

# World of Stamps: Barcelona

by Geir Sør-Reime

Prompted by two recent visits to Barcelona, the capital of the autonomous community of Catalonia, I decided to dive into the philatelic history of the region and the city. The arms of the province of Barcelona were featured on a 1962 stamp.

Catalonia covers an area of 12,400 square miles and has a population of approximately 7 million. It was established as an autonomous community within the Kingdom of Spain in 1979, the first area to receive autonomy after the fall of the Franco regime. A single Spanish stamp was issued to commemorate the autonomous status of Catalonia.

The 1979 Statute of Autonomy was revised and replaced by a new 2006 Statute of Autonomy. A 2009 self-adhesive booklet stamp featured a map of the autonomous community and its flag.

Catalonia in fact declared its independence in 988 AD (a Spanish stamp was issued 1988 for the millennium of Catalonia), from 1137 united with Aragon, from 1469 dynastically united with Castille, and the Aragon-Castille union was the cradle of the Spanish state, created in 1512, commemorated on a 2002 Europa stamp.

Catalonia and Aragon kept their autonomy until 1714, when Spain became a centralized state under the Bourbon dynasty, and Catalan language and traditions were suppressed.

In 1912, Catalan's efforts to regain some degree of autonomy were partly successful, as the Commonwealth



1979 Spanish stamp for autonomy statute of Catalonia (Sc. 2174)



2009 Spanish stamp showing flag and map of Autonomous Community of Catalonia (Sc. 3611d)



2002 Europa, Sc. 3165

of Catalonia was established, and reassured the Catalans of their status as a nation within Spain. The Commonwealth was abolished however, in 1925 under the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera.

In 1932, during the Second Spanish republic, Catalonia regained its autonomy, but the Franco regime tried to suppress regional identities and abolished Catalan autonomy again.

The oldest philatelic witnesses of Catalonia originate from the Carlist Wars, which started in 1833, when the widow queen became regent for her infant daughter (Isabella II). The Carlists supported Carlos V, the brother of the deceased king and in their opinion, the rightful heir to the throne according to the Salic law (abolished by his brother Ferdinand VII in 1830).

During the Third Carlist war, which started after elections in 1872, Carlist forces under the pretender Don Carlos II (1848-1909) succeeded in gaining control in the Basque provinces, in Navarra, in Catalonia and in the area around Valencia. Several stamps were issued by the Carlists in the Basque provinces and Navarra between 1873 and 1975, whereas only single stamps were issued by them in Catalonia and Valencia, respectively.



1988  
Span-  
ish stamp  
for millennium of Catalonia  
(Sc. 2568)



1874 Carlist issue for  
Catalonia (Sc. X4)



An 1873 Carlist issue 1 real, Sc. XI, tied by Azpeitia double circle date stamp on a June 1874 outer cover to the French post office in Bayonne, also with oval commercial cachet.

The Catalonia stamp was issued April 15, 1874. As the Carlist stamps had no international validity, mail for foreign destinations had to be mailed in two envelopes: the inner one franked with French stamps

and the outer one franked with Carlist stamps and addressed to the French post-office in Bayonne, where the outer envelopes were opened and usually thrown away.

Around 1900, a number of Catalan propaganda labels were produced by a Catalan party, and included the Catalan arms and often St. George, the Catalan patron saint, and the dragon. The Spanish authorities quickly put a ban on the use of these labels on mail, even though the letters also were franked with Spanish stamps.

The next instance of specific stamps of Barcelona started in 1929-30, when Barcelona and Seville organised exhibitions to promote Spanish commerce, the World Expo in Barcelona and the Ibero-American Exhibition in Seville. The Barcelona fair is probably most known for its German pavilion, designed by Bauhaus architect Mies van der Rohe. Unfortunately, the World Expo in Barcelona proved to be an economic disaster for the City of Barcelona, and the city was authorized to issue obligatory tax stamps to help pay off the debts. In fact, stamps were issued right up till 1945, when the obligatory tax was abolished in November that year. The last issue in fact commemorated the suppression of the tax, and depicted a selection of previous issues.



*Ca 1900 Catalan nationalist labels, most of them featuring the Catalan patron saint, St. George and the dragon (Robert is a noble family in Barcelona)*



*1929 regular Spanish stamp for Barcelona-Seville exhibitions and showing exhibition poster (Sc. 346)*



*Left to right: 1930 Barcelona obligatory tax (Michel #3; 1943 Barcelona obligatory tax for 450th anniversary of discovery of America (Michel #44); 1945 Barcelona obligatory tax (Michel #68) issued for suppression of tax and showing selection of previous issues*

The two exhibitions were publicized with 1929 regular, express, and air post issues by the Spanish post. One of the designs featured a portrait of the King (Alfonso XIII) and a view of Barcelona.



1979 Spanish stamp for 50th anniversary of obligatory tax stamps in Barcelona (Sc. 2176)



1929 regular Spanish stamp for Barcelona-Seville exhibitions and featuring a view of Barcelona (Sc. 348)

In 1979, a Spanish stamp was issued to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Barcelona obligatory tax stamps. This stamp reproduces the first of the Barcelona obligatory tax stamps.

The Barcelona Fair itself was instituted in 1920, and in 1970, a Spanish stamp commemorated the 50th anniversary of these fairs. In fact, Barcelona had organised a World Fair already in 1888, and in 1988, a single Spanish stamp commemorated the centenary of

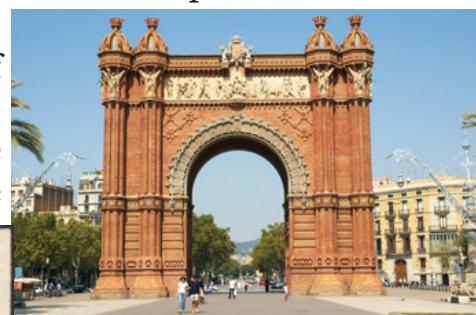


1988 Spanish stamp for centenary of 1888 Barcelona World Fair (Sc. 2558)

this exhibition. Both Barcelona's Magic Fountain and the Triumphal Arch (right) were



1970 Spanish stamp for 50th anniversary of Barcelona Trade Fair (Sc. 1609)



built as part of the 1888 exhibition.

When the Second Spanish Republic was established April 14, 1931 (the date King Alfonso XIII left Spain), current Spanish



Left, 1931 Barcelona "República" overprint (1st issue) (Sc. 457) (black & white image); Right, 1931 Barcelona "República" overprint (2nd issue) (Sc. 468) (black & white image)

stamps were overprinted “REPUBLICA” in Almeria, Barcelona, Madrid, Tolosa and Valencia, before a national issue was released on May 27.

The universally recognized Barcelona overprints are horizontal overprint, but there also exist diagonal overprints, issued May 1-3, but their status is disputed.

*Spain, 1938, 1 peseta-15p Submarine Mail complete set of six tied by “Correo Submarino/ Mahon” oval cancel, 14 Aug 1938, on cover to Barcelona, cover bears the corner card of the “Agencia Filatélica Oficial”, the agency responsible for issuing these stamps, and is addressed to itself in Barcelona.*



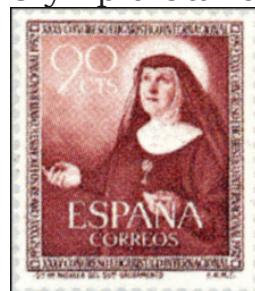
*An off cover 2p Submarine Mail stamp, Michel 721 (unlisted, but footnoted in Scott)*



A Republican issue specifically associated with Barcelona is the 1938 Submarine post stamps. The Republic intended to organize a submarine mail service from Barcelona to Port Mahón on Minorca. In the event, only one trip, with 400 covers, mainly philatelic souvenirs, was made. The stamps were valid for ordinary mail also.

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Post-Civil War Spanish stamps with Barcelona-relations are mainly centred round a few themes: fairs, sport events and architecture, and then, primarily, soccer and the 1992 Olympic Games; and the famous architect Antoni Gaudi (1852-1926). [Because of the richness of images on the web supporting the stamps, we have broken out the section on Gaudi as a separate “Browsing the Web” feature in this issue of StampNewsOnline. JFD.]



*1952 Spanish stamp for International Eucharistic Congress, Barcelona (Sc. 792)*

The first post-Civil War stamp with a Barcelona theme was a 1952 stamp for the International Eucharistic Congress, followed by 1960 stamps for the International Philatelic Congress in Barcelona. A 1963

Barcelona-related set of stamps also had a religious theme, commemorating the 75th anniversary of the canonical coronation of the Our Lady of Mercy statue in the city, and the Order of Our Lady of Mercy (originally established 1218 in Barcelona).

The fairs are an important feature of Barcelona, and the 1888 and 1929 world



1965 Spanish stamp showing Columbus monument, Barcelona (Sc. 1280)

fairs are still visible in the city, as monumental works remain standing. One such is the Columbus statue at the lower end of La Rambla, Barcelona's main street. It was built in 1888, and was depicted on a 1965 stamp. It commemorates Barcelona as the port where Columbus reported to the King and Queen of Spain after his first successful voyage to America.

In 1966, the International Graphic Arts and Packaging Exhibition was held in Barcelona, and a single stamp featuring a lead type in wrapping was issued (see page 6). Also in 1966, there was a nautical exhibition and naval week in Barcelona, also publicized on a single stamp. The following year, the 4th Congress of Spanish, Portuguese, American and Philippine Municipalities was held in Barcelona, and again, a single stamp was issued for the event.



1966 Spanish stamp for International Graphics Arts and Packaging Exhibition, Barcelona (Sc. 1336)



1966 Spanish stamp for Naval Week, Barcelona (Sc. 1364)



1963 Spanish stamp for 75th anniversary of Coronation of the Our Lady of Mercy statue in Barcelona, showing arms of the Order of Our Lady of Mercy (Sc. 1182)



1967 Spanish stamp for 4th Congress of Spanish, Portuguese, American and Philippine Municipalities, Barcelona (Sc. 1488)



1970 Spanish stamp for 50th anniversary of Barcelona Fairs (Sc. 1609)

In 1970, a single stamp celebrated 50 years of trade fairs in Barcelona; and in 2005, a Euro-Mediterranean Summit was



2005 Spanish stamp for Euro-Mediterranean Summit, Barcelona

held in Barcelona, an event honoured on a single stamp.

During the 1960s, Cinderellas were produced to publicize the Barcelona Fair.



Cinderella stamps publicizing Barcelona Fairs, left to right: 1960, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965

*To Be Continued*