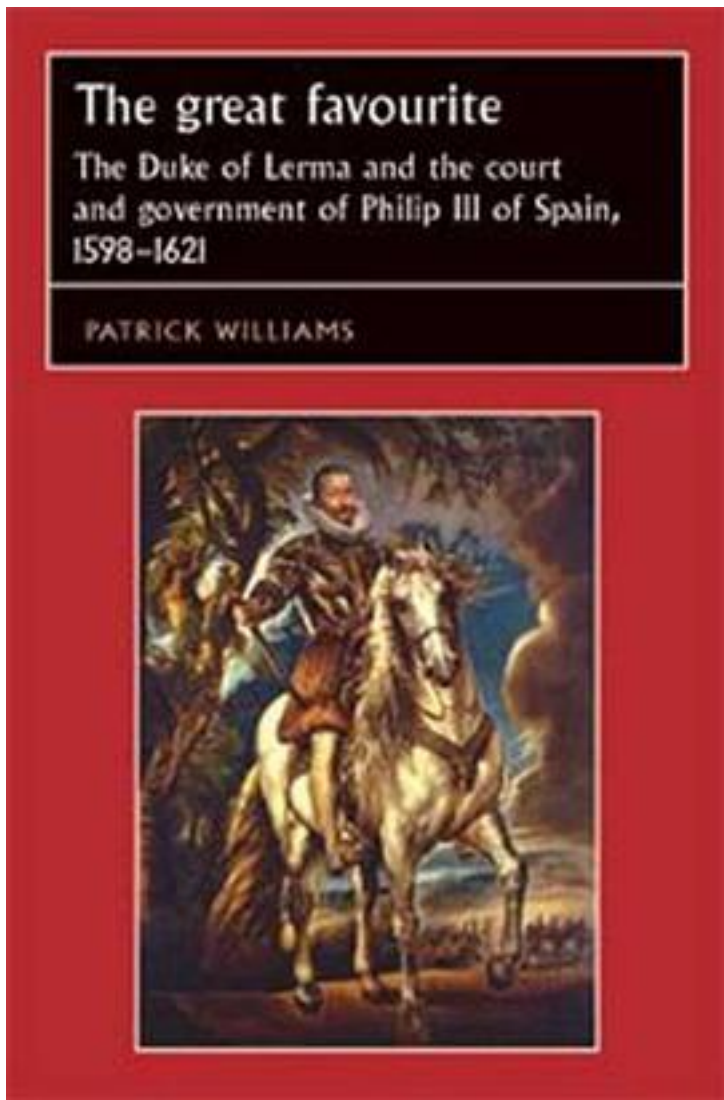


The Great Favourite



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Francisco Gomez de Sandoval, Duke of Lerma (1553-1625) is the last major unknown statesman in modern European history. Patrick Williams brings him dramatically to life and challenges the assumptions that historians have made about him and about Spanish history at a time of profound crisis, inviting a re-evaluation of the phenomenon of government by favourites in this seminal period of European history. Lerma served Philip III as his favourite and first minister between 1598 and 1618. His power dazzled contemporaries; one petitioner telling Philip that he had come to see him 'because I could not get an appointment with the Duke of Lerma'. Within a decade of assuming office Lerma had raised his family from humiliating poverty to great riches and was the greatest patron of the arts in Europe. His use of power provoked intense debate about the nature of corruption in government. Yet Lerma remained deeply ambivalent about his position. Determined to follow family tradition and retire into religious life to secure the salvation of his soul, he secured a cardinalate in 1617, ending his life as a prince of the Church.

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