

## PREFACE

When I entered graduate school in 1973, there was no such field of study as the history of sexuality, let alone homosexuality. If there had been, I would have avoided it because I intended, at that stage, to immerse myself in the European and American Enlightenments. During the next decade or so, sex migrated from the margins to the mainstream in history and related disciplines, and I migrated from Diderot in the stacks to deviance in the streets: suicide, sodomy, and spousal conflict. In the course of the 1980s, I finally acknowledged my identity as a gay man and recognized my vocation as a social historian.

After publishing more than a few articles and books about this subject, I never expected to produce the present volume—not until I read these police reports, located and photographed by Bryant Ragan and Eric Albrand, during the COVID-19 pandemic. These impressive and instructive texts deserve more readers than the few academic historians who have examined the manuscripts on site in the Archives Nationales. *Sodomites, Pederasts, and Tribades in Eighteenth-Century France: A Documentary History*, published by Penn State University Press in 2019, illustrates the variety of published and unpublished sources for the study of same-sex relations. This volume presents all the relevant archival documents from one year, a splendid sample of records that invite more detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis.

My objective is not only to make more French material available to Anglophone scholars and students but also to encourage them to study it with smaller as well as larger issues in mind. We know that humans have imagined, experienced, conceptualized, and regulated sex in different ways in different times and places. How did the police and the men they arrested understand sex between men in Paris in 1785?

To answer that question methodically rather than anecdotally, we must analyze what they said (and did not say), how they said it, and the context in which they said it. As a humanist who does research about ordinary Parisians in the archives, I write not about systems and structures but about patterns

and exceptions, with more emphasis on language than figures. For that reason the index includes many words and phrases used in the documents. At the same time, readers more inclined toward numbers will find lots to count in the following pages.

With any luck, I am not only older but also wiser than I was when I published my first article on this subject in 1998. The more I ponder the extant sources, the more informative and complicated they seem to me. My scrutiny has become more aggressive and my conclusions have become more tentative. I fully expect others to challenge my version of the subculture, as I have challenged the work of historians who explored it before me.

This volume represents my last word on this subject, or so I think at this time. In any event, I should thank a long list of scholars who have assisted and supported me over the years, but I will simply express my gratitude to Eric Albrand, who deciphered more than a few strange names and difficult passages, and to Bryant Ragan and the two anonymous readers, whose comments improved the introduction significantly. My thanks as well to everyone at Penn State University Press involved in the production of this book. It has been a pleasure to work with Ellie Goodman and her colleagues again.