



A must-have for film scholars and educators

Alba, Ramón, and Ramón Rubio. *The History of Spain Through Cinema*. Madrid: Gobierno de España, 2009. Print. 311 p.

In 2009 the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to publish the first English edition of the 2007 book *La historia de España a través del cine*, a decision that can only please the film historian community.

Being a collaborative effort by editors Ramón Alba and Ramón Rubio, *The History of Spain Through Cinema* is a complete catalog of period films embracing the nearly entire production of fiction, short and documentary films set in historical events of Spain. This book is intended to become a tool for any film historian that wishes to have a minute reference to all film productions –international and Spanish- which have used events of Spanish history as their set.

The book includes two introductions with the intention of leading the reader through the vast number of films that compose this catalog. First, "The history of Spain on the screen", written by prolific screenwriter and film historian Román Gubern, one of the founding fathers of Films Studies in Spain, is a concise and practical breakdown of the evolution of the period film genre in Spain that highlights the most recurrent historical topics brought to screen. One of the most enlightening points in Gubern's introduction is its exposition of the reasons for the inexistence of films devoted to particular historical topics from certain historical times, such as the biography of Philip II in Francoist films, or the more recent and successful series of national films set in the Spanish Civil War. The second introduction, written by film historian Rafael R. Tranche "History in cinema on the store that becomes history" reflects on different trends and evolution of the period film genre. Several sharp observations by the authors make both introductions unique. But the essence of both introductions lies in presenting an attention-worthy observation: historical films tell us more about the time in which they were made than about the past in which they were set.

Organized both chronologically and thematically, the films are structured in Prehistory, Medieval Spain, Early Modern Period, 19th Century, and 20th Century. For reference purposes, it is especially useful for reader that the periodical classification has also been divided in historical topics, events, and/or figures, thus facilitating any search or query. Also, the inclusion of frames and film posters enhances the presentation of the whole book.

It is clear that *The History of Spain through cinema* will not decode the double historical nature embedded in any period film. *The History of Spain through Cinema* volume is a helpful book in another way. Whereas other books have given excellent representations and analyses of the various historical eras on film, this book contains a unified and nearly complete

breakdown of the filmography set in the Spanish past. This approach provides a practical tool for all film historians, though it is less detailed than someone might hope for. Unlike other books such as *Catálogo de Cine Español* published by The Spanish Film Archive - *Filmoteca Española*, when listing the films, it does not include a field stating the state of availability of the film. Yet, *The History of Spain through Cinema* becomes instrumental not only for film researchers and scholars, but also for history teachers who seek for a minute guide of films to be used in the classroom.

Overall, *History of Spain through Cinema* is an important contribution to the study of period films, and it should be highly recommended in this regard.

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