



HEALTH AND BEAUTY TIPS FROM
ANCIENT GREECE



Beauty Tips from Ancient Greek Societies

In our other books about ancient beauty tips, we've talked often about practicality in dressing. Those living in ancient times didn't have the means available that we do today for improving climate conditions. Additionally, geographical conditions restricted ancient societies to using natural products grown locally or products that could be imported inexpensively. This led to a more practical perception of clothing.

Ancient Greece somewhat strays from this rule, however. The climate in Greece is multi-seasonal, which meant that fashion styles varied from time to time. Also, Greece is close to Egypt and Persia (modern-day Iran), which were hubs of civilization during ancient times. This gave Greece access to a variety of beauty options.

Regardless of this accessibility, the Ancient Greeks seemed to be quite conservative in beauty.

In this book, we're going to be presenting those varied styles to you, showcasing the norms in Greek dressing and beauty, along with information about any materials used in the process.

When We Say Ancient Greece, Who Are We Referring To?

Ancient Greece refers to era between 1200 and 300 B.C., which marks the 900 year Golden Age of the Greek Empire, up until the death of Alexander the Great. With close to a millennium of rich history, many records exist, giving us an accurate representation of Ancient Greek beauty and fashion. Those beauty tips and fashion include the following:

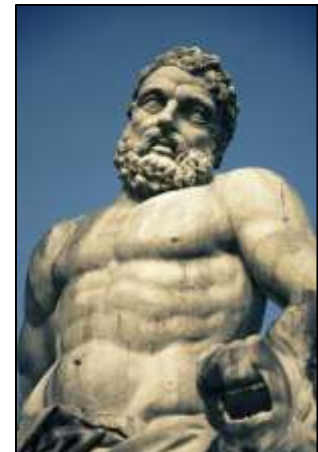
Tip #1: Hairstyles

Hair was a mark of status in Ancient Greek societies. It was especially cared for by women, where care differed in colors chosen, in addition to the hairstyles adopted.

As for color, dying hair blonde was common among Ancient Greeks in general (men and women). This was done using potions that utilized grinded yellow flowers and potash water. Blonde hair was seen as a sign of beauty in Ancient Greece. In fact, if you think about it, you'd see that a lot of Ancient Greek drawings feature blonde characters.

Blondness in hair was a style adopted by men more than women, ironically enough. The reason for this was because concoctions applied for bleaching were sun-dried. This meant that you actually had to sit in the sun for an hour, waiting for the concoction to be infused into your hair by the heat. For a woman, this would be excessively damaging to the hair, ruining it beyond repair (in an age where there were no synthetic shampoos to fix splitting or breakage).

As a result, it is usually noticed that blond men in Greek societies tended to have curly and rough hair. Smooth and silky blond hair in an individual would be difficult to find, unless the person in question was naturally blonde.



For men, beards were quite widespread. Shaving was in fact not a part of Greek culture until the arrival of the Roman Era. It is difficult to see pictures of Greek men, especially in old age, who do not retain a large beard size. For men, smaller beards are usually a result of slow genetics in beard growth, and not razor use.

Hairstyles adopted by women included ponytails and chignons. Again, chignons were often seen used by women in Ancient Greek drawings. It is quite a classy hairstyle too! Chignons in Ancient Greece were maintained through the use of ribbons to tie the hair. Metal hoops and ivory combs were also options that were used to tie the hair together.

Hair curling was common for women in Ancient Greek societies. Hair curls and knots were other forms of hair tying, which allowed Ancient Greek women to move around much easier. It helped organize the hair into manageable form for everyday life, eliminating the need to cut it off.

Ponytails were a hairstyle that seems to have originated in Ancient Greece. This was for women who wanted to show off their long hairstyles in a practical way. Other forms of long hairstyles in the region included hair braids, which are seen often in Greek artistic drawings.

Tip #2: Physiques

Ironically enough, with the diversity previously mentioned, not all Ancient Greek societies liked diversity in beauty. In fact, many Ancient Greek women ignored beauty completely!



This was specifically the case in Sparta, which was home to a military-based society that valued rigorous training and combat readiness. As a result, Greek women in Spartan societies would take natural cosmetics to a whole new level. This became known as fitness-cosmetics.

It was believed by Spartan women that a focus on exercising and living a life of healthy consumption was more than what was needed to maintain good looks.

There was no use of make-up, and hairstyles were groomed for the bare minimum of decency.

In fact, it is believed that the origins of the wonderful physiques in Ancient Greek art comes from Spartan exercise ethics. Those bodies can be seen in many sculptures of Ancient Greeks, where there's always a muscular, fit man, or a thin woman. You've probably never seen a sculpture of an overweight Greek, have you?

This exercise ethic and focus on physique had the effect of making male bodies highly valuable. It is believed by many scholars that a focus on fitness and muscularity as proponents of beauty originated in Ancient Greece.

Tip #3: Hygiene Habits and Odor

Dirt and Body Showers

Hygiene habits are the underlying foundation of any beauty attempt. No amount of perfumes and cosmetics can cover up bad bodily odors, mouth stench, or sweatiness. These things had to be dealt with, even in those times, regardless of culture.

In Ancient Greece, body cleaning was practiced often. This is seen through the existence of public baths, showers, and (hot) air rooms, which acted as saunas.

Regardless of the existence of baths, Ancient Greeks did not use soap in their washing. Instead, they would scrub their bodies with rough material that would exfoliate the dead skin. This included pumice, rocks, and sand, or a metal device used in the past called a “strigil.” After the scrubbing and scrapping process, immersion into water followed. Although they didn’t use soap, olive oil would often be used as an ointment rub during bath times.

The strongest body scrapers of those previously mentioned were the strigils. They were used by all people in Ancient Greek societies and were specifically prized by athletes. Ancient Greece was an athletic society, where competitions involved a lot of sweat and an accumulation of dirt and oils on the body. Scrapping was an intense need in such conditions, especially when you consider the high levels of humidity in Greece.



Perfumes

While the previous habits solved the dirtiness problem, they didn’t solve those of smells and odor. After all, scrapping away dead skin doesn’t necessarily mean you smell good. At the same time, smells left a great impression on people you would meet. So, how did that factor into Ancient Greek societies?

Fragrance burning was the earliest method for Ancient Greeks to eliminate odors since perfumes were not common in Greece before the times of Alexander the Great.

Prior to his rule, all perfume had to be imported from Ancient Egypt, which was known for its extravagance in cosmetics. Because of this, it could be said that diversity in smells didn’t become common in Greece until the 3rd century B.C.

While perfumes may have not been common at first, they would eventually become very diversified and plentiful thanks to Alexander’s conquests of neighboring regions.

Fragrant blends were soon introduced into everyday life, worn by poets, athletes, and desired women. Furthermore, the perfume shops that opened up all over Athens, showcasing these scents, became centers of gossip, scandal, and political intrigue.

Tip #4: Fashion Styles

Cloth Production

Greek cultures have always been conservative when it comes to forms of beauty. As such, simplicity in their fashion styles shouldn't be a surprise. This of course did not mean that all Ancient Greeks had a plain, unifying dress code. Dress, color, and fabric differed from one Ancient Greek to another, based on factors such as affordability and class.

To start with the basics, it is necessary to discuss fabric. Basic cloth made from wool and linen were the most common forms of clothes making in Greece. The wool was local, but most of the linen was imported from Egypt.

Looms were used to make this cloth, which were operated mainly by women at the time. Slaves were also assigned duties in the making of cloth, especially in the carding, spinning, and weaving processes.

Awkwardly enough, even though Ancient Egypt was just south of Greece, not much cotton was used during those times. They got the flax for the linen, but they totally ignored cotton. It would have been a convenient choice, considering the lighter wear that cotton is, and its quickness in importing. At this point, it might be assumed that Ancient Greece was import-conservative, right?

Well, this is simply not true. Silk was actually imported from Asian countries often. Unfortunately for the Greeks, they actually had no idea at the time how silk was made. This forced them to be content with simply importing it.

It should be noted that the long distance silk import and difficulty in production was something affordable only by the upper class.

Practical Clothing

The production of clothes constituted the majority of Ancient Greek fashion design. Beyond that, men and women were content with wearing their clothing in sheets, which were held together through pins. They did not wear dresses and trousers in Ancient Greece, as was common in Persian and Indian societies.

Thus, when looking at status markers, cloth dye is the identifying characteristic. The dye selected for dying clothes was in fact a mark of richness or poverty. For example, there existed a specific form of dye called "Phoenician purple dye," which was used for Greek clothing. This form of dye was expensive to extract and use, because minute drops had to be extracted from snails to get the color.

It could basically be said that purple dye in Ancient Greece is the equivalent of musk and caviar in today's societies.

As implied from the dye's name, it was actually imported from Phoenicia, a non-Greek territory. Colorful dyes were generally not manufactured in local Greek lands. In Greece, the most common colors were red, yellow, and brown (earthy colors, basically). An example of brighter dyes that were imported includes blue, which was from India, introduced during the conquests of Alexander the Great.

Maintaining the Clothes

Greeks were low on fashion styles and not too bright locally. A lot of their coloring was imported, and was generally affordable only by higher classes. When it came to clothing appearance, the only option that Greeks had left was proper care.

Clothes worn were simple in design and lacked complexity because it made them easy to wash and easy to straighten. This straightening process from Ancient Greece was actually ironing before it the term was ever coined. Irons (primitive forms) existed in Ancient Greece as far back as 6th Century B.C.



Other Basic Clothing

Footwear is something that should be also mentioned. There isn't anything special about this aspect of Ancient Greek beauty, though. The primary form of footwear has always been sandals. Even then, sandals were only worn by the rich and upper classes. The poor were often forced to go barefoot.

Another form of clothing, which is actually an accessory, was bras. Bras were worn by women in Ancient Greece for the purpose of uplifting the breasts. Breast uplifting was of course hidden under outfits, and thus was a perfectly normal procedure.

Jewelry

Jewelry was not worn often in Ancient Greece. When it was worn, however, it was usually in the form of the pins that were used to hold clothing together. These pins and buttons sometimes had jewels and gemstone decorations on them that would shine brilliantly in the sun.

Tip #5: Make-Up and Cosmetics

Even with cosmetics, simplicity was the key. Eyeliners and protocols to apply proper make-up weren't practiced in Ancient Greece. In fact, excessive make-up in Ancient Greece was seen a sign of dishonesty in women.

Instead, they were encouraged to apply skin whiteners. The reason for this was the perception of lighter skin as a sign of nobility (a perception shared with Ancient Egypt). This meant that women would spend more time indoors, wearing powders that served to brighten their skin.

Though make-up was shunned, lipsticks were used quite often in Ancient Greece. This was in addition to products that improved mouth aroma. These products were chewed by Greeks to help emit good breath from their mouths when around others.

So What Can We Learn From Ancient Greek Beauty Tips?

In one word: Simplicity. Greeks of both genders have always been seen as embodiments of beauty in Ancient culture, and their beauty styles show us why. Their reliance is less on extravagance in dress, and more on emphasizing the body's natural beauty.



This natural beauty manifested itself in fit physiques for both males and females and in the simple hairstyles that combined bright looks with good grooming. These hair styles, while diverse, were both classy and elegant.

Clothing was also decent. Simple clothes were worn around the body in a manner that was basic, yet proper looking. This was also a result of the Ancient Greek habit of caring for their clothes.

Ancient Greeks did not wear too much make-up, but they did focus on lightening their skin. This helped differentiate the nobles from slaves, making them look less “worn out” by the sun's heat.

Some of these previous factors may make Ancient Greece look like a boring society to study for fashion, yet we have to remember that practicality was top priority. Besides, can you name any ancient civilization with a fashion style as memorable as that of the Ancient Greeks?

From this style, we can learn two very important things: that it is best to be conservative with clothing choices, and that taking care of one's body speak leaps and bounds about his or her health and beauty.

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