

A HISTORY OF  
SEX FOR SALE

*Harlots*  
**WHORES**  
& HACKABOUTS

*Harlots, Whores & Hackabouts*  
WHORES & HACKABOUTS

KATE  
LISTER

Thames  
& Hudson

KATE LISTER

## Advance Information

Frankfurt Book Fair 2020

**Dr Kate Lister** is the creator of the award-winning online research project 'Whores of Yore', which seeks to build public engagement and disseminate research on the history of sex and sexuality through social media. The Twitter feed has 267,000 followers and the website receives an average of 60,000 independent visits a month. She also lectures at Leeds Trinity University, is widely published on the sex trade and collaborates with several sex-worker charities and campaign groups.

### Specification

- 256 pages
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181A High Holborn  
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www.thamesandhudson.com

Thames & Hudson Inc.  
500 Fifth Avenue  
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## Harlots, Whores & Hackabouts

A history of sex for sale

Kate Lister / Wellcome Collection

**A provocative and compelling illustrated cultural history of the sex trade that puts sex workers centre stage, revealing how they lived and worked all around the globe.**

### Marketing points

- **Captivating tales of sex workers from around the world and throughout history** provide a powerful context to contemporary debates about sexuality and the empowerment of women.
- **Lavishly illustrated with rare historic photographs, intriguing illustrations and artefacts** that show how sex workers lived, where they worked and how the world viewed them.
- **Authoritatively and entertainingly told by an expert on the history of sex and sexuality**, Dr Kate Lister, creator of award-winning online engagement project 'Whores of Yore'.
- **Compact and stylish format with raised dentelle lace quarterbinding**, and a punchy page design by the notorious Barnbrook studio.

### Description

The history of selling sex is a hidden one – its practitioners are a 'damnable crew' pushed to the margins of history. This book redresses the balance, revealing the history of the sex trade through the eyes of the sex worker, from medieval back street to Wild West saloon, and from seedy brothel to state bedroom. These enthralling tales are brought to life by Kate Lister's witty and authoritative text, and illuminated by a rich archive of photographs, artworks and objects.

The chapters are structured thematically in broadly chronological order, each one introducing a lively cast of complex and entertaining characters operating in an array of different periods, locations and settings. In Ancient Mesopotamia the harlot Shamhat was powerful and respected, able to civilize the wild man Enkidu through her charms. In medieval London Elizabeth Moryng serviced religious clergy under the guise of an embroidery business, though was eventually jailed for being a prolific procuress and bawd. In Renaissance Venice the courtesan Veronica Franco published her poetry, rubbed shoulders with royalty and founded a charity for other courtesans. In the hedonistic floating world of Edo, Japan, kabuki actresses and then geishas entertained and pleased their patrons. Three men were hanged in 18th-century London for buggery after being found in the Molly House of Margaret Clap. And at the turn of the century, in New Orleans, Lulu White ran Mahogany Hall, a four-storey building that housed up to forty sex workers. Lister's engaging and illuminating tales invite readers to look, listen and reconsider everything they thought they knew about the world's oldest profession.

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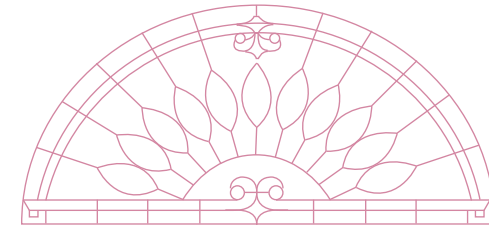
KATE LISTER

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*Harlots*  
**WHORES**  
& **HACKABOUTS**

A HISTORY  
OF  
SEX  
FOR  
SALE

KATE LISTER



**wellcome**  
**collection**

FOR REFERENCE ONLY

PREVIOUS Photograph of sex worker in a brothel in Storyville, New Orleans E. J. Bellocq's c. 1915 photographic portrait is remarkable for the relaxed demeanour of the prostitute.

BELOW & OPPOSITE Defaced photographs of Storyville sex workers Two of a number of photographic portraits of prostitutes taken by Bellocq c. 1912 in which the women's

faces have been scratched out. It is not known who scraped out the faces but it is likely to have been Bellocq himself as the photographs were damaged while the emulsion was still wet.

OVERLEAF Photograph of Storyville sex worker by E. J. Bellocq, c. 1912 Bellocq made at least 89 portraits of prostitutes in a brothel in Storyville, the red-light district of New Orleans.

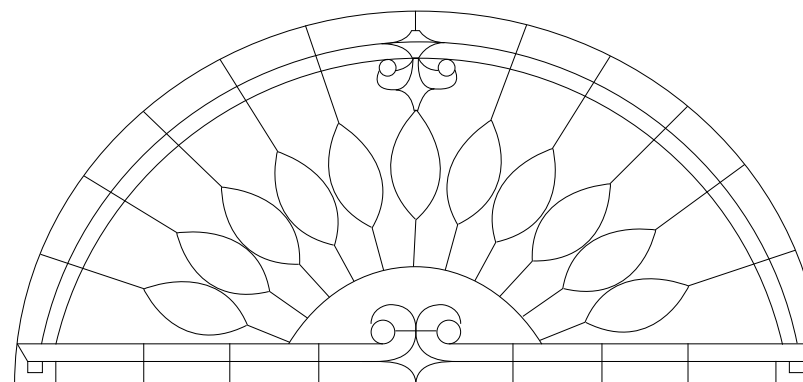




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1

Sex in  
THE ANCIENT WORLD

*In,  
Service*  
**OF THE GODS**

SHAMHAT UNFASTENED THE CLOTH OF HER LOINS,  
SHE BARED HER SEX AND HE TOOK IN HER CHARMS.  
SHE DID NOT RECOIL, SHE TOOK IN HIS SCENT SHE  
SPREAD HER CLOTHING AND HE LAY UPON HER. SHE  
DID FOR THE MAN THE WORK OF A WOMAN, HIS PASSION  
CARESSED AND EMBRACED HER. FOR SIX DAYS  
AND SEVEN NIGHTS ENKIDU WAS ERECT,  
AS HE COUPLED WITH SHAMHAT.

*The Epic of Gilgamesh*

...IF A MAN'S WIFE  
DOES NOT BEAR  
HIM A CHILD BUT  
A PROSTITUTE  
FROM THE STREET  
DOES BEAR HIM A  
CHILD, HE SHALL  
PROVIDE GRAIN,  
OIL AND CLOTHING  
RATIONS FOR THE  
PROSTITUTE, AND  
THE CHILD WHOM  
THE PROSTITUTE  
BORE TO HIM  
SHALL BE HIS HEIR...

By any standards 1872 was a very wet year across the whole of northern Europe. It was, and remains, one of the wettest years since weather records began. Rivers burst their banks, cliffs gave way, crushing the houses below, and ships were wrecked in ports. Throughout November, heavy thunderstorms pealed above the city of London. To those sheltering in the capital's doorways and public buildings, it must have seemed as if the second flood had come. And for one unassuming man watching the rain fall over Russell Square from the second floor of the British Museum, in a manner of speaking, it had.

Thirty-two-year-old George Smith (1840-76) spent much of 1872 indoors, hunched over thousands of shattered clay tablets that archaeologists had sent back to London from Nineveh in modern day Iraq some twenty-five years earlier. Carved into the clay fragments were cuneiform hieroglyphics dating back to 1800 BCE and Smith was one of a handful of scholars who could decipher their meaning. Piecing the ancient fragments back together, Smith had found forgotten Hebrew monarchs, ancient prayers and Assyrian laws, but that November, as the rain beat down, an astonished Smith deciphered a story about a flood, of a boat stranded on a mountain and of a bird sent to find dry land. It seemed to Smith, and to many others, that this was an independent account of the Biblical flood found in Genesis.

Overwhelmed at his discovery, the usually reserved Smith began shouting, whooping and running around the room. Later accounts claimed he was so beside himself that he started to take his clothes off. Smith had unearthed what would become known as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (c. 1800 BCE) – one of the oldest works of literature in the world. Of course, he did not know this as he danced around the second floor of the British Museum. Nor could he have known that the flood tablet was but one of twelve that contained the legend of Gilgamesh, King of Uruk.

Smith would go on to piece all the fractured legends back together and translate them for a new audience – all except for one. The legend of Shamhat the harlot is the earliest surviving story of transactional sex in the world, and Smith simply could not bring himself to tell it. Instead, when he published his seminal *The Chaldean Account of Genesis* in 1876, Smith discreetly omitted the nineteen lines of the poem that describe Shamhat's sexual encounter with the wild-man, Enkidu.

LEFT Plaque depicting the goddess Ishtar in relief, 1800-1750 BCE  
This Babylonian plaque, found in southern Iraq, probably stood in a shrine. The figure wears the horned headdress characteristic of a Mesopotamian deity and holds a rod and ring of justice, symbols of her divinity. Her legs end in the talons of a bird of prey, similar to those of the two owls that flank her. The background was originally painted black, suggesting that she was associated with the night.

The story Smith tried to hush up tells of how the great goddess Aruru created Enkidu to equal King Gilgamesh. Enkidu lived in the wild, among the beasts. His body was covered in long hair, he grazed on grass with gazelles and drank at the waterhole, 'his heart delighting with the beasts in the water'. Upon learning of a man 'as mighty as a rock from the sky', Gilgamesh ordered that Shamhat the harlot find Enkidu at the waterhole, 'strip off her raiment to reveal her charms' and 'do for the man the work of a woman!' Obediently, Shamhat goes to meet the wild man and she does as her king bid her to do.

*The Epic of Gilgamesh*  
transl. A. R. George —

SHAMHAT UNFASTENED THE CLOTH OF HER LOINS,  
SHE BARED HER SEX AND HE TOOK IN HER CHARMS.  
SHE DID NOT RECOIL, SHE TOOK IN HIS SCENT.  
SHE SPREAD HER CLOTHING AND HE LAY UPON HER.



**LEFT** Relief of the goddess Ishtar, 2nd millennium BCE  
This terracotta relief depicts the goddess Ishtar holding a twisted knot of reeds representing the doorpost of a storehouse, a common symbol of fertility and plenty.

**CENTRE** Sumerian relief of the goddess Inanna, 2nd millennium BCE  
The goddess Ishtar was originally worshipped in Sumer where she was known as Inanna.

**RIGHT** Relief of the goddess Ishtar, 3rd century CE.  
This Hellenized depiction of the goddess with a servant was made in ancient Palmyra, modern-day Syria.

SHE DID FOR THE MAN THE WORK OF A WOMAN,  
HIS PASSION CARESSED AND EMBRACED HER.  
FOR SIX DAYS AND SEVEN NIGHTS  
ENKIDU WAS ERECT, AS HE COUPLED WITH SHAMHAT.

After their week of frenzied lovemaking, Enkidu finds that he is no longer wild. He has reason and understanding, but the animals now fear him, and his strength is greatly reduced. Shamhat has civilized Endiku through sex.

The question of what Shamhat can tell us about the buying and selling of sexual services in Ancient Mesopotamia continues to fascinate scholars. George Smith and his conservative contemporaries may have been aghast at Shamhat, but that is evidentially not how she was intended to be read. Shamhat is powerful, respected, magical, she may even have been considered sacred, and this opens up one of the most

contentious areas of historical research, the practice of so called 'sacred prostitution' in the Ancient World.

There is ample evidence of a thriving sex trade in Ancient Mesopotamia. *The Code of Hammurabi* dates to 1754 BCE and contains several laws pertaining to the regulation and protection of sex workers.

'Marriage, Divorce And The  
Prostitute In Ancient Mesopotamia'  
transl. Martha T. Roth —

IF A MAN'S WIFE DOES NOT BEAR HIM A CHILD BUT A  
PROSTITUTE (KARKID) FROM THE STREET DOES BEAR HIM  
A CHILD, HE SHALL PROVIDE GRAIN, OIL AND CLOTHING  
RATIONS FOR THE PROSTITUTE, AND THE CHILD WHOM  
THE PROSTITUTE BORE TO HIM SHALL BE HIS HEIR; AS  
LONG AS HIS WIFE IS ALIVE, THE PROSTITUTE WILL NOT  
RESIDE IN THE HOUSE WITH HIS FIRST-RANKING WIFE.



**LEFT** Relief of copulating couple, 2nd millennium BCE.

In this Babylonian plaque a couple copulate while enjoying a draught of beer.

**CENTRE** Plaque of copulating couple, 2nd millennium BCE.  
Made of clay, this relief depicts a couple mid-coitus.

**RIGHT** Terracotta relief, c. 5th century CE  
This sandstone carving shows a copulating couple being observed by a monkey in a tree.

Legal protection and state-regulation of sex work is found throughout the Ancient World. The *Arthashastra of Kautilya* is an Indian text on politics that was composed sometime between the 2nd century BCE and the 3rd century CE. The *Arthashastra* devotes a chapter to discussing the duties of the *ganikadhyaksa*, the 'Superintendent of Courtesans', and details rules for women in this profession. Sex work was regulated by the state and sex workers paid taxes each month. A *ganika* was appointed by the state to attend the king and received a salary of one thousand *panas* every year, whereas *bandhaki* worked in brothels, and *pumscali* worked on the streets. The *Arthashastra* uses the word '*rupjiva*' to describe a woman selling sex, which translates to 'one who makes a living out of her beauty'. Clearly, then, as now, sex work was a complex and densely layered experience, ranging from the destitute to wealthy courtesans. But were those who sold sex ever regarded as holy? Did women like Shamhat sell sex in service of the gods of Ancient Mesopotamia?

OPPOSITE Eight postcard photographs of devadasi, 1860–80

- a. Two Indian dancing girls with musicians.
- b. Three women from Madras displaying their elaborate jewelry.
- c. A large group of women posing on the steps outside a building.
- d. A group of women in Srinugger, Kashmir.
- e. Three women photographed by John Burke in Kabul.
- f. Two women pose in the street with musicians.
- g. A large group of women seated outside a temple.
- h. Two women recline on a bed in Hyderabad.

THE MEN PASS AND MAKE THEIR CHOICE. ONCE A WOMAN HAS TAKEN HER PLACE THERE, SHE DOES NOT GO AWAY TO HER HOME BEFORE SOME STRANGER HAS CAST MONEY INTO HER LAP, AND HAD INTERCOURSE WITH HER OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE; BUT WHILE HE CASTS THE MONEY, HE MUST SAY, "I INVITE YOU IN THE NAME OF MYLITTA". IT DOES NOT MATTER WHAT SUM THE MONEY IS; THE WOMAN WILL NEVER REFUSE, FOR THAT WOULD BE A SIN, THE MONEY BEING BY THIS ACT MADE SACRED. SO SHE FOLLOWS THE FIRST MAN WHO CASTS IT AND REJECTS NO ONE. AFTER THEIR INTERCOURSE, HAVING DISCHARGED HER SACRED DUTY TO THE GODDESS, SHE GOES AWAY TO HER HOME; AND THEREAFTER THERE IS NO BRIBE HOWEVER GREAT THAT WILL GET HER

We owe the first extant description of Babylon to Herodotus and for centuries his work was the authority on Babylonian history. It was not until the early twentieth-century excavations of Babylon, led by German archaeologist Robert Koldewey (1855–1925), that Herodotus's account was called into question. In fact, there are so many errors in his description of Babylon that many scholars have concluded that he could never have been there. For example, Herodotus claimed the city had 100 bronze gates and a wall that was 100 metres (328 ft) high and 25 metres (82 ft) thick, but no evidence of this could be found. Likewise, his claims about sacred sex in the Babylonian temple of Aphrodite could not be corroborated by any archaeological finds. But Herodotus's description of Babylonian women selling sex to anyone with a *shekel* in service of the goddess of love proved extraordinarily influential.

Four hundred years after Herodotus, the historian Strabo (64 BCE–21 CE) describes ritual sex practised at Acilisene in Armenia. Here, citizens honoured the Persian goddess Anaitis by instructing their daughters to sell sex in her temple before they were married. In *De Dea Syria* (2nd century CE), the Greek writer Lucian of Samosata (125–180 CE) describes a ritual practised in Syria where young women had sex with strangers as an offering of worship to the goddess Aphrodite. The Augustan historian Pompeius Trogus (1st century BCE) wrote 'There was a custom among Cyprians to send their virgins to the sea-shore before marriage on fixed days, for employment in order to get dowry-money, and to make a first-fruit offering to Aphrodite, a dedication to preserve their virtue in the future'. But these vivid accounts are almost certainly based on Herodotus's stories of sacred sex in Babylon, rather than anything the authors witnessed.





A MAN BARGAINING FOR SEX  
Tondo of an Attic red-figured cup,  
5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.



A URINATING HETAIRA  
Tondo of a red-figured cup, in the style  
of the Foundry Painter, c. 480 BCE.



A MAN VISITING A HETAIRA  
Tondo of a red-figured cup, attributed  
to Dokimasia Painter, 480 BCE.



A HETAIRA AT A BANQUET  
Tondo of a red-figured cup,  
attributed Makron as painter.



A WOMAN UNTYING HER ROBE  
Tondo of an Attic red-figured cup,  
c. 490 BCE.



A RECLINING HETAIRA  
Tondo of a red-figured cup,  
c. 500 BCE.



TWO LOVERS EMBRACE  
Tondo of an Attic red-figured cup,  
attributed to Briseis Painter.



A MAN AND HETAIRA AT A PARTY  
Tondo of a red-figured cup, attributed  
to Cambitoglou Brygos Painter.



A MAN VISITING A HETAIRA  
Tondo of an Attic  
red-figured cup.



A MAN FLIRTS WITH A HETAIRA  
Tondo of an Attic red-figured cup,  
attributed to Briseis Painter.



A MAN VISITING A HETAIRA  
Tondo of an Attic  
red-figured cup.



A MAN VISITING A HETAIRA  
Tondo of a red-figured cup,  
490 - 80 BCE.

...THE DISSOLUTE  
AND MISERABLE  
PERSONS WHO  
HAVE BEEN  
SUFFERED TO  
DWELL BESIDE  
LONDON IN  
PLACES CALLED  
THE STEWES  
HAVE LATELY SO  
INCREASED AND  
ENGENDER SUCH  
CORRUPTION  
AMONG THE  
PEOPLE AS TO BE  
AN INTOLERABLE  
ANNOYANCE TO  
THE COMMON  
WEALTH...

On 27 July 1385, Elizabeth Moryng (dates unknown), wife of Henry Moryng (dates unknown), was brought from her jail cell to London's Guildhall to stand trial on charges of being 'a common harlot and a procuress'. The records tell us that men assembled to preside over Elizabeth's fate were 'Nicholas Brembre, Knight, the Mayor, the Aldermen, and the Sheriffs of London'. To a poor woman with little social standing, these important men must have seemed impossibly grand. To a prisoner on trial for her freedom, they must have been terrifying. Accusations of harlotry and whoring were not usually heard in the mayor's court, and while Elizabeth could never have inspired the same levels of fear in her judges that she must have felt, they may, at the very least, have been surprised to see her. Although, considering just how prolific a harlot and whoremonger Elizabeth turned out to be, it is entirely possible that she had met her accusers before.

The sex trade thrived in London long before Elizabeth Moryng was dragged to the dock, and its history is one of regulation, suppression, and failed attempts at abolition. Prostitution was not illegal in medieval London, but it was very heavily regulated, and the tactics deployed to control it were stigma and zoning. As early as 1277, the London courts passed a law banning any 'whore from a brothel' living within the city walls. Similar ordinances were passed in the medieval cities of York, Coventry, Leicester, and Bristol, but proved ineffective and difficult to enforce. The city's failure in prohibiting the buying and selling of sex is evident in the host of bluntly named streets where one could do just that. As E.J. Burford explained in *The Orrible Synne: A Look at London Lechery from Roman to Cromwellian Times*:

WHEN LONDON WAS COMPARATIVELY RURAL, SANITATION WAS A SIMPLER MATTER. THE PEOPLE DEFECATED OR URINATED IN THEIR GARDENS AND THOUGHT NOTHING OF IT. BUT AFTER THE NORMAN CONQUEST WHEN THE TOWNSHIP BEGAN TO DEVELOP MIGHTILY, PROBLEMS OF SANITATION AROSE THAT NEVER EXISTED BEFORE. NATURALLY OLD HABITS WERE HARD TO BREAK, AND WHEN GARDENS WERE FEWER, EASEMENTS WERE DONE IN THE LANES AND ALLEYS. THE CONSEQUENT STENCH AND OBSTRUCTIONS WERE CASUALLY REFERRED TO AS PISSING LANE, STYNKYNG ALLEY, SHITEBURNLANE OR FOUL LANE. IF THE LANE WERE ADDITIONALLY USED FOR FORNICATION IT MIGHT ALSO BEAR A SUITABLE TITLE SUCH AS GROPECUNT LANE

*The Orrible Synne: A Look at London Lechery from Roman to Cromwellian Times*  
E. J. Burford —

LEFT Engraving of an old man caressing a young woman, Germany, c. 1500-20.  
An old man strokes the breast of a younger woman, while she passes coins from his purse to another man. Harlots and procuresses, such as Elizabeth Moryng, were motivated by financial reward.

apprentices to train in the art; or at least this was the story Elizabeth told to her prospective trainees. Johanna was one such recruit and after she had broken free from Elizabeth's clutches, she had a very different tale to tell.

*Memorials of London and London Life in the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries*

ed. H. T. Riley—

THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER WAS, THAT [ELIZABETH] DID NOT FOLLOW THAT CRAFT, BUT THAT, AFTER SO RETAINING THEM, SHE INCITED THE SAME JOHANNA AND THE OTHER WOMEN WHO WERE WITH HER, AND IN HER SERVICE, TO LIVE A LEWD LIFE, AND TO CONSORT WITH FRIARS, CHAPLAINS, AND ALL OTHER SUCH MEN AS DESIRED TO HAVE THEIR COMPANY, AS WELL IN HER OWN HOUSE...



LEFT Illumination of a bathhouse, c. 1475

The medieval term for brothels —stews— was derived from their frequent simultaneous use as bathhouses, in which you could literally stew yourself in hot water.

CENTRE Illumination of a bathhouse, c. 1470

This scene makes the connection between bathhouse and brothel clear. While a group of men and women wash themselves in the bath, one couple retires to an adjacent bedroom.

RIGHT Illumination of a bathhouse, 15<sup>th</sup> century

In this depiction, couples are able to share either a bed or a bath configured for two people.

Johanna testified that on 4 May 1385 Elizabeth ordered her to accompany a chaplain to his house at night, 'that she might carry a lantern before him to his chamber'. Unbeknown to her, Elizabeth and the chaplain had contrived that she should 'stay the night there'. The next morning, Johanna returned to her mistress, who 'asked her if she had brought anything with her for her trouble that night'. When she said she had not, an enraged Elizabeth berated her and made her return to the chaplain that night, where she was to steal anything of value and bring it back. The court records that 'many other times this Elizabeth received the like base gains from the same Johanna, and her other serving-women', and retained the same for her own use; living thus abominably and damnably, and inciting other women to live in the like manner; she herself being a common harlot and a procuress'.

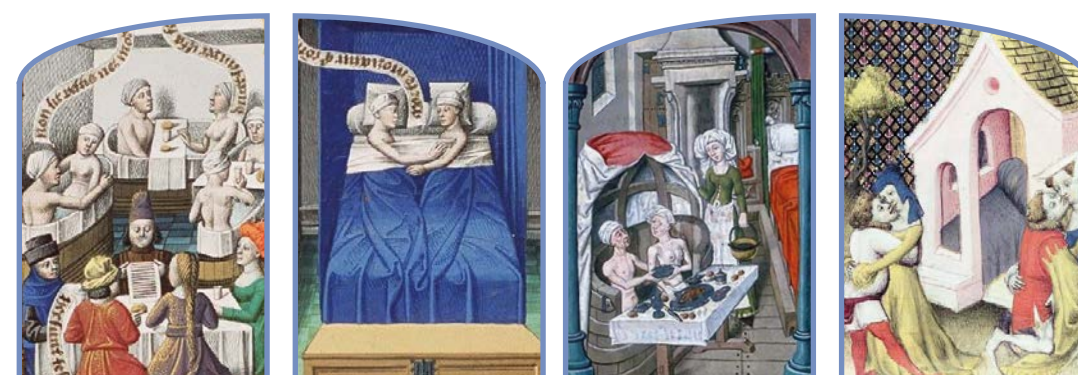
Although Johanna was the only woman to testify against Elizabeth, there were clearly many more victims who she had similarly coerced, deceived, and forced into prostitution. Despite protestations of innocence, Elizabeth was confined to

jail until the following day when 'twelve good men' found her guilty of all the offenses laid against her. Given the scale and nature of Elizabeth's crimes, the courts were not inclined to be merciful.

*Memorials of London and London Life in the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries*

ed. H. T. Riley—

UPON WHICH DAY THE GOOD MEN OF THE VENUE AFORESAID APPEARED, BY ROBERT TAWYERE AND ELEVEN OTHERS ETC; WHO DECLARED UPON THEIR OATH, THE SAME ELIZABETH TO BE GUILTY OF ALL THE THINGS ABOVE IMPUTED TO HER; AND THAT SHE WAS A COMMON HARLOT, AND A COMMON PROCRESS. AND BECAUSE THAT THROUGH SUCH WOMEN AND THE LIKE DEEDS MANY SCANDALS HAD BEFALLEN



LEFT Illumination of a bathhouse and bedroom, 15<sup>th</sup> century

Here the bathhouse is shown as a place to socialize, eat and drink. However, the sexual connection is made clear by the paired image of a couple in bed.

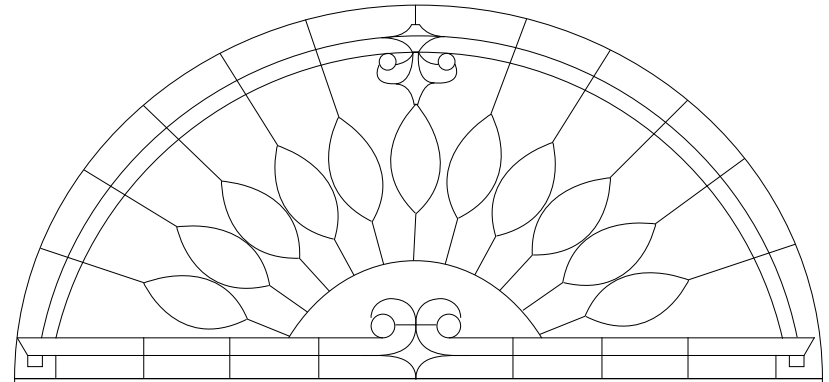
CENTRE Illumination of a bathhouse, 15<sup>th</sup> century

A couple enjoy a bath together while a bed awaits. By the early 1400s, all stews had been banned from the City of London.

RIGHT Illumination of a brothel, 15<sup>th</sup> century

Two couples passionately embrace outside a brothel before retreating to bed, visible through the doorway.

THE SAID CITY, AND GREAT PERIL MIGHT THROUGH SUCH TRANSACTIONS IN FUTURE ARISE; THEREFORE, ACCORDING TO THE CUSTOM OF THE CITY OF LONDON IN SUCH AND THE LIKE CASES PROVIDED, AND IN ORDER THAT OTHER WOMEN MIGHT BEWARE OF DOING THE LIKE; IT WAS ADJUDGED THAT THE SAID ELIZABETH SHOULD BE TAKEN FROM THE GUILDHALL AFORESAID TO CORNHULLE, AND BE PUT UPON THE THEWE, THERE TO REMAIN FOR ONE HOUR OF THE DAY, THE CAUSE THEREOF BEING PUBLICLY PROCLAIMED. AND AFTERWARDS, SHE WAS TO BE TAKEN TO SOME GATE OF THE CITY, AND THERE BE MADE TO FORSWEAR THE CITY, AND THE LIBERTY THEREOF, TO THE EFFECT THAT SHE WOULD NEVER AGAIN ENTER THE SAME; ON PAIN OF IMPRISONMENT FOR THREE YEARS, AND THE SAID PUNISHMENT OF THE THEWE, AT THE DISCRETION OF THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN FOR THE TIME BEING, SO OFTEN AS IT SHOULD PLEASE THEM THAT SHE SHOULD SUFFER SUCH PUNISHMENT.



4

**SELLING SEX  
In Renaissance Europe**

**THE HONEST**  
*Courtesans*

THERE IS A CUSTOM IN VENICE...NAMELY THAT A COURTESAN TAKES SIX OR SEVEN LOVERS, ASSIGNING TO EACH A CERTAIN NIGHT OF THE WEEK WHEN SHE DINES AND SLEEPS WITH HIM. DURING THE DAY SHE IS FREE TO ENTERTAIN WHOMEVER SHE WISHES SO THAT HER MILL NEVER LIES IDLE AND DOES NOT RUST FROM THE LACK OF OPPORTUNITY TO GRIND GRAIN.

— *Matteo Bandello* —



...THE STATUTE  
SERVES TO  
EXTIRPATE THE  
EVILS AND SINS  
WHICH MIGHT  
ENTER THE CITY  
OF FLORENCE  
STEMMING FROM  
THE INDECENCY  
OF WHORING  
WOMEN WHO  
CIRCULATE  
CONTINUOUSLY  
THROUGH THE  
CITY...

*The Making of the Modern Body:  
Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth  
Century*  
eds. C Gallagher and T. Laqueur —

LEFT *Portrait of a Lady in a Green  
Dress, 1530*  
In Bartolomeo Veneto's painting the  
lady wears a saffron yellow bodice,  
indicating that she is probably a  
courtesan. In Venice, yellow was  
associated with the sex trade, as  
sumptuary laws stipulated that  
prostitutes wear yellow cloaks.

The Ponte delle Tette is one of many small bridges that traverse the iconic waterways of Venice, Italy. Tucked away on the Rio di San Canciano and within the shadow of the Church of Saint Cassian, the Ponte delle Tette is an unimpressive edifice, and yet every year tourists flock to see it. The appeal lies not so much in its structure as its name; *Ponte delle Tette* is often translated to mean the 'Bridge of Breasts', though a more accurate translation would be the 'Bridge of Tits', or 'Tit Bridge'. Legend has it that in the sixteenth century, the 'common prostitutes' (or *meretrice*) of Venice stood atop the bridge and exposed their breasts to attract customers and to help rid the city of homosexuality; giving the *Ponte delle Tette* its iconic name. How much of this is true and how much should be ascribed to folklore is unclear, but the bridge itself is an apt symbol of how the sex trade was understood in Renaissance Italy; ugly, but necessary.

When the recently converted St Augustine of Hippo set about addressing social and moral disorder in his work *De Ordine* (386 CE), he pontificated on the subject of prostitution. Although he condemned it as sexually immoral, Augustine viewed the sex trade as an essential outlet for men's lust, without which they may indulge in even worse behaviour. He wrote:

WHAT CAN ONE FIND THAT IS MORE IGNOBLE, MORE DEPRIVED OF HONOUR, MORE CHARGED WITH TURPITUDE, THAN COMMERCIAL WOMEN, PROCURERS AND ALL SUCH SCOURGES. IF ONE SUPPRESSES PROSTITUTES, THE PASSIONS WILL CONVULSE SOCIETY; IF ONE GIVES THEM THE PLACE THAT IS RESERVED FOR HONEST WOMEN EVERYTHING BECOMES DEGRADED IN DEFILEMENT AND IGNOMINY. THUS, THIS TYPE OF HUMAN BEING, WHOSE MORALS CARRY IMPURITY TO ITS LOWEST DEPTHS, OCCUPIES, ACCORDING TO THE LAWS OF GENERAL ORDER, A PLACE, ALTHOUGH CERTAINLY THE MOST VILE PLACE, AT THE HEART OF SOCIETY.

In his thirteenth-century *Summa Theologiae* (1265-73), St Thomas Aquinas considered Augustine's words and agreed that such sinners 'may be tolerated, either on account of some good that ensues therefrom, or because of some evil avoided'. This moral ambivalence underpinned state regulation of the sex trade throughout much of Christendom in the early modern period. Although many countries were prepared to grudgingly tolerate prostitution, none were willing to

forgive it. Nor were governments about to adopt a policy of *laissez-faire* or turn a blind eye. This uneasy dynamic led to the emergence of state-controlled prostitution across Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and it was the Italians leading the way.

Any woman wanting to sell sex in Renaissance Italy could expect to be registered with the state, licensed, taxed, restricted to official zones, where she would work in a government brothel and be subjected to laws that governed what she could wear, where she could go, and where she should live. In order to justify profiting from the sex trade, the Italian authorities took their cue from St Augustine and clung to the idea that prostitution was a necessary buffer against far worse sexual sin. As the Dominican theologian, Giordano da Pisa, preached in Florence in 1306, 'do you see that in cities prostitutes are tolerated? This is a great evil, but if it were to be removed a great good would be eliminated, because there would be more adultery, more sodomy, which would be much worse'.

Far from Giordano being a lone voice, the idea that an availability of *disonesta* (women living dishonourably) would curb the sin of homosexuality was not only well established in Renaissance Italy but actually shaped public policy. It was so widespread that many historians have suggested Italy's move to legalize the sex trade in the fifteenth century was largely motivated by homophobia. Indeed, part of the mythology of Venice's 'Tits Bridge' is that the women displayed themselves to 'divert with such incentive the men from sin against nature'. You might be forgiven for thinking this line of reasoning has long been abandoned by the church, but you would be wrong. In 2010, the Bishop of Vicenza, Pietro Nonis, published an article in the *Gazzettino di Venezia* where he supported the legalization of prostitution '*per il male minore*' (for the lesser evil).

Like most countries in medieval Europe, the preferred system of regulating the sex trade throughout Italy was initially one of suppression and punishment, punctuated with periodic efforts of toleration. Various Italian states had attempted to expel the *disonesta* from their cities, and all had found this to be impossible. In 1259, the authorities of Bologna passed a statute that banished all sex workers from the city. Any woman caught selling sex was to have her nose cut off. In 1287, Florence passed laws that forced the bordellos to relocate outside the city walls. In 1313, Orvieto exiled its harlots and made the sale of sex illegal throughout the city. Any landlords caught renting

OPPOSITE Harlots' cards,  
17<sup>th</sup> century  
Each card depicting a harlot gives  
both the woman's name and how  
much she charges for her services.





OPPOSITE Venetian printed card with flap, 1563  
In this saucy card, the skirt flap can be lifted to reveal the courtesan's undergarments, symbolic handkerchief and lofty *chopins*.

ABOVE Three pairs of Venetian courtesan's *chopins*  
Originally designed to protect shoes from the mud, the height of *chopins* came to be symbolic of the status of the wearer as prostitute.

...IT BORE  
THE PUBLICK  
CHARACTER  
OF A PLACE OF  
ENTERTAINMENT  
FOR SODOMITES,  
AND FOR THE  
BETTER  
CONVENIENCY OF  
HER CUSTOMERS  
SHE HAD  
PROVIDED BEDS  
IN EVERY ROOM  
IN HER HOUSE.  
SHE USUALLY  
HAD THIRTY OR  
FORTY OF SUCH  
PERSONS THERE  
EVERY NIGHT...

HAVING GIV'N ALL THE WHORES A TOUCH,  
THE CRACKS [WHORES] WILL RAVE AND THINK IT MUCH,  
IF THE NEW SODOMITISH CREW  
HANT A BRISK FIRKING BOUT OR TWO,  
SUCH MEN, SUCH BRUTES, I SHOU'D THEM CALL,  
WHOSE TAILS ARE SODOMITICAL,  
SHOU'D EV'N POETS TO BEWAIL:  
SHOU'D WAKE THE FLOWING THOUGHTS AND PEN  
OF PRIOR, GARTH AND ADDISON.  
BUT SINCE THESE FIRST RATES EN'T ASTRIDE,  
I'LL TRY HOW MY DULL MUSE WILL RIDE.

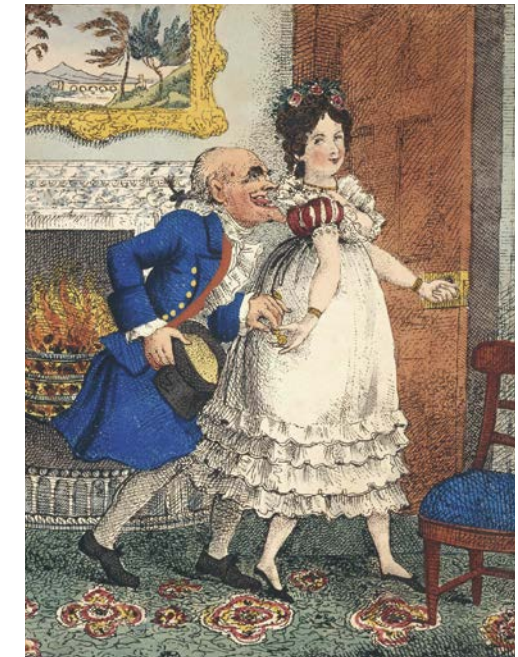
So, begins John Dunton's savage *The He-Strumpets: A Satyr on the Sodomite Club* (1707-10). He goes on to mock London's 'lewd cracks' (sex workers), whose 'Tails have burnt so many Beaus / That now He-Whores are come in Use' and 'now Men's Tails have all the Trade'. Just months before Dunton penned his satire on the men selling sex in London, the city had been scandalized by the mass arrest of forty gay men, or 'mollies', who had been caught propositioning other men for sex in places where 'Leud & Scandalous Persons' were known to meet to enjoy 'unlawful Meetings and wicked Conversation'; the 'Royal Exchange, Leaden-Hall-Market, Moorfields, [and] White-Chappel' were all identified. Tragically, three of the men arrested took their own lives while awaiting trial; a man known only as 'Jones' hanged himself, as did Augustin Grant', a woollen draper, while a clerk of the Church called 'Jermain' cut his own throat with a razor. Far from eliciting sympathy, Dunton saw their suicide as further evidence of their guilt. He wrote:

'The He-Strumpets. A Satyr on the Sodomite-Club'  
John Dunton —

THEY J[O]NES NO SOONER DID ACCUSE,  
AND TWO I'TH' COMPTER FULL AS LOOSE,  
BUT THEY STRAIT FLY TO HEMPEN NOOSE.  
JERMAIN\* — A CLERK THAT LIV'D I'TH' EAST,  
BER—DEN A HE-WHORING BEAST,  
AND FORTY S[O]D[O]MITES AT LEAST,  
NO SOONER DID THEIR LEWDNESS FLAME,  
BUT CUT THEIR VERY THROATS FOR SHAME.

LEFT *A Morning Frolic, or the Transmutation of the Sexes*, c. 1780  
A woman wears a soldier's hat and adopts a masculine stance, while a man wears a lady's wig and sits primly with a fan. That gay men, or 'mollies', would often dress or act as women horrified reformers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, who feared the corrupting and unnatural effect of this 'transmutation of the sexes'.

There is no surviving evidence to corroborate Dunton's accusation that these men were 'he-whores', depriving London's 'cracks' of a dishonest living, rather than simply gay men. For Dunton, and doubtless many others, there was little distinction to be made between men paying for sex and those looking for sex in the city's cruising hotspots: as far as he



ABOVE LEFT *A Lugsail Privateer towing a Crippled Man of War into Port*, 1783  
A harlot entices an old sailor into a tavern.

ABOVE RIGHT *An Engagement between the Heart of Oak and Charming Sally*, 1766  
A young sailor cuddles a prostitute.

BELOW LEFT *The Light Guinea, or the Blade in the Dumps*, 1773  
A prostitute weighs a defective gold coin given to her by her client.

BELOW RIGHT *The Country Man in London*, 1771  
A prostitute lifts a man's purse from his pocket and passes it to her friend.

ABOVE LEFT *A Decoy for the Old as well as the Young*, 1773  
An elderly fop peers through a lorgnette at a prostitute and a Madam.

ABOVE RIGHT *The Invitation, or Camp Politeness*, 1781  
A prostitute is invited by two soldiers into a tent on a military camp.

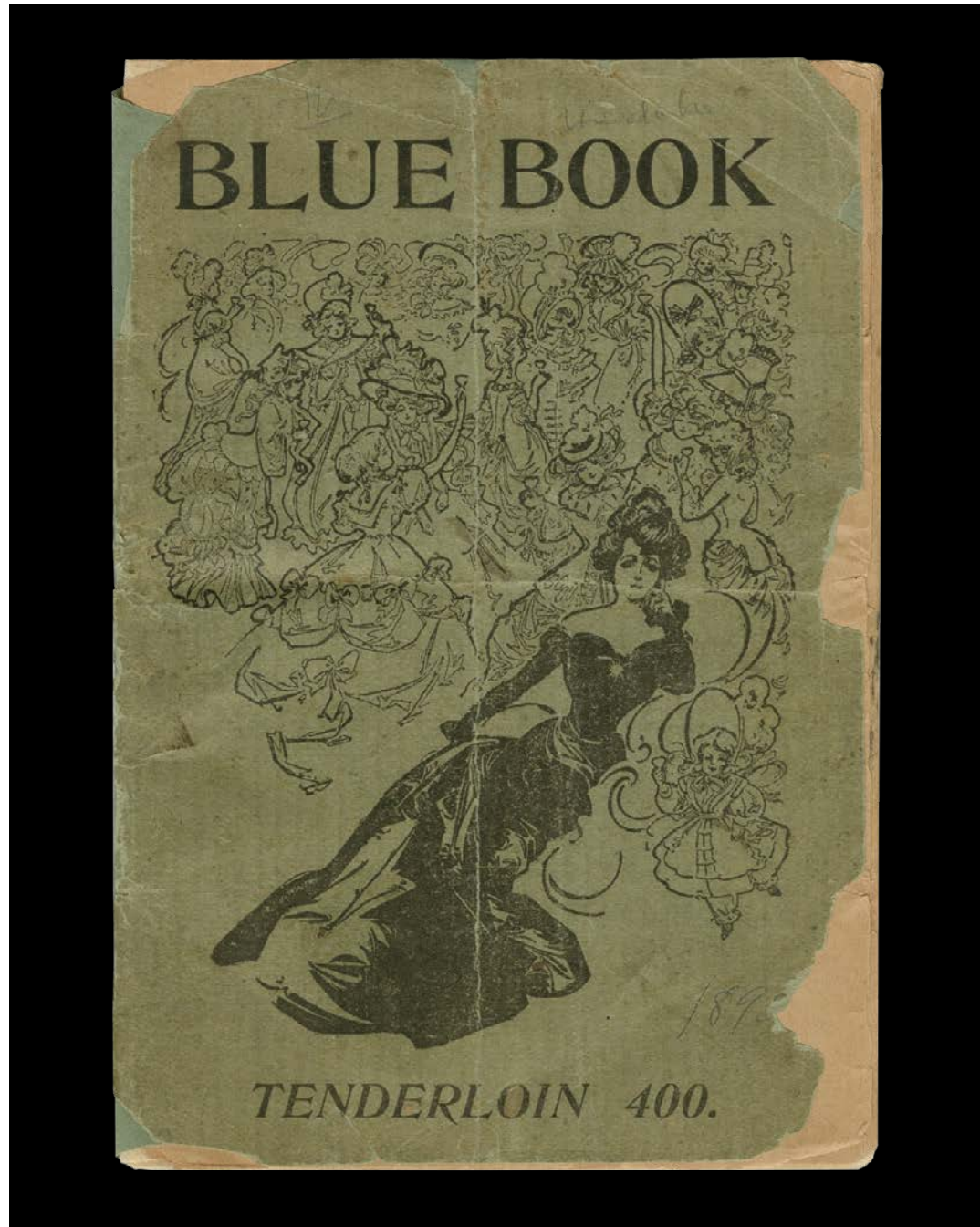
BELOW LEFT *Old Wheat Sheaf in the Trap of Venus and Bacchus*, 1782  
A prostitute is shown taking a man's purse and watch while he sleeps.

BELOW RIGHT *A Female Physician in Full Practice*, c. 1780  
An old man and young prostitute in an etching by Thomas Rowlandson.



ABOVE Women of the water trade,  
c. 1905

A group of *baishunfu* (prostitutes)  
sit in the window of a Japanese  
brothel.



ABOVE Cover of Tenderloin *Blue Book*, 1901  
 A well-thumbed copy of a directory of sex workers in New Orleans' Tenderloin district, more commonly known as Storyville.



ABOVE Interior pages of Tenderloin *Blue Book* interior, 1901  
 The guide lists the district's best brothels, providing an introduction to each and a list of the women who can be visited there.



ABOVE Photographs of a Paris brothel, c. 1900  
A group of sex workers pose in their lavishly decorated brothel.



ABOVE *Paris at Night*, c. 1900  
Sex workers and dancers socialise with their wealthy patrons.



OVERLEAF Postcard photographs of sex workers in Paris, c. 1910



These erotic and glamorous photographs of prostitutes were sold as postcards.






18

THE HISTORY OF THE GREAT PROGRESS OF THE ART OF THE ARTS IN THE CITY OF LONDON, FROM THE YEAR 1660 TO THE PRESENT TIME. BY JOHN WATSON, ESQ. OF THE MIDDLE TEMPLE. IN TWO VOLUMES. THE SECOND VOLUME.

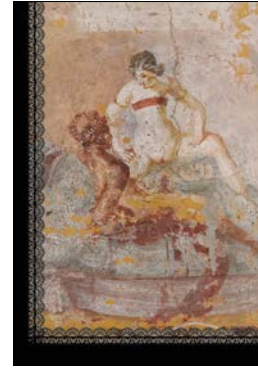



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*Fairlots, Whores & Hackabouts*

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KATE  
LISTER  
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Thames  
&Hudson

