Michael A.R. Graves. *Burghley: William Cecil, Lord Burghley.* London and New York: Longman, 1998. viii + 239 pp. $36.80 (textbook), ISBN 978-0-582-30308-9; $89.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-582-30289-1.

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Published on H-Albion (June, 1999)

Writing a study of even one fragment of William Cecil's life is an exhausting task. Burghley was one of the most formidable characters of English and British history in the second half of the sixteenth century. His public career, in modern British politics, would have stretched from Clement Attlee to Tony Blair: from the reign of Edward VI as Protector Somerset's master of requests and king's principal secretary to his Elizabethan offices of principal secretary and lord treasurer, with one break between 1555 and 1558. Burghley's archive is huge. During a period when private political papers were indistinguishable from 'state' collections, he kept, marked, and endorsed nearly all of the documents which crossed his desk. He acted as a crucial point of contact between Elizabeth I and her councillors. His portfolio as principal secretary included the issues of England's relationship with the European powers, Ireland, domestic order, and, during a period of religious reformation, political security both inside and outside the kingdom. Along with his responsibility for the financial stability of the realm, these were concerns which exercised Burghley until his death in 1598.

Michael Graves's *Burghley* is not, of course, a comprehensive biography: it is part of the Profiles in Power series of thematic and analytical studies of key individuals. The book is divided into two main sections. First, a narrative of Cecil's early years (which are still slightly obscure), with three core chapters (pp. 29-83) on his Elizabethan career. And second, a thematic assessment which covers Burghley's relationship with Elizabeth I, his administrative and political duties, parliament, finance and economy, religion, and Britain and Europe. Like every historian of Elizabeth's reign, Michael Graves has to deal with an entrenched historiography and successive readings of William Cecil's political career which, more often than not, tried to squeeze him into an almost prime ministerial role as 'Secretary of State' and political partner of the queen. Professor Graves's short historiographical essay (pp. 4-11) moves from William Camden through to Conyers Read, and it makes an important point: the volume of material for Burghley's life and career is massive.

So Cecil, and the political system he helped to shape, demand delicate handling. On the one hand, historians have inherited a Burghley almost born into his late sixties, stable, dependable, and conservative. On the other, recent work (by Patrick Collinson and John Guy) has emphasized some crucial differences of political belief between Cecil and his queen, even to the extent of forming conciliar plans for a quasi-republican council of state to govern the realm in the event of Elizabeth's death (pp. 102-103). Even Burghley's political office before 1572 is easy to misrepresent. He was not a "Secretary of State," but the queen's principal secretary. Although he once called himself "a secretary of estate," this term reflected the close relationship between his office and the royal estate. The "state" as something abstract and separable from the person of the monarch came later. But during his career, Cecil certainly experienced a tension between service to the crown and a commitment to something wider–the preservation of the commonwealth.

Burghley fights a moderate path between the claims for Cecil of dependable conservatism and instinctive radicalism. Professor Graves argues that he was in tune with the queen politically and personally, in a relationship "which proved to be the fulcrum of political stability during most of her reign" (p. 89). And yet there was political frustration, and clear difficulties in trying to per-

suade Elizabeth on policy (pp. 89-90). The reader is reminded that it is important not to overplay the relationship between Elizabeth and Cecil at the expense of the conciliar context (p. 102). But, argues Professor Graves, queen and minister shared a common religious position, a cautious political conservatism, and a determination to preserve the "independent Protestant nation-state" Elizabeth had inherited. Cecil certainly seems to have had a strong godly and internationalist faith, the queen less so. Burghley and his colleagues were committed to support for their co-religionists on the continent of Europe Elizabeth seems to have been less interested.

Burghley forces us to think about the relationship between practical politics and the beliefs which underpin them. Michael Graves accepts the evidence for periods of political awkwardness. He also believes that, at their core, the values of Elizabeth and Burghley were remarkably similar. I am not absolutely sure that the story is as straightforward as that. Professor Graves accepts John Guy's argument that (in Graves's words) "the queen held that conciliar advice placed no limitation on her prerogative power to make decisions," and Burghley believed that it did (p. 92). This was not policy: it was a reflection of fundamental belief. There are interesting problems Elizabethan historians have to reconcile. Elizabeth was given the same intellectual training as many of her councillors and courtiers, often by the same people (pp. 19, 30). She was a subtle and sophisticated classical scholar. The effect of this intellectual training on her councillors seems to have been a developed concept of public duty and conciliar action, with or without the monarch. Elizabeth, on the other hand, was determined to press prerogative at the expense of counsel, and also prepared to stonewall council and parliament on principle.

Elizabethan government was a complex mechanism and, in just over two hundred pages, Professor Graves demonstrates beyond doubt that William Cecil affected virtually every aspect of it. His contention that Cecil played a major part "in the preservation of the national state and church created by Thomas Cromwell" (p. 214) may strike some as a little whiggish. But if the 1530s were responsible for introducing tensions between imperial monarchy and more conciliar responses to issues of governance, then Cecil was a worthy heir. Burghley was perhaps the Grand Old Man of Elizabethan politics, but he was also a courtier and a councillor who believed strongly that imperial royal government could be enhanced by the involvement (even partnership) of privy council and parliament. Burghley's career was, in a way, quite subversive. He reflected the demands of a political system which had to adapt to the queen's sex, age, personality, and temperament. "Constitution" becomes an awkward word to use when historians have to deal with a political system which evolved and developed over forty years–a system which was acutely sensitive to the political condition of Ireland, Scotland, and continental Europe, and aware of its own fragility. William Cecil Lord Burghley's career, as Michael Graves demonstrates, represents a period of continuity and consistency, but it was a consistency marked by profound difficulties and uncomfortable choices.

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Citation: Stephen Alford. Review of Graves, Michael A.R., *Burghley: William Cecil, Lord Burghley.* H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. June, 1999.

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