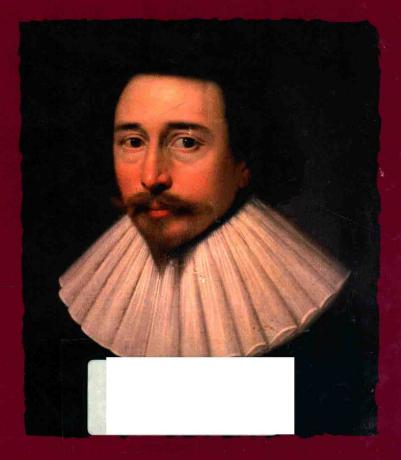
Sir Robert Filmer (1588–1653) and the patriotic monarch

PATRIARCHALISM IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY POLITICAL THOUGHT



CESARE CUTTICA

Sir Robert Filmer (1588–1653) and the patriotic monarch

Patriarchalism in seventeenth-century political thought

CESARE CUTTICA

Manchester
University Press
Manchester and New York

distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan

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Published by Manchester University Press
Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9NR, UK
and Room 400, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA
www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk

Distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA

Distributed exclusively in Canada by UBC Press, University of British Columbia, 2029 West Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada v6T 1Z2

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data applied for

ISBN 978 0 7190 8374 7 hardback

First published 2012

The publisher has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or any third-party internet websites referred to in this book, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Typeset in Scala with Pastonchi display by Koinonia, Manchester Printed in Great Britain

by TJ International Ltd, Padstow

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Acknowledgements

During the completion of this book I benefited from the precious help of a number of people without whom this research would not have been accomplished. I am most indebted to my doctoral advisors Martin van Gelderen and Johann P. Sommerville. The former has been helpful, encouraging, and always enthusiastic about the project. Johann has provided me with great scholarly insight into the history of early modern European political thought. He has helped me to better understand a complicated century and its political discourses. In addition, his support during my stay at the University of Wisconsin and afterwards has been pivotal to the writing of this book. His comments and scholarship can only be described as exceptional. Moreover, I owe a great intellectual debt to Ionathan Scott, who gave me the opportunity to spend a very productive semester in a congenial environment at the University of Pittsburgh. Jonathan offered his invaluable knowledge and admirable patience. He read the entire manuscript and made essential comments, without which this book would be a much lesser achievement. Last but not least, I owe much to Peter Lake for having believed in this project since 'day one'. He too read my work several times and several times put me straight back on the right track.

A number of other scholars have been generous with their help, time, or material. Amongst them are Glenn Burgess, Dario Castiglione, David Cleggett, James (Jim) Collins, Richard Cust, Jacqueline Eales, Rachel Foxley, Marco Geuna, Janelle Greenberg, Mark Greengrass, Matthew Growhoski, Knud Haakonssen, Rob Iliffe, Robert Kingdon, Gaby Mahlberg, Emilio Mazza, Jason McElligott, Anthony Milton, Eleonora Montuschi, Linda Levy Peck, Maria Luisa Pesante, Sue Petrie, Arfon Rees, Giuseppe Ricuperati, Julia Rudolph, Mark Somos, Naomi Tadmor, Ann Thomson, Edward (Ted) Vallance, Richard Whatmore, and Blair Worden. I am also grateful to my first mentors, Gianni Francioni and the late Fiorella De Michelis, who fuelled my early interest in the history of ideas and have been constant guides for all these years. The 'Politics, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain' series editors at MUP and the anonymous referees helped me to correct mistakes and reorganise the material here presented.

My PhD thesis – from which this book partly originates – would not have been written without the financial support of the European University Institute (Florence). I am also grateful to a number of institutions and research boards whose financial help made this project possible. I would like to thank, above all, the University of Pavia, the Luigi Einaudi Foundation (Turin), the University of Wisconsin, and the Scaliger Institute (Leiden). Last but not least, a Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowship enabled me to complete this project at the Sussex Centre for Intellectual History at the University of Sussex. Here I found a warm

Acknowledgements

and stimulating environment, and two excellent tutors in Knud Haakonssen and Richard Whatmore.

At different stages Ken Goodwin, Kris Grint, Kerry Mason, Tom Roper, Amy Smith, and Janet Summerton provided me with editorial help. A big thank you goes to my family, to whom the name Filmer probably represents my long absences from Piedmont. Friends have been generous with their encouragement, humour, and intellectual stimuli. A special mention goes to Adrian, Amy, Ben, Charlie, Chris, Clair, David, Florence, Gerben, Ian, Jake, John, Lucy, Massimo, Matthew, Miriam, Nick, Rico, Romy, Ruth, Sam, Seonad, Stefaan, and Tatiana. A particular thank you to Mark, who has accommodated an unseen and discreet lodger, Filmer, for many years. Last but not least, my deep gratitude towards Karin whose *company* has kept me sane.

Brighton, October 2011

List of abbreviations and conventions

SELECTED WORKS BY FILMER (POLITICAL)

- AN The Anarchy of a Limited or Mixed Monarchy, in J. P. Sommerville (ed.), Robert Filmer. Patriarcha and Other Political Writings (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 131–71.
- DO Directions for Obedience to Governours in Dangerous and Doubtfull Times, in Sommerville (ed.), Patriarcha, pp. 281–6.
- FH The Free-holders Grand Inquest Touching Our Sovereraigne Lord the king and His Parliament, in Sommerville (ed.), Patriarcha, pp. 69–130.
- OA Observations Upon Aristotles Politiques Touching Forms of Government, in Sommerville (ed.), Patriarcha, pp. 235–81.
- OG Observations Concerning The Originall of Government, Upon Mr Hobs Leviathan, Mr Milton against Salmasius, H. Grotius De Jure Belli, in Sommerville (ed.), Patriarcha, pp. 184–234.
- PT Patriarcha or The Naturall Power of Kinges Defended against the Unnatural Liberty of the People, in Sommerville (ed.), Patriarcha, pp. 1–68.

SELECTED WORKS BY FILMER (OTHERS)

- AD An Advertisement to the Jurymen of England, Touching Witches. Together with A Difference between An English and Hebrew Witch (edition printed from the original manuscript by The Rota, at the University of Exeter, 1975).
- BHG Of the Blasphemie against the Holy-Ghost (London, 1647).
- QQ Quaestio Quodlibetica or A Discourse, Whether it may bee Lawfull to take Use For Money (London, printed for Humphrey Moseley, 1653).
- VW 'In Praise of the Vertuous Wife', in M. Ezell, The Patriarch's Wife. Literary Evidence and the History of the Family (Chapel Hill and London, 1987), Appendix I, pp. 169–90.

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

BDO	Bodleian Library, Oxford
BL	British Library, London
CCL	Canterbury Cathedral Library
DNB	Dictionary of National Biography

EEBO Early English Books Online

EHR English Historical Review

HJ Historical Journal

HPT History of Political Thought

List of abbreviations and conventions

IBS Journal of British Studies

KAO Kent Archive Office, Maidstone

ODNB Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (new edition online)

OED Oxford English Dictionary

PP 1610 E. Read Foster (ed.), Proceedings in Parliament 1610 (New Haven and London, 2 vols., 1966), vols i and ii

PP 1628 R. C. Johnson et al. (eds), Proceedings in Parliament 1628 (New Haven and London, 6 vols., 1977–83), vols ii, iii, vi (Appendixes and Indexes)

PRO Public Record Office, London

PLACES OF PUBLICATION

The place of all publications is London unless otherwise stated.

DATES

All dates are given with the year beginning on 1 January.

TITLES

Titles of primary sources are given in short when they are too long and when this does not compromise their general meaning. Titles of secondary sources have been capitalised. The name of authors of primary sources is given in full, whilst only the initials and the surname are provided in the case of secondary literature.

TRANSLATIONS AND SPELLING

Translations of non-English sources that have no English edition are the author's own. The notes direct the reader to the original text.

MANUSCRIPTS

Recto and verso of manuscript pages are indicated both by 'r'-'v' and by 'a'-'b'.

Everything has been said before. But since nobody listens we have to keep going back and begin again. (André Gide, *Le traité du Narcisse*, 1891)

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This book explores the patriarchalist theories of Sir Robert Filmer (1588–1653) in relation to early modern English and European political cultures. The nine chapters – divided into two parts and chronologically structured – focus on Filmer's life and intellectual activity; on his main political treatise, *Patriarcha*; on the context in which it was produced and on its reception since the seventeenth century; on the theoretical importance of the two doctrines of 'patriarchalism' and 'patriotism'; on the intellectual role as well as ideological place of Filmer's major political ideas throughout the Stuart dynasty. They address central questions regarding *Patriarcha* (and Filmer's oeuvre) that have been hitherto ignored or, at best, left unanswered. More broadly, by studying the language of the Filmerian treatise, this book rethinks some crucial issues in the reading of seventeenth-century English history. Likewise, it also invites new reflections on the theory of patriarchalism in European political thinking.

Making use of unexplored primary material and adopting an innovative contextual approach to *Patriarcha*, this book provides a response to the following points: who was the 'real biographical' Filmer? What do we know about the much commented upon *Patriarcha*, namely about the document itself? When was it conceived and in connection with what milieu of publications? Did it respond to a particular target and, if so, what were the offending texts or political languages in question? What factors drove Sir Robert to compose his writing? Moreover, to what extent were Filmer's doctrines compatible with those of his contemporaries? Did Filmer shape his principles in conjunction with the discourses of other authors? What is the political and argumentative value of patriarchalism? Why did *Patriarcha* find a vast audience in the 1680s in England? Lastly, what aspects of Filmer's theory contribute to explain some of the most politically and culturally relevant dynamics concerning the seventeenth century?

Generally identified in the scholarly mainstream as the *villain* of early modern political thinking, Filmer has been depicted as a narrow-minded representative of a patriarchal society; as a conventional absolutist; or, simply, as the target of John Locke (1632–1704) and the republicans Algernon Sidney (1623–83) and James Tyrrell (1642–1718). In contrast to these approaches, this study focuses on the political and religious contexts where Filmer wrote and on the intellectual debates in which he was involved during his lifetime. Specific

attention is paid to Patriarcha (written in the late 1620s but not published until 1680) with the aim of unveiling the theoretical cornerstones of the language of patriarchalism, its goals and political message(s). Filmer's ideas are thus examined both in conjunction with the Caroline regime (1625-49) - with its cultural standards and ideological trends - and as a response to European debates centred on questions of liberty and sovereignty. In particular, the book connects Filmer's patriarchalist theories to the debates on the Oath of Allegiance (1606); to the controversies engendered by the Jesuit theory of the active role of the Pope in the temporal sphere; to the emergence of a strong patriotic discourse of parliamentary power in the 1620s in England; to claims of popular participation in government and the right to resist tyrannical or heretical princes in European disputes; to the Exclusion Crisis period (1679-81) when they enjoyed a revival. Thematically rich and multivalent in scope, Filmer's oeuvre is thus presented as the articulation of a European mind at work to clarify the same topics which had engaged Jean Bodin and the French politiques, King James VI and I, Thomas Hobbes, and Jesuit thinkers like Cardinal Robert Bellarmine and Francisco Suarez, John Locke and Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet.

By no means a hagiographic portrayal of Filmer nor an unhistorically sympathetic account of his ideas, the following pages show how his works – caught in the heat of debates – sometimes presented contradictory statements and discrepancies between their content and what was going on in the arena of political affairs. Indeed, our aim is to restore Filmer's thought and *Patriarcha* to precisely those debates and their time.

Any analysis of Filmer's work should start with the study of an important doctrine in the history of Western political thought: patriarchalism. This is a term used in different ways and fields. It is traditionally employed in the theological sphere where references are made to biblical patriarchs. In this context the word 'patriarch' as attached to biblical personages comes from the Septuagint version, where it is adopted in a broad sense, including religious and civic officials like in Chronicles. In a more restricted sense it is applied to the antediluvian fathers of the human race, and more particularly to the three great progenitors of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the New Testament the term is also extended to the sons of Jacob and to King David. As far as social theory is concerned, 'patriarchalist' normally indicates a pre-modern societal organisation at the centre of which stood the absolute authority of the male landowner over a large familial unit. In economic parlance 'patriarchalism' describes a specific structure of production and distribution of goods and labour characterising the household as an entity. Political theorists generally associate it with a form of oppressive, archaic, and anti-modern power (patriarchy) whereby the father of the household had absolute dominion over the

members of his family. This kind of personal and personalised authority has generally been considered antithetical to a liberal, conventional, and artificial conception of politics. Furthermore, feminist scholars depict patriarchalism as the quintessence of women's subjugation to men and their consequent oppression under a rigorous system made of duties and no rights, obedience and no liberties.

As for the history of political thought, patriarchalist theory maintained the supremacy of monarchs since they held the same authority as Adam, to whom God had assigned absolute power over all creatures. From the progenitor of mankind, power had passed to kings through the ancient patriarchs. On the whole, patriarchalism had a significant impact on the organisation of politics, society, and family in early modern Europe for it claimed that order and submission to higher authorities ought to be preserved in all human institutions. It thus followed that kings in the political realm, fathers in the family, and masters in the household wielded the same authority over their subjects, wives, children, and servants. Equally, the theoretical implications of these ideas profoundly influenced many traditions of political thought in Europe. In seventeenth-century England it was Filmer who became known as the representative of the patriarchalist theory since he had insisted on the superior role of Adam as first king on earth. In consequence, *Patriarcha* came to be seen as the ideological bedrock of patriarchalism.

PATRIARCHALISM IN THE THEATRE OF IDEAS: HISTORIOGRAPHICAL LIMITS AND A NEW APPROACH

The most extensive and pervasive use of the family in political thought was made by patriarchalists. The analogy between the familial and the political spheres served to justify the divine right theory of kings. According to several historians, this doctrine 'fitted well with the prescriptions of the writers of household manuals'.' Patriarchalism, Gordon Schochet maintained, was the political language adopted by Plato, Aristotle, Bodin, and Hooker to identify and define 'the organizational precursor of the political order'. More specifically, Schochet argued that in seventeenth-century England the idea that the household represented the source of governmental authority became 'the basis of an absolutist theory of political obligation'.3 However, even though 'the familial symbol had played a significant role in political thinking' throughout the early modern era, for Schochet there was no developed patriarchalist doctrine that could be employed in political debates.4 Patriarchalism thrived until it had the 'ability to "fit into" a culture and to incorporate and rely upon the principles that [were] widely accepted or taken for granted' within that culture. Defeated by the Lockean paradigm, patriarchalism became 'outmoded, irrelevant, and therefore unacceptable'. Its demise was due to 'the collapse of two attitudes':

'the appeal to origins to discover the nature of political authority' and the juxtaposition of political and familial societies. 6

This approach presents two main problems. Firstly, Schochet assumed that patriarchalism exclusively referred to the origins of authority. It followed that it had to do with the normative phase of the development of political government. Moreover, by focusing univocally on its historical and anthropological connotations, Schochet failed to see patriarchalism in relation to cultural meanings, metaphorical references, gendered paradigms permeating the broader intellectual context of early modern England and Europe. 7 He ignored that treatises like Patriarcha participated in the multiple process of imageconstruction that the Stuart monarchy set up through cultural, aesthetic, moral mediums to convey various politico-ideological messages. Secondly, Schochet neglected patriarchalism's role as a political language employed both to depict a distinct sketch of monarchy and to counterattack rival political paradigms. Patriarchalism entailed a stringent configuration of power that promoted a specific form of absolutism. It also provided a thorough model for the method of government and set forth a fully-fledged account of sovereignty. In other words, patriarchalism was more than the codification of archaic beliefs failing to succeed in the theatre of ideas when confronted by the typhoon of modern philosophy, empirical science, and social change.

Equally problematic is Glenn Burgess' view of patriarchalism as 'an important sub-language closely attached to order theory'. Following William H. Greenleaf's interpretation, Burgess associated patriarchalist discourse with the notion that society had to be preserved by means of a hierarchical structure, for which the theologically laden theory of patriarchalism represented the strongest justification. As he put it, the 'sub-languages' of 'order theory, patriarchalism, millenarianism ... possessed an uncontested capacity to make statements of *moral* duty', which 'in *political* matters was vague and unspecific'. For Burgess patriarchalism functioned in a prescriptive mode. It was employed either to enforce subjects' obedience or to emphasise the unselfish role of the king to promote the common good. That subjects had 'to love kings as one loved one's father' did not imply any 'particular political or ideological points' other than the mere imposition of instructions with which society could be aptly controlled.

Despite their acumen, these interpretations did not see that patriarchalism articulated a specific vision of politics through rational arguments, historical research, analogical reasoning. Filmer did not transpose social prejudices into his political theories. His work cannot be schematically reduced to the antithesis of '[i]ndividualism, political conventionalism, and rational justification'. Nor can it be branded as the systematisation of a 'more communitarian view, naturalism, and the use of genetic-historical arguments'. To think so obscures the fact that Filmer adopted a conservative vocabulary with a radical

meaning.¹⁵ In substance, 'anthropological' and 'ideological' readings of patriarchalism need to be replaced with interpretations that highlight its *political* dimension. And it is from this angle that the following pages consider this intellectual category.

Thus, it is argued that political patriarchalism was not simply a strong reaction to the idea that a voluntary contract formed civil society. Nor was it merely a fierce rejection of the concept that human consent was the wellspring of government. This was the theoretical performance that patriarchalist theorists played when it came to analysing the origins of political society.16 Yet there was another stage on which authors like Filmer knew it was fundamental to act. This regarded governance (the method of governing a polity), and entailed a different representation of power. Nor can patriarchalism as a forceful theory of absolute and arbitrary government be identified tout court with the theory of the divine right of kings.¹⁷ In this respect, whilst the latter doctrine claimed that kings had been entrusted with power either directly by God or indirectly through the irrevocable mediation of the people, the patriarchalist Filmer rejected all forms of popular participation in politics and made Adam the exclusive founder of political authority. Besides, divine right theory applied to republics too, in that it concerned government per se, which made it all the more incongruous with the Filmerian viewpoint.

Through his free will, the patriarchal sovereign regulated political interaction with no consideration for assemblies and fundamental laws. The arbitrary power of Adam represented the guiding model of political organisation. The Adamite paradigm fused absolute and arbitrary power. Moreover, if royalist thinkers like John Hayward, Adam Blackwood, and John Barclay⁸ admitted that men had originally been free and had, therefore, set up different kinds of government, Filmer denied that a state of nature had ever existed. Likewise, he rejected Hobbes' claims that in the beginning people had been free of government and that, as such, polities stemmed from a contract. Whilst these royalists saw the king as the embodiment of the persona of the respublica, Filmer dismissed the fictional element of this argument, opting, instead, for a configuration of sovereignty where king and State coincided thanks to the Adamite argument and its fatherly metaphors. For Filmer the sovereign was not a fictional character on the political stage. He was the real (genetic) source of the body politic. The sovereign was the body politic. In contrast to the Hobbesian model. 19 the Filmerian ruler did not act in the name of the State because he was the State.

Contrary to received scholarly views, contractualists were not the sole target of patriarchalists. A major part of their criticism in early seventeenth-century England discredited claims that Parliament was the true representative of the people. This conflict centred on the identity of the nation. Let key element was the identification of the head of the nation either with Parliament as

the cornerstone of liberties or, instead, with the absolute monarch as *pater* patriae.²¹ This last image is here taken as the theoretical fabric of what we call political patriarchalism.²²

THE CONDESCENSION OF POSTERITY: FILMERIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY²³

As for the main scholarly interpretations of Filmer's political theory to date, the older view – with few notable exceptions²⁴ – portrayed it as obsolete and superseded already in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Based on a Lockean-conditioned and supposedly modern standpoint, a largely liberal and Whiggish (but also Marxist) approach failed to place Filmer's ideas in context.²⁵ As a result, it gave a caricatured picture of *Patriarcha* as a relic of the past that received surprisingly close scrutiny from intellectual heavyweights such as Locke,²⁶ Sidney,²⁷ and Tyrrell.²⁸ Following a tradition which had in Jean Barbeyrac and Jean-Jacques Rousseau two influential precursors,²⁹ the historiographical mainstream denied Filmer the status of independent thinker within the history of English political thought and considered him as an 'inconspicuous' figure.³⁰ Reputed as an unoriginal theorist to whom only the devastating criticism of Locke and Sidney lent any significance, Filmer and his works were thus studied exclusively in connection with the astringent remarks made by Whigs and republicans against them.

A small number of new historiographical readings of Filmer's thought came into the debate by promoting a novel critique of his patriarchalism. Ironically, the first scholar to do so was Peter Laslett, the modern editor of Locke's Two Treatises and of Filmer's political works (1949), with a brief but remarkable study of Sir Robert's Kentish intellectual milieu (1948-49).31 For Laslett, Filmer set up a code of 'conscious and unconscious prejudice' typical of his county environment.32 Sir Robert's 'brash naivety and his obviously amateur outlook' made him an 'extremely rare phenomenon' whose name by 1750 'had already become a rather dreary appendage to the name of John Locke'.33 Patriarcha was the quintessential expression of a patriarchal society, that is, of what with a much celebrated phrase Laslett named 'the world we have lost'.34 Subsequently, Gordon Schochet (1975)35 and James Daly (1979)36 studied - in somewhat mutually exclusive ways - patriarchalism as the ideological cornerstone of Filmer's work.³⁷ Schochet argued that almost all seventeenth-century thinkers subscribed to the idea that fathers and masters had dominion over their families. Hence he concluded that the positions of Filmer and Locke were 'not vastly different'.38 By contrast, Daly stressed the originality of Filmer's principles and their distance from seventeenth-century English royalism.³⁹ His political ideas were too controversial and, therefore, were followed up only by a 'minority of authors' supporting the Stuart monarchy. 4° Daly coined