
H-France Review Vol. 19 (December 2019), No. 285

Merrick, Jeffrey, ed. *Sodomites, Pederasts, and Tribades in Eighteenth-Century France: A Documentary History*. University Park: Penn State Press, 2019. Xvii + 251 pp. Glossary, Map, Notes. \$90 U.S. (hb.). ISBN 978-0-271-08335-3.

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Jeffrey Merrick's collection of primary sources revealing the history of "sodomites, pederasts, and tribades" joins a growing library of books bringing original documents to new readers interested in the histories of ordinary and marginalized people.[1] Whether through reproduction, contextualization, or more often both, these collections offer readers a connection to the past, an especially powerful opportunity for those who were once taught that they did not have one. It is no coincidence, therefore, that so many of these projects offer histories of sexuality, revealing the depth and breadth of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) past in particular.

Merrick's contribution is unique in its ambition. *Sodomites, Pederasts, and Tribades in Eighteenth-Century France* forms one part of a broader reconceptualization of eighteenth-century sexual lives that explicitly invites readers to "track down, dig up, root out, and take in as much as we can about the operations and regulation of sexual desire and networks in eighteenth-century France and to locate the patterns and insights we extract from the sources in the context of the society that produced them and of larger issues in the history of sexuality" (p. 2). The give-and-take between Merrick, the documents, and readers thus produce new understandings of what the history of sexuality could mean to professional historians and students. As both a research intervention and a teaching tool, *Sodomites, Pederasts, and Tribades* accomplishes a rare feat. It simultaneously showcases the process and the results of archival research. It does so, however, without foreclosing the ways its readers will respond to and interpret the history it reveals.

Sodomites, Pederasts, and Tribades is not Jeffrey Merrick's first document collection on the history of sexuality. The out-of-print *Homosexuality in Early Modern France: A Documentary Collection* was published in 2001 and was co-edited with Bryant Ragan. It will also not be his last. The forthcoming *Policing Homosexuality in Pre-Revolutionary Paris*, also co-edited with Ragan, will, along with a companion website (coloradocollege.website/phs/), "translate[] and analyze[] all the relevant documents from one year (1781) in the papers of the official responsible for the surveillance of sexual relations between men in the capital of France from 1780 to 1783" (p. xi). These databases and collections will enable researchers to trace same-sex sexual networks in the eighteenth century, while also encouraging them to reconsider what we think we already understand about how people involved in those communities understood themselves. *Sodomites,*

Pederasts, and Tribades stands on its own, but it can only be fully appreciated in light of this broader project.

The book is organized into two parts: the first focuses on archival material and the second emphasizes published sources. Each part is, in turn, divided into sections based on the provenance of the documents or genre of the publications. Preceding the sources themselves is a short glossary of key terms, defined using examples drawn directly from the eighteenth century. Merrick introduces both the volume as a whole, each part, and each section of the book, providing readers with just enough grounding to understand what the documents are saying, without telling them what they precisely mean. The sources themselves are drawn from a range of archives, both newly reviewed by Merrick and his collaborators and already interpreted by historians such as Michel Rey and Merrick himself. These range from entire judicial cases drawn from the Archives of the Bastille to short reports by the watch/guard to the various papers of the police commissioners Pierre Louis Foucault and Charles Convers Desormeaux. Published sources include *libelles*, moralist tracts, Enlightenment philosophy, and fiction that round out the volume's second part.

The book contributes to Merrick's recent research into the history of male homosexuality in eighteenth-century France, especially Paris, much of which explicitly builds upon and responds to the pathbreaking work of Michel Rey. Beginning with his 1980 master's thesis, Rey began drawing a picture of Paris's sodomitical subculture in a series of articles. Rey argued, alongside historians of other urban centers, that eighteenth-century Paris featured a well-established subculture of men who sought sex with other men. Basing his work on a reading of some of the documents from the Archives of the Bastille, he also claimed that eighteenth-century policing gradually shifted from a concern with the punishment of sin to one of social order. Finally, and most controversially, Rey suggested that by the late eighteenth century at least, the men who participated in this subculture began to think of themselves in new ways, as different from other men on the basis of their desire for other men. Rey asserted, put simply, that we can witness the beginning of modern male homosexuality in the subculture of the eighteenth century.[2]

In a recent article, Merrick puts Rey's initial hypotheses into dialog with the new sources presented in *Sodomites, Pederasts, and Tribades*. Indeed, following the same structure and containing some of the same material as the individual introductory sections as the book, I almost wish Merrick had decided to republish the piece here. I certainly recommend the article, especially the section on "questions for research," to those assigning the book in their classrooms. In any case, using a more complete set of sources than Rey had available, Merrick explains, should contribute to "an agenda for the next stage of research on this subject, to explain the nature, uses, and limits of archival documents in which it has not been systematically investigated, to illustrate the variety and complexity of topics they allow and require us to address and to consider ways in which sodomites and pederasts were integrated into, not just separated from, the society in which they lived." [3] In staking out this position, Merrick's work participates in recent trends that seek to account not only for the ways that men and women who sought sex with members of the same sex constructed separate subcultures, but also participated and shaped their broader society. [4]

Sodomites, Pederasts, and Tribades reveals the place of men who sought sex with other men in the urban social environment. Often on the lookout for decoys and police spies, these men nonetheless found ways to reveal their interest in sex, to locate partners, and to consummate

relationships. Some of these men were regulars, others not. Some acknowledged their innate “taste,” while others did not (p. 66). Some sold sex, others did not. One example can here illustrate the depth of these accounts. A police report of May 11, 1723 describes how the police arrested a twenty-two year old man named Charles Antoine Chevelet. On the evening of May 10, a police officer “encountered Chevelet in the Luxembourg.” The two men got to talking and Chevelet described how he had once lived with a “schoolboy for three years, during which time both of them enjoyed all the infamous pleasures of sodomy, and with yet another young man in Lyon.” The two agreed to meet the next morning in the garden and they went to a “tavern in order to be safer.” While there, Chevelet described his relationship with his patron, the Abbé Chrétien: “They both sleep together and commit sodomy upon each other, based on what Chevelet told me.” Chevelet was thereupon arrested (pp. 29-30).

Fortunately for historians, the records regarding Chevelet do not stop there. They also record the arrest of the Abbé and Chevelet’s reappearance after being repeatedly exiled from Paris. Also included in the documents is a petition from Chevelet’s sister, Marie. Having traveled to Paris from Franche-Comté, she pleaded for the release of her brother, “given that he is not guilty of what he was falsely accused of and that those who arrested him knew the contrary quite well, since they demanded money from him to release him. He had none at that moment, so they detained him wrongly. He was on the point of returning to their native region” (pp. 30-31). How she could have known any of this is left to our imagination—certainly, considering Chevelet’s unwillingness to actually leave Paris after he was exiled puts the lie to any claim that he was anxious to return home. In any case, these documents underline that men who sought sex with other men not only built and sustained connections amongst themselves, but also with family, friends, and other acquaintances in and outside Paris. Chevelet was a regular at the Luxembourg gardens, he had acquaintances and sexual partners that he was attached to. His particular proclivities did nothing to weaken his bond with his sister who—protestations to the contrary notwithstanding—knew why he was arrested. Like so many of the documents, only the perspective of the police remains to us, but they nevertheless “tell us as much as we will ever know about sodomitical solicitation in this time and place” (p. 15).

Merrick proves a deft guide through this material. In the first section, for example, he offers documents from the 1720s as well as the 1760s in order to allow the reader to witness the extent of continuity and discontinuity as the subculture developed (p. 18). Acknowledging central questions regarding change over time, identity and identity formation, and the range of relationships built by men who sought sex with other men, Merrick’s commentary prods the reader to consider how uneven the development of homosexuality was. Introducing the final section of archival documents, Merrick notes how men arrested toward the end of the century offered confusing remarks regarding their own desires. While some seemed to associate same-sex sexual desire with passive sex, others describe falling into a “life of pederasty” and a “curiosity” about sex with other men (pp. 118-120). The confusion of the documents attests to the difficulties of making blanket claims about the formation of identity and community in this context.

If the final term of book’s title has yet to be mentioned in this review, it is because, as Merrick recognizes, women’s relationships with other women hardly appear until the second part of the book, “representations of same-sex relations” (p. 133). It is here that Merrick reveals how eighteenth-century thinkers of various stripes understood same-sex sexual relations between men and women. However, owing perhaps to the familiarity of some of these sources, this section

does not provide the same urgency as the archival documents. The documents of the first section of this part “constitute a transition” between the archival and published documents (p. 137). Featuring *nouvelles* and *libelles*, the documents reveal some of the ways Parisians constructed visions of same-sex sexual activity around real people. Merrick here offers deeper contextualization than in the preceding archival sections. Following translations of each text, he offers a commentary tracing the true story. Sections that follow include material from the Church, Enlightenment philosophy, and popular fiction.

Although some of these sources are available elsewhere, those who decide to teach *Sodomites, Pederasts, and Tribades* will find Part Two especially useful. Offering texts with clear arguments, perspectives, and claims, these sources will be more easily grasped by undergraduates and will offer the opportunity to integrate sexuality more fully into even introductory courses that address eighteenth-century culture, society, and politics. For instance, the short excerpt from lawyer Antoine Joseph Thorillon contains an interesting contrast that would jumpstart a discussion about the ways in which sexuality challenged traditional mores and social order, as well as the ways that gender structured such anxieties. Although Thorillon declares “pederasty or sin against nature, [a] monster reborn from the ashes of Gomorrah,” he argues for less severe penalties in order to prevent the spread of scandal and to allow men so accused “time to appease divine anger through sincere penitence” (p. 165). At the same time, he also claims that “for tribades, I think exile for a period of time is sufficient. Their crime does not have the same character of animality” (p. 165). Putting Thorillon’s claims into dialog with other Enlightenment thinkers would offer students an entry-point into debates central to the period. Although I appreciate Merrick’s goals in placing the material on representation after the archival sources, assigning the second part of the book first would provide sufficient grounding for teaching the archival sources more effectively, allowing students to have some grounding in eighteenth-century understandings of sexuality before they begin interpreting the archival documents.

Indeed, there remains some tension within the book regarding the relationship between these two parts. At one point, Merrick argues that “Police reports include scattered references to popular assumptions about and attitudes toward same-sex relations. *Nouvelles*...and *libelles*...include more abundant but less transparent evidence on this score” (p. 136). I could not help but pause at this claim that the police documents were “transparent,” whether Merrick meant to imply relative or absolute terms. In fact, Merrick’s book shows just how opaque the lives of the past remain. By highlighting the importance of the archives toward interpreting identity, not only by placing them at the fore of the document collection, but also by framing them explicitly in relation to the questions raised by scholars like Rey, Merrick in fact shows that they are anything but transparent. Indeed, I would argue that they deserve the same kind of interpretive work as one would bring to the published documents of the second half of the collection. Ultimately, the book offers us just this opportunity. Presenting readers, students, and researchers with a selection of archives that we only normally would have access to with expert knowledge and the ability to travel to the archives, Merrick invites us to accomplish this interpretative work. That Merrick, even with knowledge of these sources, refrains from foreclosing the meaning of these texts, offering us questions rather than answers, prodding us to consider future research paths, and opening new discussions within the classroom, is itself indicative of the success of this, to say nothing of future, endeavors.

NOTES

[1] See for example, Gabrielle Houbre, *Le Livre des courtisanes: Archives secrètes de la police des mœurs, 1861-1876* (Paris: Tallandier, 2006); William A. Peniston and Nancy Erber, trans. and ed. *Queer Lives: Men's Autobiographies From Nineteenth-Century France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Arlette Farge, ed., *Flagrants délits sur les Champs-Élysées: Les dossiers de police du gardien Federici (1771-1791)* (Paris: Mercure de France, 2008); Jean-Claude Féray, "Pédés:" *Le premier registre infamant de la Préfecture de police de Paris aux XIXe siècle suivi d'un Dictionnaire des noms propres et noms communs les plus significatifs du registre, et d'annexes* (Paris: Quintes-feuilles, 2012).

[2] Michel Rey, "Parisian Homosexuals Create a Lifestyle, 1700-1750: The Police Archives," *Eighteenth-century Life* 9, no. 3 (1985): 179-191; Michel Rey, "Police and Sodomy in Eighteenth-Century Paris: From Sin to Disorder," *Journal of Homosexuality* 16, no. 1-2 (1989): 129-146.

[3] Jeffrey Merrick, "New Sources and Questions for Research on Sexual Relations Between Men in Eighteenth-century France," *Gender and History* 30, no. 1 (2018), 10.

[4] Regina Kunzel, "The Power of Queer History," *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 5 (2018): 1560-1582.

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ISSN 1553-9172