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作成者: 岩井, 淳
メールアドレス:
所属:

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Inventing a Commonwealth: The Puritan Revolution and the Political Culture

Jun IWAI

The purpose of this paper is to consider the processes of inventing a Commonwealth from the point of view of the political culture.

In 1649 the continuity of English monarchy was brought to an end with the execution of Charles I. England became a parliamentary republic. The Puritan Revolution demolished almost all political landmarks. This paper describes how the state of Commonwealth successfully restored the dignity of civilian government by expressing its authority and legitimacy through a range of imagery and symbolism.

Individual sections focus on the occupation and revival of the abandoned royal palace of Whitehall by members of the new regime; the public spectacle mounted to celebrate its military victories; the ritual and ceremony with which it dignified everyday politics; the invention of a new state iconography to replace familiar forms such as the crown and the royal coat of arms; and the complex and shifting popular images of Oliver Cromwell from his first appearance as a public figure to the period of his power.