



Thomas Cromwell: Machiavellian Statecraft and the English Reformation

By Patrick J. Coby

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Thomas Cromwell, chief architect of the English Reformation, served as minister of Henry VIII from 1531 to 1540, the period during which more political and religious reform was accomplished than at any other time in Henry's thirty-seven-year reign. Thus the momentous events of the 1530s are generally (but not universally) attributed to Cromwell's agency. Cromwell has been the subject of close and continuous attention for the last half century, with positive appraisal of his work and achievements as the scholarly norm. In this classroom biography—the first in a generation and the only one now in print—that judgment is largely accepted, though it is combined with earlier and more critical assessments that view Cromwell as a disciple of Machiavelli. One distinguishing feature of this study is its overview of Machiavellian thought, along with its overview of Marsilian thought. Marsilius of Padua, fourteenth-century political philosopher and author of *Defensor Pacis*, is widely recognized as the source of Cromwell's reformation ideas; but nowhere is Marsilius explicated. The same is true of Machiavelli—never explicated though said to be (by Reginald Pole, cousin of Henry and cardinal of the church) the source of Cromwell's ideas on statecraft. A second distinguishing feature of the book is its inclusion of an introductory chapter that situates Cromwell in the sixteenth century and shows his connection to important events, characters, and ideas. Thus, while the book is a biography, its focus is broader and its uses more various.

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- Rank: #2030883 in eBooks
- Published on: 2009-02-16
- Released on: 2009-02-16
- Format: Kindle eBook



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Editorial Review

Review

Well-organized introductory work...Recommended. (*CHOICE, January 2010*)

Coby's work in contextualizing the rich and complicated story of Cromwell's life cannot be praised enough....Coby ably depicts how Cromwell worked with and against his fellow courtiers.... *Thomas Cromwell: Machiavellian Statecraft and the English Reformation* will revitalize the study of Cromwell. (*The Journal Of The Review Of Politics, Volume 72, 2010*)

This is at once a compelling, much needed biography and a massively well-informed intellectual history of the sixteenth century. J. Patrick Coby artfully tells the story of the man born to middling circumstances who helped transform England into a modern state. At the same time, he provides a lively account of the intellectual, religious, and political ideas and movements roiling the sixteenth century, showing how they influenced Cromwell and how Cromwell in turn helped to shape them. Coby focuses on events?biographical, historical, intellectual?of the 1530s, and students of the period will find particularly valuable his assessment of the seven sessions of the Reformation Parliament. (Larry Carver, University of Texas at Austin)

A series of though-provoking points of reference as Coby recounts Cromwell's rise and maintenance of his position as chief minister to Henry VIII in the 1530s, as the king's 'great matter' made that transcendent leap into the jurisdictional phase of the English Reformation.... An engaging and enjoyable study, ideal for both undergraduates and more casual students of Tudor history in its succinct description of 1530s England. (*Sixteenth Century Journal*)

About the Author

J. Patrick Coby is chair of the Department of Government at Smith College.

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