

GRAFFITI

Since classical antiquity, the art of writing has afforded the opportunity to

record one's sexual feelings, interests, desires, and experiences in the form of inscriptions, for the most part anonymous, that were left for all and sundry to read. A few of these have survived over many centuries to be recorded by modern archaeologists. The oldest known texts of a pederastic character are from the Dorian island of Thera; stemming from the sixth century B.C. and later, they seem a record of homosexual acts performed as rites of initiation. The ruins of Pompeii and the remains of ancient Rome furnish a considerable number of erotic graffiti duly recorded in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*; some relate sexual adventures, others are insults directed at the hapless passerby.

The word *graffito* made its appearance in Italian toward the end of the sixteenth century. The study of homosexual graffiti in modern times began shortly after the beginning of this century. The first articles in which homosexual urinal inscriptions were published appeared in 1911 in *Anthropophyteia*, the journal of sexual folklore edited by Friedrich S. Krauss. More recently whole volumes have been devoted to collections made in men's rooms from different parts of the world. Some of these locales were in effect homosexual rendezvous where the writer could expect an attentive—and responsive—public.

The graffiti may take either verbal or pictorial form, or both. The pictures are frequently obscene, often of the erect virile member or of two or more persons engaged in homosexual intercourse. Exceptionally, the texts may be narratives—diary entries as it were—of sexual encounter or experience, liberally embellished by the writer's fantasy. Others are advertisements that until quite recently could not be published in any periodical and so had to be inscribed on the wall. These are requests for partners for sexual encounters, with the desired physical attributes, age and the like specified in detail, followed by instructions for making

contact—time and place, telephone number, and the like. Presumably such texts were originally inspired by the more conventional personal advertisements that were printed in nineteenth-century newspapers. Then there are general comments on sexual mores, expressions of ridicule or hostility directed against classes of individuals disliked by the writer, or rhymes and sayings of an erotic nature. The significance of such graffiti is that they express notions that are taboo in the conventional media which, until quite recently, had to conform to all the restrictions imposed by society, attest the occurrence of socially condemned forms of sexual expression, and record non-literary and obscene words and phrases excluded from polite speech.

Sometimes, as during the 1968 uprising in Paris, graffiti emerge from their accustomed haunts in toilets and underpasses and appear prominently on the streets, where they make some political point. The prominence of graffiti—usually neither sexual or political—in New York City subways has prompted an effort to interpret them as an art form. However this may be, the gay artist Keith Haring, now internationally known, first attracted attention through his subway drawings, which were executed clandestinely in a deliberately simplified style.

The analysis of graffiti can yield evidence for linguistic forms unattested elsewhere, for sexual behavior not usually recorded by the participants, and for the attitudes not just of those engaging in such behavior but also of outsiders. Thus homosexual graffiti may provoke dialogues with others so inclined, or abusive and hostile comments by heterosexuals, even threats of violence to the author of the homoerotic inscription. In the 1980s the spread of AIDS in the gay community became a frequent topic of comment. Clever puns, rimes, word plays and the like may reflect a moment of lewd inspiration on the part of the author. Others are banal pieces of doggerel. Within the walls of an institu-

tion graffiti may contain bits of malicious gossip about the sexual identity or the sexual life of a wellknown individual, who cannot retaliate because of the anonymity of the writers. This function of giving vent to repressed feelings recalls the grotesque marginalia of medieval manuscripts that spill over into the crudely obscene. Political opinions and attitudes, especially ones excluded from the media by contemporary unofficial censorship, can find vivid expression in erotic graffiti that blend anger and satire, insult and defiance, reality and fantasy. Nearly all homosexual graffiti are by men; lesbian inscriptions are so far the rare exception.

Graffiti are thus in modern times, even with the freeing of the media from long-standing taboos, a precious document of the attitudes and mores of the culture that produces them and of the evolution of both homosexuals' own behavior and the attitudes of heterosexuals toward homosexual expression.

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GRANADA

Granada is a small city, until 1492 capital of the last Islamic kingdom in Spain. Blessed by climate and geography, it is a striking example of the incorporation of running water into architecture and urban design. Much of the Moorish city has been lost, and visitors should be aware that for many present-day *granadinos* its Moorish heritage is only a source of tourist income. However, there remains the superlative palace, the Alhambra, with a unique esthetic which has suggested homosexuality or androgyny to many, although the topic has yet to be given proper examination in print. There is also the most important survivor of the many pleasure-gar-

dens of Andalucía, the Generalife. The city of Fez (Morocco) is said to resemble Moorish Granada.

When the Castilian armies conquered Córdoba and Seville in the thirteenth century, Granada, with its natural defenses, reached new prominence as a center for refugees. There are great gaps in our knowledge of Granadine culture, and basic source works, such as Ibn al-Khatib's *Encyclopedia of Granadine History*, remain untranslated. The last major poets whose works survive are the fourteenth-century Ibn al-Khatib, his disciple Ibn Zamrak, whose verses adorn the walls of the Alhambra, and the king Yusuf III. Five thousand manuscripts, which would presumably have much illuminated the fifteenth century, were publicly burned by Cardenal Cisneros shortly after the conquest of the city. The best-known and most-translated Spanish source is Ginés Pérez de Hita's *Granadan Civil Wars*; it and other sixteenth-century presentations of former Granadan life include much that is deliberate falsification.

What information we have suggests that homosexuality was widely practiced in Granada, as part of a broad tapestry of hedonistic indulgence. (Wine and hashish were also widely used.) As preserver of the spirit of Islam in Spain, anything else would be very surprising. Granada was "an example of worldly wisdom" in which "their quest in life was to impart beauty to every object, and joy to every hour." All the major Granadan poets are linked to homosexuality to a greater or lesser extent. Various of its rulers, apparently including the last king Boabdil, openly indulged. Castilian monarchs who were sympathetic to homosexuality (Juan II, Enrique IV) lived in relative peace with Granada. Isabella's expensive campaign against Granada was partly motivated by fear of a Granadine alliance with Turkey, which had recently conquered Constantinople; it may well have had as another motive the suppression of homosexuality in Castile.