

CHAPTER 10

Classically Trans: Gender Diversity in Artifacts, Art, Icons, and Legends from Antiquity to the Middle Ages

Key Questions

1. What can we learn about gender identity and gender diversity from artifacts that are thousands of years old?
2. How do ancient artifacts, legends, and icons reflect contemporary social issues and concerns?
3. What stereotypes and issues have not changed much over the course of millennia?

Chapter Overview

The ancient civilizations of Egypt, Greece, China, Mesopotamia, Rome, and India created artifacts, art, and spiritual or religious icons depicting gender diversity and gender expansiveness. Some legendary figures from ancient and medieval history even crossed the gender binary. From the sacred to the everyday, this chapter explores gender diversity from ancient times to the Middle Ages.

The chapter begins in Egypt, where recent excavations from the bottom of the Nile have recovered a religious statue of Hapy (sometimes spelled Hapi), a deity who was both male and female. After discussing gender diversity in ancient Egypt, the chapter goes on to explore the gender-diverse iconography and art of several world religions. Next, it offers insight into two powerful women who adopted male descriptors: Pharaoh Hatshepsut and General Mulan. The chapter closes with an examination of ancient Greek and Roman culture and their often uneasy relationship with gender diversity.

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