

alities more with men than with women". True enough, but I am not sure that, in this case, gender was the most interesting feature of the story.

Those who follow lesbian and gay political organizing will find this a wealth of detail and information, and a good example of a local community study informed by national currents. Stein's work restructuring the history of political organizing should help put the Stonewall myth to rest; as he says, "in no other movement was the denial of prior political traditions so complete" (p. 289). Certainly gay liberation did not happen the day after the Stonewall uprising, but it is sobering to reflect on the differences between lesbian and gay public political organizing after only a few decades. Stein calls the pre-Stonewall political vision one of "militant respectability" as activists debated whether same-sex couples should hold hands at protests and how to tone down female mannishness and male effeminacy. Gender conformity made an effective weapon to challenge sexual conformity — or so it was thought at the time.

If one thought gay history began and ended in New York or perhaps San Francisco, this book certainly suggests otherwise. It is a model of painstaking research and lively writing and a welcome reminder of the pleasures of the local study.

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Robert Tittler — *The Reformation and the Towns in England: Politics and Political Culture c. 1540–1640*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. Pp. xi, 395.

The Reformation and the Towns in England essays political history on the grand scale, encompassing over 600 small and scattered towns and the whole of Tawney's century. It seeks their politics as they "emerged more or less directly out of legislation of the Henrician and Edwardian Reformation, and especially from those statutes which dissolved various religious institutions and undermined many aspects of traditional faith and practice" (p. 10). Robert Tittler situates his inquiry in a space he identifies between historical interest in the protestantization of urban religion and concern with urban social and economic life, a space that configures urban politics as a response to challenges both doctrinal and socio-economic.

The decades of the 1540s and 1550s wrecked the traditional structures on which the civic life of England's towns had rested, destroying their economic as well as their cultural infrastructures and confronting them with the challenge of creating new foundations on which to rebuild their savaged civic life. The book is a study of how they did this, concentrating especially on the middling towns where the tide of reformation had either swept away ecclesiastical lordship or otherwise presented new opportunities to expand limited practices of self-government. In the event, evolving schemes to gain municipal control over urban monastic and chantry properties blended seamlessly into schemes to expand the authority of urban government and its leaders. The book has much to say about the technical devices employed to accomplish the former — litigation, enfeoffment to use, incorporation — and the "tendencies" that accompanied the drive to secure the latter, including the "narrowing" (p. 145) of the numbers and political vision of the elite. Political life was indeed

refashioned, but with unintended consequences. Throughout the odyssey of political reconstruction, town governors responded to their sense of mounting insecurity with attempts to create harmony by imposing conformity only to discover that their means were enemy to their ends.

Although the author sets out to rescue early modern urban political life from the condescension of national history by insisting that urban responses to the dissolution crisis be treated as *sui generis* “rather than as part of some wider focus” (p. 52), the evidence of the book not surprisingly disputes its own postulate. New civic celebrations reflected the nation’s intoxication with its queen; new civic politics registered the impress of new civic responsibilities legislated by Westminster and new civic powers granted by the crown. Nor, on the evidence given here, can the evolving forms of urban authority be separated from parallel developments within the surrounding countryside. Cushioned comfort, satirized by Swift and now historicized by Tittler, formed part of the panoply of early modern magistracy, be the bottoms and benches rural or urban.

The book’s biggest challenge arguably lies with its concept of politics. While it uses Aristotle’s distinction between aristocracy and oligarchy to characterize the towns’ political evolution, it nevertheless ignores his distinction between institutional structures and political activities. Aristotle viewed politics as more than a system of offices and rules. Aristotelian politics are actions embedded in the way of life of the community. This book says much that is important about offices and rules but little about politics as active community engagement. Nor is it well placed to do so. Aristotle’s further point, that crucial to the nature of any politics are the forms of reciprocity linking the few and the many, finds no echo here. In this the book ignores not only the insight of the ancient sage but also the pioneering practice of contemporary historians. Cynthia Herrup, Tessa Watt, Margaret Spufford, Keith Wrightson, David Underdown, and Mark Fissel, to name a few, have all shown the gains in understanding that follow from conceptualizing the politics of this period as dialogue between governors and governed. Their work has transformed early modern English politics from an account of the silence of the many before the monopoly of power by the few into the story of an unequal conversation between the few and the many driven by the uneven diffusion of power throughout the community. In Tittler’s book, however, the plebs do not speak. Until they do, we can have no adequate history of urban politics in Tawney’s century.

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Alain Vivien et Mireille Raunet — *Les Français de l'étranger*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1997, 128 p.

Ce petit livre, le 3 207^e de la collection « Que sais-je? », est le fruit de la collaboration entre un ancien secrétaire aux Affaires étrangères et une déléguée au Conseil supérieur des Français de l'étranger. Tenant du rapport officiel, il donne l'essentiel des connaissances sur les Français expatriés.