



MAY 26, 2017

ROMAN HYGIENE & AROMATHERAPY

PRESENTED AT POTRERO WAR 2017

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Roman Bath Houses & Aromatherapy: Presented at Potrero War 2017

Objectives

- Understand basic Humourism
- Discuss Roman Bath Houses
- Identify the different areas of bath houses
- Understand purpose of aroma and scent
- Understand basic blending techniques
- Apply blending techniques
- Create a personal scent

Course Outline

1. Brief History of Skin Care
 - a. Egypt
 - b. Greece
 - c. SUNSCREEN
2. Roman Hygiene
 - a. Bath Houses
 - b. Toilets
3. Humourism Basics
 - a. Origins
 - b. Four Humors
4. Aromatherapy
 - a. Herbs & oils
 - b. Layering

Brief History

It is important to realize that skin care and hygiene is as old as human civilization, itself. Egyptian make up, for example, served the dual purpose of adorning the body and blocking the sun's harmful rays (Knowles, 2013a). In a documentary about finding the mummy of Pharaoh Maatkare (known better as Hatshepsut), scientists revealed that she had a genetic skin condition for which she used a skin lotion (Butler & Quilici, 2007). Researchers at University of Bonn discovered that what was originally thought to be a perfume vial contained traces of a skin lotion (Cohen, 2011). They listed Palm and nutmeg oils as some of the residue ingredients. These two oils were used to treat eczema or psoriasis; unfortunately, it also contained benzopyrene, which is highly carcinogenic (Klimas, 2011). Scholars believe Hatshepsut died of bone cancer, which could have been caused by prolonged exposure to the skin salve (Cohen, 2011; Klimas, 2011).

Hatshepsut died around 1458 BCE, in her mid-40s (History.com, 2009). About 1100 years later, Ptolemy I declared himself Pharaoh of Egypt (305 BCE), ushering in the Hellenistic period, and bridging the gap to the eventual takeover of the Roman Empire in 31 BCE. This is important because Roman hygiene grew and adapted

from the cultures they conquered; and hygiene in Egypt was of utmost importance (Knowles, 2013a; Illes, n.d.). Even the lowliest workers in Egypt were paid in body oils for bathing (Knowles, 2013b; Illes, n.d.).

That is not to say that hygiene was not important to the Romans. The Romans borrowed customs from their Greek neighbors (Knowles, 2013c). In fact, during the years of the Roman Republic (300 BCE – 30 BCE), the Greek philosopher Hippocrates developed his theory of the Humors, which controlled the human body (more on this later). Rome was known for its attention to extravagance (Knowles, 2013c) and in the realm of hygiene, it was to be no different. They were still using skin care techniques learned from the Egyptians, but they were starting to shift their focus to exercise and physical fitness (Knowles, 2013c).

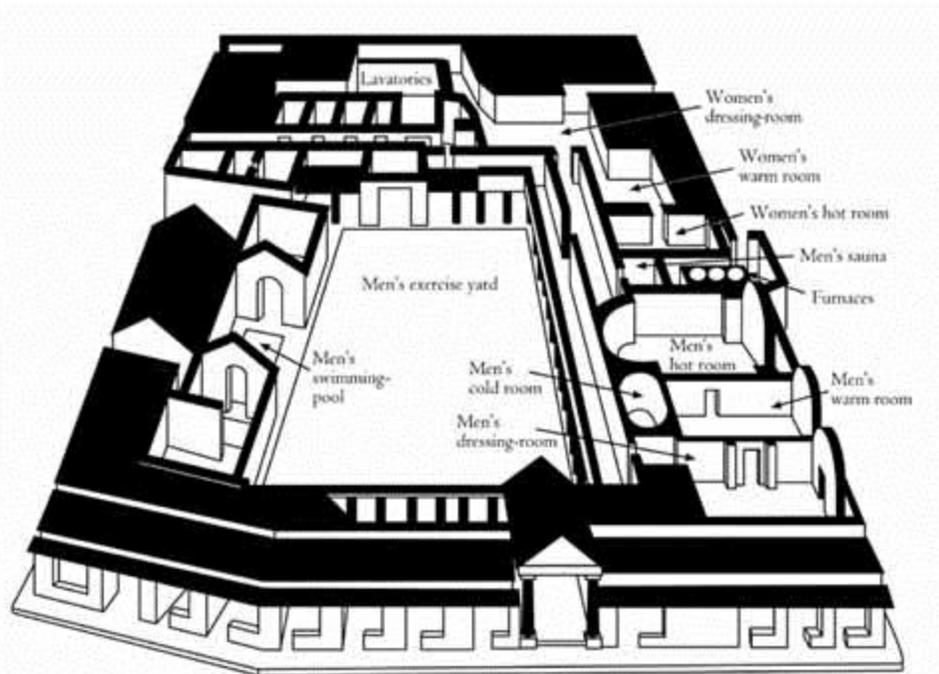
Skin Care, Sunscreen, & You

If ever there was a society fixated on the human form, it was the Greeks. The word *cosmetic* comes from Greek, in fact, the term being *kosmetikos*, meaning order, tranquility, and harmony (BioElixia, 2014). I can certainly see how cosmetics can bring order, tranquility, and harmony to the face and body! Greek women, in particular, cleansed and moisturized their skin with olive oil (BioElixia, 2014) The Greek men, particularly athletes, would bathe in olive oil and dust themselves with fine sand to help regulate their body temperature and prevent getting burnt by the sun (BioElixia, 2014). In Egypt, the people used honey and beeswax were to moisturize the skin (Knowles, 2013b) and a mixture of honey and olive oil could serve as a sunscreen, a practice that carried over to Greeks (BioElixia, 2014) and Romans (Crystal, n.d.).

Going without sunscreen is not a period thing. Whereas I do not recommend using honey and olive oil and hoping for the best, I do recommend using at least an SPF of 30, any time you are outside for an event. Skin cancer is very real and very preventable, thanks to modern chemistry! As I am a natural red head, I have super photosensitive skin. I use Hawaiian Tropics SPF 30 on my face and Neutrogena SPF 75 on the rest of my person. Reapply your sunscreen every 2 to 4 hours, based on packaging instructions. Sunscreens can be expensive; but your skin is priceless.

Roman Baths

The Roman bath houses were more than just places to attend to cleaning. They were social events and those who frequented them had opportunity to make a day of it. Generally speaking, there were separate times for men and women to bathe (McManus, 2011). The image above shows the typical layout of a Roman bath house (Crystal, n.d.). Those looking to partake of the bath house would arrive and go to their designated changing areas and strip (McManus, 2011). Slaves would rub the person down with olive oil. This step served as a type of protection from the sun, as well as a cleanser, later (McManus, 2011; Crystal, n.d.). The men would make use of the field for working out (McManus, 2011; Trueman, 2015; Crystal, n.d.); however, pictorial evidence shows that women would *also* work out, despite there being relatively little recorded history supporting this (see McManus, 2011). Once the participant had finished his or her workout, it was time to get rid of the sweat and grime that accumulated on their skin. This would be done by a slave scraping the skin of the bather with a curved instrument called a *strigil*. If you're into watching short videos of modern people trying things out, I highly recommend watching BuzzFeed's Try Guys trying ancient Greek Olympics. The guys actually do strip naked, oil up, and participate in the sports, then have the oil and grime scraped off their bodies with strigils. It's very entertaining, if not slightly gross. You can find it by doing a YouTube search for "The Try Guys try Greek Olympics."



Bath houses differed across the Empire in that some had a *sudatorium* (moist steam bath) and a *laconicum* (dry steam bath). All bath houses, however, featured a *tepidarium*, a *caldarium*, and a *frigidarium*. In order, the bather would pass, first through the tepidarium where he or she would partake in a warm, or tepid, bath (Crystal, n.d.; McManus, 2011; Trueman, 2015); then pass into the caldarium, which was located right next to the furnace, providing a hot bath (McManus, 2011; Trueman, 2015). Once the bather was finished in this room, he or she could return to the tepidarium and hang out with others (Trueman, 2015), go to a masseuse for a massage with scented oils (McManus, 2011), or simply move on to the frigidarium for a cold bath or swim (Crystal, n.d.). Once the bathing process was complete, bathers could purchase food from vendors, go to an on-site library, take in a show by one of the many street performers, or just sit and gossip with those who were there (McManus, 2011; Trueman, 2015).

Bath houses did charge for their use. In what seems to be an ancient tradition involving the Pink Tax¹, women were charged 1 copper and men were charged ½ copper. Equality, indeed.

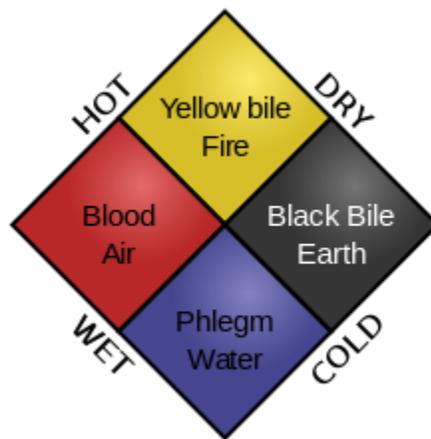
Bathing, as well as toileting, was a social thing (Gill, 2016). There was a communal toilet sponge used to clean one's self after doing one's business, which was then dutifully cleaned off and returned for the next user (Illies, n.d.; Gill, 2016). There were 144 public latrines by the later part of the Roman Empire, most of which were housed with the public baths (Gill, 2016). The toilets were actually comfortable and designed to allow people to sit and read, chat, procure a dinner invitation, etc (Gill, 2016). The urinal buckets were regularly collected and the contents sold to *fullers*, aka dry cleaners, for cleaning wool (Gill, 2016).

The Romans, also traveled through the Middle East and towards India, learning about new herbs and spices. These spices would become foundational for many skin care remedies throughout the remainder of the Middle Ages, even into our modern times. For more information on Middle Eastern spices used for skin care, please see <http://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/200605/natural.remedies.of.arabia.htm>.

¹ Charging women more for products that are identical to men's; or charging more for products that women require, such as feminine hygiene products.

Humourism Basics

Before discussing aromatherapy and perfumery, we need to talk about Hippocrates. In Hippocratic medicine, which was practiced from 450 BCE til about 1858 CE, when Rudolf Virchow discovered the cell (Rudd, n.d.). The way this theory works is based on the idea that we have four humors in our blood: Yellow bile, black bile, phlegm, and blood, not to be confused with the actual blood (Arikha, 2007). Each individual has is born with a certain temperament that is comprised of a blend of these humors, and the health of the person is dependent upon the blend remaining balanced (Arikha, 2007). If the humors were thrown out of balance, the person became ill or unhappy (Arikha, 2007). Some psychology still uses humourism as the basis for certain types of personality tests, but the theory has fallen out of favor with the advent of scientific rigor.



It is, however, important to understand how the ancient peoples thought regarding health to understand how perfumery and aromatherapy were designed to work. According to several researchers, perfumes and scented waters were used from ancient times through the Renaissance as a way to ward off diseases due to foul smelling air. In Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Rome, perfumery was used in worship (Branham, 2012). Egyptians used scented oils during the mummification process to keep the air smelling fresh and for keeping the dead young for the afterlife (Knowles, 2013a). Despite popular belief, sachets and scented waxes were not used to mask body odors; instead, they were used to keep the air smelling fresh for fear of catching a disease or unbalancing their humors (Thorpe, 2015).

Aromatherapy

Because humourism sought to balance the mind and the body, it was viewed as an holistic approach to disease and illness (Arikha, 2007). Perfumes and incense were used in daily life to purify the air; in worship to offer sacrifice to the deities; and in health to heal the body from diseases. It was Pharaoh Hatshepsut, in fact, who brought back from her legendary journey to Punt incense. Different areas of the world, naturally, had different herbs available to them, and therefore, different blends of perfumes and aromas.

Focusing on the Roman era, perfumes were used in worship of Aphrodite, among others; to show status or wealth; by athletes, politicians, aristocrats, and royalty; burial rituals; or medicinally, primarily for lungs and skin (Branham, 2012). Many herbs and their essential oils have properties that are known to help with different ailments. Rosemary, for example, is known for its healing properties and when mixed with peppermint and eucalyptus oils, can help soothe a tension headache. Lavender is a skin softener and is also good for burns. If you get a sun burn and you don't have aloe handy, grab a wash cloth and douse it with some vinegar and add a few

drops of lavender. Helichrysum is known for its anti-inflammatory properties and reacts quickly when applied to spider bites (I know from experience).

Unless you know how skin reacts to oils, it is always best to use what is called a carrier oil before applying any essential oil or essential oil blend. A carrier oil is a neutral oil and helps to dilute the concentrated essential oil so that it won't negatively affect your skin. Some examples of carrier oils are coconut oil, olive oil, sweet almond oil, and jojoba oil. In Roman times, olive oil and bitter almond oil would have been plentiful and would have been used as their carriers (today, we use sweet almond oil).

Perfumes of today are made with a hydrosol, which is usually alcohol-based. The hydrosol acts the same ways as a carrier oil, however, it evaporates much more quickly, allowing the scents of the oils to linger in the air. I use distilled alcohol (such as vodka) for room sprays, for example, because I want people to smell the scent in the air for a while. Perfumes, however, I prefer to use oils because the scents will stay on the skin much longer, they are more subtle, and you have to get in close to smell them.

In order to develop a perfume—or, really, any aromatherapy item—you need to layer the scents. Top notes are the first scents you smell in a perfume and they evaporate quickly. Middle notes, also called heart notes, form the main body of your scent; and base notes are the fixatives, holding the blend together and remaining on the skin the longest. Branham (2012) stated that animal-derived scents were the most precious of the base notes available during the Roman era. Those animal-based fixatives include natural musk, from the mule deer; civet from the civet cat; and ambergris from the sperm whale. Ambergris is expensive and is the fixative for most high end perfumes, even today; civet tends to be the fixative of choice for mid-level perfumes; and musk can usually be found in lower-end perfumes. Plant-based base notes include frankincense, myrrh, labdanum, benzoin (which can also be a middle note), cedarwood, vetiver, sandalwood, patchouli, helichrysum, and vanilla.

Because the base notes are strong, you only need a little bit. Romans would have had access to the animal-based fixatives, as well as frankincense, myrrh, labdanum, and benzoin (called laserpitium in Rome, Styrax in medieval times). If making a woman's perfume, choose one base note; if making a man's cologne, add a little more of the chosen base note, or select two base notes. If using plant-based fixatives in the raw, you will only need 4-5 nuggets; if using essential oils, 2-3 drops for 2oz of olive oil (or whatever your carrier is).

Middle notes include scents such as chamomile, cinnamon, nutmeg, rosemary, fennel, rose, neroli, marjoram, hyssop, jasmine, black pepper, and cypress. Rose can be extremely intense and overpowering; if using raw materials, add no more than 3 petals to the olive oil (1 drop of essential oil).

Top notes include anise, basil, marjoram, coriander, bay, lavender, mints, and eucalyptus. When mixing these into the oil, be liberal; these are the light scents that could get lost under the middle and base notes. Some suggestions for mixing with essential oils would be as follows:

Myrrh - 2	Civet – 3
Rose – 1	Rose – 2
Benzoin – 2	Cinnamon – 5
Marjoram - 5	

The first recipe will produce a warm and sweet scent while the second will produce a sweet, spicy scent. Both recipes have ratios that add to 10; this is my personal preference when instructing how to make a perfume. Realize these scents will be strong—especially the one with Civet!

If using raw materials, you will need to put everything, including your carrier oil, into a heat-proof bowl (such as glass or ceramic). Bring a pot of water to a boil and then turn off the heat and place your bowl of oil and

additives into the water as it cools. The mixture should then steep for 24-48 hours, at which point you can strain out the additives with a cheesecloth and bottle your very own ancient perfume!

If you use essential oils, fill your bottle with your carrier (oil or distilled alcohol), leaving a gap at the top for air. Carefully drop in your essential oils or essential oils blend, if you have one pre-made, then cap it and shake it. Allow it to sit anywhere from 24 hours to 6 weeks, shaking daily.

The first perfumes were all made with oils; it wasn't until the 13th century CE that the first perfumes made with alcohol became popular (Hess-Dravovich, 2014). There exists a recipe for what is known as Queen of Hungary Water, a lovely, spicy perfume that I use for a tent-air freshener, and a garb refresher. It was first developed in the 13th century and became very popular, evolving in complexity to the form that follows (1570 CE). I found this on another SCA person's website, and I present it for you here:

Dried rosemary

1 tsp cloves

½ tsp anise seed

1 tsp mace (or 1 whole nutmeg)

1 sprig fresh sage

1/8 oz rosewater

4 oz vodka, brandy, whiskey, or everclear

You want to put all these things into a jar that can be sealed tightly, and cover them with the vodka. You will wait for two weeks, then strain out the solids using a cheesecloth. **It will be strong** (recipe translated by Lady Heodez of the Middle Kingdom, Barony of Middle Marches).

Conclusion

Aromatherapy is not a new development; it has been around since ancient times. Pure essential oils, when raw materials are otherwise unavailable, are best to use because they provide the most health benefits. Aromatherapy should **never** take the place of medical care. It is merely to assist with symptoms, not treat them or the problem. Always make sure your blends are balanced and not too strong. Remember your sunblock. Happy war-ing!

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