

# **PHILIP II of SPAIN**

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# Philip II of Spain

## Introduction

Philip was the most powerful ruler in Europe in the second half of the sixteenth century.

From his father, the Emperor Charles V, he inherited

the united Crowns of Spain;

the former Aragonese Empire in the Balearic Islands, Naples and Sicily, and the Castilian colonies in the New World.

By a political sleight of hand, executed in 1549, Charles bestowed upon him what had been technically Imperial territories in the Low Countries and Milan.

He was also titular King of Jerusalem, and had through his mother a claim to the throne of Portugal, which he made good in 1580, acquiring in the process the entire Portuguese Empire in the Far East.

And for four years, from 1554 to 1558, he was also King of England.

First his uncle Ferdinand, and then his cousins, were Holy Roman Emperors, and although relations were not always easy or cordial, each side refrained on principle from actions hostile to the other, and this family compact remained valid throughout Philip's reign -and well beyond.

His financial resources, particularly from the New World and the taxation of Castile, were unequalled elsewhere in Europe, and the manpower of Castile gave him the finest infantry -the *tercios* -to be found in Christendom.

France: His position was further strengthened by the fact that the power which had so consistently confronted and frustrated his father – France – was in the throes of protracted and debilitating civil conflicts which lasted for almost his entire reign, from 1561 to 1598.

The Ottoman Empire: Only beyond Europe could a power be found to equal Philip's, and that was the Ottoman Empire.

In 1560 the Sultan was Suleiman the Magnificent, one of the great conquerors of the age, who together with his father Selim I had defeated Venice, conquered Hungary, Egypt and Syria, and made telling alliances with the Muslim states of North Africa.

Although Suleiman's successors, Selim II and Murad III, were not his equals, both their resources and their ambitions were the equals of Philip's own.

In the Mediterranean, Spain was constantly on the defensive, particularly against the so-called 'Barbary Corsairs', and the strain of this on-going confrontation, sapped the king's strength elsewhere in his dominions.

Although the Balkan frontier was no longer his responsibility, and he won a number of victories -most notably Lepanto in 1571, the Ottoman threat remained constant and pressing.

Although he probably had no option but to confront the Turks, most of Philip's problems were the results of his own choices of policy.

**He worked on two fundamental principles; never surrender territory once acquired, and never compromise with heretics.**

It was the latter which caused particular trouble, and led to his most significant failure, in the Low Countries.

His willingness to compromise over the privileges of the Walloon nobility eventually preserved the allegiance of about half the Netherlands, but his absolute refusal to countenance any form of Christian worship and belief other than his own forced the remaining provinces into remaining defiant, and Philip was unable to conquer them

**The Inquisition** was neither as cruel nor as arbitrary as its reputation made it, but it was extremely secretive and absolutely intolerant. Philip used it, as his predecessors had done, to create a sense of Spanish and catholic identity, and in that respect it was very successful, but the price was high.

By appointing only pure-blooded 'old Christians' to high office, the king not only devalued the process of conversion, but deprived himself of much loyal and talented service.

It was also the activities of the Inquisition which ruined much of Spain's overseas trade by driving out those Jewish and protestant merchants who had been so important to the earlier prosperity of Seville, and more particularly of Antwerp.

The beneficiaries of this exodus were towns such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam and London, and it was the commercial wealth and skills which the exiles brought with them which allowed the Dutch, and to some extent the English, to defy the King of Spain after 1580.

It was also the intolerance of the inquisition which caused the endless problems which Philip suffered with the Morisco population of Spain, and drove many of them into a dangerous alliance with the Barbary Corsairs.

By his own choice, Philip was the champion of the Catholic Church, and for much of his reign his political influence in Rome maintained a stranglehold on papal elections.

It was not until the election of Clement VIII in 1592 that that influence was weakened.

The immediate consequence was the readmission of Henry IV of France into the church, an event which led directly to the end of those French civil wars which Philip had been doing so much to keep alive.

The king's perception of himself as the defender of the faith led directly to those military commitments, in France, in the Low Countries, and at sea against the English, which so drained his resources and hampered him in his constant battles with the Ottomans

Philip is sometimes said to have had no sense of the value of money.

That is not true, because he understood the realities of finance very well. However, his priority was always his sense of duty -what had to be done -rather than his ability to afford it.

A lack of money might force him to retreat, but the availability of resources always led to over commitment.

In other words, he had no sense of retrenchment.

He suffered from a rather similar disability in other areas of government.

He was by temperament suspicious and unable to delegate.

This inevitably clogged up the administrative processes, and led one official to observe

*'if death came from Madrid, we should all be immortal'.*

Philip commanded, and to some extent created, the most powerful European state of the period, and in this his conscientiousness and his religious faith both played a large part.

However, just as his conscientiousness led to endless delays, so his faith led to untimely intransigence, and sometimes to a neglect of sensible precautions.

When the Duke of Medina Sidonia pointed out the hazards of trying to rendezvous the Armada with the Duke of Parma in the absence of an available deep water port, the king instructed him to proceed irrespective, because God would provide for His own work.

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## 1. Childhood and youth, 1527-1544

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Philip was born in Valladolid on the 21st May 1527.

His father was King Carlos I, otherwise known as the Emperor Charles V, and his mother Isabella, the sister of the king of Portugal.

The young prince was seen as symbolising his father's commitment to Spain, and was an important part of the healing process after the revolt of the *comuneros*, which had ended in 1522.

Charles had come to Spain as a foreigner, and had been received as such; but in 1526 he had jettisoned an unsatisfactory alliance with Henry VIII of England, which had represented his northern priorities.

By the terms of that treaty of 1522 he had been betrothed to Henry's daughter, Mary, then aged six.

Disenchanted with Henry, and unwilling to wait nearly ten years to beget a legitimate heir, Charles had turned to Portugal, and married his twenty three year old cousin in March 1526.

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### Charles' influence

Charles remained in Spain until July 1529. There were elaborate celebrations for the birth of the prince, and his father presided over the arrangement which were made for his upbringing, but he probably saw little of him. Philip remained 'among the women' until long after Charles's departure, as was customary, and we have no stories about their early relationship (if any).

Isabella gave birth to a daughter, Maria, in 1528, and the royal nursery was a bustling place, but most of what we know about Philip comes from correspondence during Charles's absence. With the exception of his Governor, Pedro Gonzalez de Mendoza, most of the people he came into contact with were female, and Portuguese, particularly his nurse Leonora Mascarenhas, for whom he developed an enduring affection.

### Mother's influence

However, it was his mother who was the dominating influence. As soon as he was old enough to do so, Philip was prone to lord it over his younger sister, and this behaviour attracted sharp correction, even to a spanking on more than one occasion.

These were administered by Isabella herself, and some observers commented upon her 'severity', but neither Charles (nor indeed, Philip) seem to have objected. Most references to the prince in letters, however, relate to his health.

With infant mortality at 50%, this anxiety is not surprising. In 1532 there are two references to his being ill with a fever, but in neither case were the attacks severe, and he seems to have been a robust child.

When Charles returned to Spain in 1533, the time had come to begin his serious training.

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Philip had already been recognised as the heir to the Crown of Castile in 1528, and now needed an education appropriate to his status.

## EDUCATION

His first known tutor was a priest called Juan Martinez de Siliceo, appointed in July 1534. In 1535 Philip was given his own household, which was placed under the direction of a new governor, Juan de Zuniga.

This was a standard rite of passage for a royal prince; at the age of eight he was no longer 'among the women', although there is no reason to suppose that his relations with his mother deteriorated.

Unfortunately she died in 1539, at the early age of thirty six, and with his father still more absent than present, his childhood really came to an end at the age of twelve.

Most of what we know about the progress of his schooling comes from his tutor's regular reports. He learned to read and write, both in Spanish and Latin, to appreciate music and to play the guitar.

Philip was not an enthusiastic scholar, and by 1540, when he was approaching fourteen, was reported to be much addicted to hunting. If he was equally addicted to other pleasures of the flesh, Siliceo either did not know, or remained discreetly silent.

By 1541 Charles was increasingly disappointed with his son's academic progress, and three distinguished humanists were appointed to widen and deepen his knowledge; Cristobal Calvet de Estrella for Latin and Greek, Honorat Juan for mathematics and architecture, and Juan Gines de Sepulveda for history and geography.

A library was built up for Philip's use, but nothing would turn him into a scholar. He developed a respectable interest in history and mathematics, but made no progress with Greek. He was not taught alone. Both as a child and as a young adolescent he was given a group of six classmates, the sons of courtiers of suitable status, and some of them appear to have been a good deal more diligent than he was himself, which added to his tutors' chagrin.

Siliceo moved on to be Bishop of Cartagena in 1544, but by that time it was Zuniga rather than any of his teachers, who was the main influence on the young prince, and it was from him that he learned the sober sense of duty, and the earnest piety which were to be his characteristics in later years.

Although relatively small of stature, Philip was good at all physical sports. By the age of fourteen he was noted as a fine dancer, and skilled at running at the ring.

In 1543, when he was sixteen, Zuniga proudly declared that he was already the most accomplished man of arms in the court.

### **Philip comes of age**

He came of age, technically, at fourteen, and this significant step was marked, on the one hand, by receiving his first communion, and on the other by having his own secretary.

By 1543 the household over which Zuniga still presided numbered about 110 people, and cost 32,000 ducats (about £8000) a year.

In another rite of passage, in January 1543 he was betrothed to his young cousin, Maria of Portugal, whom he married in November of the same year at Salamanca.

When he left Spain (again) in July 1543, Charles left for his son a set of Instructions which envisaged his increasing involvement in the affairs of state.

He was to put away childish things, and place himself under the guidance of Fransico de los Cobos, the king's secretary for Spanish affairs.

Although he received no official appointment, by 1544 he was 'a fully committed head of government', and both los Cobos and Charles were delighted with his rapid maturity in this connection.

Only in developing a relationship with his young wife was his progress giving cause for concern.