

Richard L. Kagan. *Clio and the Crown: The Politics of History in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*.

Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009. xiv + 342 pp. index. illus. tbls. map. bibl. \$55. ISBN: 978-0-8018-9294-3.

The late medieval and early modern chroniclers at the center of Richard Kagan's latest book were often inadequately trained, uncritical of their sources, unsystematic in their analyses, and insufficiently diligent to complete the sweeping histories of Spain which their royal patrons commissioned. Happily, the same cannot be said of Kagan himself. Researched and written with characteristic skill and grace, *Clio and the Crown* offers a much-needed survey of the social and intellectual milieus in which scholars from Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada in the thirteenth century to Juan Bautista Muñoz in the eighteenth labored to create a national historiography suitable to the needs of the Spanish court.

Clio and the Crown is not primarily a history of historical scholarship per se. This is not to say that Kagan is insensitive to the Renaissance revolution in historical method. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to write about sixteenth-century humanists like Antonio de Nebrija and Ambrosio de Morales without a keen awareness of the philological, archival, and antiquarian innovations that characterized their work. This book, however, has a different story to tell, one that has more to do with Spanish historians' political and ideological commitments than with their methodological principles. By privileging the when, where, why, and for whom of Spanish historiography — and by choosing to look only at those historians who held official royal commissions, however great or mediocre their talents — Kagan lays bare the tensions inherent in writing "official history" in medieval and early modern Spain.

"Official history," Kagan explains, is shorthand for "'approved' or 'authorized' history" that "receives governmental sponsorship and support," "is generally crafted with an eye toward creating a historical record that favors the interests and concerns of the ruler . . . for whom it was originally written," and "speaks to the present" (as well as the future) in order "to court public opinion, legitimate a ruler's claim to power, or rally support" for beliefs or policies (3). As such, any Spanish royal historian working in the genre faced a panoply of pragmatic and diplomatic considerations dictated not only by the personal tastes of the reigning monarch and interpersonal squabbles of his advisors, but also by the monarchy's international standing. Kagan narrates these changing expectations lucidly and in rich detail. Chapters 2–4, for example, chart the transition from Charles V's preference for *historia pro persona* (history as royal biography) to Philip II's more demure taste for *historia pro patria* (history as national

narrative). The hero of Philip's reign, the prolific chronicler Antonio de Herrera, returns in a separate chapter on Philip III's royal historians' defense of the empire, while other chapters deal in turn with historiography as international propaganda during the Thirty Years' War (6) and the rise of a new kind of critical historiography, denuded of providentialism, which flowed from the pens of the eighteenth-century *novatores* (7). Along the way, Kagan expertly frames the royal chronicler's evolving brief in light of Spain's inexorable experience of "imperial diminution."

As the chroniclers profiled in *Clio and the Crown* knew all too well, there was no history so perfect that the royal council could not send it back with a memorandum demanding another five or ten centuries' worth of material. (Contemporaries tended to argue that Spanish history began with Noah, if not with Adam.) One is tempted to do the same of Kagan. For all of this book's obvious quality, it is, nevertheless, far from the final word on the history of Spanish historiography. Historians' arguments are always shaped as much by what they omit as by what they include, and Kagan acknowledges that he has covered "but a tiny percentage" of the historians at work in medieval and early modern Spain — in several cases, the least "imaginative and original" percentage (290). While his decision to narrow his inquiry to the genre of "official history" is worthwhile, readers should know that many of the most meaningful historical debates in early modern Spain happened outside of the court. Recent work by Katherine Elliot van Liere, Guy Lazure, A. Katie Harris, and others has shown the myriad ways in which some of the same Spanish historians profiled by Kagan coped in fascinating ways with the challenge posed by Spain's Jewish and Muslim — not to mention Phoenician, Carthaginian, and Roman — past. These issues, too, have a good claim to belong in a book on "the politics of history" in Spain.

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