**Queen Isabella of Castile**

Queen Isabella of Castile was a powerful queen as Europe passed from the Late Middle Ages to the Renaissance. When she was eighteen she already favored jewels and beautiful gowns which she wore throughout her life. She had beautiful blue eyes and chestnut hair and was just striking. Isabella was queen of Castile from 1474 to 1505, and she had to fight a civil war to secure her throne. Her marriage to Ferdinand II of Aragon began a thirty five year joint rule of a unified Spain by the Catholic Monarchs. Ferdinand and Isabella succeeded as joint sovereigns to the throne of Castile on the death of Isabella's half brother Henry IV in December of 1474. From 1481 the "Catholic Kings," as Ferdinand and Isabella were known, ruled both kingdoms jointly, but it was a union of crowns not countries. The two kingdoms maintained their separate laws, institutions and governments. In 1478, they established the Spanish Inquisition as a royal council under royal control. In 1492 The Inquisition persuaded the Catholic Kings to expel the Jews whose conversion to Christianity was doubtful.

It was typical of Isabella's political vision that she agreed to finance the expedition of Christopher Columbus which brought the New World and wealth to Spain. If it weren't for Queen Isabella of Spain, Christopher Columbus would never been able to set sail. Isabella took an interest in the Native Americans of the new lands and when some of them were brought back to Spain as slaves she had them returned and freed, she wanted the Indians to be treated fairly.

Isabella had five children: Isabel, John, Joan, Maria, and Catherine. Of her five children, two of them were deceased before Isabella, also her grandson and heir passed on, which brought many sorrows during her last few years. Also her daughter Joanna Juana la Loca was mentally unstable and her son Charles, after Ferdinand's death, became Holy Roman Emperor. Catherine was the first wife of Henry VIII of England and mother of Mary I of England.

**King Ferdinand II**

In the meantime, Ferdinand and Isabella focused the first years of their regency directing their military forces on the conquest of Granada--the last Arab-Muslim state on the Iberian Peninsula which was finally accomplished also in 1492. Upon the erradication of the last Muslim state, Isabella and Ferdinand then issued the infamous Alhambra Decree in March 1492 ordering the expulsion of all Venetian/Sephardic Jews from the Kingdom of Spain by July of the same year.

Contrary to historic myth, the decision was more economic than anti-Semitic as the Venetian jewish families remained in control of much of the valuable trade. Their expulsion meant Castile and Aragon no longer needed to pay substantial trade debts to Venice, nor continue to pay hefty "middle man" fees.

In 1494, Charles VIII of France invaded Italy and expelled Alfonso II. Ferdinand allied with the Italian princes and Emperor Maximilian I to successfully expel the French by 1496 and install Ferdinand, son of Alfonso as the new king of Naples.

After the death of his wife Isabella in 1504, the crown of Castile went to their daughter Joanna with Philip I as her consort. Ferdinand eventually grew tired of Philip and after his untimely death in 1506, Ferdinand resumed direct regent control over Castile as his grandson Charles of Ghent was still a child.

In 1508, was returned to Italy, with forces aligned against Venice at the Battle of Agnadello. A new league of nations known as the Holy League was then formed aligned against France.

In 1511, Ferdinand and his son-in-law Henry VIII of England signed the Treaty of Westminister, pledging mutual aid between the two nations against France.

Ferdinand died in 1516.