

2006

Her Majesty's Spymaster: Elizabeth I, Sir Francis Walsingham, and the Birth of Modern Espionage,

John R. Arpin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Arpin, John R. (2006) "Her Majesty's Spymaster: Elizabeth I, Sir Francis Walsingham, and the Birth of Modern Espionage," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 59 : No. 3 , Article 20.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol59/iss3/20>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

however, he has written a hundred pages that describe the origins of the empire, racing from pre-Roman times to the mid-eighteenth century. From that point forward, Black expands out into his larger study, tracing both the British Empire's rise and its decline. In this Black is careful to give weight to the three elements of his title: the "Britishness" of that empire, the complexity of its maritime basis, and the distinctive differences with other types of imperial powers. The book is a dense collation of factual detail, but the picture that Black paints and the perspective that he presents are interesting. He links maritime exploration, trade, migration, and naval affairs in a broad context while at the same time bringing in the wide range of cross-cultural issues involved. Even beyond that, Black characterizes the British Empire as the power that gave indirect rise to America and was America's immediate predecessor as a global superpower. This linkage, as Black reminds us, allows a reader to begin to think about the connections between consecutive global powers.

Imperial history has largely been ignored until recently in academic circles, but Black's work clearly succeeds in underscoring the importance of the British Empire's maritime nature in its distinctive contribution to the development of the modern world. Black concludes that "if the British Empire is blamed for many of the aspects of modernization and globalization, it also serves as a way of offering historical depth to a critique of American power, and, in part, this is at issue when British imperialism is criticized."

JOHN B. HATTENDORF
Naval War College



Budiansky, Stephen. *Her Majesty's Spymaster: Elizabeth I, Sir Francis Walsingham, and the Birth of Modern Espionage*. New York: Penguin, 2005. 235pp. \$24.95

For many years the U.S. intelligence community has been dominated by a subculture enraptured with intelligence collected by technical means. Despite the wealth of intelligence these means provide, they do not always lead toward an understanding of how an opponent thinks. Many current and former intelligence officers have argued for over a decade that the United States must improve both its human intelligence and counterintelligence capabilities; events since 9/11 have reinforced that view with a vengeance.

History provides many examples of effective intelligence organizations in the days before technical means, and Stephen Budiansky, a journalist and military historian, has chosen for his subject one of the best for his latest book. Budiansky describes the intelligence successes of Sir Francis Walsingham, first as ambassador to France and later as Principal Secretary to the Privy Council of Queen Elizabeth I. In the latter role (at the time, akin to a chief of staff) Walsingham not only coordinated domestic and foreign policy but ran the kingdom's primary secret service.

Walsingham was a legend in an era filled with men of legendary stature. Where others were self-promoting, he was unobserved. Where many bragged of power and connections, he wielded power quietly and subtly, but always effectively. His painstaking attention to detail and his deep understanding of human nature made him the ideal spymaster.

The focus of “Mr. Secretary” (as he was known) was maintaining England’s independence from the maneuverings of Spain, France, and Rome. Budiansky describes how Walsingham’s skill in gathering and analyzing information complemented (if not always easily) Elizabeth’s talent for political and diplomatic intrigue. England, at the time a small fringe state tottering between Protestantism and Catholicism, was vulnerable to the machinations of the great powers of the day. Walsingham played critical roles in countering plots against Elizabeth, the most famous being that of Mary, Queen of Scots.

Walsingham’s role in the defeat of the Spanish Armada provides a textbook example of what intelligence can and sometimes cannot provide. He developed a comprehensive collection plan and employed a network of agents throughout Europe to gather information. He never blindly trusted any one source, using multiple agents against the same target. As the Armada preparations came to a head, Walsingham commissioned naval reconnaissance missions of key Spanish ports, and although his work provided strategic warning to the crown and the Royal Navy, contrary winds prevented tactical warning.

Walsingham understood that intelligence must support decision making—after all, he was a major player in both domestic and foreign policy—and ensured that the information he provided was focused on those ends. Upon becoming Principal Secretary, he was informed that the job required him to know everyone and see everything. By the time of his death, both his supporters and enemies believed him unsurpassed in this regard.

While Walsingham’s network did not survive him (he left no written legacy for his successors to follow), the memory of his effectiveness lives on.

If this book has a fault, it is the lack of discussion on Walsingham’s impact on later incarnations of the British secret service. Nonetheless, several maxims attributed to him remain sound guidance for today’s intelligence and policy professionals. “Knowledge is never too dear” speaks for the value of good intelligence. “An habit of secrecy is both policy and virtue” reminds us that success requires constant effort. Finally, “See and keep silent” remain watchwords for today’s intelligence professionals, as they were in the past.

JOHN R. ARPIN
Defense Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C.



Berube, Claude, and John Rodgaard. *A Call to the Sea: Captain Charles Stewart of the USS Constitution*. Dulles, Va.: Potomac Books, 2005. 299pp. \$35

Charles Stewart was one of the preeminent officers of the early sailing navy. He is best remembered for the brilliant victory he gained over HMS *Cyane* and *Levant* as captain of USS *Constitution* during the War of 1812. Less well known, however, are the significant contributions Stewart made to the sea service over the remainder of his career—a career that witnessed the birth, growth, and evolution of the Navy during its first six decades of existence. As a central figure of the formative period in the Navy’s history, Charles Stewart has long merited greater scholarly attention than he has heretofore received.