

Trans People throughout history

By Paul and Simon

Throughout history transgender and third gender individuals have been prevalent and accepted in a large amount of history, whether for ceremonial/traditional purposes to people literally seeking out gender affirming care or simply socially transitioning all are present in the historical record.

Disclaimer: there are very secondary sources for this. Any source we use is at most a tertiary source (might not be a real term). A lot of primary sources were translated centuries ago and words have changed meaning since then, also some languages (like sumerian) don't use gendered pronouns and gender is conveyed in other ways, also a lot of context is missing (just google sumerian dog + bar joke and see what comes up).

Part One: Mesopotamia and ancient history. In ancient Mesopotamia (at least during the sumerian period) gender was a concept very similar to our own concept of gender back in the 50's, with the exception of one thing. Some religious and governmental roles either may have been considered part of a third gender or definitely were not traditionally male or female.

For example the cult of Ishtar (also known as Inanna), who later migrated to Greece and became Aphrodite, was the goddess of war, sexuality, fertility, love, and being the queen of heaven, she was uniquely associated with transgender identities and multiple members of her following and priesthood held third-gender identities, such as the Gala, which were musicians who sang for Ishtar, it was a group that may have been made up of those who were assigned male and female at birth, however all sang in a dialect reserved for women imitating the goddesses, in addition to this a poem made for Ishtar has the following quote in reference to her (referred to as Inanna) "to turn a man into a woman is and a woman into a man is yours Inanna." there are also myths where someone referred to with a female adjective is described as being transformed by Ishtar by the goddess handing them a spear "as if they were a man" and renaming them, they are then referred to with the epithet of "transformed". There are also possible third gendered individuals in the historical record for example a statue of someone who appears androgynous or possibly born female but has a male name (this statue was also dedicated to Inanna). And also "Silimabzuta of Inanna" who is described as a hermaphrodite (in translation over a century ago) but may be better literally described by other people as Person-Man-Woman. See source for more information on all topics. Also, in the myth of Enki and Ninmah, Ninmah makes people she sees as broken or flawed and her husband Enki gives them a good life, one of these is a person with quote "neither penis or vagina" this intersex person may have held a third gender role but we don't know as the translation is unclear.