



What kind of ruler was Oliver Cromwell?

Case study 2: Cromwell in the eyes of others – Source 3

A picture of Cromwell's body lying in state in 1658

(Cromwelliana: A chronological detail of events in which Oliver Cromwell was engaged from the year 1642 to his death 1658. Published by Machell Stace, Westminster, 1810)

What is this source?

This shows Oliver Cromwell after his death in September 1658. His body lay in state at Somerset House in London.

The picture was made around the time of Cromwell's death. This copy was published in a later book about Cromwell.

What's the background to this source?

When rulers died they were usually laid out for mourners to come and say goodbye. This was called lying in state.

Cromwell died in September, but his funeral took place in November, when he was buried in Westminster Abbey. If his body had lain in state in Somerset House for months, it would have got rather smelly. In fact this picture is probably not of Cromwell's actual body, but of a model of wood and wax, made for mourners to see when they came to pay their respects.

It's worth knowing that ...

There are a lot of details in this source that provide clues about people's attitudes to Cromwell.

You can see:

- People mourning Cromwell;
- His guard of honour;
- The crests of England and Scotland, the lion of England and the unicorn of Scotland;
- The crown (although it is not on his head as he never became king);

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- His fur robes of office (very much like a king's robes);
- The large bed he is lying on, with 4 pillars (pillars sometimes represent power – on the other hand they sometimes just hold up the drapes)!

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. Would you say that this picture was meant to make Cromwell look grand?
2. What details in this source tell us about Cromwell's power and importance?
3. Compare this image of Cromwell with the images of James I and Elizabeth I in Gallery 2. What is similar about them? What is different about them?
4. What overall impression does this source give of what people thought of Cromwell?



Learning Curve

Civil War



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