

available mainly in law libraries, goes back to the early 1970s. Geared mainly to the practice of law in North America, *Lexis* also offers access to British and French libraries. As these examples show, the time frame of such enterprises tends to restrict the items collected to recent years, so that exclusive use of such sources narrows the focus of material at the researcher's disposal by date of origin of the material.

Large public and university libraries are beginning to record their acquisitions—though not usually extending to older holdings—in on-line systems, which are gradually being “hooked up” into larger systems. One such computerized catalogue lists the recent acquisitions of 25 major American research libraries, with terminals and print-out facilities in all of them. These retrieval systems are commonly linked to printers, so that users can with minimal effort obtain a permanent record of what they have found. In using all these instruments, it must be remembered that they are only as good as what has been entered in them. Classifiers may lack sophistication, so that entries under “Georgian” may mix indiscriminately the American state, the Soviet republic, the Caucasian language, and English architecture. Also, books and periodical articles tend to live in two different universes as far as on-line systems go. For a number of reasons (including the inherent convenience of the book format), conventional, hard-copy materials will probably continue to be used for a long time to come. Of course, the two modes are not incompatible, and the ideal situation is probably that of simultaneous access to most collections of material through both channels.

Whatever systems may be used, the compilers must face the problem of the enormous proliferation of material. In 1910, say, a one-page item would be worth noting, while by 1980 the output has increased so markedly that selectivity is imperative. Today no one would aspire to

collect every piece of writing with some relevance to homosexuality in any given year: too much would simply be redundant. Like all else in human affairs, the problems are in part a function of the time matrix. Yet when all is said and done, our knowledge of homosexuality is increasing. Masses of material that in former decades would have been ignored are being recorded and classified by state-of-the-art techniques.

See also Libraries and Archives.

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BILITIS

The name Bilitis is one of the Hellenic forms of Ba'alat, the female counterpart of Baal in Northwest Semitic mythology. In the writings of Philo of Byblos, Baaltis is equated with Dione, one of the three daughters of Uranos and consorts of Kronos, who receives the city of Byblos as her domain. The significance of Bilitis for lesbianism stems not from antiquity proper, but from the work of Pierre Louÿs, *Les Chansons de Bilitis, traduites du grec*, first published in 1894, although clandestine editions with the erotically explicit lesbian passages appeared only after the author's death, with the title *Les Chansons de Bilitis inédites* (1929), and as *Les Chansons secrètes de Bilitis* (1931). Louÿs originally offered the collection of texts to the world as translations from a classical source; it made the author's reputation in France and was never surpassed by his later writing. The heroine of the work is described as “born at the beginning of the sixth century before our era, in a mountainous village located on the banks of the Melas, in the eastern part of Pamphylia. . . . She was the daughter of a Greek and a Phoenician woman.” Leaving her homeland, she settled in Mytilene on the isle of Lesbos, “then the center of the world,” which “had as its capital a city

more enlightened than Athens and more corrupt than Sardis." Here she became part of the circle around Sappho, the poetess who taught her the art which she expressed in some thirty elegies devoted to her attachment to a girl of her own age named Mnasidika.

This product of the decadent school of the fin-de-siècle has, though written by a man, become one of the classics of lesbian literature, and was to give its name to the American organization The Daughters of Bilitis, founded in San Francisco in October 1955. The name was chosen just because it "would sound like any other women's lodge," but convey an esoteric meaning to lesbians everywhere.

This first lesbian political organization in the United States was founded some five years after the *Mattachine Society*. The leaders of the group were Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, who had settled in San Francisco as lovers in 1953. Their desire was to socialize with other lesbian women. When one of their acquaintances invited them to a meeting to discuss the start of a social club, the two accepted with enthusiasm. On September 21, 1955 eight women—four couples—gathered and within a few weeks had formed the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB). Before long Martin and Lyon were arguing that DOB should broaden its activities to include the political task of changing the public's attitude toward lesbianism. The model for the new endeavor was the *Mattachine Society* of San Francisco.

The group split over the suggestion, and the six women who remained joined forces with the *Mattachine Society* and with ONE, Inc. in what was then called the homophile movement. In April 1956 the group participated in its first public event, a forum cosponsored by *Mattachine* on the differing problems faced by lesbians and homosexuals. DOB then resolved to hold its own "public discussions," where lesbians could attend without fear as the "public." In October of the same year the organization published the

first issue of its monthly publication, *The Ladder*, in a printing of 200 copies that was mailed to "every lesbian whom any of its members knew" and to professionals in the Bay Area.

For the most part, the Daughters of Bilitis worked closely and cooperatively with its male homosexual counterparts throughout the 1950s, since in an era of intolerance, the tiny movement had to close its ranks for self-protection. The full support of the *Mattachine Society* mitigated the growing pains of DOB, and the shared outlook—the belief that dispelling myth, misinformation, and prejudice was the primary means of bettering the status of their members—bound the organizations together. But DOB also existed to provide self-help for lesbian women, a haven where they could experience a sense of belonging instead of the rejection that they encountered elsewhere, and where they could reorient their lives so that they could face the larger society with renewed strength.

The pages of the *Ladder* reflected the priority that DOB attached to personal problems of the individual lesbian, especially the one living in isolation far from the subculture of the large cities. The magazine reported political news, but was never meant to be a political journal, and so the publishers shunned advocacy, devoting space instead to poetry, fiction, history and biography. It was also a soundingboard for the experience that society distorted and denied. The special concerns of lesbians were debated on its pages, such as the rearing of children in a lesbian household, the problems of the still married lesbian, and the low salaries and restricted job opportunities of women in Eisenhower's America. Published continuously for sixteen years, this journal remains a major source for the period's activism; it was reprinted by Arno Press (New York) in 1975 with a new index by Gene Damon.

Some male attitudes, such as the notion of the homosexual organizations

that this was a "ladies' auxiliary," created tension between DOB and its allies. The promiscuity of many homosexual men and the police harassment which they encountered struck the lesbians as an encumbrance and a stigma unjustly attached to them by society. At jointly sponsored events the men even questioned the need for a separate women's group, to which the DOB members replied by asserting their need for autonomy and their identification with a larger movement for the emancipation of women—foreshadowing the far more radical feminism of the 1960s.

On the whole, DOB attracted significantly fewer members than did the male organizations, in part because the pool of potential constituents was smaller, in part because women had a more precarious economic position in American society. Professional women who had been successful felt that they did not need the group, and those who benefited from its nurturing efforts achieved independence and "graduated." The founders and leaders were white-collar semi-professionals who could not identify with the blue-collar bar subculture of working women, reflecting the fact that women are generally more sensitive to class identity than are men. The lesbian patronage of the bars belonged to a different subculture with its own well-defined identity—one that the membership of DOB generally did not share. But during the initial phase of the American homosexual movement, the Daughters of Bilitis were the rallying point for lesbian interests and aspirations.

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Evelyn Gettone

BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The appeal of biography is multifaceted, ranging from a desire to elevate one's imagination by dwelling on the accomplishments of great figures to an all-

too-human love of gossip and muckraking. Moreover, the form of a human life, from birth to death, provides a readily comprehensible narrative structure in which the reader can identify with the subject as the moving center. Homosexual autobiographies, uncommon before modern times, are the external embodiment of a process of internal self-examination; in writing autobiography and publishing it, one willy-nilly creates an apologia for oneself. Problems of concealment are common in the biographies and autobiographies of homosexuals; lengthy tomes have been compiled about such figures as **Walt Whitman** and **Willa Cather** without a mention of their sexuality. Determining the sexual orientation of noted figures of the past is significant for its own sake: the establishment of historical truth in its fullness. This aim of truth usually accords (though it occasionally conflicts) with the psychological need that members of any minority group have for heroes. And homosexuals and lesbians, so often stereotyped en masse as hopelessly neurotic if not deranged, understandably yearn for reassurance that all have not been cases in the medical waxworks museum of **Krafft-Ebing's** *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Although such psychological needs are normally met by candid and accurate biographies, there is also a temptation to provide "gay hagiography," works which extoll an individual because he or she is homosexual, not to mention the "reclamation" of figures whose sexual orientation is uncertain.

Classical Antiquity. The first hesitant emergence of biography as a genre about 500 B.C. is grounded in Greek individualism, the idea that the uniqueness of the human personality stands over against and must not be subsumed by one's public persona as fixed by official or class standing. This awareness allowed the Greeks to maintain biography as a genre distinct from **history**, which is concerned more with the general and typical. The Theban poet **Pindar** (518–438 B.C.), whose writings are suffused with homoerotic sentiment,