

**“Adam and the king”: the fatherly image of the State.
Patriarchalism as political language in early seventeenth-century
England.**

My paper focuses on the category of “political patriarchalism” in early seventeenth-century England. In particular, I analyse the political language that a number of monarchical theorists employed to carve out a persuasive and strong image of supreme kingship during the reign of King James I and the initial phases of his son and successor Charles I’s. I will thus show that patriarchalism served to defend absolute power from the attacks of some vehement parliamentary thinkers. The latter were the so-called “Patriots” whose political discourse rested on the strenuous defence of the country and the right and liberties of freeborn Englishmen against kingly absolutism. After giving an account of the historical context in which these controversies occurred, I will unveil the narrative of power writers like Sir Robert Filmer (1588-1653), Sir Francis Kynaston (1586ca.-1642), Peter Heylyn (1600-1662) and others set forth to construct a model of rulership at the centre of which stood out the figure of the king as *pater patriae*.

This is to say that in England in the 1610s and 1620s two opposite political languages made of the idea of *patria* and its protection the keynote of theories of liberty and sovereignty. In particular, I will focus on how the patriarchalist theorists here taken into consideration not only deprived *patria* of its Ciceronian and republican connotations, but - most importantly - adopted the princely model of the “father of the fatherland”¹. Such rhetorically powerful vocabulary helped these patriarchalist authors to support absolute monarchical power in a period in which the Stuart government was implementing very unpopular policies like the Forced Loan (1626-7) and manifesting sympathy for Catholicism. In fact, in contrast to Queen Elizabeth I’s skilful elaboration of the royal image, both James I and Charles I failed to provide their subjects with a successful picture of monarchy. Because of its divisive religious policy, controversial political strategy at home and disastrous diplomatic campaign abroad, the Crown was alienating consensus it had

¹ Despite its importance in the sixteenth century, nowadays this “moment” of monarchical representation is amply underestimated in the literature. According to Robert Bast, Ernst Kantorowicz’s study of medieval political theology showed that - whilst the idea of *patria* was widely employed in the texts Kantorowicz studied - the intertwined concept of *pater patriae* derived from imperial Roman discourse was «conspicuously absent in the medieval sources» analysed in *The King’s Two Bodies* (cf. R. Bast, *Honor Your Fathers. Catechisms and the Emergence of a Patriarchal Ideology in Germany 1400-1600*, Leiden-New York-Köln 1997, p. 147, fn. 5).

previously been able to rely upon. For this reason, a significant number of patriarchalist works depicted an idea of kingship whose main goal was to regain to the monarchical cause those subjects who were by then losing trust in the Stuart regime.

By and large, the paper will address two major issues. Firstly, by concentrating on the paradigm of political patriarchalism in early seventeenth-century England, I will provide further evidence of the importance of the “Linguistic Turn” to the study of political doctrines. I will explain how the approach of the Cambridge School (especially, Quentin Skinner’s work) to the history of political ideas provides a fundamental methodological springboard from which to revitalise political discourse. Secondly, I will underline the necessity to remap the theoretical canon of patriarchalism by studying it as a distinct political language whose complex and multivalent configuration of monarchical government carved out a specific idea of sovereignty and national identity. Hence I will show that patriarchalism was more than the codification of obsolete views or a system of archaic beliefs failing to succeed in the theatre of ideas when confronted by the ‘typhoon’ of modern philosophy, empirical science and social changes. In so doing, I will then overcome the traditional and unproblematic “anthropological” and “ideological” readings of patriarchalism².

Together with stressing the metaphorical dynamics of patriarchalist parlance, I also unveil the multiple meanings the idea of “patriotism” assumed in discourses on government in the early Stuart era. Considering the multifarious applicability the concept of *patria* had in the writings of different groups of theorists, I suggest that patriotism served opposite causes in the political and philosophical conflicts of early seventeenth-century England.

My methodological approach relies upon Quentin Skinner’s theory of contextualism. This entails - paraphrasing Skinner’s words - to try and see things the way in which the patriarchalist thinkers here studied saw them. The goal of presenting their works under a new light rests on Skinner’s argument according to which in order to interpret a text we need to analyse not only its immediate content, but also the various types of «illocutionary acts» the author adopted in writing it³. For this reason I concentrate on the thinkers patriarchalists were attacking and the positions they were dealing with. Secondly, I explore their historical context. Finally, I analyse how they were taking part in the debates occurring in their own time. In this way, I will be enabled to assess what they “were doing”.

² See G. Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought. The Authoritarian Family and Political Speculation and Attitudes Especially in Seventeenth-Century England*, Oxford 1975 and J. Daly, *Sir Robert Filmer and English Political Thought*, Toronto 1979.

³ On this part of Skinner’s methodological approach see the essays collected in *Meaning and context. Quentin Skinner and his Critics*, edited and introduced by J. Tully, Cambridge 1988, esp. J. Tully, *Quentin Skinner on Interpretation*, in *ibid.*, pp. 29-132 and, above all, Q. Skinner, *Visions of Politics. Volume I: Regarding Method*, Cambridge 2002.

In substance, the patriots played down the leading role of the sovereign in the body politic. They questioned the inviolability of his royal prerogative. They made of the king the mere figurehead of the English nation. They replaced him with the claimed indissoluble authority of Parliament whose chief function was remodelled around the image of the constitutional bastion of the country. By proposing an alternative political allegiance, the patriots were undermining the unifying role of the monarchy.

Thus, in light of this increasing opposition, in *Patriarcha* (composed in the late 1620s) Sir Robert Filmer addressed his adversaries' theories as «the whole fabric of this vast engine of popular sedition»⁴. In so doing, he had a clear target in mind. He knew that his arsenal of arguments had to be reserved for a specific category of seditious opinions. These were the country and parliamentary patriots who were at work to stir up «the common people» by appointing themselves as the latter's representatives in Parliament. Filmer warned against the «faith»⁵ many people were putting forward in the country and into which «many an ignorant a subject hath been fooled»⁶. This was the belief that «a man may become a martyr for his country by being a traitor to his prince»⁷. Accordingly, puritan and quasi-republican stalwarts considered the people above the king (as well as the papists argued that the Pope was superior to secular monarchs) so that the former could judge the latter and re-appropriate the power they claimed to have conceded to the sovereign.

Filmer believed that these stances had become so popular that «many out of an imaginary fear pretend the power of the people to be necessary for the repressing of the insolencies of tyrants, herein they propound a remedy far worse than the disease»⁸. Above all, this factious doctrine had engendered «the new coined distinction of subjects into royalists and patriots», which was «most unnatural, since the relation between king and people is so great that their well-being is reciprocal»⁹.

In addition, Filmer accused the Jesuits of diverting the subjects from their due obedience to the monarch in favour of the Pope who had the power to interfere in the temporal sphere and dethrone kings. Confronted by these doctrines, Sir Robert subtly extrapolated from the philosophical bedrock of the patriarchalist paradigm the concept of the ruler as *pater patriae*: «many a child, by succeeding a king, hath the right of a father over many a grey-headed multitude, and hath the title of

⁴ R. Filmer, *Patriarcha*, in *Patriarcha and Other Political Writings*, edited by J. P. Sommerville, Cambridge 1991, p. 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

pater patriae»¹⁰. Most importantly, in articulating his robust critique of the emerging patriotic discourse, Filmer was in good company.

Thus, writing in 1629, Sir Francis Kynaston defined the monarch, who was endowed with «the Royall and just Prerogative [...] by the Lawes of God and the Custome of Nations», as «Pater Patriae». Accordingly, he claimed that there existed «a strong Relation of Filiationis et Paternitatis between the King and the Parliament»¹¹. After having recalled the ideal relationship between a father and his son to indicate the «mutuall trust and Confidence» which was always necessary in the State, Kynaston concluded that the inferior ought not to «plot» against the superior¹². Holding popularity as the principal threat to the integrity of the monarchy, Kynaston maintained that it was vital

to regard our (the) King and Sovereigns good more then our own; and if so, let no man think himself a good Patriot, that under a pretence of the Liberty of the Subjects or the Commonwealths Welfare stands in opposition to the Kings pleasure, or is too rigid and strict for legality in a busines, that the King directs to be done¹³.

In accordance with this attempt to reinforce the patriotic image of the sovereign, in 1627 Robert Sanderson (1587-1663) argued that

[t]ime was, when Iudges, and Nobles, and Princes delighted to bee called by the name of *Fathers*. The Philistims called their Kings by a peculiar appellatiue, *Abimeleob*; as who say *the King my Father*. In Rome the Senatours were of old time called *Patres, Fathers*: and it was afterwards accounted among the Romans the greatest title of honour that could bee bestowed vpon their Consuls, Generalls, Emperours, or whosoeuer had deserued best of the Commonwealth, to haue this addition to the rest of his stile *Pater patriae*, a Father to his Countrie¹⁴.

For Sanderson it was vital that «all good Kings and Gouvernours should haue a *fatherly care* ouer, and beare a *fatherly affection* vnto those that are vnder them»¹⁵.

In 1621 Henry King (1592-1669) had argued that «[f]or this cause a Master is called the Father of his family, and the King is *Pater Patriae*, the father of his Countrey»¹⁶. Three years later another staunch absolutist, Edward Forsett (1553/4-1629/30), in *A defence of the Right of Kings* had rhetorically asked: «hath shee [Nature] left any such law or libertie, that in any respects the childe

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

¹¹ F. Kynaston, *A True Presentation of forepast Parliaments to the viewe of present tymes and Posteritie*, British Library, Lansdowne 213, ff. 146a-176b, f. 163b.

¹² Cf. *ibid.*, f. 164b.

¹³ *Ibid.*, f. 167a.

¹⁴ R. Sanderson, *Ten sermons preached* [...], London 1627, p. 165.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁶ H. King, *A sermon preached at Pauls Crosse, the 25. of Nouember. 1621*[...], London 1621, p. 32.

may renounce or disclaime his parents? [...] Let us now by applyingly remember, that the Prince is *Pater Patriae*, the Father of the Countrey»¹⁷. Hence the similitude of the head and the body showed

the dutious dependancy of the Subject upon the person of the Sovereigne, with a true naturall relation and recognition of all love and obedience, having from nature (out of the resemblance of those paternes) no other law, then *parendi & patiendi*¹⁸.

In line with Forsett's stances, *God and the King* (1615) of the absolutist theorist Richard Mocket (1577-1618) had put forward a very radical interpretation of the Fifth Commandment. Mocket maintained that the maxim "Honor thy Father, and thy Mother" pertained to the political sphere rather than to the familial one since it had more to do with political obedience than with submission within the household¹⁹. Bypassing the traditional line of argumentation set out in seventeenth-century Church catechisms, Mocket argued that there was «so mutual a dependance» between the society of kings and that of fathers that «the welfare of the one is the prosperity of the other»²⁰. However, not only did he see a strict correlation in traditional terms, but he radically resorted to «the Evidence of Reason» to stress «that there is a stronger and higher bond of Duty between Children and the Father of their Countrey, than the Fathers of private Families»²¹. To justify this important concept, Mocket declared that the latter

procure the good onely of a few, and not without the assistance and protection of the other, who are the common Foster-fathers of thousands of Families, of whole Nations and Kingdoms, that they may live under them an honest and peaceable life²².

Mocket's work confirms that the patriarchalist configuration of government was not only deployed to defend monarchical power, but also to represent the ruler as father of the fatherland. The dialogue between the two friends Theodidactus and Philalethes in *God and the King* presented an unequivocal conclusion. After having affirmed that the duty of subjects towards their sovereign was grounded on «the Law of Nature» and «also enjoyed by the Moral Law, and particularly [...] in the fifth Commandment», Mocket explicitly stated that subjects were «required to honor the

¹⁷ E. Forsett, *A defence of the Right of Kings* [...], London 1624, p. 23.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁹ Cf. R. Mocket, *God and the King* [...], London 1615, p. 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Fathers of our Countrey and the whole Kingdom [...] much more» than «the Fathers of private Families»²³.

These examples are important because they unveil that specific line of patriarchalist discourse which placed centre stage the supreme fatherly monarch. The latter was its Trojan horse deployed to knock down the popular fortress erected by the patriots on the battlefield of the appropriation of the title of “protector of the nation”. In order to further dissect this type of absolutism, it is vital to investigate the concrete models and unfold the ideal references which these political theories have to be associated with.

²³ Ibid., p. 77.