



Napoleonic Friendship: Military Fraternity, Intimacy, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France (Becoming Modern: New Nineteenth-Century Studies)

By Brian Joseph Martin

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Winner of the Laurence Wylie Prize in French Cultural Studies

One of the first books on “Gays in the Military” published following the historic repeal of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” in 2011, Napoleonic Friendship examines the history of male intimacy in the French military, from Napoleon to the First World War. Echoing the historical record of gay soldiers in the United States, Napoleonic Friendship is the first book-length study on the origin of queer soldiers in modern France. Based on extensive archival research in France, the book traces the development of affectionate friendships in the French Army from 1789 to 1916. Following the French Revolution, radical military reforms created conditions for new physical and emotional intimacy between soldiers, establishing a model of fraternal affection during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars that would persist amid the ravages of the Franco-Prussian War and World War I. Through readings of Napoleonic military memoirs (and other non-fiction archival material) and French military fiction (from Hugo and Balzac to Zola and Proust), Martin examines a broad range of emotional and erotic relationships, from combat buddies to soldier lovers. He argues that the French Revolution’s emphasis on military fraternity evolved into an unprecedented sense of camaraderie in the armies of Napoleon. For many soldiers, the hardships of combat led to intimate friendships. For some, the homosociality of military life inspired mutual affection, lifelong commitment, and homoerotic desire.

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