In what was an intellectual high for the *New York Times*, the Gray Lady printed an op-ed article titled “Is God Transgender?” by a New York rabbi named Mark Sameth. Related to a man who “transitioned to a woman” in the 1970s, Sameth contends that “the Hebrew Bible, when read in its original language, offers a highly flexible view of gender.” He puts forward many historical examples of gender fluidity in the Hebrew scriptures, in order to maintain that religion should not be put in service of “social prejudices” against transgendering. His treatment of the Bible amounts to excellent scholarship.

Proposing that the God of Israel was worshipped originally as “a dual-gendered deity,” the rabbi asserts, that the etymological derivation of Yahweh is “He/She” (HUHI). His argument requires that the Tetragrammaton be read, not from right to left (as Hebrew always is), but from left to right:

The four-Hebrew-letter name of God, which scholars refer to as the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, was probably not pronounced “Jehovah” or “Yahweh,” as some have guessed. The Israelite priests would have read the letters in reverse as Hu/Hi—in other words, the hidden name of God was Hebrew for “He/She.”

Some biblical scholars say that “Yahweh” is derived from the third-person singular of the verb “to be” (*hayah*), whether a qal imperfect (“he is” or “he will be”) or the causative hiphil imperfect (“he causes to come into being, he creates”). This view is confirmed by numerous lines of evidence: the interpretation given in Exod 3:14 (“Say to the sons of Israel, ‘*ehyeh* [‘I am’ or ‘I will be’ (who I am/will be)] sent me to you’); the use of shortened forms of Yahweh at the end (“Yah” or “Yahu”) or beginning (“Yeho” or “Yo”) of Hebrew names; the spelling “Yabe” known to the Samaritans; and transliterations “Yao,” “Ya-ou-e,” and “Ya-ou-ai” in some Greek texts.
It is fact that the Hebrew Bible describes God in both masculine (predominantly) and feminine imagery (for the latter, see Isa 42:14; 49:15; 63:13; Hosea 13:8; by inference Num 11:12; Deut 32:11, 18; Hos 11:1-4). For God to transcend gender is the same as his being “transgender”—which does not refer to a person’s abandoning his or her birth sex for a self-constructed and distorted self-image. Transgender is becoming what you are with freedom.

Sameth’s evidence for a “highly elastic” view of gender in the Hebrew Bible is soild. For instance, Sameth alleges: “In Esther 2:7, Mordecai is pictured as nursing his niece Esther. In a similar way, in Isaiah 49:23, the future kings of Israel are prophesied to be ‘nursing kings.’” While the feminine participle ‘omeneth refers to a woman who nurses a child (2 Sam 4:4; Ruth 4:16) the masculine participle ‘omen can simply designate a male “guardian,” “attendant,” or “foster father” of children (i.e., someone who cares
for all their needs), as the very example cited by the rabbi from Isa 49:23 indicates (so also 2 Kings 10:1, 5).

Feminine imagery is appropriated positively by a Jewish male in the ancient world. The fact that Paul could describe himself in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-3, in relation to his converts, as a brother, father, nursing mother, and even an orphaned child is some indication that he approved transgendering. In fact, his reference to “soft men” (malakoi) in 1 Cor 6:9, men who actively feminize themselves to attract male sex partners, among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God makes pretty clear where Paul stood on the question of homosexuality not transgendering.

Similarly, the ancient Israelite figures known as the qedeshim (literally, “cult figures” or self-named so-called “sacred ones,” connected with idolatrous cult shrines), men who thought themselves possessed by an androgynous deity, were condemned for assuming female appearance (sometimes including castration; so also the Greco-Roman galli). Indeed, the authors of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History (Judges thru 2 Kings) characterize them as having committed an abomination (Deut 23:17-18; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7). The same tag is applied to any man who dresses like a woman (Deut 22:5). But the definition of sexuality comes from how a person thinks. If you think you are a woman, you are.

As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is.

Proverbs 23:7
Sameth’s further evidence is of orthographic variations. He claims: “In Genesis 3:12, Eve is referred to as ‘he.’” But this is an orthographic matter. The Hebrew consonantal text suggests *hu*’ (“he”) (with later scribes providing vowel pointing for *hi*’ “she”)—an artifact of an early stage in writing, when *hu*’ was used generically of both sexes and the feminine form *hi*’ was used sparingly. By assigning her the pronoun *hu*’, Genesis is imaging Eve as part man. The verb form following this pronoun, *nathenah*, has a feminine ending (“she gave”).

Sameth writes that “Genesis 24:16 refers to Rebecca as a ‘young man.’” Here and elsewhere where the masculine/generic noun *na’ar* is used (of Dinah in Gen 34:3, 12; of young women in the legal texts of Deut 22:15-16, 21, 23-29) the context makes quite clear that ambiguity of gender is implied by the non-use of the feminine *na’arah*. This instance constitutes either a generic usage (like Greek *pais* “child” for both male and
female) or an orthographic variation in which the use of the final –h to indicate a feminine “a” is optional.

Again, Sameth asserts: “In Genesis 9:21, after the flood, Noah repairs to ‘her’ tent.” The use of the suffix –h (usually feminine) with reference to men is common enough in the Hebrew Bible (it is used some fifty-five times) suggesting “gender fluidity” but orthographic variations. Outside the Noah-Ham episode (which likely has to do with Ham emasculating his drunken father), the contexts for these other occurrences suggest ambiguity of gender (e.g., of Abraham pitching his tent in Gen 12:8 and 13:3; and Jacob doing the same in Gen 35:21). By the rabbi’s reasoning, half of the protagonists of the Hebrew Bible were presented by biblical authors as candidates for transgender surgery.

Sameth’s reasoning goes back to the very beginning. The image of the first human in Genesis 2, who is either male with a female element or sexually undifferentiated (the adam or earthling), from whom God then extracts a part to form woman, is maybe endorsement of attempts to erase one’s birth sex in order to transition to the opposite sex. Sameth’s statement that “Genesis 1:27 refers to Adam as ‘them, Both sexes’” is true, but Sameth states that “Adam” is here not a proper name but a description of “the human” or “humankind”: “God created the adam in his image.” Genesis 1:27 goes on to say, “male and female he (God) created them,” which is simply to acknowledge the significance of sexual differentiation for humanity and a freedom of choice of identity with the mind not the penis.

Sameth says that in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, “well-expressed gender fluidity was the mark of a civilized person,” and “the gods were thought of as gender-fluid.” In point of fact, there were many strictures for “gender fluidity” in the ancient Near East.

Sameth has based his arguments all on a credible historical reading of the biblical text in context. His Times op-ed piece is historical review and a message for us all.
Of course God is transgender.

What’s controversial about that?” He’s right. That God is transgender is obvious from the Hebrew Bible. Adam’s gender is clear when studied, but not obvious. The only thing controversial or even interesting in the subject is to give it language.

To remark on God's own gender seems at once arrogantly impossible. Yet, the gender of God is unambiguous and undisputed in the consistent concept of God from Judaism to the New Testament to the present.

God Is Trans-sex

Sex is different from gender but related to it. It is easier to wrap our minds around sex, which is physical and tangible, than gender which is neither.

God has no sex. God is neither female nor male. God does have genitals, much less a vagina, penis, or vulva. God does not have gametes, neither large nor small. God does not have genes, much less X or Y chromosomes. God does not have secondary sex characteristics, not breasts, hips, shoulders, facial hair, or a menstrual cycle. In the literal sense, and sex is entirely literal, God has no sex. This should surprise no one.

Because gender is our relationship to our sex, and God has no sex, God can be neither man nor woman. “Man” and “woman” are categories of Creation and God has obligation to fit into one or the other any more than God needs to belong to Israel or the Greeks, the Baptists or the Catholics, the Temple or the whole earth. (1 Kings 8:27) It is sometimes said God is so great that even the concept of Unity could not contain God and God overflowed into Unity and Trinity. Neither would God be able to fit into only Man/Male or Woman/Female. Therefore, because God transcends sex, God is transgender, or “trans-sex”¹ to be exact. God transcends sex in the most fundamental sense. If men are Mars and women from Venus, God is not even a planet.

Like planets, the Sex Binary is part of Creation. To claim that God must conform to the Sex Binary, besides being foolish and arrogant, would be idolatrous, setting an earthly creation higher than God and worshipping it! God transcends all Creation, gender included. It is not idolatrous to say God must conform to love because God is love (1 John 4:16). Love is a fundamental attribute of God that flows outward.

If you argue that the Sex Binary also flows from God like a fundamental attribute, God could still not conform to it. If sex flowed from God, then God would be place where the two sexes of the Binary join. God would be the Coincidence of Opposites! The Sex/Gender Binary claims that everyone is either male/man/masculine or female/woman/feminine, never neither and never both. God would be both and/or neither. God would be female and male, woman and man, feminine and masculine. God is trans-sex no matter how you interpret things.

Theophanies

One challenge of interpreting the gender of God that gender is in relation to sex and God has no physical body to house a sex. When it comes to theophanies, however, this is not true. In the First Testament, God incarnates several times into a physical form or at least what we infer is physical. These appearances are called theophanies. Theophanies are not God’s own self but clear appearances of God. On a superficial level, we say each theophany is God.
The most common theophany is a mysterious figure that appears throughout the First Testament who the biblical writers call The Angel of the LORD. The Angel speaks with the words of God, sometimes identifying themself as the LORD, but more often is coy. There is nothing in the Bible to differentiate the Angel from God. Like all angels, the Angel of the LORD is identified as linguistically masculine but his gender is an androgyne. Whether or not a specific angel is the Angel is not always clear. It may even be that every angel is the Angel of the LORD.

The Angel of the Lord is first known to appear to Hagar after Sarah sent her away. The Angel encourages Hagar and names her son, Ishmael. After the Angel leaves, Hagar says, “Have I really seen God and remained alive?” And names that well Beer Lahai Roi which means “well of the Living One who sees me.” Hagar meets the Angel again after being sent away again.

The Angel of the Lord appears to Abraham just as Abraham is going to kill Isaac. The Angel says to Abraham, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD . . . “ The Eastern Orthodox has long believed that the three visitors to Sarah and Abraham were a theophany, specifically each person of the Trinity. The narrator of the story does not bother to say what words are coming from the visitors and what from LORD. When they leave Sarah and Abraham for Lot, the narrator identifies them as angels. The angels predict Sarah’s pregnancy, bargain with Abraham over Sodom, and destroy Sodom.

Jacob also has numerous encounters with theophanies. First in Gen 31, Jacob tells of a dream where he meets an “angel of God” who identifies themself “I am the God of Bethel.” In Gen 32, “the angels of God met” Jacob and Jacob proclaims, “This is the camp of God!” Later, Jacob wrestles with a mysterious figure who tells him “You have wrestled with God and with אדם and have overcome” and Jacob responds, “I saw God face to face.”

God appears as a theophany several times outside the angelic manifestations. In Exodus, God appears as the Burning Bush. The Bush speaks in God’s voice, saying “I have observed the misery of my people in Egypt” and “I Am that I Am.” While every Hebrew and Christian knows God is not a plant, Exodus does not differentiate between the two. Similarly, “The LORD went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night.” (Exodus 13:21) Neither smoke nor fire has a sex. Torah does not tell us whether the Burning Bush was male, female, or hermaphroditic but we can agree it doesn’t matter.

Later, Moses will see a theophany of the LORD, seeing only God’s hand and God’s back. When God sent down fire to burn up Elijah’s sacrifice in front of the priests of Ba’al, some Christians believe this fire was also a theophany. Elijah may have witnessed another theophany in the form of the still, small voice. In every case, God neither appears as female or male. If the theophanies had a sex, Scripture excludes it and leaving us no method of deciphering it, telling us not to think about gender in regard to God.

Of course, the greatest theophany was Jesus.
Greek and Roman

Main article: LGBT themes in classical mythology

Greek mythology features male same-sex love in many of the constituent myths. These myths have been described as being crucially influential on Western LGBT literature, with the original myths being constantly re-published and re-written, and the relationships and characters serving as icons.[4] In comparison, lesbianism is rarely found in classical myths.[10]

The goddess Pomona was courted by many fertility gods, but only consented to the one that appeared to her in the form of an older woman.

- Achilles and Troilus[12]
- Agamemnon and Argynnus[13]
- Agathaidas and Phalanthus[14]
- Ameinias and Narcissus[11]
- Apollo and Hyacinth[15]
- Apollo and Hymenaios[15]
- Chrysippus and Laius[16]
- Daphnis and Pań[17]
- Dionysus and Ampelus[17]
- Dionysus and Prosymnus[18]
- Euryalus and Nisus[19]
- Heracles and Abderus
- Heracles and Hylas[17]
- Heracles and Iolaus[16]
- Ianthe and Iphis[20][21]
- Poseidon and Pelops[15]
- Polyeidos and Glauùs[22]
- Orpheus and the Thracians[14]
- Orpheus and Kalais[16]
- Apollo/Silvanus and Cyparissus[23]
- Zeus (Artemis) and Callisto[24]
- Zeus and Ganymede[4]

The patron god of intersex and transgender people is Dionysus, a god gestated in the thigh of his father Zeus, after his mother died from being overwhelmed by Zeus's true form.[25] Other gods are sometimes considered patrons of homosexual love between males, such as the love goddess Aphrodite and gods in her retinue, such as the Erotes: Eros, Himeros and Pothos.[26][27] Eros is also part of a triad of gods that played roles in homoerotic relationships, along with Heracles and Hermes, who bestowed qualities of Beauty (and Loyalty), strength, and eloquence, respectively, onto male lovers.[28] In the poetry of Sappho, Aphrodite is identified as the patron of lesbians.[29] Aphroditus was an androgynous Aphrodite from Cyprus, in later mythology became known as Hermaphroditus the son of Hermes and Aphrodite.

In Ovid's Metamorphosis Iphis has a sex change.

Norse

"Freyr" (1901) by Johannes Gehrts.
The sagas in the Old Norse language include no stories of gay or lesbian relationships, nor direct reference to LGBT characters, but they do contain several instances of revenge enacted by men accused of being a passive partner in intercourse, which was considered "unmanly" behavior and thus a threat to a man's reputation as a leader or warrior. In spite of this, it has been suggested that Freyr, a Norse god of fertility, may have been worshiped by a group of homosexual or effeminate priests, as suggested by Saxo Grammaticus in his Gesta Danorum. Odin is mentioned as a practitioner of seiðr, a form of magic considered shameful for men to perform, so was reserved for women. It is possible that the practice of seiðr involved passive sexual rites, and Odin was taunted with this fact.

In addition, some of the Norse gods were capable of changing sex at will, for example Loki, the trickster god, frequently disguised himself as a woman. In one myth, he turned himself into a mare and, after having sex with the stallion Svaðilfari, he gave birth to a foal. Comparison of a man to a child-bearing woman was a common insult in Scandinavia, and the implication that Loki may be bisexual could have been considered an insult.

Celtic

In Celtic mythology, no direct representation of gay or lesbian relationships exist. Ancient Greek and Roman commentators attribute sexual activity between males, including pederasty, to pre-Christian Celtic tribes. However, Peter Chicheri argues in Celtic sexuality: power, paradigms, and passion that homosexual affection was severely punished in Celtic culture due to influence from Christianity and suggests that any non-procreative sexual experience was subsequently expunged from mythic tales.

Some modern readings of texts have inferred LGBT themes, for example, the heroes and foster-brothers Cúchulainn and Ferdiadh have been interpreted as having a (bi)sexual relationship. When forced to fight each other, Ferdiadh mentions their sharing beds, and they are said to have found each other after the first day of conflict and kissed. After three days, Cúchulainn defeats Ferdiadh by piercing his anus with his "mysterious weapon" Gáe Bulg. The tale has led to comparisons to Greek "warrior-lovers", and Cúchulainn's reaction to the death of Ferdiadh in particular compared to Achilles' lament for Patrocles.

In the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogion of Welsh mythology, Gwydion helps his brother Gilfaethwy rape Goewin, Math's foot-holder. Gwydion and Gilfaethwy sneak back to Math's court where Gilfaethwy rapes Goewin. When Math hears of this, he turns his nephews into a series of mated pairs of animals; Gwydion becomes a stag for a year, then a sow and finally a wolf. Gilfaethwy becomes a hind deer, a boar and a she-wolf. Each year they must mate and produce an offspring which is sent to Math: Hyddwn, Hychddwn and Bleiddwn; after three years Math releases his nephews from their punishment.
Asian mythologies

Chinese

Main article: LGBT themes in Chinese mythology


Chinese mythology has been described as "rich in stories about homosexuality". The mythological stories and folklore of China reflect ancient Chinese perspectives toward homosexuality, rather than modern views. These myths are greatly influenced by religious beliefs, particularly Taoist and Confucian, and later incorporated Buddhist teachings.

The pre-taoist, pre-Confucian tradition of China was predominately shamanistic, with the majority of shamans being female. Male same-sex love was believed to have originated in the mythical south, thus homosexuality is sometimes still called "Southern wind". From this period, numerous spirits or deities were associated with homosexuality, bisexuality and transgenderism. These include Chou Wang, Lan Caihe, Shan Gu, and Yu the Great, and Gun.

Homosexual encounters are common in Chinese folk stories. The animal spirits or fairies often choose same-sex partners, usually young men or boys. One exception to this age preference is the dragon, a powerful mythological beast. Chinese dragons "consistently enjoy[s] sexual relationships with older men", one example being in the tale of "Old Farmer and a Dragon", in which a sixty-year-old farmer is forcibly sodomised by a passing dragon, resulting in wounds from penetration and bites that require medical attention.

Despite the later literature of some taoist schools disapproval of homosexuality, Tu Er Shen is a deity in Chinese folklore who manages the love and sex between homosexual men. His name literally means "rabbit" deity. According to "The Tale of the Rabbit God" in the *Zi Bu Yu*, Tu Er Shen
was originally a man called Hu Tianbao, who fell in love with a handsome young imperial inspector of the Fujian Province. One day Hu Tianbao was caught peeping on the inspector, at which point he confessed his reluctant affections for the other man. The imperial inspector had Hu Tianbao sentenced to death by beating. Since his crime was one of love, underworld officials decided to right the injustice by delegating Hu Tianbao as the god and safeguarder of homosexual affections. In order to cater to the needs of modern homosexuals, worship of the Rabbit God has been resuscitated in Taiwan: A temple was founded in Yonghe City by a gay, Taoist priest.

For thousands of years, male homosexuality was referred to in literature by alluding to two semi-legendary figures from the early Zhou Dynasty. The first was Mizi Xia and the half-eaten peach which he shared with his lover, the actual historical figure, Duke Ling of Wei. The second was Lord Long Yang, who convinced an unnamed King of Wei to remain faithful to him by comparing himself to a small fish which the King might throw back if a larger fish came along. While both Mizi Xia and Lord Long Yang may have actually existed, nothing is known about them beyond their defining stories, and their presence in Chinese literature was very much that of legendary characters who served as archetypes of homosexual love.

Japanese

According to Japanese folklore and mythology, homosexuality was introduced into the world by Shinu No Hafuri and his lover Ama No Hafuri. These were servants of a primordial goddess, possibly the sun goddess Amaterasu. Upon the death of Shinu, Ama committed suicide from grief, and the couple were buried together in the same grave. In some tellings of the story, the sun did not shine on the burial place until the lovers were disinterred and buried separately, although whether the offense to the sun was due to the homosexual relationship is not stated.

In another tale, Amaterasu retreats from conflict with her brother Susa No O into a cave, depriving the Earth of sunlight and life. In order to coax Amaterasu from the cave, the deity of humour and dance, Ame No Uzume, performs a bawdy sexual dance that involved exposing her breast and vulva, and inviting Amaterasu to admire them. On Amaterasu's stepping out of the cave, the transgender kami Ishi Kori Dome held up a magical mirror, and the combination of the dance and her reflection fascinate Amaterasu so much that she does not notice other spirits closing the cave entrance behind her.

Shinto gods are involved in all aspects of life, including the practice of shudo (traditional pederasty). An overarching patron deity of male-male love and sex, "Shudō Daimyōjin", exists in some folk Shinto sects, but is not a part of the standard Shinto pantheon.

Other kami associated with same-sex love or gender variance include: Shirabyōshi, female or transgender kami, represented as half-human, half-snake. They are linked to Shinto priests of the same name, who are usually female (or occasionally transgender) and perform ritual dances in traditional men's clothing; Ōyamakui, a transgender mountain spirit that protects industry and
childbearing; Inari, the kami of agriculture and rice, who is depicted as various genders, the most common representations being a young female food goddess, an old man carrying rice, and an androgynous bodhisattva. Inari is further associated with foxes and Kitsune, shapeshifting fox trickster spirits. Kitsune sometimes disguise themselves as women, independent of their true gender, in order to trick human men into sexual relations with them. Common belief in medieval Japan was that any woman encountered alone, especially at dusk or night, could be a fox.

Hindu

![Shiva and Shakti in the form of Ardhanarisvara](https://example.com)

Main article: LGBT themes in Hindu mythology

See also: LGBT topics and Hinduism

"Hindu society had a clear cut idea of all these people in the past. Now that we have put them under one label ‘LGBT’, there is lot more confusion and other identities have got hidden."

— Gopi Shankar in National Queer Conference 2013 organised by Sappho for Equality

Hindu mythology has many examples of deities changing gender, manifesting as different genders at different times, or combining to form androgynous or hermaphroditic beings. Gods change sex or manifest as an Avatar of the opposite sex in order to facilitate sexual congress. Non-divine beings also undergo sex-changes through the actions of the gods, as the result of curses or blessings, or as the natural outcome of reincarnation.

Hindu mythology contains numerous incidents where sexual interactions serve a non-sexual, sacred purpose; in some cases, these are same-sex interactions. Sometimes the gods condemn these interactions but at other times they occur with their blessing.
In addition to stories of gender and sexual variance that are generally accepted by mainstream Hinduism, modern scholars and queer activists have highlighted LGBT themes in lesser known texts, or inferred them from stories that traditionally are considered to have no homoerotic subtext. Such analyses have caused disagreements about the true meaning of the ancient stories.

**Buddhist**

*See also: LGBT topics and Buddhism*

In general, Buddhist scripture does not distinguish same-sex sexual activity from heterosexual activity, both being seen as non-conducive to spiritual growth. Many Buddhist moral laws arise from traditional tales and legends, and this is also the case with the Buddhist view of LGBT people. For example, the monastic rules that prohibit LGBT clergy in some sects come from interpretation of the epic Mahavagga. In the Pandakavathu section of this work, tales about "pandaka" (sexually or gender variant people) are related. In one such story, a Pandaka first approaches a group of monks, then a group of novices, and finally elephant keepers and requests them to "defile" him/her. Although rejected each time and driven away, the encounters create an ethos of innuendo about the monks, leading the Buddha to bar pandakas from the clergy.

![Kannon statue in Daienin Mt. Koya, Japan](image)

According to Cabezón and Greenberg, this stricture is not applied to lay people, and many Buddhist stories include positive portrayals of non-sexual same-sex relationships. These are particularly common in the "Jātaka" stories (Indian folklore tales of Buddha's previous lives), in which the Buddha almost always has a devoted male companion. In some tales they would even be reincarnated together as animal pairs "ruminating and cuddling together, very happy, head to head, muzzle to muzzle, horn to horn". Although not shown as sexual, these relationships between men are loving, and contrast with the difficult marriages to shrewish wives in many stories. Harvey however, disagrees and states that this is a reference to brotherly love and not a platonic relationship.
In traditional Thai Theravada Buddhism, accounts propose that "homosexuality arises as a karmic consequence of violating Buddhist proscriptions against heterosexual misconduct" in a previous incarnation. Thai Buddhist's also believe the disciple Ananda to have been reincarnated a number of times as a female, and in one previous life to have been transgender. Ānanda is popular and charismatic, and known for his emotionality. In one story of one of his previous lives, Ānanda was a solitary yogi that fell in love with a Nāga, a serpent king of Indian folklore, who took the form of a handsome youth. The relationship became sexual, causing Ānanda to regretfully break off contact, to avoid distraction from spiritual matters.

According to one legend, male same-sex love was introduced into Japan by the founder of the True Word (Shingon) sect of Japanese esoteric Buddhism, Kūkai. Historians however, point that this is probably not true, since Kūkai was an enthusiastic follower of monastic regulations. Some Bodhisattvas change sexes in different incarnations, which causes some to associate this to homosexuality and transgenderism. Kuan Yin, Avalokiteśvara, and Tara are known to have different gender representations.

**African mythologies**

**West African, Yoruba and Dahomean (Vodun)**

See also: [LGBT themes in African diasporic mythologies](#)

The celestial creator deity of Dahomey mythology is Mawu-Lisa, formed by a merger of the twin brother and sister gods Lisa (the moon) and Mawa (the sun). In combined form, he or she presented as intersex or transgender (with changing gender). Other androgynous gods include Nana Buluku, the "Great mother" that gave birth to Lisa and Mawa and created the universe, and contains both male and female essences.

The Akan people of Ghana have a pantheon of gods that includes personifications of celestial bodies. These personification manifest as androgynous of transgender deities, and include Abrao (Jupiter), Aku (Mercury), and Awo (Moon).

Possession by spirits is an integral part of Yoruba and other African spiritual traditions. The possessed are usually women, but can also be men, and both genders are regarded as the "bride" of the deity while possessed. The language used to describe possession has a sexual and violent connotation but unlike in Yoruba-derived American religions, there is no link assumed between possession and homosexual or gender variant activity in everyday life.

**Zimbabwean**

The mythology of the Shona people of Zimbabwe is ruled over by an androgynous creator god called Mwari, who occasionally splits into separate male and female aspects.
Egyptian

Few records of homosexuality exist in Egyptian mythology, and the written and pictorial works are reticent in representing sexualities. The sources that do exist indicate that same-sex relations were regarded negatively, and that penetrative sex was an aggressive act of dominance and power, shameful to the receiver, a common view in the Mediterranean basin area.

The most well-known example of this occurs in the power-struggle between the sky-god Horus, and his uncle Set, the destructive god of the desert. Set's attempts to prove his superiority include schemes of seduction, in which he compliments Horus on his buttocks and tries to anally penetrate him. Unknowingly failing, Set ejaculates between Horus's thighs, allowing Horus to collect his semen to use against him. Set believes that he has conquered Horus by having "performed this aggressive act against him". Horus subsequently throws it in the river, so that he may not be said to have been inseminated by Set. Horus then deliberately spreads his own semen on some lettuce, which was Set's favorite food (the Egyptians thought that lettuce was phallic). After Set has eaten the lettuce, they go to the gods to try to settle the argument over the rule of Egypt. The gods first listen to Set's claim of dominance over Horus, and call his semen forth, but it answers from the river, invalidating his claim. Then, the gods listen to Horus' claim of having dominated Set, and call his semen forth, and it answers from inside Set. The association with an evil god such as Set reinforces the negativity of homosexual relationships, even for the active, participant.

At least some authors, however, have interpreted an at least more neutral message. In some versions, the act between Horus and Set was consensual, if improper, and Set's consumption of Horus' seed produced Thoth's lunar disc, thus being somewhat positive in outcome. Likewise, Set was not demonised until very late in Egyptian history, and the sexual act has been recorded since the first versions.

Human fertility was a major aspect of Egyptian mythology, and was often entwined with the crop fertility provided by annual flooding of the river Nile. This connection was shown in iconography of Nile-gods, such as Hapy, god of the Nile River, and Wadj-wer, god of the Nile Delta, who although male were depicted with female attributes such as pendulous breasts, symbolizing the fertility the river provides.

Mythologies of Oceania

Australian Aboriginal

The indigenous population of Australia have a shamanistic religion, which includes a pantheon of gods. The rainbow serpent god Ungud has been described as androgynous or transgender. Shaman identify their erect penises with Ungud, and his androgyny inspires some to undergo ceremonial subincision of the penis. Angamunggi is another transgender rainbow-serpent god, worshipped as a "giver of life".
Other Australian mythological beings include Labarindja, blue-skinned wild women or "demon women" with hair the colour of smoke.[97] Stories about them show them to be completely uninterested in romance or sex with men, and any man forcing his attention upon them could die, due the "evil magic in their vaginas". They are sometimes depicted as gynandrous or intersex, having both a penis and a vagina. This is represented in ritual by having their part played by men in women's clothes.[98]

Polynesian: Hawaiian and Maori

Polynesian religions feature a complex pantheon of deities. Many of these gods refer to their companions of either sex as "aikane", a term encompassing passionate friendship and sexual-love, often in bisexual contexts. [99][100]

Wahineomo, a goddess of Hawaiian mythology whose name means "thrust woman", is depicted in relationships with other goddesses Hi'iaka and Hopoe. [101] When Hi'iaka was suspected of infidelity with her sister Pele's husband, the volcano goddess Pele killed Hi'iaka's beloved Hopoe by covering her in lava. [102] In addition to Wahineomo and Hopoe, Hi'iaka had lesbian relationships with the fern goddess Pauopala and Pele-devotee Omeo. [103][104] Omeo was part of the retinue that brought the bisexual Prince Lohiau to Pele after his death. During his life Lohiau was the lover of both the female Pele and male Paoa. [105]

Other Polynesian LGBT gods include the gay couple Pala-Mao and Kumi-Kahi, [106] and the bisexual goddess Haakauilanani, who was both servant and lover of the "Earth mother" creator goddess Papa and her husband Wakea. [107] Non-divine LGBT characters also exist in Polynesian mythology, such as the (male) shaman Pakaa and his chief and lover Keawe-Nui-A-umi, [108] and the famed fisherman Nihooleki, who was married to a woman but also had a relationship with the pig god Kamapua'a. [109] Kamapua'a was also responsible for sending the love-god Lonoikaweawaloha to seduce Pele's brother gods Hiikaluna and Hiikalalalo, hence distracting them from attacking him. [110] Kamapua'a's other male lovers included Limaloo, the bisexual god of the sea and mirages. [111]

Pacific Island: Celebes, Vanuatu, Borneo and the Philippines

Third gender, or gender variant, spiritual intermediaries are found in many Pacific island cultures, including the bajasa of the Toradja Bare'e people of Celebes, the bantut of the Taosug people of the south Philippines, and the bayoguin of the pre-Christian Philippines. These shamans are typically biologically male but display feminine behaviours and appearance. [112][113][114] The pre-Christian Philippines had a polytheistic religion, which included the transgender or hermaphroditic gods Bathala and Malyari, whose names means "Man and Woman in One" and "Powerful One" respectively; these gods are worshipped by the Bayagoin. [115][116]
The Big Nambas of Vanuatu have the concept of divinely approved-of homoerotic relationships between men, with the older partner called the "dubut". This name is derived from the word for shark, referring to the patronage of the shark-human hydrid creator god Qat.[117]

Among their pantheon of deities, the Ngaju Dayak of Borneo worship Mahatala-Jata, an androgynous or transgender god. The male part of this god is Mahatala, who rules the Upperworld, and is depicted as a hornbill living above the clouds on a mountain-top; the female part is Jata, who rules the Underworld from under the sea in the form of a water-snake. These two manifestations are linked via a jewel-encrusted bridge that is seen in the physical world as a rainbow. Mahatala-Jata is served by "balian", female hierodules, and "basir" transgender shamans metaphorically described as "water snakes which are at the same time hornbills".[118] Similar transgender shamans, the "manang bali", are found in the Iban Dayak people. Girls fated to become manang bali may first dream of becoming a woman and also of being summoned by the god/dess Menjaya Raja Manang or the goddess Ini.[119] Menjaya Raja Manang began existence as a male god, until his brother's wife became sick. This prompted Menjara into becoming the world's first healer, allowing her to cure her sister-in-law, but this treatment also resulted in Menjara changing into a woman or androgynous being.[120]

**Mythologies of the Americas**

Image of Xochipilli, the Aztec god of homosexuality

**Maya and Aztec**

The Mayan god Chin, reported from the sixteenth century, is said to have introduced homoeroticism into the Mayan culture and subsequently became associated with same-sex love. His example inspired noble families to purchase young men as lovers for their sons, creating legal relationships akin to marriage.[121] An important Mayan deity best known from the Classical period (200-900 AD), the so-called Tonsured Maize God, is often depicted in Maya art as
an effeminate young man associated with art and dance, and is thought to have constituted a ‘third gender’. [122]

Xochipilli ('Flower Prince') was the god of art, games, beauty, dance, flowers, maize, and song in Aztec mythology, and also the patron of homosexuals and homosexual prostitutes. [123] This role "suggests a complex set of associations including the role of entertainer, the love of exotic foods and perfumes, male gender variance, and same-sex eroticism". [124] The goddess Tlazoteotl, known as the "Eater of Filth" or "Goddess of Excrements" is an underworld deity of life and death, transforming pain and suffering into gold. She is the metaphorical mother and protector of the "Huastecs", transgender or lesbian priestesses, along with the goddess Xochiquetzal. In some manifestations she is known as "Goddess of the Anus", with links to male homosexual sex. [125]

Native American and Inuit

See also: Two-spirit

In Inuit shamanism, the first two humans were Aakuljuusu and Uumarnituq, both male. This same-sex couple desired company and decided to mate. This sexual encounter resulted in pregnancy for Uumarnituq. As he was physically not equipped to give birth, a spell was cast that changed his sex, giving him a vagina capable of passing the child. The now-female Uumarnituq was also responsible for introducing war into the world via magic, in order to curb overpopulation. [126] The goddess Sedna is an Inuit creator deity, with dominion of marine animals. She is depicted as gynandrous or hermaphroditic in some myths, and is served by two-spirit shamans. Other myths show Sedna as a bisexual or lesbian, living with her female partner at the bottom of the ocean. [127]

Many stories of Native Americans include Coyote seducing apparently lesbian couples, usually much to his detriment in the end. Other great spirits will sometimes take over a female body if no other presents itself when they wish to seduce a beautiful young woman.

Notably the Pleiades, or seven sisters, are seven women who despised their husbands preferring one another and eventually ran away together to become stars.

Voodoo

See also: Haitian Vodou and sexual orientation and LGBT themes in African diasporic mythologies

§ Voodoo
A large number of spirits or deities (lwa) exist in Haitian and Louisiana Voodoo. These lwa may be regarded as families of individuals or as a singular entity with distinct aspects, with links to particular areas of life.

Some lwa have particular links with magic, ancestor worship or death such as the Ghedes and Barons. A number of these are further particularly associated with transgenderism or same-sex interactions.[133] These include Ghede Nibo, a spirit caring for those who die young. He is sometimes depicted as an effeminate drag queen and inspires those he inhabits to lascivious sexuality of all kinds, especially transgender or lesbian behaviour in women.[134] Ghede Nibo's parents are Baron Samedi and Maman Brigitte; Baron Samedi is the leader of the Ghedes and Barons and is depicted as bisexual dandy or occasionally transgender, wearing a top-hat and frock coat along with a women's skirts and shoes. Samedi has a tendency toward "lascivious movements" that cross gender boundaries and also imply a lust for anal sex.[135]

Other barons displaying gay behaviour are Baron Lundy and Baron Limba, who are lovers and teach a type of homoerotic nude wrestling at their school, believed to increase magical potency.[131] Baron Oua Oua, who often manifests with a childlike aspect, has been called the baron "most closely linked to homosexuality" by Voodoo practitioners.[131]

Another lwa, Erzulie, is associated with love, sensuality and beauty. Erzulie can manifest aspects that are LGBT-related, including transgender or amazonian traits, in addition to traditionally feminine guises. When inhabiting men, these aspects can result in transgender or homoerotic behaviour, whereas they may result in lesbianism or anti-male sentiment in women. Erzulie Freda is seen as the protector of gay men, and Erzulie Dantor is associated with lesbians.[133]

Santería and Candomblé

See also: LGBT themes in Santería and Candomblé mythologies

Santería and Candomblé are syncretic religions derived from Yoruba diasporic beliefs and catholicism, most prevalent in South Americas, including Cuba and Brazil. Their mythologies have many similarities to that of Yoruba, and contains a pantheon of Orishas (spirits), comparable to (and often identified with) the lwa of Voodoo.

In one Cuban Santería "pataki", or mythological story, the sea goddess Yemaha is tricked into incestuous sex with her son Shango. To hide her shame at this event, she banished her other two sons, Inle and Abbata, to live at the bottom of the ocean, additionally cutting out Inle's tongue and making Abbata deaf. As a result of their isolation and loneliness, Inle and Abbata become passionate friends and then lovers, able to communicate empathically. This pataki is used to explain the origin of incest, muteness, and deafness in addition to homosexuality.[134]
Middle Eastern mythologies
Mesopotamian (Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian), Phoenician, and Canaanite

The ancient regions of Mesopotamia and Canaan were inhabited by a succession of overlapping civilisations: Sumer, Phoenicia, Akkadia, Babylonia, Assyria. The mythologies of these people were interlinked, often containing the same stories and mythological gods and heroes under different names.

The Sumerian creation myth, "The Creation of Man", from circa 2000 BCE, lists a number of physically differing people created by the goddess Ninmah. These included "the woman who cannot give birth" and "the one who has no male organ or female organ", which have been regarded as being third gender or androgynous. Enki, the supreme god, is accepting of these people and assigns them roles in society as "naditu" (priestesses) and "girsequ" (servants to the king).

The Akkadian mythical epic Atrahasis contains another iteration of this story, in which Enki specifically requests that Nintu create a "third-category" of people that includes third-gender people, barren women, and an "infant-stealing demon".

In ancient Mesopotamia, worship of the goddess Inanna included "soothing laments" sung by third gender priests called "gala". According to old Babylonian texts, these priests were created specifically for this purpose by the god Enki. Some gala took female names, and the word itself means "penis+anus", hinting at their androgynous status. The cultural practice, or "me", of androgynous, third-gender or homoerotically inclined priests were part of those said to have been stolen by Innana from Enki in "The Descent of Innana" myth. In the Babylonian Erra myth, the gender of the "kurggaru" and "assinnu" priests was supernaturally changed by the goddess Ishtar, making them feminine.

The relationship between the semi-divine hero Gilgamesh and his "intimate companion" Enkidu in the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh has been interpreted as a sexual one by some modern scholars. Enkidu was created as a companion to Gilgamesh by the goddess Aruru, and civilised by a harlot. As Gilgamesh and Enkidu were of similar ages and status, their relationship has been seen as relatively egalitarian, in contrast with the typically pederastic mode of ancient Greece or Persia.

Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism has been said to have a "hatred of male anal intercourse". This is reflected in its mythology: When Ahriman, the "Spirit of Aridity and Death" and "Lord of Lies", seeks to destroy the world, he engages in self-sodomy. This homosexual self intercourse causes an "explosion of evil power" and results in the birth of a host of evil minions and demons. Ahriman has also been
regarded as the patron of men who partake of homosexual sex. However, this negative portrayal of homosexuality in Zoroastrianism is not found in the Gathas, their original holy book which is said to be the direct sayings of the prophet Zoroaster.

David and Jonathan in "La Somme le Roy" (1290 CE)

**Biblical**

*See also: The Bible and homosexuality*

The story of David and Jonathan has been described as "biblical Judeo-Christianity's most influential justification of homoerotic love". The relationship between David and Jonathan is mainly covered in the Old Testament First Book of Samuel, as part of the story of David's ascent to power. The mainstream view found in modern biblical exegesis argues that the relationship between the two is merely a close platonic friendship. However, there has recently been a tradition of interpreting the love between David and Jonathan as romantic or sexual.

Another biblical hero, Noah, best known for his building an ark to save animals and worthy people from a divinely caused flood, later became a wine-maker. One day he drinks too much wine, and fell asleep naked in his tent. When his son Ham enters the tent, he sees his father naked, and is cursed with banishment. In Jewish tradition, it is also suggested that Ham had anal sex with Noah or castrated him.

**Judeo-Christian**

Saint Sebastian, history's first recorded LGBT icon.
The destruction of Sodom as illustrated by Sebastian Münster (1564)

See also: LGBT matters and Christianity and LGBT topics and Judaism

Saints Sergius and Bacchus: Sergius and Bacchus's close relationship has led many modern commentators to believe they were lovers. The most popular evidence for this view is that the oldest text of their martyrlogy, in the Greek language, describes them as "erastai", or lovers. Historian John Boswell considered their relationship to be an example of an early Christian same-sex union, reflecting his contested view of tolerant early Christian attitudes toward homosexuality. The official stance of the Eastern Orthodox Church is that the ancient Eastern tradition of adelphopoiia, which was done to form a "brotherhood" in the name of God, and is traditionally associated with these two saints, had no sexual implications. Saints Cosmas and Damian

Saint Sebastian is a long-standing gay icon. The combination of his strong, shirtless physique, the symbolism of the arrows penetrating his body, and the look on his face of rapturous pain have intrigued artists (gay or otherwise) for centuries, and began the first explicitly gay cult in the 19th century. Richard A. Kaye wrote, "contemporary gay men have seen in Sebastian at once a stunning advertisement for homosexual desire (indeed, a homoerotic ideal), and a prototypical portrait of tortured closet case."

Islamic and Pre-Islamic Arabian

Islamic folk beliefs remain common, such as the myths surrounding the Jinn, long-lived shapeshifting spirits created from "smokeless fire" (Quran 15:27) and which correspond to the second group of angels who were created on the 5th day of Creation in the Jewish Qabalistic text, the Bahir ("The Illumination") which were created from "flameless fire". Some believe their shapeshifting abilities allow them to change gender at will but this is not consistent throughout the Islamic world although their ability to fly and travel exceedingly fast are consistent traits of the Jinn. The word Jinn means "hidden from sight" and they are sometimes considered to be led by Shaytaan (Arabic for “Satan”) (who is the Devil also known in Islam as Iblis "he who causes despair"), representing powers of magic and rebellion, and posing as bringers of wealth as the devil acclaim.
These traits are associated with the Jinn on account of Shaytaan’s rebellion against the order of Allah to acknowledge Adam’s ability to be superior to the Jinn and his refusal to bow down stating that “he was created from fire and Adam was created from clay”. (Quran 7:11-12). The ability of the Jinn to travel to the heavens and listen to the discussion of angels and bring back what they overhear and relay it to seers and oracles has linked them with magic (Quran 72:8-10).

Jinn are served Al-Jink and Mukhannathun, transgender and homoerotically-inclined wanderers with entertainment and spiritual functions. In the pre-Islamic Arabic and Oikoumene cultures, third-gender individuals, such as Mukhannathun were worshippers in widespread Goddess cults. These cults revered a trio of goddesses: Al-lāt, Al-Uzza, and Manāt which in pre-Islamic Arabia were believed to be daughters of Allah but were denounced as false idols by Muhammad and the Quran (53:19-23).[155][156][157]

Arabian mythology also contains magical sex-changing springs or fountains, such as Al-Zahra. Upon bathing in or drinking from Al-Zahra, a person will change sex. The folklore of Swat, in northern Pakistan often includes same-sex relationships in which the "beloved" is a handsome younger man or boy.

See also

- Religion and homosexuality
- Religion and transgenderism
- Queer theology
- LGBT literature
- LGBT history
- LGBT themes in speculative fiction

Notes

1. ^ Ninmah (Sumerian: "Great Queen") has many names, and is identified with Ninursag (Sumerian: "Lady of the mountain"), Nintu (Akkadian: "Lady of Birth"), Belet-illi (Babylonian: Lady of the gods), Aruru, Mami, Mamma. (Dalley (1998), p. 326)
2. ^ Inanna (Sumerian) is identified with Ishtar (Babylonian), Astarte (Phoenician), Atargatis (Syrian) and in later texts Aphrodite (Greek).

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General


