

Spain

El Escorial Issue of 1961

This set of 6 stamps was issued on October 31, 1961. The images are engraved, with bi-color printing.

Background

The story of El Escorial begins with King Phillip II of Spain, most often mentioned in the history of English-speaking countries as the monarch who sent the Spanish Armada against the navy of Queen Elizabeth I. Born in 1527, Phillip was the son of King Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. His mother was Queen Isabella, whose marriage to Charles helped to unite the houses of Spain and Portugal. Married to Maria of Portugal in 1543, Phillip remarried in 1554 to Mary I of England.

Phillip became King of Spain in 1556. His empire was large, including the Netherlands, Naples, Sicily, Milan, Brazil, Honduras, Peru and Mexico. In 1559, after the death of Mary, he married Elizabeth of France. By 1580, Phillip had also conquered Portugal and claimed its throne. His navy had soundly defeated the Turkish navy. He appeared to be invincible. The debacle of the Armada as it attempted to destroy the English navy was only 8 years away.

The story of the building of El Escorial begins several years back. Phillip was fighting the French in 1557. On August 10th, his forces won the battle of San Quentin. In the Catholic calendar, this is the day of Saint Lawrence. To thank God for the victory, Phillip began construction of San Lorenzo de El Escorial.

El Escorial was completed in the year 1584. The Spanish Armada would set sail for England in just 4 years.

El Escorial

The El Escorial complex is massively built of granite. It includes the monastery and its church, a college, a library, a mausoleum and a royal palace. The overall arrangement is that of a quadrangle. The original architect was a Toledan named Juan Bautista. He did not live to see the completion of the work. That fell to his student, Juan de Herrera. The two stamps below provide an overview of El Escorial and a depiction of the Patio of the Kings.



5p

1025



70c

1021