

IMAGE WARS
PROMOTING KINGS AND
COMMONWEALTHS IN ENGLAND,
1603-1660

KEVIN SHARPE

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW HAVEN AND LONDON

of this rather different representation, the reader is asked: 'why should we not love and embrace him though the royal blood may not . . . stream in his veins?'²²³ After all, the reader is reminded, 'to be wrapt and swaddled in purple is not so much as the one half of a good prince . . . wisdom and virtue are of the perfection and essence of a regular and complete sovereignty.'²²⁴ Though at first reading like a manifesto for Cromwell to be king, the text is ambiguous: ambiguous because, as the author acknowledges, there is opposition to kingship, not least from Cromwell himself.²²⁵ Anxious above all for settlement, the author, presenting a king and not a king, urged in his address to the reader: 'we have no little reason to unite and stick close to our Caesar.'²²⁶

The Unparalleled Monarch, while appealing for unity – 'methinks we should combine like Christians and countrymen' – was written out of, and into, a culture of division.²²⁷ Because England was divided, when he last refused parliament's offer of the crown, Cromwell, as much as he disappointed some, gained the support of others. Wither, as we saw, in *A Sudden Flash* offered reasons in verse why 'the style of Protector should not be deserted.'²²⁸ Pamphlets publicized versions of the arguments Cromwell had used against kingship. In 1658, one T.L. in *Considerations*, as the title page has it, 'printed for the public good', defended the Protectorate and endeavoured to persuade all to submit to Richard, Cromwell's son and successor, established by the Humble Petition that followed the refusal of the crown.²²⁹

Oliver Cromwell, as we shall see, in death at last was given the crown that some had lobbied him to receive, that others had feared he would take.²³⁰ The contested representations of Cromwell – king or no king, prophet or Machiavellian – continued long after his death. If, however, from 1653 to 1658 England reached some kind of peace and a settlement where most accommodated with the regime, that was due not only to the Protector himself but to the array of panegyrists and prose writers who, often but not always with official support, presented and re-presented Cromwell to the people as the best hope of stability, and who sustained hopes and countered arguments so as to keep him in office in rapidly changing circumstances. Like the course of the revolution itself, the images of Cromwell which were constructed and disseminated were always contested and changing. But from the institution in 1653 of the Protectorate as 'midway between . . . monarchical and democratical', the drift in the style and image, and in the perception of the Protector, whatever his protestations, was inexorably to the regal.²³¹

PAINTING PROTECTORAL POWER

I

One of the things best known about Oliver Cromwell's visual image is known through words: that is Oliver's supposed instruction to the artist Peter Lely, who was about to execute his portrait:

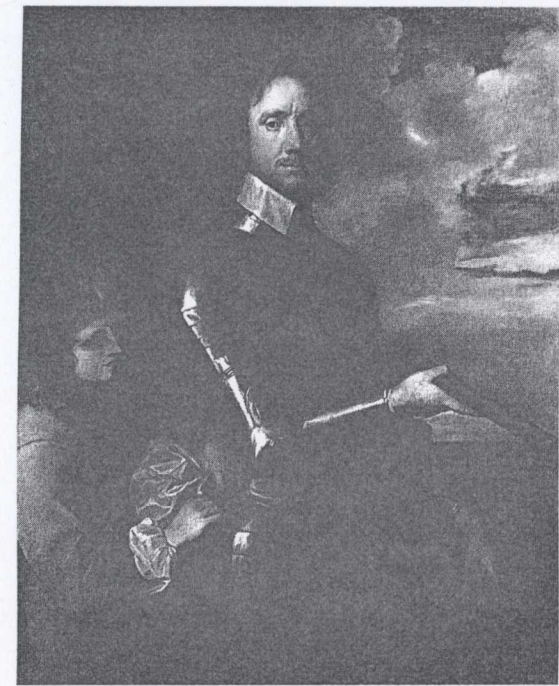
Mr Lely I desire you would use all your skill to paint my picture truly like me & not flatter me at all. But (pointing to his own face) remark all these roughness, pimples, warts & everything as you see me. Other wise I never will pay a farthing for it.¹

The 'warts and all' Cromwell has passed into history: as the plain man, the plain speaker and plain captain who only reluctantly took the reins of government. Recently, Laura Knoppers identified in Cromwell's portraits a 'plain style' which, she argued, was the aesthetic preference of just such a figure who resisted the crown, the champion of an aesthetic iconoclasm to match the revolutionary political and religious iconoclasm of the 1640s and 1650s.² Perhaps slightly contradictorily, Knoppers also observed that different artists painted Cromwell's portrait, that in writings he made no references to portraits and that he had, in contrast to monarchs, no official court painter. 'His interest in visual and verbal representations of himself,' Laura Knoppers concludes, 'was largely limited to countering the negative.'³ The Cromwell she paints is a man who very much fits with the familiar puritan type: a figure uninterested in vanity and suspicious of the visual arts as arts of misrepresentation rather than representation.

The story, as Knoppers acknowledges, of Cromwell's injunction to Lely is not contemporary: it was first related by George Vertue about 1721 and it may be anecdotal.⁴ That aside, there are difficulties with taking the injunction straightforwardly as a summation of Cromwell's attitude to his portrayal and with the interesting case that Laura Knoppers puts forward. For the danger is that one takes as Cromwell's representation, as he wished one to, his self-representation as but the commander of the 'plain russet coated captain[s]'.⁵

Surprisingly, Knoppers argues that Cromwell took little interest in 'visual and verbal representations of himself [my emphasis]' when, as we have seen, and most would concur, his speeches were carefully rhetorically crafted to enhance his position and authority. In those speeches, the pose of modesty, and of reluctance to govern, was coupled with endlessly rehearsed claims to be God's instrument and to an authority granted by Providence that would not brook opposition. Certainly, Oliver's critics and enemies – Royalists on the one side, old Commonwealthsmen on the other – suspected him of masking vanity and ambition in order the better to obtain dominance; and they should not be dismissed just because they were hostile. Where his portraits are concerned, Cromwell clearly took a greater interest in his image after 1653 than earlier. Where, we recall, during the 1640s, and in the particular case of the medal to commemorate the victory at Dunbar in 1650, Oliver had resisted a prominent image of himself and had advised collective representations of parliament and the army, as Protector he evidently commissioned and distributed official portraits of himself as a single, commanding figure of authority.⁶ Cromwell may not have appointed an official court painter – by no means all monarchs did. But that is not to say that he was not (as the instruction to Lely itself suggests) as careful of his visual portrayal as of his verbal self-representation; nor that the so-called 'plain style' was not, in every sense, as artful as the speeches were rhetorical. The visual representations of the Protector in portraits and engravings, as on seals, medals and coins, were devised to sustain and enhance Cromwell's authority in shifting historical circumstances no less than the earlier images of kings from which they borrowed. They developed and changed with shifting circumstances and became, I shall argue, increasingly regal.

A discussion of the Protector's visual image must return us to the earlier portrait of Cromwell by Robert Walker, probably executed in 1649. David Piper, noting that Cromwell approved it, describes it as an official portrait that remained the dominant image of Cromwell until at least 1654 and one of the types which was continued to 1656.⁷ There are variants as well as copies of the portrait, which was evidently hung in numerous aristocratic and gentry houses and remains one of the most frequently encountered portraits in England in replica and repetition.⁸ Though all versions probably descend from one sitting, and the head remained the same, there are three-quarter-lengths and versions to the waist only, as well as one double portrait, with Major-General Lambert, which, though of uncertain date, may be connected with the institution of the Protectorate.⁹ In this portrait, Cromwell, as we noted, is depicted with a baton and in armour with, behind him (on the left in most versions, but on the right in some) a page tying a silk sash around his waist. In general terms the armoured Cromwell follows a whole panoply of European representations of generals. But David Piper long ago identified a more local and topical debt to Van Dyck's portrait of Viscount Goring and Lord Newport now at Petworth;



86 *Oliver Cromwell* by Robert Walker, c. 1649.

more recently, I suggested the influence of the 1636 portrait of Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Stafford by Van Dyck.¹⁰ While acknowledging these debts, Laura Knoppers interprets the portrait not as a simple replication but as an appropriation and revision of a courtly, indeed monarchical, image.¹¹ Though Cromwell's body is richly appraised and elongated by the position of the page and viewer, Knoppers observes a plain head with uneven hair and suggests a contrast with the idealized version of the page, who (though she does not argue this) may stand for a courtly culture of ease in contrast to the military action Cromwell symbolizes. While, however, Knoppers is right to insist that Walker's Cromwell is not a simple reproduction of Van Dyck, the similarities remain striking. Importantly, too, at least in its signification, this is no plain – if by that is meant straightforward – record of Cromwell. Not only, as we know from the later 'warts and all' images, has Cromwell's face been cleared of blemishes, but the representation is softened and idealized.¹² The armour Cromwell wears is not that of the civil war soldier (who would have worn a cuirass with a buff coat and helmet) but of an antique, sixteenth-century style of the sort we have seen in portraits of Prince Henry and Charles I. Approving the portrait, Cromwell evidently wished to be represented in this chivalric, at least quasi-regal mode, as early as 1649 – though whether to aspire to, or erase the memory of, monarchy remains unknown. Certainly, the Walker portrait

'challenges the exclusionary claims of the Caroline court to images of power and authority'.¹³ But it also sits strangely with Cromwell's reluctance to have his image on the Dunbar medal and so suggests early ambiguities about his personal position, authority and representation, perhaps even a desire to keep options open. Though proclaiming in a speech to the army in 1649 that 'it matters not who is our commander-in-chief if God be so', Cromwell's portrait by Walker positions Cromwell as just that: a commander-in-chief of the army to Ireland and perhaps potentially of the nation.¹⁴

It may seem ironic that while such a regal image of Cromwell circulated as portraits and engravings during the Commonwealth, after he became Protector Oliver evidently sought a less monarchical image. As David Piper has argued, a new portrait type emerged in 1654, soon after Cromwell's proclamation as Protector (in December 1653) and appears to have been a replacement official portrait.¹⁵ Since it was in 1654 that Peter Lely began to work for Cromwell, the new image may well relate to the instruction to the painter as related by Vertue. However, it has been persuasively argued that the originator of the new style was not Lely but Samuel Cooper, the miniaturist.¹⁶ Though his brush has been detected in the works of his uncle John Hoskins at the Caroline court, Cooper himself only became established in London after the outbreak of the civil war, during which he executed portraits of Parliamentarian generals.¹⁷ He began to work for Cromwell in 1650, producing likenesses of Oliver and his daughter Elizabeth, and possibly other members of the Cromwell family. Cromwell's family's employment of a miniaturist suggests, John Murdoch argues, the adoption after 1653 of a French courtly practice.¹⁸ But in Oliver's case, Cooper's first image of him, dated by Piper to 1653, was far less regal than the Walker. Indeed, Cooper's miniature, now in the Buccleuch collection, is realistic to the point of wilfully unflattering – the simple attire, receding hair and warts (one very prominent on the chin) constituting indeed a 'startlingly honest and plain depiction'.¹⁹ Other Cooper miniatures of the Protector, including a bust facing to the right, differ but have in common the realism and plain, simple appearance of the earliest: an image that follows, in Knoppers's words, 'Cromwell's own plain-spoken Biblicism and piety'.²⁰

Cooper's plain image appears to have become a model for the portraits of Cromwell which followed his appointment as Lord Protector. Lely's head and shoulders portrait in oval, now at Birmingham, follows a Cooper miniature in the pose and position of the head, though it softens the warts that were prominent in Cooper and depicts Cromwell's body in the cuirassier armour which, as we commented, was often an artistic prop signifying chivalric values and virtues.²¹ As in Cooper's unfinished miniature, Lely's Cromwell does not look out to the viewer, as monarchs often did on canvas, but appears as if caught, unposed, in a moment of intense contemplation – perhaps of his duty of service to God and nation. The similarity between the two artists' portrayals suggests a new official image which can only have been commissioned by



87 *Oliver Cromwell* by Samuel Cooper, c. 1650.

Cromwell himself to mark his new position. Indeed, another undated portrait (attributed uncertainly to Walker), depicting Cromwell as a cavalryman, may well belong to the remaking of his image. The portrait, in the Cromwell Museum, presents the Protector in a less flamboyant manner than Walker's earlier image and contributes to the re-presentation of Oliver as the ordinary minor gentleman and soldier that the other 1654 portrayals helped to construct.

Plainness and simplicity, however, are not the only messages one takes from this canvas. The portrait owes a clear debt to Van Dyck portraits, especially the 1632 canvas of Frederick Henry, Prince of Orange who, of course, by 1640 was Charles I's son-in-law, and has some echoes of Mytens's portrait of Charles as prince.²² Another, anonymous, painting, also in the Cromwell Museum and dated to c. 1654, similarly recalls earlier, regal images. Laura Knoppers



88 *Oliver Cromwell* by Peter Lely, 1654.

curiously describes the equestrian portrait of Cromwell astride a barb stallion as 'significantly non-monarchical, more like that of a Dutch burgher'.²³ In general this type of equestrian portrait, especially as here with a reproduction of Hollar's engraving of the city of London as a backdrop, was a regal, indeed a Stuart, image. And while it is true that Cromwell's velvet jacket and breeches are not especially opulent, the sugar loaf hat with feathers recalls countless engraved images of Charles I.²⁴ As with the Protector's speeches, new portraits of Cromwell executed after 1653, though they advertised ordinariness, yet retained distinctly recognizable monarchical forms.

The last contemporary portraits of Cromwell perpetuate that ambiguity or doubleness that was at the heart of the Protectorate as well as its representation. A recent interpretation of the portrait of Cromwell by the little-known artist Edward Mascall, acquired by the Cromwell Museum in 1966, draws attention to its simplicity. Representing Oliver as older, with no symbols of



89 *Oliver Cromwell* by an unknown artist.

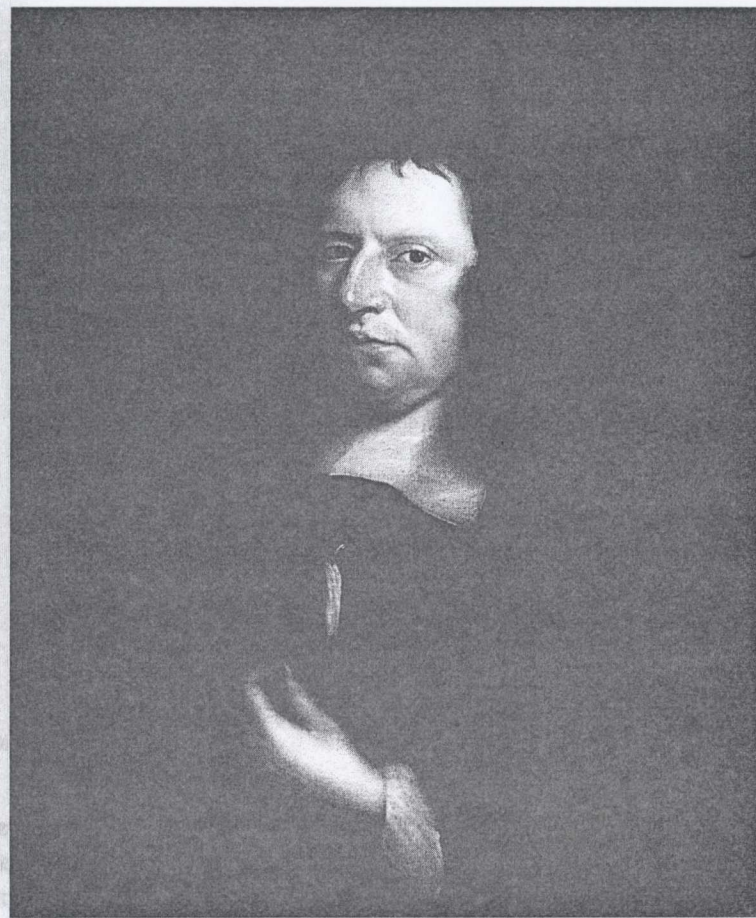
office or authority, the portrait exhibits, it is argued, 'no signs of royalty nor indeed of pomp'.²⁵ At the time of the offer of the crown, Mascall directs the viewer not to the Protector but to the man. It may be that, as Laura Knoppers implies, Mascall's image contributed to the debate about kingship and, since he presumably sat for it, perhaps represented Cromwell's reluctance to take the crown. Yet, though plain and even austere, the portrait still evokes portraits of Charles I who tended to be depicted without the trappings of regality, representing his authority as intrinsic to his person. But most problematically, Mascall's portrait, if interpreted as a rejection of regal representation, fits uneasily with the increasingly monarchical style of Cromwell's court and with other visual images of the Protector from his last year. In 1658, for example, Oliver evidently approved the decoration of the initial letter of a charter with his portrait. Not only was this a distinctly Tudor regal form, on a charter at Chester and patent of nobility Cromwell is depicted in ermine, and in the latter



90 Anonymous equestrian painting of Cromwell, c. 1654.

case with a sceptre.²⁶ If Mascall's portrait was 'a remarkably private depiction' of Cromwell, it may be seen as a representation of one of the two bodies of a ruler who made his person the source of his authority.²⁷ If in that, for all their differences, he shared something with Charles I, no less than for the king were the personal and public reconciled for Cromwell in death, when the effigy of his body was represented with the regalia and the crown.

Like monarchs before him, Cromwell sent copies of his portraits to fellow rulers like Queen Christina of Sweden and the king of Denmark, gave them to Dutch and Portuguese ambassadors, presumably for presentation to their heads of state, and donated them to friends such as Colonel Robert Rich.²⁸ The numerous copies of Walker's and Lely's portraits and copies after Cooper's miniature in various genres (one for example in a ring, another as a jewel) indicate that there was a wide interest in the image of the Protector and that it



91 *Oliver Cromwell* by Edward Mascall, 1657.

hung as the visible face of authority in numerous gentry houses.²⁹ Moreover, surviving portraits of his sons, Richard and Henry, and of Cromwell's wife Elizabeth and daughters (Elizabeth, Bridget, Frances and Mary) in fashionable attire, many executed during the Protector's life, suggest that the Cromwells fostered the impression that they were, and were perceived as, a dynasty: presumably one that many thought might become the hereditary ruling family of the realm.³⁰ If so, Mary's marriage into a Royalist family, and Elizabeth's alleged vanity – 'she acted the part of a princess', Harrington noted – must have strengthened that perception.³¹

II

Whatever the distribution of these paintings, it was through other genres of visual representation that most Englishmen and women viewed Cromwell as



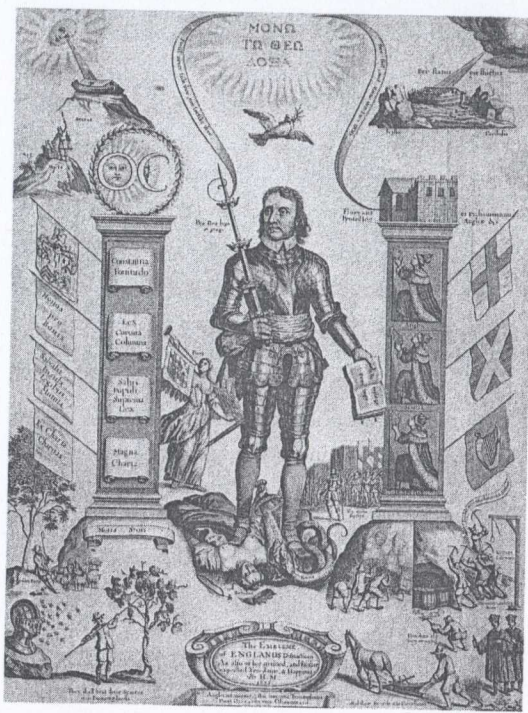
92 Letters patent for a Cromwellian hereditary peerage.

Protector from 1653 to 1658. As we have seen, the market for engravings was rapidly growing in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and appears to have been stimulated by the civil war. Given that, we might expect to find more contemporary engraved portraits of Cromwell than we do. In the large English collections of prints, almost all contemporary or near-contemporary engravings of Cromwell are after Walker rather than Cooper or Lely, making the most courtly of portraits the most widely disseminated.³² Other engravings that we can with reasonable confidence date as contemporary do nothing to qualify that regal representation. William Faithorne produced an engraved portrait of Cromwell surrounded with smaller images of the biblical kings, David and Solomon, and the imperial Alexander the Great and Caesar; and another Faithorne, perhaps anticipating a new royal dynasty, is inscribed below his portrait 'Olivarius Primus'.³³ An anonymous engraving, again of Cromwell in a plumed hat, appears to gesture to Van Dyck's *Le Roi à la chasse*, Cromwell's right hand on a cane and left arm in foreshortening being modelled on the stance of Charles I.³⁴ Famously – or rather infamously – an engraving executed before 1658 by Pierre Lombart of Van Dyck's canvas of a mounted Charles with Monsieur St Antoine etched Cromwell's head on to one of the most imperial images of Charles I that had conspicuously hung at the end of rows of portraits of emperors in the gallery at St James's.³⁵ Though in Lombart's



93 Olivarius Cromwell, engraving, 1654–8.

version, the city on the hill behind may serve to represent the godly Cromwell, the image, in the most obvious material way, appropriates regal representation. Another Faithorne engraving appears to claim, beyond that, divine, universal monarchy. A rare print in the Pepys Library and in the Richard Bull Granger at the Huntington Library, dated 1658, is titled 'The Emblem of England's Distractions as also of her attained and further expected Freedom and Happiness'.³⁶ In this complex image, Cromwell stands in armour between two columns, which often represented the pillars of Hercules and imperial power. The Protector crushes beneath his feet the beast of superstition and the whore of Babylon. In his right hand he bears a sword, beside which is written in Latin 'For God, the law and the people'. In his left hand he holds a book inscribed 'Tullo prolego protego' (I take up, I lead and protect). Above the Protector a dove holds an olive branch of peace beneath a Greek inscription according glory to the one God alone, inside a scroll with the legend 'I will never fail thee nor forsake thee' and 'Be still and know that I am God'. On Cromwell's right (our left), above scenes of peace and pastoral tranquillity, stands a column, topped with his initials inside a sun, moon and wreath. On the column, four tablets contain inscriptions reading 'Constancy and fortitude', 'The law is the safest pillar of state', the Roman adage 'Salvo populi suprema



94 *The Embleme of Englands Distractions*, print by William Faithorne after Francis Barlow, 1658.

lex' (the safety of the people is the supreme law) and, simply, 'Magna Carta'. Banners attached to the column are topped with one displaying Cromwell's family arms; and, above the pillar, biblical scenes of Abraham and Isaac and the ark at rest on Mount Ararat symbolize the chosen people saved. Beneath the pillar on the right (Cromwell's left) demoniac priests threaten the polity with faggots, gallows and gunpowder, the historical symbols of destructive English Catholicism. On the pillar, topped with a crenellated building symbolizing the government (with the inscription 'May the Protector and parliament of England flourish'), kneeling figures representing the three nations of England, Scotland and Ireland offer wreaths.³⁷ Above the pillar, the ship of state is being safely guided between the rocks of Scylla and Charybdis to safety from winds and wars. Fame with her trumpet proclaims Oliver as God's instrument who brings peace to distracted nations.

Apparently produced and sold just before Cromwell's death on 3 September, the engraving – after a drawing by Francis Barlow, who entered the Painter Stationers Company with Walker – perhaps represented Cromwell as in 1658 he wished to be seen: as the godly Protector of those nations (and Christendom) against popish plots.³⁸ But, for all that it celebrates Protector and parliament (and

the wreaths proffered by grateful nations may symbolize the offer of a crown not taken), the image is regal and imperial. Indeed, the engraving recalls Van de Passe's 1592 plate of Elizabeth I between two crowned columns; and, interestingly, Barlow's drawing of Cromwell was reworked, with almost no change, in 1690 as a representation of William III after the Glorious Revolution.³⁹ Not only did he appropriate royal iconography, in revising it for Protectorial rule Cromwell bequeathed visual symbols to Protestant Whig kingship.

In Faithorne's engraving, Cromwell's family crest is permanently displayed on a banner, directly opposite the English flag, the cross of St George. In 1649, one image of regicide displayed blank escutcheons to signify the death of honour, chivalry and heraldry with the death of the king.⁴⁰ The Commonwealth took care over the devising and publicizing of new arms; but it was the return of single-person rule under Cromwell that re-established a personal and family escutcheon as the device of government. And Cromwell marked his elevation to the Protectoral office by an important revision of his arms. Cromwell's crest as Lord General had borne a demi-lion holding in its paw a halbert or pike. After he was made Lord Protector, he took away the halbert and gave the demi-lion a diamond ring in his right paw 'to signify his political marriage to the imperial crown of the three kingdoms.'⁴¹ In 1655, the arms Cromwell approved to be worn by his bargemen re-established a recognizably royal escutcheon. The device revived the heraldic supporters of the Tudor monarchs: a lion guardant crowned and a dragon with wings, with a shield with a kingly crown and on top the royal crest of Britain, the crowned lions. To an escutcheon that was 'very much the symbol of royalty' Cromwell imported, in the midst of quarterings with symbols of the three nations, his own arms of a lion rampant, added his motto ('Pax quaeretur bello'), and replaced C.R. with his own initials O.P., for Oliver Protector.⁴² In 1657 the Council ordered new coats to be issued to the watermen, in the grey cloth already worn by Cromwell's footmen and with his arms and initials, to be worn on the front and back.⁴³ Despite his refusal of the crown, the Protector's arms displayed on buildings, boats and the bodies of household servants signified regal – and, to English observers, specifically Tudor – authority.⁴⁴

It is noteworthy that the establishment of the Protectorate in December 1653 was not marked by the commissioning of a new seal. While these took time to prepare and there was other pressing business, it may be that, at a time when he was anxious to convey a sense of continuity and adherence to the old cause, Cromwell chose not to, literally, stamp his image on the new government and all the documents issued by it. The Commonwealth Seal, we recall, hurriedly and poorly cast in 1649, had been remade in 1651 with, in place of the royal person and arms, the map of England on one side and, on the other, an image of a crowded House of Commons, with a legend in English 'In the third year of freedom by God's blessing restored.'⁴⁵ In the spring of 1655, after the failure

and dissolution of his first parliament, Cromwell approved a new seal for the Protectorate that marked a revolution: in the seventeenth-century sense of a return to old – and again ‘manifestly monarchical’ – forms.⁴⁶ The obverse of the seal, in imitation of earlier royal seals, figured Cromwell armoured and mounted facing left, against a view of London, but on a pacing rather than galloping horse and with a baton of command rather than a sword. If, as has been suggested, Cromwell was keen to distance the Protectorate from its military origins, the addition of his escutcheons evidences his determination to advertise his personal authority, which is inscribed in the legend – now again in Latin: ‘Olivarius dei gr[atia] rei[publicae] Angliae Scotiae et Hiberniae protector’. On the reverse, the new Protectoral arms prescribed for the watermen’s badges placed Cromwell’s family beast, now with a ring, at the centre of the heraldic achievements of the Tudor monarchs, with, below, Cromwell’s motto repeating that peace had always been the goal, even of war. Recognition of the counter-revolution that the new seal represented comes from no less a figure than the Chief Engraver of the Mint himself. For, in submitting his account for work to the Protector, Thomas Simon itemized ‘two steel seals in imitation of Charles Stuart.’⁴⁷ In some respects, the seal of Charles I, though the nearest in time, was not the closest model. As Roy Sherwood has observed, with its pacing horse and antique armour Cromwell’s seal more recalls Queen Elizabeth’s, and the baton lends it an imperial air.⁴⁸

Along with the Great Seal, a new Privy Seal was ordered, on the inscription of which France was included in the Protector’s (as former monarchs’) fiefdoms, and a seal for the Council with Oliver’s arms at the centre.⁴⁹ Not surprisingly, several observers, seeing the new seals, believed they signified a major constitutional change. The Swedish ambassador heard rumours while the seal was being made that ‘it has been kept open whether he shall be designated Rex

or Imperator’, while in May a Westminster correspondent reported that the seal ‘makes people here give out generally that his Highness is to be crowned forthwith.’⁵⁰ Whatever Cromwell’s speeches or protestations of humility, in a heraldic culture the display of personal arms, on badges and seals, announced not a collective but a distinctly personal authority, and not the authority of a parliament and Council but that of a sovereign monarch. And a sovereign of all three kingdoms at that. With a design similar to that for England, the Protectoral seal for Ireland had on one side an equestrian portrait of Cromwell with a view of Dublin in the background and the arms of Ireland, the harp, surmounted by an escutcheon with Cromwell’s lion rampant, which was repeated on the reverse.⁵¹ In April 1654, instructions for the new seal for a Scotland conquered and reunited with England ordered: ‘And that this union may take its more full intent, be it further ordained . . . that the arms of Scotland, viz a cross commonly called St Andrews, be received into and borne from henceforth in the arms of the Commonwealth as a badge of this union.’⁵² When it was finally made in 1656, the seal offered Cromwell as the sovereign of a reunited Britain, a Britain created by the succession of the Stuarts.

The shift to the representation as well as reinstatement of single-person sovereign authority is also evident in medals. Cromwell, as a commander, evidently attached importance to medals and, we recall, had strongly urged parliament to advertise its, rather than his, authority on the medal issued to celebrate the victory at Dunbar.⁵³ The Commons did not take his advice; and various ‘reward’ medals bearing Cromwell’s portrait were issued during the early 1650s – along with those figuring Henry Ireton, Admiral Blake, Secretary of State John Thurloe and Bulstrode Whitelocke.⁵⁴ Yet, despite his earlier reluctance to promote his own image, Cromwell ordered a medal to commemorate his elevation as Lord Protector on 16 December 1653, and there can be no doubting that thereafter this highly personal image of authority was *the* medallic image of the new government.⁵⁵ On the obverse of the medal executed by Simon, a bust of Cromwell, after a miniature by Cooper, presented a Roman image of the Protector in decorated armour, with a plain collar and scarf looped on the left shoulder inside a Latin inscription (‘Olivarius dei gra repub Angliae Sco et Hib & protector’) that signalled rule over the three kingdoms and in that ‘&’ perhaps territories beyond, as France had always been claimed in regal titles. Continuing the Roman image and the theme of peace proclaimed with the Protectorate, the reverse is engraved with a laureate lion supporting a shield displaying the crosses of St George and St Andrew, the Irish harp and the paternal coat of Cromwell, the demi-lion with the ring inside Oliver’s legend ‘Pax quaeritur bello’. Though officially struck in gold and silver, a copy of the medal (attributed to Simon but not by him) was also made in copper, presumably for broader distribution and sale.⁵⁶



95 Great Seal of the Cromwellian Protectorate.



96 Protectorate medal.

Interestingly, though medals were struck in Holland to celebrate the Peace of Westminster signed with England on 15 April 1654, Cromwell ordered no official medal.⁵⁷ While the Dutch medals praise the Lord Protector, they also depict the cap of liberty, at a time when critics of the Protectorate accused Cromwell of surrendering it, and these official medals were answered by pro-Orangist medals figuring Charles I's daughter Princess Mary and her son William, whom Cromwell promised to exclude from power.⁵⁸ Similarly, no English medal was struck to mark the victory of the French over the Habsburgs at Dunkirk, even though Cromwell had, in accordance with his treaty obligations, sent 6,000 troops to serve under Louis XIV.⁵⁹ In fact, after the inauguration medal, no official medals of Cromwell were struck until his death, when a funeral medal was issued with Oliver's bust after Cooper, but now laureate, and, on the reverse, an olive tree and shepherds tending their flock – the symbols of peace.⁶⁰ Though Oliver died on, and the medal was issued on, 3 September, the anniversary of his great victories at Dunbar and Worcester, the death medal celebrated peace rather than war. It may be that the absence of medals marking military successes and campaigns during the period 1653–8 also reflects Cromwell's concern to portray the Protectorate as a government dedicated to peace and the return of Augustan calm and stability after a decade of turmoil and strife.

Whether by design or on account of the difficulties involved in minting a new currency, Cromwell as Protector, like several monarchs before him, continued to use the coins of the Commonwealth as ordered by parliament, with the cross, palm and laurel and the words 'The Commonwealth of England'.⁶¹ These coins in 20, 10 and 5 shillings, half-crowns, shillings and sixpences were minted with the dates 1653, 1654, 1656 and 1657 and evidently remained in circulation to the time of Oliver's death. However, in February

1655 Cromwell appointed Thomas Simon Chief Engraver of the Mint; and it may be that he was then planning a new issue of coin to mark the Protectorate.⁶² Certainly by mid-1656, about the time the rumours of his being offered the crown were mounting, Cromwell resolved on a set of new coins bearing his portrait and titles to replace the dies and he appointed Peter Blondeau, who had proposed a mint for Dublin, to strike them.⁶³ On 27 November, the Protector and Council approved Simon's designs and inscriptions for the new gold and silver pieces and it was probably intended that the new coins would be ready before the end of the Old Style year – that is by March (1656/7).⁶⁴ It appears, however, that though some bear the date 1656, the coins were not struck before June or July 1657, well over three years after Cromwell's investiture as Lord Protector.

The new 1656 milled coin, of fine workmanship, carried an excellent bust of Cromwell, in profile to the left and – following James I – laureate, to signify classical, imperial regimen, inside an inscription announcing Oliver as 'By the grace of God Protector of England, Scotland and Ireland &c'.⁶⁵ On the reverse, the arms of the Protector on a shield is topped with an imperial crown, almost exactly resembling that of Charles I, with Cromwell's legend inscribed around. On the edge of the 50-shilling coin is written 'Protector literis literae nummis corona et salvo', suggesting that the letters protect the coin (from clipping, for example), as the Protector did the nation. Without the inscription on the edge, this was the pattern for 20 and 10 shilling coins. For the silver half-crown, classical drapery was added to Cromwell's laureate bust, to distinguish it from the gold.⁶⁶ As well as the earliest to use milling, as opposed to the old hammer process, these coins marked an extraordinary improvement in quality, especially in the portrait of the Protector for which Cromwell may well have sat for Simon.⁶⁷ In 1656, Cromwell clearly recognized the importance of the quality of his image on the medium that most broadly represented and disseminated sovereign authority – coin.



97 Protectorate coin depicting Cromwell wearing a laurel crown.

Indeed, in 1658 Oliver instructed Blondeau to mint more coins to the value of £10,000 a week.⁶⁸ Though the production of these probably did not go on for more than weeks before Cromwell's death, coins dated 1658 are the commonest survivals of Cromwellian currency and must have circulated widely.⁶⁹ For the crown, half-crown, shilling and sixpence coins, Simon used the laureate bust of the Protector with classical drapery, similar to the 1656 half-crown; and the two highest-denomination coins were inscribed on the edge with 'Let no one take [this] from me, except on pain of death.'⁷⁰ The inscription was again a warning against clipping or other illicit use of the coin, but we may read it too, since minting coin was one of the essences of sovereign power, as an assertion of Protectoral authority. If the story is true that, finding the people still favoured the Commonwealth coin, Cromwell decided to end it and replace it with that bearing his image, the 1658 coining may be seen as an important move to erase the signs of the republic and to establish the hereditary Protectorate in the house of Cromwell.⁷¹ Though formerly scholars deduced from the fine state of surviving examples that Cromwell's coins of 1656 and 1658 were patterns which never circulated as currency, the evidence points to a short period in which coins, from the largest denomination to popular pattern farthings for the poor, bore Oliver's laureate head.⁷² The significance of that circulated image for contemporaries is well captured in an apologia for Cromwell published against his republican critics in 1657. In his 'answer to a treasonous pamphlet', the anonymous author of *Killing Is Murder* praising single-person rule, urged that Englishmen 'follow the possession' and obey authority.⁷³ Such advice, he added, had Christ given, 'commanding tribute to be paid to Caesar because the money bore his image.'⁷⁴ As well, that is, as representing authority, the image on coin endowed Caesar – and now the laureate Protector – with authority, and a prerogative that, since Bodin, early modern subjects had considered that of kings. As Bodin wrote in Book I, chapter X of the *Six Books of a Commonwealth*, the right of coining 'is of the same nature as law and only he who has the power to make law can regulate the coinage'; 'in every well-ordered state it is the sovereign prince alone who has this power.'⁷⁵ It seems therefore only appropriate that, for Cromwell's funeral, the effigy with a sceptre, globe and sword, and a crown on its head, was modelled by Oliver's medallist and Chief Engraver to the Mint – Thomas Simon.⁷⁶

The institution of Cromwell as Lord Protector was also manifested in architectural changes which, increasingly, represented Oliver as a monarch. From his return from Ireland in June 1650, Cromwell and his family occupied lodgings next to the Cockpit within the precincts of the Palace of Whitehall.⁷⁷ When he was elevated to Protector, however, Whitehall Palace, along with St James's, Greenwich, Hampton Court and Windsor, were granted him 'for the maintenance of his . . . state and dignity.'⁷⁸ A mere week after Cromwell's investiture,

an official newspaper reported that 'Whitehall is being prepared for his Highness to reside in, and the old Council Chamber is being fixed out for his honourable Council to meet in.'⁷⁹ As work commenced, government newspapers reported progress, as though a suitably good residence was felt to be essential to the image of the new regime. In the edition for 14–21 March 1654, the *Weekly Intelligencer* announced, amid the usual political news, that 'The Privy Lodgings for his Highness the Lord Protector in Whitehall are now in readiness, as also the lodgings for his Lady Protectress . . . and it is conceived the whole family will be settled there before Easter.'⁸⁰ If the language of the report suggested a return to regal arrangements, reference to the refurbished privy kitchens and the list of tables established for gentlewomen, stewards, coachmen and other servants confirmed the physical reconstitution of an earlier royal architecture. On 13 April, it was reported that the bedchambers were now ready and that Cromwell and his family would move in the next day.⁸¹ The refurbishment was evidently considerable. During the work of 1654, John Embree, Surveyor of the Works, 'obtained warrants authorising . . . a level of expenditure unknown since the king's time.'⁸² And though the Council and Treasury Commissioners urged restraint, expenditure on Whitehall and Hampton Court, to which Cromwell and his family retreated at weekends, remained high. As well as items recovered for the state's use at the time of the sale of Charles I's goods, furnishings and tapestries were purchased for the Lord Protector.⁸³ A new organ was installed in the Great Hall at Hampton Court and a fountain in the palace grounds.⁸⁴

Early in 1656, John Evelyn recorded: 'I ventured to go to Whitehall, whereof for many years I had not been, and found it glorious and well furnished.'⁸⁵ Foreign observers did not doubt what it all signified. Reporting that Cromwell had had Whitehall 'done up for his own convenience', the Venetian envoy observed, 'So he will henceforth exercise regal sway under the royal roof.'⁸⁶ Not surprisingly, he had deduced that the re-equipping for Cromwell of the palaces of Tudor and Stuart kings signified the beginning of a new royal dynasty. With Mortlake tapestries, Mantegnas and Raphaels again adorning the walls, and royal furnishings and plate restored, Whitehall was reconstituted as a court and a theatre of majesty.⁸⁷ We must now turn to see how Cromwell performed in both.