

June L. Burton. *Napoleon and the Woman Question: Discourses of the Other Sex in French Education, Medicine, and Medical Law, 1799-1815*. Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 2007. Pp. 206. Hardcover \$40.00

Scholars often neglect women of the Napoleonic Empire (1804-1815) in favor of warfare and the men who fought. In her landmark book, *Napoleon and the Women Question*, June Burton, Professor of European Studies at the University of Akron, remedies this gap in scholarship. She explores how discourses in education, medicine, and law created spaces for women's agency. Burton also analyzes Napoleon's personal attitudes concerning the nature of women using letters, diaries and other accounts to conclude that he did not view them as weak but rather as productive figures whose role as wives and mothers was central to the success of the empire. She shows how the government reformed women's lives through institutions that aimed at either improving or saving the lives of women. Incorporating personal narratives, journals, and other socio-cultural historical methods, Burton argues that Napoleon's policies reflected his belief that women were essential to the survival of empire, thereby furthering the nascent women's movement. Discourses that exalted motherhood and family as integral to the success of the French nation influenced public policy and helped push forward welfare projects focusing on women, legislation aimed at protecting women and families, and the opening of educational opportunities to women from all social classes.

Napoleon believed women's primary duty as French citizens was to increase the French population through "baby-making" (7). Advice manuals and scientific treatises written by male scientists and surgeons emphasized "the importance of the uterus" which rendered women as "walking wombs" (129). Medical writings also glorified motherhood and provided advice on methods for producing the strongest progeny as well as how to avoid a miscarriage. Such sentiments underlay the creation of new institutions that aided women and provided new opportunities for them. Napoleon established several national educational centers for girls whose curriculum inculcated the skills necessary to be a good wife and mother such as knitting and nursing. Burton argues these institutions set the groundwork for higher education for subsequent generations of young women. The chapter "The Biomedical Foundation of Domesticity" discusses Napoleon's creation of charitable institutions designed to save women's lives by assisting needy mothers financially. The high level of state sponsorship of such institutions conveys Napoleon's belief that women as mothers were essential to the French Empire.

The highlight of Burton's work discusses Napoleon's policies in conjunction with an examination of medical discourses regarding female nature. She draws on evidence from midwives, surgeons, and patients themselves. While the majority of medical science buttressed the ideology of domesticity and valorization of motherhood, women carved out their space in the public realm through midwifery, which represented an area of science that women were encouraged to join (112). Napoleon created a centralized system of midwifery schools, including one for pre-natal care to poor mothers. For Burton, midwifery served as proof that Napoleon venerated motherhood; he believed women "were naturally better-suited to practice midwifery and to safeguard the woman's femininity" (111). The imperial design of midwifery education encouraged women of all classes to pursue it as an occupation.

Well researched and clearly organized, *Napoleon and the Woman Question* elucidates new information regarding women during a socially constraining epoch of French history. Burton refutes the notion that Napoleon regarded women as weak and rather viewed them as integral to the survival of French society through their role as mothers. The opening of all-girls boarding schools, the creation of charitable institutions to provide assistance to poor mothers, the emergence of gynecology as a specific medical field, and the increasing importance of midwifery reflect government policies that rendered women as essential to the health of the nation, thereby empowering them. Burton's research will benefit historians of medicine as well as students of the history of gender and sexuality.

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