* and the *Lex Romana Visigothorum*, and the *Codex revisus* of Leovigild and Reccesvith. Societal structures, patterns of kingship, coinage, building works and precious objects – notably the distinctive Visigothic votive crowns – all receive consideration. Section 3 surveys the effects of the Islamic conquest tracing the successive Emirates and Kalifates to the fall of the Kalifate of Cordova in 1031. Meanwhile in the north and east, Christian kingdoms flourished following the defeat of the invaders in the Asturian mountains at Covadonga in 722; and the cult of St James as apostle of Spain, fostered by Beatus of Liébana († 798), opened up a new ecclesiastical perspective, leading eventually to the triumph of Catholicism and the extinction of the Visigothic liturgy. Political changes led to the emergence of the kingdoms of León and eventually Castile, Navarre and Aragón, while at the same time the many counties of Catalonia began to emerge from Carolingian dominance and move towards independence. Incursions from the northern kingdoms into Islamic territory continued through the 9th and 10th centuries. Herbers couples older religious explanations for the *reconquista* with more recent Annales School social and demographic explanations of conquest and settlement. Extensive building campaigns characterized all these Christian regions in the 9th and 10th centuries. In Section 4 the complexities of northern links to wider Europe and southern links to Africa in the 11th and 12th centuries are discussed. This is a period of increasing hostility between Christians and Muslims, culminating in the capture of Toledo by the Christians in 1085. In the Christian sphere, penetration of the Benedictines and Cluniacs, papal influence, the triumph of the Roman liturgy and Roman script can be traced along the Pilgrimage Route to Santiago de Compostela, while the economic and societal exploitation of the route favoured the development of a network of linked villages and towns whose monuments and their decoration were closely linked to contemporary artistic movements in France and Italy. In the south the arrival of the Almoravids and Almohads from North Africa marked a new, more extreme, phase in the Islamic regions of the south with the exception, for a time, of the kingdom of Valencia under the leadership of the Cid and the kingdom of Zaragoza, conquered and reconquered in several campaigns up to 1118. Often known as »Africanization« this movement ran parallel, and no doubt fostered, the »Europeanization« of the north. At the same time Herbers considers the corollary, the little-considered question of Muslim Spain’s influence on North Africa, notably continuing into the twelfth century (Section 5) in the domain of architectural monuments built by Yusuf. This was also the era of Averroes (Ibn Rusd, † 1198) and Ibn Tufayl († 1185), and the music theorist Avempase (Ibn Bagga), and the Jewish thinker Maimonides († 1204), born in Cordova but practicing mainly in Egypt. Incursions from the north intensified in the 1230s and 40s due to the consolidation of the northern power base due to the unification of the kingdoms of León and Castile under Ferdinand III and to the support of the papacy; Córdoba was recaptured in 1236. With Alfonso X »The Wise« came a failed attempt at claiming the imperial crown through his mother’s heritage in Swabia, and conflict with the increasing power of Aragón under James I († 1276) and Peter III († 1285), the latter linked to Italy through his marriage to Constanza, daughter of Manfred King of Sicily and offered the Kingdom of
Sicily following the ousting of the Angevins at the Sicilian Vespers in 1282. Like Ferdinand before him, Alfonso’s ambitions included expansion in Morocco, while the Aragonese kings expanded into the Mediterranean, capturing Mallorca (subsequently an independent kingdom), Menorca and Ibiza in the 1230s, the Lordship of Montpellier in southern France, the County of Barcelona and Valencia under James I. Herbers’ analysis of the 13th century is particularly thorough (section 5), giving due consideration to Navarre and Portugal and to issues of Mediterranean versus Atlantic interests. Similar attention is given to the rôle of the church not only the papacy but the monastic orders, military and mendicant, and the crusading movements. Of special interest is section 5.5.3 on culture and knowledge, Latin and Arabic, and the emergence of Castilian alongside the Arabic studies at the University of Seville founded by Alfonso X in 1254. Did the School of Toledo harbour necromancy, as claimed by Caesarius of Heisterbach, and to what Hispania did Otto of Freising refer when he claimed a translatio studii from the east to Gallias et Hispanias? The academic programs of Palencia (founded 1208), soon to be eclipsed by Valladolid (founded 1346) and Salamanca (founded 1243) are compared, contrasting with another model in Aragón, exemplified in public disputations and in the work of personalities like Arnau de Vilanova († 1311) and Ramon Llull († 1316). Trade, the emergence of guilds, privileges and taxation, the geographical distribution of Jewish enclaves and notions of unity in diversity round out section 5. The last section (6) deals with the 14th and 15th centuries, the increasing outreach towards the Atlantic from Aragón and Portugal and towards the Mediterranean and Africa, culminating in the voyages of Columbus (1492–1504).

In the peninsula the late 15th century saw the transition from the five kingdoms, Navarre, Grandada, Aragón, Castile and Portugal at the beginning of the rule of Ferdinand of Aragón and Isabelle of Castile, the Catholic Kings, in 1474, to two, a unified Spain and a separate Portugal, by the end of their reign. The taking of Granada, the expulsion of the Jews, and Columbus’s first voyage all in 1492 paved the way for the Habsburg ascendance in 1516 and the emergence of a powerful unified Spain ruled by an absolute monarchy on a par with England and France. It is a complex story whose multiple dimensions are admirably captured by Herbers.

The book is complemented by an excellent bibliography of works in English French and German, by list of the rulers of the Visigoths, Muslim regions, lists and genealogical tables of the kings of Asturias and León, Navarre, Aragón, Castile and León, Castile and Aragón, and Portugal, and by an index of people and places contributed by Claudia Alraum. 19 photographs of buildings, manuscripts, precious objects (some of which could be better identified – shelf and folio numbers are lacking for fig. 2 and 16; and fig. 15 is not dated), and 27 maps complete the volume and make it a handy reference tool as well as a thoughtful and wide-ranging study. An English edition would be a desideratum.