

turies who cherished a wholly different moral code.

Of lesbianism the Mesopotamian literature has virtually nothing to say: there is but a single mention of a homosexual relationship between two women in the thousands of cuneiform texts uncovered and deciphered since the mid-nineteenth century. This may be explained partly by the fact that the scribes who composed and transcribed the tablets were male, and partly by the circumstance that women's lives were private and outside the concern of male society. The lone exception is an astrological prognosis that "women will be coupled," which reveals that such practices were not unknown, and need not even have been rare.

Conclusion. Mesopotamian records attest that at the dawn of Near Eastern civilization, homosexual activity was, if not glorified, at least accepted as a part of everyday life alongside its heterosexual counterpart, and while the passive-effeminate male prostitute was stigmatized, the heroic component of male love was recognized and celebrated in literature of true verbal art. No ascetic tendencies in Mesopotamian religion cast their shadow over the erotic bond between males, and Ishtar, the goddess of love, gave her blessing to homosexual and heterosexual adorners alike.

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METASTASIO (ASSUMED NAME OF PIETRO TRAPASSI; 1698-1782)

Italian poet and opera librettist.

Hearing the ten-year-old lad improvising poems to a street crowd, an aristocratic literary critic, Gian Vincenzo Gravina, adopted the son of a Roman grocer. Gravina hellenized Trapassi to Metastasio and gave his young protégé, whom he made his heir adoptive, a fine education, but when the strain of competing with the leading *improvvisatori* in Italy nearly wrecked the ambitious boy's health, he sent his beloved protégé to rest quietly by the sea in Calabria.

In 1718 Gravina died, bequeathing a fortune to Metastasio, who had become an abbé. Having squandered his legacy in a mere two years, he had to apprentice himself to a Neapolitan lawyer. In 1721 he composed a serenata, *Gli Orti Esperidi*, at the request of the viceroy, to celebrate the birthday of the Empress of Austria. The Roman prima donna Marianna Benti-Bulgarelli (known as "La Romanina" [1684-1734]), who had played the leading role in the serenata, took Metastasio into her house where he long resided (together with her husband), and eventually moved in his parents and siblings. La Romanina persuaded him to abandon the law and to devote himself to music. Through La Romanina he came to know the leading composers: Porpora, Hasse, Pergolesi, Alessandro Scarlatti, Vinci, Leo, Durante, and Marcello—all of whom later set his libretti to music, and singers, with one of whom, the castrato Carlo Broschi (better known as Farinelli; 1705-1782), he may have had an affair. His 26 somewhat conventional melodramas (1723-1771), based on heterosexual love stories from classical mythology and history influenced by the seventeenth-century French theatre, often had absurd plots and little concern for historical accuracy. Yet when set to music, particularly of the Venetian school which was then eclipsing

the Neapolitan, they became masterpieces, some being adapted over seventy times.

After 1723, always encouraged by La Romanina, Metastasio produced libretti rapidly, beginning with *Didone abbandonata*, which was loosely derived from Vergil. In 1729 he was appointed poet to the court at Vienna, then beginning its rise to become the world center of music, where Haydn arrived fifteen years later. He moved in with a Spanish Neapolitan, Nicolò Martinez, with whom he remained until his death and composed there his finest plays, including *Olimpiade*, *La Clemenza di Tito* (later set by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart), *Achille in Sciro*, and *Attilio Regolo*, his own favorite. He became so close to the Countess of Althann, Marianna Pignatelli, that many believed that they had secretly married. Perhaps out of jealousy and seeking an engagement at the court theatre, La Romanina set out for Vienna, but died en route, leaving her fortune to Metastasio, who declined it.

Metastasio's later cantatas and the canzonetti he sent his friend the castrato Farinelli were produced before the Countess of Althann died in 1755. As his fame increased, the collection of his works in his own library stretched to over forty editions and were translated into all major languages, even modern Greek. With the musical changes introduced by Christoph Willibald Gluck and Mozart, the innovator who created the "modern" opera, his works came to seem old fashioned and increasingly difficult to adapt, and after 1820 were neglected. Farinelli, whom he called his "twin brother," best expounded his poetry. The decline of castrati combined with the popularity of *opéra bouffe* to end his domination of the operatic stage, which had lasted almost a century. Maria Theresa prohibited the huge sums expended by her predecessor Charles VI on operas.

Opera, the chief cultural export of eighteenth-century Italy to northern Europe, was often regarded with suspicion there—especially in England, where it was

even blamed for the spread of homosexuality. Inasmuch as Italy was then in the throes of Counter-Reformation repression and papal obscurantism, this claim seems ironic until one remembers that the balconies of Sicilian opera houses and the standing room of the old Metropolitan in New York (to give two far-flung examples) provided not only quarry but even sexual action for homosexuals, a disproportionate number of whom are *aficionados* of this artificial but consummate art form. Yet Metastasio sailed serenely—more or less—through troubled waters. With today's revival of *opera seria*, works set to his libretti are once again being performed, including his *Olimpiade* during the 1988 Olympic Games.

William A. Percy

MEXICO

The modern Mexican republic displays a fascinating duality of indigenous (Amerindian) and European-derived themes. The process of integrating the two streams is still continuing.

Pre-Columbian Societies. At the point of European contact, the area we now call Mexico (along with parts of Guatemala and Honduras) was inhabited by numerous diverse societies. But in spite of prominent regionalism exhibited by Mayas, Zapotecs, Mexicas (Aztecs), and others, it was a single culture area. When the Spaniards arrived early in the sixteenth century, some parts of Mesoamerica were in a state of urban decline—particularly the Mayan areas. Yet the central highlands of Mexico were experiencing a cultural florescence. In the Valley of Mexico, the Nahuatl or "Aztecs" of the central valley of Mexico lived in urban centers such as Texcoco, Tlatelolco, and Mexico/Tenochtitlán (all now part of the federal district). These people claimed a direct heritage of urban living on a massive scale which dated back to the founding of Teotihuacán, about 300 B.C. In comparison with European cities of the time, the largest Aztec