



Historically Speaking

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Cloth and Clothing



The Goddess Clotho

The Fates or Moirae were three sisters that controlled the lifespan of mortals. Clotho, "the spinner", spun the thread of life for all the individuals alive. Lachesis, "the measurer", controlled the length of an individual's life. At the point indicated by Lachesis, Atropos, "the cutter", would cut the thread of life, bringing death. It is tempting to assume that the word cloth comes to us from Clotho, especially since she spins threads, and threads are used to make cloth. But that does not seem to be the case, as the word cloth has an etymology that shows it coming into Old English through Dutch and Old High German.

The ancient Greeks used three types of fabric; linen, wool and silk. The most common fabric for clothing was linen because of the often hot climate. Clothing was homemade and the same piece of cloth was often used as a shroud or blanket in addition to clothing. The clothing sometimes had elaborate designs and colors. For both men and women, the basic clothing items were a tunic (either a peplos or a chiton) and a cloak (himation).

The peplos was a large rectangle of heavy fabric, usually wool, which was folded so that the upper edge would reach to the waist. It was wrapped around the body and secured at the shoulders with a pin or brooch, leaving an opening on each side for the arms. It was generally floor length overall.

The chiton used a lighter fabric, usually linen. It was a long and wide rectangle sewn up on the sides and pinned or sewn at the shoulders. A belt of some kind was usually worn at the waist. It, too, was floor length for the women, but most often knee-length or shorter for the men. An exomis was a short chiton fastened on the left shoulder and was worn for exercise, horse riding and hard labor.

The himation (cloak) was worn by men and women. It was a rectangle of heavy fabric (wool or linen), draped diagonally over one shoulder or symmetrically over both shoulders. Women sometimes wore a shawl called a epiblema over the peplos or chiton.

Greek men occasionally wore a petasos, which was a broad-brimmed hat, and on rare occasions, women might wear a flat-brimmed hat with a peaked crown. Men and women wore sandals, slippers, soft shoes or boots, but usually went barefoot at home.

(see the second page for information on clothing of the gods.)

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