

Magic and masculinity. Ritual magic and gender in the early modern era. By Frances Timbers. Pp. xii + 217 incl. 10 ills. London–New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014. £20. 978 1 78076 403 0
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Francis Timbers's book makes a useful contribution to understanding the gendered meanings to be found in the practices and materials of early modern ritual magic. Chapters explore a range of magical lives, including the famed partnership of John Dee and Edward Kelley, the Civil War astrologer-occultist William Lilly, the seventeenth-century Christian mystic clergyman John Pordage, and the eccentric treasure-hunter Goodwin Wharton and his enigmatic partner in magical escapades, Mary Parish. These lives are used to explore issues such as manhood, honour, passivity, sex, gender subversion and metaphor. There is a lot of familiar material, and at one level the book serves as a lively, general introduction to ritual magic and English magicians in the period. The book is rather too brief, though, when it comes to wrestling with some major issues regarding the gender politics of the period. Some big generalisations are made in the two-page conclusion, such as that 'female magicians tended to blur the boundaries associated with magic, just as they blurred the boundaries of their own bodies' (p. 155). Not enough material is presented to support such assertions, but the value of Timbers's book is in signposting issues and in illustrating in what ways there is much more work to be done. As such it is a welcome addition to recent historiography.

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Ideas of liberty in early modern Europe. From Machiavelli to Milton. By Hilary Gatti. Pp. ix + 215. Princeton–Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015. £30.95. 978 0 691 16383 3
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The concept of liberty has been so dissected in the last half century that one could easily believe its original vigour lost. Gatti's work puts those fears to rest. By returning to the texts of the 'long sixteenth century', Gatti seeks to represent the rich vitality of thought that produced the tradition of liberty inherited by the Enlightenment era, and by us today. Gatti highlights those texts often left out of a discussion of liberty, especially those addressing religious questions, demonstrating her breadth of reading and impressive familiarity with the sources. This volume is a rich treasure-trove of insights and illuminating 'case studies'. It is in the organisation and justification of these case studies, however, that the book falls a little short. Gatti perhaps goes too far in seeking to avoid over-categorising the concept of liberty, giving her reader many striking impressions, but few concrete conclusions to take away. This, however, appears to have been her intention, as she gives her book the rather modest and nebulous aim of showing that the sixteenth century resulted in 'a number of startling new claims for liberty', and nothing more than this. Though Gatti's text lacks a decisive conclusion about the expressions of liberty that she recovers, *Ideas of*