

History of Fashion

History of Fashion – Study Notes

1. Overview

- **Definition:** Fashion is the prevailing style of dress, accessories, and personal appearance at a given time and place.
- **Key Drivers:** Social status, technology, economics, politics, cultural exchange, and artistic movements.
- **Chronological Scope:** From prehistoric adornment (c. 30,000 BCE) to contemporary “fast fashion” and digital trends (2020s).

2. Pre-Historical & Ancient Periods

Era	Region	Main Features	Representative Items
Prehistoric (c. 30,000–3,000 BCE)	Global	Body painting, beads, shells for symbolic display	Animal bone beads, ochre pigments
Ancient Egypt (c. 3,000–30 BCE)	Nile Valley	Linen, tight-fitting sheath dresses, elaborate jewelry; clothing indicated class and gender	Linen kilts, shendyt, kalasiris, gold collars
Mesopotamia (c. 3,500–539 BCE)	Fertile Crescent	Wool, layered skirts, pleated fabrics; sumptuary laws regulated colors	Woolen shawls, embroidered fringes
Ancient Greece (c. 800–146 BCE)	Mediterranean	Simple draped garments (chiton, himation), emphasis on proportion	Wool/linen chiton, leather sandals
Ancient Rome (c. 753 BCE–476 CE)	Mediterranean	Togas for citizens, stola for women, use of silk from East (later)	Wool toga, silk stola, decorative fibulae

3. Medieval & Early Renaissance (5th–15th c.)

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Period	Geographic Focus	Fashion Highlights	Social Context
Early Middle Ages	Europe	Loose tunics, cloaks, woolen fabrics; limited color palette due to dye scarcity	Peasants wore coarse wool; clergy in distinct habits
High Middle Ages	Europe	Introduction of fitted bodices, surcoats, fur trims; sumptuary laws appear	Nobility displayed wealth through furs and dyed fabrics
Late Middle Ages	Europe	More elaborate silhouettes (e.g., houpelande), use of silk from Italy, decorative "panniers"	Rise of merchant class, increased trade routes (e.g., Hanseatic League)
Early Renaissance	Italy	Emphasis on humanist ideals: body-conscious tailoring, padded shoulders, slashing to reveal linings	Patronage of artists (e.g., Botticelli) influenced textile patterns

4. The Age of Exploration & Baroque (16th?–?18th?c.)

Century	Key Regions	Signature Styles	Technological / Economic Factors
1500s	Italy, Spain, France, Ottoman Empire	Doublet & hose (men), farthingale (women), ruffs, richly embroidered silks	Introduction of New World cotton, spice-driven wealth
1600s	England, France, Netherlands	Baroque opulence: lace collars, elaborate sleeves, "court dress"	Development of loom technology; rise of mercantilism
1700s	France (dominant), England, Russia	Rococo (silky pastel gowns, panniers), later Neoclassicism (high	