

Tornados (Gunther Tews, Holger Klotzbach, and Arnulf Rating), founded in 1977.

The first gay revues in the United States were flashy commercial enterprises like Fred Silver's *In Gay Company* (1975). But more extreme drag groups like Hot Peaches and "gender-bender" concepts heralded more politically satirical enterprises. Typical is the five-man United Fruit Company, which arose in 1985: its targets included AIDS, gentrification, U.S. interference in Central America, and TV commercials. San Francisco fostered Gay Comedy Nights at the community arts center, the Valencia Rose, from 1981 to 1985; performers who cut their teeth there later constituted *Can't Keep a Straight Face*, a three-man/three-woman revue which resembles traditional cabaret in its reliance on sketches and in its satirical point. In other cities as well, the emergence of the gay audience from underground and its merging with a "with-it" public has encouraged more elaborate entertainments than mere microphone jockeys; for example, Boston's Club Cabaret has begun to sponsor regular musical revues (*The Ten Percent Revue*, 1987; *Disappearing Act*, 1988).

*Lesbian Performers.* British lesbian comics have often managed to walk the knife-edge between radical statement and commercial success: Karen Parker and Debby Klein were cited as one of the three top cabaret acts in England in 1987. Siren Theatre Company created a parodic Western, *Hotel Destiny* (1988), which simultaneously spoofed stereotypical film roles and illusions of personality. American lesbian performance in the mid-1980s has centered around the WOW cafe in Manhattan's East Village. In a parody of talk-show formats, Alina Troyana would appear both as the outrageously "femme" Carmelita Tropicana and the "butch" Julio Iglesia to send up traditional gender identities within the lesbian community. Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver of the Split Britches Company comprise a doubles act

that shifts between these roles. While some stand-up comics, such as Terry Baum, graphically and hilariously depict lesbian sexuality, others, such as Kate Clinton, who began performing at feminist conferences and musical events, have had to tailor their material to more mixed audiences when they moved to comedy clubs. Achieving split focus has not proved a problem for Lily Tomlin, using material by Jane Wagner; having begun as a mainstream comedian, she has become bolder and franker as her particular constituency has grown more conspicuous.

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### VASE PAINTING, GREEK

Introduced during the Neolithic period of prehistory, ceramic pots were the all-purpose containers of the ancient world. They were used for eating and drinking as well as for long-term storage. In order to increase their value, or make the wares inside more attractive, many vases, especially those intended for the upper classes, bore incised or painted decoration.

In Greece during the Mycenaean period in the second millennium, figural decorations appeared on vases, though none is erotic as far as present knowledge goes. In the succeeding "dark age," vase painting became austere geometrical, with schematic animals and human figures appearing only occasionally. A wave of Near Eastern influence enriched this meagre repertoire, heralding the emergence of the full-blown black-figure style featuring an elaborate iconography of mythological and everyday-life scenes. Leading potters and painters, especially at Athens, began to sign their work as a mark of pride. About 530 B.C. a fundamental change occurred in the technique of Greek vase painting, with red figures in reserve against a black ground, a field reversal of the contrast that had been the hallmark of the black-figure mode. Iconographical conventions continued, however, basically unchanged.

In the early sixth century, scenes began to appear in which an older bearded male (the *erastes*) courts a younger man (the *eromenos*). In some instances, the intention is signaled by unmistakable body language: the older man extends one hand in entreaty to the youth's chin, while the other touches his genitals. In other examples the older man brings a gift, such as a live hare or a rooster. These presents suggest a relationship of older hunting customs with **pederasty**. There are also banqueting scenes (**symposia**) in which older and younger men recline together on couches. In the 1970s Italian scholars published a monumental fresco of this type found at Paestum, a discovery that suggests that many of the scenes known at present only from vase paintings had their counterparts in large-scale works.

In a few instances copulation occurs, though usually intercrurally—that is to say, the older man inserts his erect member between the thighs of the younger. From these scenes Sir Kenneth Dover inferred that anal copulation was rare—a conclusion contradicted by literary evidence. What probably accounts for the discrepancy is that the limited conventions of the artistic language of Greek vase painting permitted only a limited range of depiction, so that one cannot expect the vases to document the full spectrum of ancient sexual conduct.

There are also mythological depictions bearing on homosexuality, the most frequent being those of Zeus' courtship and abduction of the Phrygian youth **Ganymede**. In some pieces, the mythological scene is the doublet of one of daily life, suggesting that the homoerotic inclinations of the gods were regarded as warrants for human conduct.

Homoerotic interests were not limited to a small clientele of purchasers, but were evidently prevalent among the painters and the potters themselves, who often adorned the vases with inscriptions indicating that "So-and-so is beautiful." These *kalos* inscriptions, which occur

even when the imagery of vase is not otherwise homoerotic, have parallels in **graffiti**, as seen on the island of Thera. Sometimes they are accompanied on the vases by "pinups," portraits of the beloved youths. Studies of the chronology of the *kalos* inscriptions indicates that they were allocated among a restricted number of supremely admired sex objects, who were evidently members of the *jeunesse dorée*; each individual reigned only a few years, yielding to other favorites as his beauty faded.

Study of the male images, which are frequently nude, shows something of the changing fashions in male beauty over the generations. In the sixth century the youths were relatively husky, but as time passed they became more lithe and elegant, possessing what would now be called a swimmer's body. By the fourth century an almost androgynous ideal prevailed.

Interest in shapely male bodies persisted through Greek art until the end, in sculpture as well as in painting, but popularity of overtly homoerotic scenes began to taper off in the later part of the fifth century B.C. The reasons for this decline are not entirely understood, but it appears to reflect overall changes in the iconography of vase painting, which became relatively impoverished.

While painted pottery is known from many cultures, no body of homoerotic imagery comparable to that of ancient Greece has as yet been identified. This seeming dearth may reflect in part prudery in publishing and exhibiting relevant pieces, rather than any complete absence. Until recently most homoerotic Greek vases were kept locked in museum store-rooms, and photographic reproductions, when published at all, were likely to be cropped or altered. Pre-Columbian Peru had a lively production of erotic ceramics in which explicit scenes of copulation are presented sculpturally; a few of the surviving pieces (some were deliberately destroyed after finding) are homosexual.

*See also Beauty Contests.*

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### VENEREAL DISEASE

See Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

### VENICE

This northern Italian city, which stands on a series of islands in a lagoon of the upper Adriatic, is world-famous for its wealth of artistic monuments and for its unique and picturesque urban fabric, punctuated by innumerable canals and bridges.

*History.* Founded in the middle of the fifth century by refugees from a mainland then ravaged by barbarian invaders, the city remained in Byzantine hands, growing as a commercial center and increasing in autonomy, until independence was achieved in 697. In the ninth century Venice's particular political profile began to emerge: a republic that was at first democratic, then from 1197 on oligarchic. The merchant families who monopolized power (and the title of *nobili*) made sure that Venice's policy was directed to the increase and safeguarding of commerce. Expansion in the East and the securing of trading posts there were favored by the Crusades, especially the Fourth (1204), which the republic succeeded in manipulating to its own advantage to create an empire.

Defeating its maritime rival Genoa in 1378, Venice expanded its domain in the hinterland. The fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 and the discovery of America in 1492 ultimately doomed the city to gradual decline as new trade routes opened on the oceans. Yet the strength of the republic remained impressive: although locked in a seemingly end-

less conflict with the Turks, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Venice was nonetheless able to conduct a foreign policy that was independent of the great European powers and of the papacy. The descending curve, which was relieved by festive ceremonial and renewed artistic vitality, ended in 1797 with loss of independence. Conquered by Napoleon, the city was ceded to Austria, which kept it until 1866, when Venice joined the new Kingdom of Italy.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries industrialization occurred in the coastal centers of Marghera and Mestre, which are administratively part of Venice. The city on the lagoon, having lost much of its own population, today lives mainly on the receipts from tourism.

*Homosexuality in the Renaissance: Research Parameters.* Among the various city-states of Renaissance Italy Venice has gained particular attention on the part of historians for its evidence of older patterns of homosexual behavior. The reason for this interest resides not so much in any special quality of homosexual behavior in the republic as in a particular political situation.

A thousand years of political stability, and the city's freedom from invasion and sacking, permitted it to accumulate one of the fullest historical archives in the Western world. These archives have preserved trial records, sentences, and texts of laws against sodomy from the fifteenth century onwards. The accessibility of this material has made it a precious resource for research—the city's tangled and peculiar political structure notwithstanding.

*The Administrative Framework.* Never having been part of the Holy Roman Empire, Venice never accepted the political forms and legislation in force on the mainland. Venice tended to shun an organic code of laws. In practice it often occurred that two courts were called in, so that differences had to be decided pragmatically, case by case. For these reasons, Venetian antisodomy legislation cannot