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Fashion Design in Ancient Ages

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Summary:

The researcher traces the form of clothing that prevailed in the prehistoric era through the Chinese, Egyptian, Mesopotamia, Greek, and Roman civilizations. The researcher follows the descriptive analytical approach to the form of clothing in these civilizations, and for different classes of society, does not forget the functional aspect of these clothes. Ancient societies viewed fashion as a sign of riches and high social standing. The researcher reached some results that enrich the research topic, as he found that the first and last goal of manufacturing and designing these clothes was not for the aesthetic aspect, but for the functional aspect, whether these functions were social, military, or climatic. For example, clothes in ancient Egypt were made from sheep wool, goat hair, and palm fronds. While Greek clothes were made of linen and wool, Roman clothes are an extension of Greek clothes and were characterized by the (Toga and Picta), while Chinese clothes were characterized by silk, such as the (Haifu). The researcher concluded that the clothing industry varied in form and function from one civilization to another and was subject to the cultural aspects of these civilizations.

Key words: Fashion Design, Ancient Ages, Ancient Egyptians, Mesopotamia, Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, Ancient China.

Introduction

As a representation of identity, status, and power, fashion plays a significant role in the development of any civilization. “Garments are a civilization fact in ancient Mesopotamia, made of linen, then wool, it is highly dependent on the development of agriculture and animal husbandry, born and developed from the 9th millennium on” (Cécile Michel, 2024). Its design also conveys the cultural character and nature of the environment to which the individual belongs, as well as their economic and social standing. India, China, Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, and Egypt are among the ancient civilizations that have established the art of garment design (Orr, David, 1998). For example, around 3500–539 B.C., the people of Mesopotamia fashioned basic coats and clothes out of flax and wool fibers to protect themselves from warmth and sun protection, both sexes used shawls and cloaks. During the 3-rd millennium, wool becomes a basic element of the Mesopotamian economy, and new techniques linked to this fiber are developed (Völling, E., 2008). “Fashion and dress in Mesopotamia – clothing, footwear, and accessories – was not only functional but defined one’s social status and developed from a simple loincloth in the Ubaid Period (c. 5000-4100 BCE) to brightly colored robes and dresses by the time of Sassanian Empire (224-651 CE). Styles changed, but essential form and function remained the same” (Joshua J. Mark, 2023).



Headdress and Necklaces from the Royal Cemetery of Ur

Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin (Copyright)

Additionally, they conveyed spiritual beliefs as well as meanings and details about the person's identity and status. These garments' symbolic value set society apart in addition to individuals. In Scotland, for instance, women wear long dresses and men wear short skirts. The evolution of the art of design and its aesthetics was also influenced by the techniques of weaving and dyeing. Ancient societies viewed fashion as a sign of riches and high social standing. Because members of the royal families and the clergy wore clothing that was unique in form, content, and material, setting them apart from the general populace, these people wore clothing made of wool, cotton, and silk materials embellished with jewelry and embroidery that was thought to be intricate for the time. King Sargon of Akkad, for instance, emphasized his status and power by donning ornate, inlaid garments and crowns. (Erica H. Robb, 1997).

Fashion Design among the Ancient Egyptians

"We do not know exactly when the first piece of clothing was created, but archaeologists believe that clothing dates back to the Stone Age, about 100,000 years ago, and its use, as we mentioned, was limited to protecting the body and providing warmth, and it was made from materials found in nature, such as fur, natural leather, and plant fibers" (<https://www.hiamag.com>). Drawings and writings discovered in several ancient Egyptian tombs show a range of clothing items that can be categorized based on activity and status. Cloaks, Shawls, and dresses are among the wrapped garments fashioned of long cloth. Because of the hot tropical climate and the abundance of accessible materials, the clothing worn by the ancient Egyptians was distinguished by lightness and coolness. The majority of the clothing worn by the ancient Egyptians was made of linen, but there were other options for sheep's wool, goat hair, and palm fibers.



(Egyptian Queen)

lauren m. lowell, costume designer, <https://lowelldesigns.com/ancient-greece/>

“Cotton only became popular in the first century AD, and silk after the seventh century AD. Sheer robes made of light linen were preferred by upper-class women, often decorated with a scarf or robe, tied with a belt at the waist, and decorated with a headdress, necklace, and earrings.” (Basant Gamil, 2023). Because both men and women frequently wore calaseris, or linen jackets, which were the attire of the aristocracy, including the wealthy and kings, they were renowned for their understated yet sophisticated elegance. In order to demonstrate their power and religious standing, the ancient Egyptian nobility wore luxurious apparel embellished with gold and semi-precious stones, as well as jewelry, particularly crowns and ceremonial attire. Royal family members also wore jewels, big rings, and the Nemes, a striped headpiece that symbolizes strength. (Wilkinson 2003).



(Fashion Design in Ancient Egypt)

<https://www.youm7.com>

Ancient Greece (c. 800 BC – 146 BC)

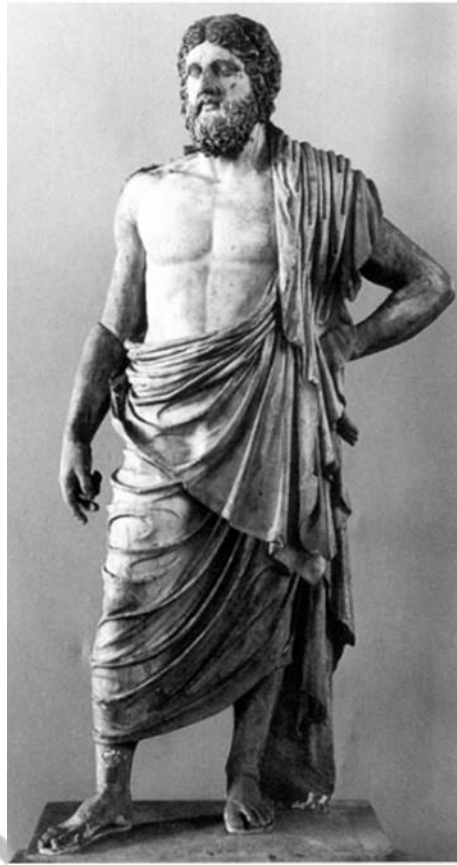
The nearly exclusive materials that defined ancient Greek dress were linen and wool. The garments were wrap-around, including the himation, a big cloak worn over the chiton and frequently artistically wrapped to highlight the wearer's body, and the chiton, a rectangular tunic made of cloth connected at the shoulders with pins. (Spivey, Nigel, 1991. Understanding Greek Vases).



Statue of Artemis. Statue of Artemis called Diana of Gabies. Marble. Found by G. Hamilton in 1792 in Gabies, Italy.

<https://lowelldesigns.com/ancient-greece>

Greek attire was made to be functional for both public life and athletic competition, with an emphasis on the body and physical fitness. It was elegant and simple. Women wore chitons, which were typically longer, and males wore shorter than usual tunics. The affluent and upper classes adorned their garments with elaborate and vibrant needlework and wore richer fabrics. (Elizabeth S. H. Muller, 2003).



(Statue of a philosopher wearing a himation, 3d cent. BC (Delphi))

<https://lowelldesigns.com/ancient-greece/>

Ancient Rome (c. 500 BCE – 476 CE)

Greek fashion had an influence on Roman fashion, which was more varied than Greek fashion to reflect social and political changes. The Toga was a basic clothing, usually made of wool, worn by both men and women. “Roman citizens wore the Toga, a symbol of Roman citizenship. Women wore long tunics, often with an outer garment such as the Stola” (Baird, Mary, 2007). A long, pleated, sleeveless robe known as the Stola may be worn by Roman spouses (Matrona). Roman Matrona, or wives, may dress in the Stola, a long, sleeveless, pleated gown. Additionally, Roman Vestal priestesses wore it as a sign of a woman's married status. However, the term (Matrona Stolata), referring to married women of equestrian rank.

(Stola: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>). (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stola>).

Similar to numerous other civilizations, the Romans employed distinct fashion styles to denote social standing. Generals wore the Toga Picta, an embroidered garment that demonstrated wealth and prestige and was worn by generals for political events and victories; magistrates wore the Toga praetexta, which was framed in purple; and citizens of noble families wore the Toga, which was a symbol of dignity, citizenship, and identity.

Roman attire served as a means of defining roles and social classes. Roman citizens wore the Toga, which was frequently regarded as a sign of citizenship and dignity. The Toga's color and design also revealed the wearer's social standing. For instance, boys from aristocratic families and magistrates wore the purple-bordered Toga praetexta. In contrast, generals wore the (Toga Picta), a richly embroidered garment, during victories (Kelly, J.L, 1998).



(<https://eferrit.com>)

Clothing in Ancient China (c. 2100 BC - 221 BC)

Clothing was a sign of virtue, class, and rank in ancient China and was linked to cultural philosophies, particularly Confucianism. Early Chinese dynasties were the first to use (Hanfu), a traditional Chinese garment. Silk was used to make the Chinese clothing, which frequently had loose, broad sleeves and multiple layers. In addition to being made for everyday wear, these

garments served as status and moral status symbols. These garments' color, pattern, and embroidered embellishments served as indicators of social standing, occupation, and rank. The emperor's clothing is embroidered with dragons, which are a representation of wealth and authority. Scholars and aristocrats wore different attire according on their social or political position. As for the common people, their clothes were simple and without decorations. (Loewe, Michael, 1994).



<https://ziseviolet.tumblr.com/post/684723361340932096/chinese-mens-clothing-throughout-history-shang>

- Shang Dynasty Traditional Costume: The phrase "Yi Shang (衣裳)" was derived from the fact that the Shang dynasty's costumes, irrespective of legitimacy and gender, were divided into two sections: higher Yi and lower Shang. The clothing's sleeves and waist were essentially made to be knee-length to allow for easier mobility and to be snug and narrow.



The characteristics of the ancient Chinese attire of the upper Yi and the lower Shang and the Jiaoling Youren were formed in the Shang Dynasty. (<https://www.newhanfu.com/14969.html>)

- Shang Dynasty (c. 16th-11th century BC): The "upper garment, lower Chang (裳), Youren (右衽), hair bunch" is the primary characteristic of Shang period clothing. Chang, or the skirt, is worn on the lower half of the body while clothing is worn on the upper half. The head is dressed in the tall Ge(葛) fabric crown worn by noble men. An emblem of aristocratic standing was the Yue-shaped fabric that hung from the front abdomen. The only thing covering a commoner's head in civilian men's attire is a hairband composed of fabric strands. Due to the lack of sophisticated dyeing and weaving techniques and the scarcity of valuable dyes, the majority of people in the Shang dynasty were only able to wear clothing made of uncolored linen.
- Warring States Period (475-221 BC): The appearance of Shenyi (深衣) and Hu garments throughout the Spring & Autumn and Warring States periods were the most significant fashion shifts. The traditional "upper garment, lower Chang" was combined to create the Shenyi.
- Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD): People in the Western Han Dynasty continued to like Shenyi. The nomads taught the soldiers how to wear trousers, which were later adopted by the entire community.
- North-South Dynasty (420-589): Features: Xianbei apparel was well-liked in North China during the North and South Dynasties, and clothing innovation and national integration coincided.

- Tang Dynasty (618-907): Tang dynasty men wore a variety of garments in their daily lives, such as Futou (幞头) and round-necked Quekua robes (缺胯袍). Futou is modeled from Xianbei headgear, and Quekua garments are robes with slits. The majority of women's apparel is made up of shirts, skirts, and pei. During the Song Dynasty (960–1279), men wore futou caps whenever they wanted. In addition to shirts (衫), women wore skirts (裙). The majority of shirts were Duijin (对襟), which covered the skirt. Based on artifacts discovered in Qipan Mountain in Anqing, Anhui Province, women's hair in a bun, with the gold crown worn on the bun, were frequently used to clip hair bows during the Southern Song Dynasty. The Boli hat (钹笠) worn by men is modeled after an actual item that was discovered in Zhang County, Gansu Province, and the haircut is a Bojiao head. The jacket is modeled after an actual item that was discovered in Inner Mongolia. The waistband's belt, as well as the gold belt buckle and hoop in the style of begonias, are inspired by actual items from Wuxi.
- Qing Dynasty (1644-1911): A significant shift in the history of ancient Chinese attire occurred during the Qing Dynasty when forced hair shaving and clothing changes were instituted, and long-preserved garments, such as Chang and crowns, were eliminated. The "top wearing flower plume" and Manchu women dressed in Manchu attire are the most significant aspects of the officials' clothing. (Eddy, Ancient Chinese Clothing Timeline).

Conclusion

Culture has not ended since the dawn of history, as it has continued to influence and be influenced by each other until the present day. Clothing was and still is an important part of global culture, as each civilization was distinguished by different forms of clothing that met the living needs of man and adorned his appearance according to his culture. Ancient civilizations contained clothing that evolved from the beginning of each civilization until its collapse. The process of designing clothing evolved over the course of ancient civilizations in India, China, Greece, Rome, the Egyptian civilization and the Mesopotamian civilization. Clothing was designed in essence to perform a specific function, whether these functions were social, military or climatic, and did not exist in these eras for the aesthetic aspect, but the reasons were not without other aspects. Fashion in ancient civilizations was considered an indicator of high social status and wealth. These people wore clothes made of wool, cotton and silk materials decorated with embroidery and jewelry that were considered complex for

that time period, as members of royal families and clerics wore special clothes in shape, content and material. The Toga and Picta were found among the Greeks, while Chinese clothing featured silk such as the Haifu. The ancient Egyptians wore clothing made primarily of linen, which was light and cool due to the material available and the hot tropical climate. The Romans wore the Toga, as the Toga was a symbol of Roman citizenship. Women wore long tunics, often with an outer garment such as the Stola.

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