

less if somewhat eccentric. In other instances they are hermetic at the surface level also, and indecipherable to anyone who does not possess the key.

Interpreting burchiellesque language is difficult, inasmuch as often the solution is a riddle leading to another riddle. For example, it is possible to read the verb *tagliare* (meaning "to cut" in standard Italian) as "to sodomize" because it echoes the word *tagliere*, "chopping board." In former times these boards were round, not square; hence the meaning "anus." The metaphorical meaning of *tagliere* parallels that of *tondo* ("round" and, by extension, a round sculpted or painted relief), which also means "anus."

Burchiellesque jargon is generally constructed through symmetrical contrasts: *asciutto*, "dry" = "sodomy" vs. *umido*, "humid" = "heterosexual coitus"; *valle*, "valley" = "vulva" vs. *monte*, "mountain" = "anus. In other comparisons the counterpart of the penis is not the vagina, but usually the anus.

Penetration is not usually expressed in the heterosexual sense, but commonly in terms of anal copulation with a man as object. This prominence of sodomitical coitus probably reflects the "transgressive" intent of burchiellesque poetry, for which anal relations are more suited than "banal" heterosexual contact.

The difficulty of burchiellesque language, and the "scandalous" subject matter, have combined to discourage scholarship. Even today there is no critical edition of the works of Il Burchiello, the founder of the trend, nor has a key been worked out that would enable one to recover all the hidden meanings.

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BURMA

A southeast Asian republic of about 40 million people, Burma is an agricultural, mountainous country. Conquered by Great Britain in the nineteenth century, it achieved independence in 1948. Knowledge of homosexuality in Burma is complicated by the fact that the country has been largely closed to tourists since independence (except for brief tourist visas of up to seven days), by the dominant language, Burmese (which is tonal and part of the Sino-Tibetan group), by the Burmese script (which derives from south Indian scripts), and by the plurality of cultures and cultural influences. More than one hundred indigenous languages are spoken in Burma. Besides Burmese, Mon, Shan, Karin, Chinese, and Kachin are spoken by large numbers of people, though at the time of the British occupation only Burmese, Mon, and Shan had written alphabets.

Animism, which preceded Buddhism, introduced in the fifth century, is still practiced by the hill tribes in the northeast such as the Shans, Karins, and Kachins. Among the Kachin, the Gashadip, according to Joel M. and Ester G. Maring, is "conceptualized as a bisexual human being who controls the fertility of the soul and of human beings. The Kachin chief makes periodic offerings to the *gashadip*." Such bisexual mythic beings appear widely across southeast Asia, in Indonesia and in northern Australia.

Burmese Buddhism, like that of Thailand, is of the Theravada School dominant in Sri Lanka and in Southeast Asia and has been compulsory in large parts of the country since King Anawaratha conquered Thaton in the south in 1044 and forcibly removed the entire population, including Buddhist monks, to Pagan in the north. It has been tolerant of homosexuality. Monks are said to be highly sexed and tourists are warned to be careful of sexual advances—though such reports may be exaggerated. Transvestism is also

known. The first Western report of homosexuality in Burma stems from Jan Van Linschoten's (1563–1611) visit to Pegu.

Homosexuality is said to be portrayed in puppet plays in a comic way as in Indonesian puppet theatre, in Asia as far west as Turkey and in Europe. Homosexuals no doubt existed and exist in Burmese theatre—especially probably in Burmese dance—as they certainly do in the closely related dance traditions of East Java. Dance in Burma is largely based, as in Indonesia, in East Java and Bali, on the epics of India, the *Ramāyana* and *Mahabhārata*. The greatest oil painter of modern Burma, U Thein, was almost certainly homosexual; for example, in the painting "Best Friend" in the National Museum in Rangoon, the artist's Friend is portrayed as the Loving Buddha, an icon suggestive of homosexuality.

Homosexual references or writings have not been found in Burmese, but as Burmese literature is based on Indian literatures—which are highly erotic without, especially in south India and in Tantrism, distinguishing between hetero- and homoeroticism—it seems reasonable to look for them. Homosexual writing in Thai—also tonal and written in a similar script with a common south Indian origin—has been reported; so, given the close interrelationship of the two bordering cultures (the Burmese conquered Thailand in the eighteenth century and sacked the capital Ayutthaya), this also points to the fact that homosexual references and homoerotic writings may exist in Burmese. The issue is complicated by the massive destruction of Burmese culture both by wars (such as the British conquest in the nineteenth century and scorched earth policies in World War II) and by nature (a ferociously hot climate in the north which led to the destruction of the wooden palace of Burmese rulers and its contents in Mandalay after it survived World War II—and high humidity in the south). Manuscripts in Rangoon and in London at the British Library and the

University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies (the main repositories outside Burma) have not been assessed for homosexuality so far as is known.

With over 2,000 monuments, the great archeological site of Pagan sacked by the Mongols in 1287 (but not destroyed), should be examined (particularly its wall reliefs and frescoes) by someone familiar with Buddhist iconography and its possible homosexual references. The erotic symbolism of the stupa and the spire needs to be considered—especially in regard to the great Shwedagon pagoda in Rangoon and such masterpieces as the Ananda pagoda in Pagan and also in relation to Tantric Buddhism which is highly influential in Burma. The underplaying of eroticism is a serious handicap. I. B. Horner in translating the Pali scriptures in the early twentieth century left out many references to sexuality at the time of Christ, including the split among Buddhists in Sri Lanka over five theses, one of which concerned nocturnal emissions by monks. The influence of Chinese culture—also tolerant of homosexuality—on Burmese culture must also be considered. For much of its history Burma, like Thailand, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan (though only culturally for Japan), was a vassal state of China where the ruler had absolute power until 1908. In the matter of sexuality this meant that he—or she—could do as he—or she—pleased sexually. Burmese rulers, like Thai, Korean, and Vietnamese, modeled themselves on Chinese. Their sexuality needs to be examined in detail by a competent scholar as does the art and literature, both written and oral.

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