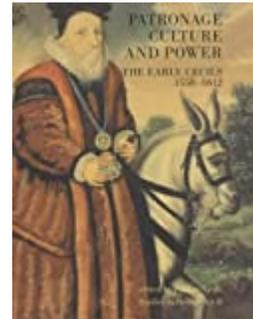




**Pauline Croft, ed.** *Patronage, Culture and Power: The Early Cecils, 1558-1612*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. xxi + 308 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-09136-6.



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**Published on** H-Albion (May, 2004)

## Cultural World of the Cecils

This richly illustrated volume is a collection of fourteen essays on the cultural patronage of William Cecil, Lord Burghley; his two sons, Thomas, Earl of Exeter, and Robert, Earl of Salisbury; and their families. Several essays are the work of multiple authors with the result that the book contains a diverse authorship of eleven women and five men of whom seven are listed as independent scholars. The inclusion of nineteen excellent color plates and eighty thoughtfully selected black-and-white illustrations enhances the book's visual appearance. The editor has organized the essays around four general topics, "The Cecils as Builders," "The Cecils as Patrons of the Arts," "The Cecils as Economic Patrons," and "The Cecil Household and Family."

The great Cecil country houses, Burghley, Theobalds, and Hatfield, are treated in separate essays as are the Cecils' London houses at Wimbledon. While Burghley and Hatfield still stand, Theobalds, "the most important and publicly acclaimed of all the great country houses built by the political grandees of the Elizabethan court," was demolished during the Commonwealth (p. 3). The section on the Cecils as artistic patrons includes essays on

gardens, art collections, music, and entertainments. Two essays on economic patronage deal respectively with Burghley's schemes for economic development and the family's creation of an urban power base in Westminster. The final section offers an essay on the Cecil women, with a separate contribution on Mildred, Lady Burghley, and a study of Burghley's household biographers.

Among the best essays is Jill Hesselby's study of Burghley House that emphasizes Cecil's politicization of hospitality. Drawing on the philosophy of Cicero, Cecil believed that for those who wished to possess power honorably, it was important to wield influence and command gratitude through the guests one entertained. Burghley House was not convenient to London, but it was regarded as the Cecil "flagship" and the seat with which the family was most closely identified. Although little is known of the craftsmen who built and furnished the house, clearly Cecil himself was closely involved, and imported leather and velvet chairs as well as a completely fabricated classical stone gallery from Antwerp were part of the furnishings. The whole environment of Burghley, according to Hesselby, was ideally suited to the "see and be seen" cul-

ture of the court. Another strong contribution is Lynn Hulse's study of the musical patronage of Robert Cecil. Between about 1591 and his death, he employed over twenty musicians and apprentices including three members of the Lanier family, violists John Coprario and John Sherley, and the Irish harpist Cormack MacDermott. He also patronized two organ-makers, Thomas Dallam and John Burwood. As an adherent of Renaissance educational theory, Cecil believed that a knowledge of music was a necessary attribute for the aspiring courtier. Both his son and son-in-law received thorough musical training. Hulse, like other contributors, was troubled by limited documentation, yet she is able to give a good indication of Cecil's musical taste. His patronage was of such magnitude that John Dowland praised him saying, "such is your divine disposition that both you excellently understand and royally entertain the exercise of music" (p. 153).

Pauline Croft's notable contribution seeks to correct the bad press of Mildred, Lady Burghley, of whom it was said she had more learning than was "necessary for that sex" (p. 283). Any reassessment of her must necessarily begin with a complete rejection of the sexist prejudice of the Tudor era. Indeed, Burghley was uniquely fortunate to have married one of the most learned women in Elizabethan England. Mildred received an excellent classical education that enabled her to speak and write Greek as well as her native English; she studied the Bible and collected medical texts. Not deficient in worldly wisdom, she possessed detailed knowledge of Scottish affairs, maintained close relations with the Earl of Leicester, whose mother had been her friend, and sent her son, Robert, to cultivate Sir Christopher Hatton. Mildred gave generously to charities, but her husband stressed the secrecy of her benefactions. Croft concludes that Mildred Cecil was "formidably learned, capable, greatly respected, and devoted to her family" (p. 297). Her portrait was the only picture displayed in her son's bedchamber at Hatfield House.

Alan Smith's study of Burghley's household biographers may not quite fit into the scheme of a book on patronage and culture, but it is the most thoughtful contribution. Smith examines two contemporary biographies, neither of which was published with the support of the Cecils. The first, John Clapham's four-thousand-word biography, remained unpublished until 1951. The editors,

Conyers and Evelyn Read, determined that Clapham, a clerk of Burghley, wrote the book in 1603 shortly after the death of Elizabeth. The second, an anonymous life, of some twenty thousand words, was first published in two editions in 1732 and most recently by Smith himself in 1990. Although no manuscript has survived, Smith concluded from internal evidence that the author was Michael Hickes, principal secretary to Burghley at the time of his death in 1598. Clapham and Hickes agreed on Burghley's devotion to the Church of England. Hickes noted that Burghley prayed on a cushion next to his bed each morning and evening and delighted at hearing sermons. Despite his great wealth, both biographers agreed that Burghley led a simple life and seldom drank wine. The two contemporary authors disagreed, however, with regard to Burghley's acquisition of wealth, a subject of enormous importance to this book. Clapham held that Burghley "grew rich and oftentimes gratified his friends and servants" (p. 258) through his mastership of the Court of Wards, whereas Hickes defended him. Smith compares the contemporary accounts with modern scholarship and argues that Burghley's conservatism, especially low taxes for the political elite, created future economic problems.

The major problem with this book is that many of the essays are descriptive rather than analytical. The authors have excluded all discussion of political patronage, but they also neglect the people—architects, builders, craftsmen, scholars—who benefitted from the Cecils' cultural patronage. Although several contributors comment on problems of insufficient documentation, a fuller discussion of this would have been helpful. With several notable exceptions, the authors fail to consider the economic resources that allowed the Cecils to practice patronage in such an extravagant way. The account of Hatfield is especially disappointing as the authors concede that Lawrence Stone covered the essentials of building the house in an article published many years ago. Except for Smith and Croft, the contributors are strangely uncritical of the Cecils and their acquisition of wealth. Furthermore, the book is exceptionally insular and ignores a large body of research on cultural patronage in Renaissance Italy. It would have been valuable to learn how the Cecils' patronage compares with noble patronage in Florence and Venice. Despite its limitations, this attractive book is a substantial compendium of information about the Cecils, who were the premier English patrons of their age.

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**Citation:** Barrett Beer. Review of Croft, Pauline, ed., *Patronage, Culture and Power: The Early Cecils, 1558-1612*. H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. May, 2004.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=9392>

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