

The History Of Lingerie & Chastity Belts

Many think of chastity belts as a part of medieval society, but there is little archaeological evidence to show that they were common, and many examples that do exist have been denounced as fakes. Even so, there is a basis in legend of the symbolic nature of the chastity belt.

What archaeological evidence there is suggests the belts were largely manufactured for women, although the main issue of conjecture is whether or not distrustful husbands forced them on their wives when they left home, or whether they were to safeguard women from rape. The most probable answer is that there were instances of both.

The most beautiful legend behind the history is written in the poetry of Guigemar de Marie de France who wrote in the twelfth century. She wrote that two young lovers were going to be separated and that they performed a ritual to honour their oath of fidelity to each other. The girl tied a knot around her lover's shirt, while he knotted a belt around her waist. They swore that they would only give their love to one who could remove the garment without tearing or cutting it.

Lingerie

The first known example of women using lingerie to enhance their figure is in Crete, with the Minoan civilisation. Archaeological records depict a fashion of flounced skirts with a corset that moulded around the breasts and lifted them, leaving them bare. Whether this was a social fashion or a form of religious worship is unknown.

In the Middle Ages, however, there was an emphasis on small breasts, a range of different corset styles coming into fashion, notably the cotte, thebliaunt and the surcot.

During the Renaissance, however, this style became much more emphatic. The Spanish influence meant the introduction of much tighter corsets that moulded the woman's shape into one highlighting a narrow waist, flat stomach and small bust. As a result, women often fainted, which enforced a dependency and the notion of feminine weakness within a male-dominated society.

Later in the eighteenth century, women emphasised a more voluptuous figure and began to employ more luxurious fabrics to enhance the sensual power of the female shape. This style continued, although in the 1770's, boned corsets were prohibited only to make a reappearance in the 1800's.

Bodices that could be laced by the wearer also came into fashion.

In the 1900's, scented underwear and specific types of lingerie for different activities and times of day became fashionable. The fashion for tight corsets, however, remained. Garters and suspenders grew in popularity as more women wore stockings.

The twentieth century saw a decisive break from the tradition of the previous years, as more and more companies began to have an interest in the role of a woman's body in her notions of self. Styles diversified and became more comfortable, while bra sizes and designs developed.

This development of lingerie throughout the ages has left women today with a much firmer sense of their own beauty, and the range of styles, fabrics and sizes allows each woman to dress according to her own style and what makes her feel positive about herself and her body. The romantic aspect of lingerie is essentially the feeling of self worth that comes from sensuality and indulgence.

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