

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN PORTUGAL: THE ORIGINS OF THE COUNTRY

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Introduction

Portugal is a purely Atlantic country in a geographical sense. Culturally there is an elemental difference between the North and the South of the country. Portuguese geographer Orlando Ribeiro summarises this dichotomy. He conceptualises Portugal between the Atlantic (North) and Mediterranean (South) cultures. He establishes the limit for this difference in Coimbra (as an intuitive reference).

That dichotomy is fundamental in order to understand Portugal today, but this has historical origins. It is important to have a basic knowledge on the ancient history of the Portuguese territory - when it was not yet Portugal - until the formation and consolidation of Portugal as a singular and independent country. Therefore, one can see how the North of Portugal politically shaped the South, and how this South - with its own differentiated cultural features - adapted to the Northern influence. The Northern culture constructed the Portuguese state, but it mixed up, it did not suppress with the Southern cultural background. Consequently, we have now a modern Portugal, united, build from a mosaic of successive different cultures that left a particular footprint.

Therefore, these lines try to summarise what happened in the Southern territory until it finally constituted Portugal; and what happened in the North in terms of culture and in terms of political evolution. For this reason, because this section ends when Portugal as itself appears, it is crucial to understand what happened around the Northern territory, where the Northern territory was comprised in political terms, what the Northern territory was, and how (and why) the process of independence began.

Ancient History

First settlements in Portuguese territory: estimated around 1.200.000 BC.

Megalithic Culture: first great cultural feature, defined by Gordon Childe as the “Neolithic revolution”. It comprised the European Atlantic fringe, from the Sahara (Africa) to Norway. It is thought to be first introduced in Europe via the Portuguese region of Alentejo. It lasted from 8400 to 2800 BC mainly, but it really ends around 2100/2000 BC. With this culture the agriculture and farming were first introduced. Physical remains: menhirs, dolmens, stone graves, etc. There is an intense trade between the Peninsula and other areas of Atlantic Europe (specially the British Isles). The end of this culture coincides with the beginnings of the metallurgy and the apparition of engravings on the stones (spirals, triskels, labyrinths, etc.). Peoples from central Europe begin to appear gradually.

Celts and Iberians: central European tribes - *Celtic* related – first settled in the Iberian Peninsula between 2000-1000 BC. They occupied the northern areas and the very south-west corner. The Atlantic routes of trade continue; the trade was basically based on metals (bronze and tin). Soon the Bronze Age begins (and later the Iron Age). *Iberian* tribes from the Mediterranean occupied the south and south east of the peninsula. In the central areas of the Peninsula Celts and Iberians mixed up conforming the **Celtiberos** (Celt-Iberians). One of the main Iberian-Celtiberian tribes are the **Lusitanians**, who occupied what today is central and south Portugal. Lusitanians were defined by the Romans as “the strongest Iberian tribe”. From 700/600 BC it appears the **Cultura Castreja** in the north-west, a Celtic civilisation which will drastically shape the area of nowadays North Portugal, Galicia and eastern areas. It is called *castreja* because they lived in *castros*, word for Celtic hillfort. These *castrejos* were divided into tribes, but they had elements in common such as the art, the system of beliefs and religion, the settlement pattern (in *castros*), etc. These aspects will crucially affect modern folklore and culture in Galicia and North Portugal. Other Mediterranean influences are felt, such as the Phoenicians, who came to trade with the Celtic tribes in the north-west and with the Lusitanians; these trading activities are the origin of cities such as Porto or Lisboa.

Note: Lusitanians attracted the future attention of the Portuguese poets. It is curious, because Lusitans did not leave the footprint the Celts (*Castrejos*) did. In spite of everything, Portuguese people are still today called Lusitanians and the country *Lusitania*. In addition, in Portugal the *castros* are considered Lusitanians, but this people never built *castros*, in fact, the term ‘Lusitanian’ in this context is just a way to define these castros as purely Portuguese, as opposed to the Galician ones. It could be said that the term Lusitan was adopted in order to distinguish Portugal from Galicia. It is also curious to notice how historians tended to call the peninsula ‘Iberian’ (‘Iberian Peninsula’) when in fact half of it was Celtic.

The Roman Empire

The Romans entered the Peninsula forced by the wars against Cartago. The Empire of Cartago, was based in North Africa, so the Peninsula became a strategic sector for both sides from where to launch an attack. The Roman Empire first secured the routes crossing the Peninsula and it later began the real occupation. Rome fought the Lusitanians between 147-139 BC. The Lusitanians were more or less united under the command of Lusitanian leader **Viriato**, future mythical reference for Portuguese poets, who saw in him the first Portuguese “king” or “hero”, “resisting the aggressor”. Viriato is thought to be from the Serra da Estrela region. Afterwards, there was a slow and gradual occupation and subsequent romanisation. With the Roman Empire it came a more intense trade, Latin language (basis for modern Portuguese), writing, law, administrative organisation, etc. Under Roman rule Christianity came around 2nd – 3rd C. AD. Also it emerged Priscilianism in 4th C. (an own peculiar Christian movement in the northwest).

Romans were not really interested in colonising the north, as they did with the south, but they eventually decide to do that in order to take advantage of the natural resources of the area. They first meet the northern Celtic tribes in 139 BC. In 137 BC general Junius Brutus wins an important battle in river Douro, the natural limit between the Celtic and Lusitan tribes. Brutus fought a tribe based in the Porto area, called the **Callaicos** (“the worshippers of *cailleach*”), origin of the term *Gallaecia* (Galicia) and Galaico (Galician). Romans begin to apply those terms to the northern region in general; they said: “river Douro divides Gallaecia from Lusitania”. Between 96 and 94 BC Publius Crasus leads a trade expedition to Gallaecia. There is a new military invasion in 73 BC. Julius Caesar leads another military expedition in north Gallaecia between 61 and 60 BC. With Emperor Augustus it begins the formal and definitive occupation of the northwest; that campaign lasted from 29 to 19 BC. Romans created the city of *Lucus Augusti* (nowadays Lugo, in Galicia), and established different provincial limits. Firstly, Romans created a province called *Lusitania*, including nowadays Galicia, Portugal, and extending to the east. The Galician section (already called Gallaecia, a sub-provincial entity) was later included in the *Tarraconensis* province, and Galicia and Lusitania were separated by River Douro. Emperor Diocletianus created the province of *Gallaecia* in 305 AD (Lucus Augusti the capital). This province was sub-divided in three parts or sub-provinces, called *Gallaecia Lucensis* (nowadays Galicia), *Gallaecia Asturicensis* (nowadays part of Asturias and León, in Spain), and *Gallaecia Bracarensis* (nowadays North Portugal, down to river Douro). These three subdivisions are vital in order to understand the future evolution of the actual countries; each one of these three subdivisions will result in three nations nowadays: Portugal, Galicia and Spain (as we will see).



Here we also have the first differences between north and south, between the territories up north from river Douro and down south from that river. The North was celticised, weakly romanised and christianised. And, in a way, Rome gave the *castrejos* a sense of unity, grouping them into a single administrative unit. The south saw Iberian occupation, it was strongly romanised and sooner christianised. The limit in river Douro will be a constant in history.

Note to the map: Roman provinces in 305 AD in the Iberian Peninsula. The apparition of the Gallaecia province and the three subdivisions. Portugal will emerge from the area called Gallaecia Bracarensis. This is the original region first occupied by the Suevi (see below). *Source:* López Carreira et al. (1997).

Crisis of Classical Rome: The Barbarians

This crisis is mainly marked with the fall of Rome and the *Barbarian invasions* (Germanic tribes from central Europe). The “official” fall of the Western Roman Empire occurred in 476 AD. The Empire was not able to manage its excessive administration and super-structures already in the beginnings of 5th century. The Empire was also suffering severe attacks from a series of Germanic tribes. Rome is forced to sign **foedus**. These were agreements with some partially romanised Germanic tribes, who would “look after” of some territories in the name of the Empire, until the Empire was able to retake the control again (it would never happen). One of the agreements was with the **Swabians**, in 410 AD, for the control of Gallaecia. The Suevi already settled there in 409. Afterwards the *Visigoths* will enter the Peninsula in 416 AD, “looking after” of the rest of the Peninsula. The Suevi created a kingdom in 411, therefore, it was the first organised European power after the Roman Empire, the first “country” in Western Europe: this is the **Swabian Kingdom of Galicia**. They created an own administration based on the Roman one, and they endorsed the former Roman province with a real political power. They organise the system of parishes, standardising them as the main territorial unit. The first king was Hermerico and the capital was located in Braga (nowadays in Portugal). It is a peaceful process which sees a revival of the *castros* and pre-Roman customs.

When Suevi expand beyond Douro, it is the first time that this river is not a natural political boundary. Some think that this could be the root of a future Portuguese nationality, because it was the first time there is a communication north/south Douro. The Suevi kingdom extends down south to Coimbra.



The greatest period of prosperity during the Suevi dynasty occurred between 550 and 585. King Miro (570-585) wanted to build a strong state, and he seeks for allies among the *Franks* (enemies of the Visigoths), as he fights important battles against the Visigoths. In 583 he sends an army to help an internal uprising of the Visigoths, but this attack made the Visigoths in France to decide helping the Visigoths in Spain. Furthermore, King Miro never had that help from the Franks or the *Byzantines* (located in the south of the Peninsula and also in conflict with the Visigoths). Miro dies and his son Andeca is king. He tries to retake his father’s plans, but Visigoth king Leovigildo finally invades and conquers Galicia in 585. From that moment the Galician kingdom is under Visigoth rule.

Map above: Suevi Kingdom around 550 AD. Suevi first occupied the Roman province and later extended south. Source: López Carreira et al. (1997).

The **Visigoths** tried to unify their territories, but they face the problem of dealing with different administrative and cultural structures. They send a viceroy to Galicia. With time, those viceroys began to feel Galician themselves, and Galicia in fact worked as an independent entity. The Visigoth domains comprised three great provinces: *Galia Narboarenensis* (south of today’s France), *Gallaecia* (as in the Suevi kingdom) and *Hispania* (the rest of the Peninsula). The Visigoths established the capital in Toledo (nowadays in Spain), and Braga is shadowed by this fact. The Visigoths introduced things such as the Galician-Portuguese way of naming the weekdays (in *feiras*) or the territorial organisation of the country in *freguesias*.

The Arabs

They arrive at the Iberian Peninsula from North Africa in 711. The invasion is fast and effective, destroying the Visigoth kingdom. Beginning in the south of the Peninsula in 711, in 716 they are already settled in south of nowadays Galicia. They never get the north and finally leave in 740, going south to what

it is now North Portugal. The Arabs definitely settled in the south, and they will shape the southern culture forever: behaviour, art, construction and settlements, scientific improvements, etc. The Arabs will bring the “medieval enlightenment”, they bring astronomy and mathematics, crucial subjects for the future Portuguese maritime expansion (the *navegantes* will use this crucial scientific knowledge in the discoveries age).

During the Arab invasion the Visigoth rule dismembers, and the Christians seek for refuge in the north of the Peninsula. A series of small Christian kingdoms will appear, as they will be crucial in the future “conquest”. There were also a number of political instabilities in the Christian domains, and this tended to a fragmentation of the political powers, even inside the Galician kingdom. There is a “New Galician Monarchy” between 711 and 813, but it was more symbolic than real.

In 813 it was the ‘**Discovery**’ of the **Sepulchre of Saint James the Apostle**. It was in fact a political manoeuvre, pretending that the remains of St. James the Apostle were found in Galicia and brought to the city of Santiago de Compostela. This was a way to join the Christian kingdoms against the “common cause of fighting the Arabs”. The Pilgrimage Route to Santiago de Compostela (*St. James Way*) was also a way to secure a constant presence of European Christians in the northern areas - including *Crusaders* - creating a defensive axis, some kind of “northern limit” for a possible Arab expansion. It was the consolidation of a purely Medieval society.



Map above: the Kingdom of Galicia around 850 AD. Source: López Carreira et al. (1997).

Politically the “sepulchre issue” meant the consolidation of the kingdom of Galicia, namely between 813 and 910. The new capital is, obviously, Santiago de Compostela. In 848 King Afonso the Third conquered Coimbra again, and recovers the extension of the Suevi kingdom. But in the south nothing will be as it was before, due to the **Mozarab** presence. The society in the south is definitely changed, and this will be the real cause for the beginning of the territorial differences. The Mozarabs were converted Arabs and Jews, mixed families. The Arab and Jewish influence, and also the idea of a more heterodox, ethnically mixed and open society, shaped drastically the southern peoples.

The apparition of territorial differences: 910-1037

The more the country expands, the more the territorial differences among the dominant classes (big landowners) are evident. The society is changed due to the Mozarab influence, and the political and social situation changed after the instabilities in 8 c. There are new internal powers and interests.

In 910 part of the nobility and clergy are sent to the city of *León* in order to secure the area (namely the Gallaecia Asturicensis, according to the Roman divisions). This decision already provokes some territorial instabilities. Those sent there begin to feel that they are conforming a “front line”, in opposition to the others safely staying. This is the beginning of a Leonese sentiment of difference. In addition, at the end of the 10 c. there is the first reference to a small *Condado Portucalense* (County of Portugal), of imprecise limits, but already existing around the Porto-Guimarães area. Count Vimara Peres (a Mozarab) promotes the repopulation of the town of Portucale (Porto), and one of his descendants - Countess Mumadona - builds a convent in the city of Guimarães, as well as the castle of São Mamede. A son and grandson of Mumadona govern the city of Portucale, and they enjoy some degree of independence. The political power of the family grows, and this will later be known as the *Mendes family*, who will crucially help the first Portuguese king, Afonso Henriques. There also appears another small county, the County of Coimbra, ruled by a Mozarab count called Nuno Mendes, who even fights the Galician king in 1071.

When king Afonso the Third dies León splits from the Kingdom of Galicia for a short period, constituting an independent kingdom, the new **Kingdom of León**. It is later peacefully recovered, but this

issue will constitute the corner stone for the total independence of that new kingdom, as well as constituting a reference for the future Portuguese independence. Leonese nobility, after the years, did not feel Galician anymore; they had their own reality and problems, and the influence of Santiago de Compostela was felt as centralist. Furthermore, Galician nobility was taking advantage of the Leonese kingdom. Galician kings began to take the arms of León, keeping Galicia in a safe second place, far from that “front line”. Galician nobility took profit from the situation, securing a stable position at home, and upsetting Leonese nobility. The Kingdom of León enjoyed short periods of total independence. According to the traditional historiography, the kingdom was known as “Kingdom of Galicia and León” (or even simply “Kingdom of León” for both), but this name was a mere formality, hiding a very complex situation. The so-called *Galician Dynasty* was still in control of the Leonese territory, but behind this there was the fact that Leonese nobility deeply disliked that control. When Arab Almanzor attacks Santiago de Compostela (997) and conquers Coimbra in 998 there is a period of crisis. It carried an important military defeat, but it also dramatically damaged the political balance because Almanzor was helped by a sector of the Leonese nobility.

When King Vermudo the Third of Galicia dies (1037) there is yet another dynastic conflict. This is the end of the direct succession for the *Galician Dynasty*. As he has no descendants, his brother in law (and rival) Fernando receives the Galician crown. Fernando was already king of a new kingdom, the **Kingdom of Castile**. Therefore, this Fernando rules on the kingdoms of Galicia, León and Castile jointly. He calls himself “Emperor”. Galician nobility rejects this foreigner as their king, but with the help of the Leonese sector Fernando finally becomes Fernando the First. Nevertheless, he is in a difficult situation. He tries to organise the three kingdoms under the same crown, combining efforts against the Arabs. When he dies (in 1065) he divides the crowns into his three sons. He gives Galicia (including nowadays north Portugal, do not forget that) to young Garcia; León to Afonso, and Castile to Sancho. The Kingdom of Galicia finally loses the Leonese territory, but it is again a clearly defined independent kingdom. King Garcia tries to re-organise the kingdom, pleasing the southern nobility and stopping future territorial separations. He re-conquers Coimbra in 1058, and even though the capital of the kingdom was still in Santiago de Compostela and not in Braga, the southern nobility seemed temporarily satisfied with the new king. Meanwhile, Afonso of León had a very personal agenda. Afonso kills his brother Sancho and takes over the kingdom of Castile. Later, when King Garcia is on a trip, Afonso takes advantage of this situation and occupies Galicia (1072). Afonso claims for himself the three crowns by force, becoming Afonso the Sixth of Galicia. Galician nobility and clergy fiercely rejected Afonso, but as it happened with Fernando, they are forced to accept him, even though they will always defend Garcia’s rights as the true and legitimate king of Galicia. Garcia would finally die in prison in 1090.

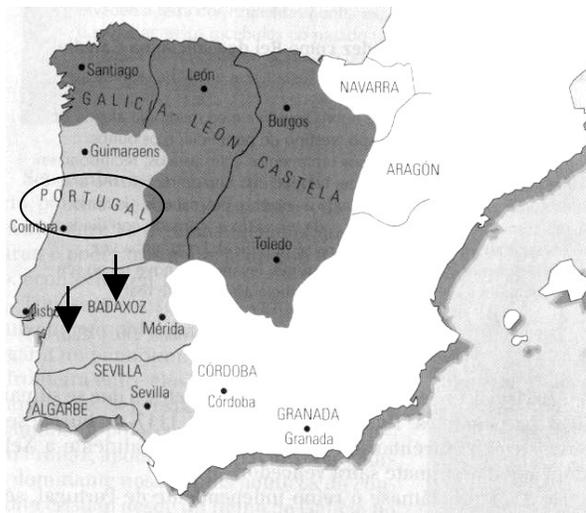
These new instabilities, the imposition of the new king, and still the influence of Santiago de Compostela, will revive the claims of the southern nobility. They definitely wanted the city of Braga to recover its ecclesiastical privileges, and with it their political influence in the Christian world. When Afonso the Sixth conquers Toledo the situation worsens. He grants Toledo the ecclesiastical privileges, as it was during the Visigoth period. Therefore, the northern Galician nobility (based in Santiago de Compostela) is upset because this ends their privileges and great part of their political powers, also their power to influence in the other kingdoms. And, for the southern nobility, this means the end of their aspirations for Braga; they see no way to prosper in the Christian alliance.

In addition, Afonso the Sixth renounces to the direct sovereignty over the kingdom of Galicia in 1092. He is more interested in León and in the always growing Kingdom of Castile. So, according to the existing differences, he creates two counties: the **County of Galicia** (Gallaecia Lucensis) and the **County of Portucale** (Gallaecia Bracarensis), ruled by two counts, “governor-style”. The kingdom would still be the Kingdom of Galicia, but for this period this was a formality as Afonso, the king, was absent. For the first time, the core of the Portuguese state will be defined and endowed with a political and administrative structure of its own. This will be the beginning of Portugal as itself and the Portuguese nobility will not ruin this opportunity.

Afonso gives the County of Galicia to Raimundo de Borgonha, who marries one of Afonso’s daughters, Dona Urraca. The County of Portucale goes to Henrique de Borgonha, who marries Afonso’s other daughter, Dona Teresa. These counts have total powers, and the counties work as virtual independent kingdoms. The counts are from the powerful French family of Borgonha, temporal allies of King Afonso.

- *Consequences for Galicia*: Paradoxically, in spite of the separation, this will be a period of splendour for the Galician County. Count Raimundo integrates very quickly, and he coincides in time with a very influential individual in Galician history, Bishop Xelmírez. They both constitute a formidable tandem since 1093, and they take advantage of a period of good harvests, feeling of security, urban revival, revival of the arts, culture, strengthening of the “Way of St. James”, etc. This is the *Era Compostelá* (the “Compostela Age”). Some Galician nobility try to create a new independent kingdom again in this situation of prosperity, and they try to convince Raimundo and Xelmírez in doing so. But Raimundo dies in 1107. Theoretically, his son Afonso Raimúndez is the legal successor of the Kingdom of Galicia - as Afonso the Sixth promised - but in Galicia arise three sectors representing different interests. The first group is lead by the Count of Traba (called Pedro Froilaz) who defends Afonso Raimúndez as the legitimate heir and king of Galicia. The second group is represented by Dona Urraca, who wants to be queen with a external support from the Kingdom of Aragón. The third group is the clergy and the Galician Church, lead by Xelmírez. Xelmírez finally supports the Count of Traba and Afonso Raimúndez’s option. Afonso the Sixth dies in 1109. In 1110 Afonso Raimúndez is very solemnly proclaimed King of Galicia in a ceremony at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. He is Afonso the Seventh of Galicia. There is a war against Dona Urraca between 1116-1117, where Afonso Raimúndez is victorious. When Dona Urraca, his mother, dies in 1126, Afonso Reimúndez has no rival and begins an expansion to the east, claiming the crowns of León and Castile (in fact, he is the grandson of Afonso the Sixth). This will lead to the self-proclamation of Afonso Reimúndez as “Emperor” in 1135.

- *Consequences for Portugal*: the County of Portugal suffered a similar evolution. When Count Henrique dies two confronted groups appear. Dona Teresa marries Galician count Fernán Pérez de Traba, and she defends a re-unification of the two counties again in the Kingdom of Galicia. The legitimate heir, Afonso Henriques, claims for an independent kingdom. He has the support of all the Portuguese nobility (including the influential Mendes family), and also the Portuguese Church and clergy. It is argued that the Order of the Temple also helped in the construction of this new state. Afonso Henriques is the real “father” of the country, the one who personalised, who embodied, the desire of independence and accomplished it eventually.



In 1120 Santiago de Compostela regains its ecclesiastical rights, so Braga had no role again in a hypothetical re-unified kingdom. Furthermore, Xelmírez tried to centralise the Church and clergy in Santiago de Compostela (including those in the Portuguese county). The tensions convinced Afonso Henriques to proclaim the **Kingdom of Portugal** in 1121, but he refuses to proclaim himself as king in the beginning. Nevertheless, since that moment the Kingdom of Portugal as itself began to exist as a differentiated unity. The already existing political reality was finally shaped in an independent political entity, even though socially the differences where not so clear.

Map above: the “Empire” of Afonso Raimúndez and the expansion of Portugal. Source: López Carreira et al. (1997).

Nevertheless, the **process of total independence is gradual**:

1121: Proclamation of the Kingdom of Portugal (Afonso Henriques).

1129: Battle of São Mamede. Afonso Henriques confronts his own mother in this battle near Guimarães. Afonso Henriques’ victory constitutes the real corner stone for Portuguese total independence.

1129-1137: Period of instability: some Galician nobility try to recover Portugal. Afonso Raimúndez is also interested and a number of battles are fought.

1137: *Peace of Tui*: through this treatment peace is finally reached. Portugal will not be claimed back anymore by Galicia. On the other hand, Afonso Henriques promises “fidelity, security and help against the enemies” to his cousin, the “Emperor” Afonso the Seventh (King of Galicia).

1139: *Battle of Ourique*. This is related to the legend... According to this, Afonso Henriques won a formidable battle against the Arabs in what is today the Alentejo. He wins over five Arab kings, and that is why there are five castles in the Portuguese coat of arms: these are “the castles of the five Arab kings defeated by Afonso Henriques”. Geographically and historically this is hard to believe, but if we accept that there was some kind of crucial battle or similar, the fact is that this had a very important positive psychological impact on the minds of Portuguese people in those times.

1140: Afonso Henriques calls himself *King of Portugal* for the first time. Until that moment Portugal was a kingdom, but lead by a count. He is now *Afonso the First of Portugal*.

1143: *Conference of Zamora*: It is mediated by an official prelate send by the Pope. Portugal wants to attract the favour of the Vatican in the recognition of the kingdom and the “new” king. The definitive peace with the other Afonso, the “Emperor”, is sealed.

1147: Afonso Henriques conquers Santarém and Lisboa.

1157: *Afonso the Seventh (Afonso Raimúndez), the “Emperor”, dies*. There are no more formal/diplomatic links with Galicia or with the family for Afonso Henriques.

1179: A *Papal Edict* is released: it is the *official acknowledgement* of the Vatican of the *Kingdom of Portugal*. For the first time the papist prelates call Afonso Henriques *king*.

1180: End of the conflicts with King Fernando the Second of Galicia and León (heir of Afonso the Seventh) for the control of southern areas (such as the Andalusian coast).

1185: *Afonso Henriques dies*. His dynasty will carry on. The fight for the independence of Portugal will go on, consolidating the country in the battles against the Arabs and the oppressive presence of the Kingdom of Castile. Portugal had to manage two different fronts: the war against the Arabs and the expansionist pretensions of the other Christian kingdoms, namely Castile.

1190-91: The Arabs are stopped in River Tejo as they are trying to recover lost territory. The campaign for the *final conquest of the south* begins.

1249: *Faro is conquered*, in the very south of the country. Portugal approximately reached then its present extension. The country is “completed”. For the first time since 711 the Arabs are no longer in control of the southern areas. After five centuries these territories will be officially Christian, but the footprint of the Arab culture - by large more advanced and sophisticated - will definitely shape the southern territories, until today. The Jewish influence can also be felt.

1297: The continental limits are defined and agreed with Castile. Those will remain unchanged in history until present days. This is the reason why it is said that Portugal has the most stable frontier in the world.

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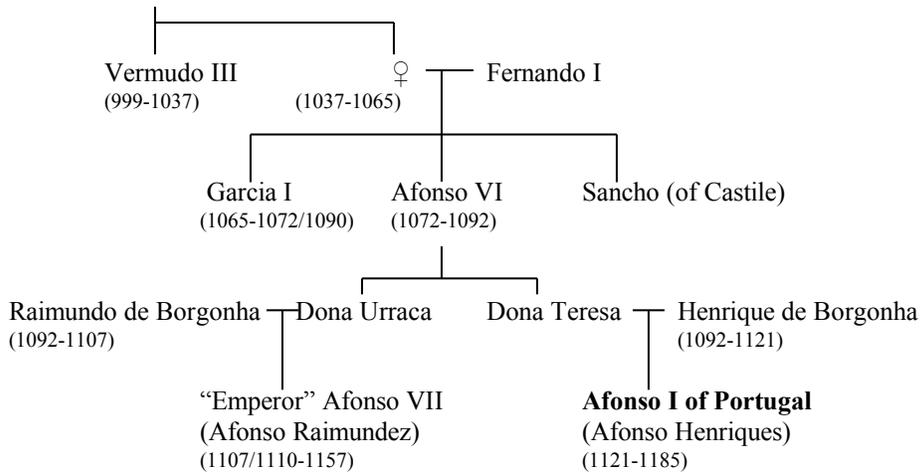
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“Classical Galician Dynasty”



Vermudo III



Henrique de Borgonha



*Afonso Henriques
(Afonso I of Portugal)*