



Clio and the Crown: The Politics of History in Medieval and Early Modern Spain

Richard L. Kagan

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Monarchs throughout the ages have commissioned official histories that cast their reigns in a favorable light for future generations. These accounts, sanctioned and supported by the ruling government, often gloss over the more controversial aspects of a king's or queen's time on the throne. Instead, they present highly selective and positive readings of a monarch's contribution to national identity and global affairs.

In *Clio and the Crown*, Richard L. Kagan examines the official histories of Spanish monarchs from medieval times to the middle of the 18th century. He expertly guides readers through the different kinds of official histories commissioned: those whose primary focus was the monarch; those that centered on the Spanish kingdom as a whole; and those that celebrated Spain's conquest of the New World. In doing so, Kagan also documents the life and work of individual court chroniclers, examines changes in the practice of official history, and highlights the political machinations that influenced the redaction of such histories.

Just as world leaders today rely on fast-talking press officers to explain their sometimes questionable actions to the public, so too did the kings and queens of medieval and early modern Spain. Monarchs often went to great lengths to exert complete control over the official history of their reign, physically intimidating historians, destroying and seizing manuscripts and books, rewriting past histories, and restricting history writing to authorized persons.

Still, the larger practice of history writing—as conducted by nonroyalist historians, various scholars and writers, and even church historians—provided a corrective to official histories. Kagan concludes that despite its blemishes, the writing of official histories contributed, however imperfectly, to the practice of historiography itself.

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