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The Complete History Of Costume & Fashion: From Ancient Egypt To The Present Day



Synopsis

From the first fashion style of the Egyptians to the emergence of "haute couture in the 20th century

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Always on the lookout for any new costume reference, I was eager to leaf through this one.

Unfortunately, it was nearly a waste of time. I say "nearly", because Cosgrave provides quite a few helpful illustrations, though the objects depicted are often mislabelled and period paintings are seldom fully cited. In general, I found this volume to be shallow and badly researched. It's full of bad generalizations and misused terminology. Cosgrave makes numerous statements which are at odds with everything I've come to know about historical costume. Seldom are these bald statements backed by sources discussed in the text. She also has a 'thing' about Byzantine costume.

Everything worn in any other place or time suffers in her constant comparisons. One of my favorite absurdities is that her entire discussion of medieval jewelry is a dismissal of the same as "crude". (Though she does allow that the Irish did some nice work. And, of course, it suffers by comparison to Byzantine jewelry.) Another example: The caption regarding a painting of people in Burgundian Court Dress urges the reader to "Note the Byzantine influences". Huh?!! In general I'd recommend that the re-enactor or Costume History student look at the pictures and ignore the text.

This is a beautifully designed publication certain to be rewarding to someone seeking an overview of the subject. The text, while not truly in depth, is very readable and is written in a vernacular yet

polished style. Customs of the various cultures and periods, along with manners and gender roles in society, are covered as well. Ancient Europe and the Mesopotamian cultures (Sumer, Babylon, and Assyria) are omitted. Some of Ms. Cosgrave's information about other early cultures - especially the Egyptians - does not totally coincide with other authors and should not be taken as gospel, but rather as a possible interpretation. In other chapters, some of the observations and conclusions are quite insightful. The illustrations are wonderful and astutely chosen (with the exception of some 19th century line drawings used to illustrate early Egyptian, Greek and Roman costume.) The illustrations are also reproduced well, and the number of color plates is quite abundant for a book of this price. The book's main weakness, and this is a big weakness, is that these beautiful and well chosen illustrations are not consistently attributed with the date, name of the work, artist, or museum, and in fact some of them are incorrectly identified or dated. Also, in the sections of the book on the 19th and 20th centuries - both in the illustration placement as well as the text - the reader does not really get a clear picture of the looks of the individual decades and periods within these centuries. Given the rapid changes of silhouettes and styles that occur in these years, a more thorough and detailed account would be welcome. With these notable reservations, this publication has still achieved reasonable success, and is still a recommendable text on the subject, especially for novices. The attractive price - especially the price - makes this a good value as well and contributes to its overall rating.

The most complete book of History of Costume I have found is "Survey of Historic Costume" by Phyllis Tortora and Keith Eubank. The title of this book "The Complete..." and the lack of content simple don't belong together. This book is a beginner's basic introduction to costume. It needs to be reviewed and mistakes need to be fixed.

There are cool pictures and all but seriously you cannot cover the whole Egyptian, Etruscan, Greek...periods in 3-4 pages. The book plainly describes what people were wearing in these periods (and it does not give you the complete info) and it does not tell you much about the story behind these costumes which I found pretty lame.

So, I gave this book 3 stars because I couldn't figure out how to do 2 1/2. Mixed feelings. On the plus side, I really enjoyed the pictures and some of the book was informative. On the minus side, I feel that the author may have just pieced this book together too quickly without doing her research. Some of her dates for different eras were wrong. And while she may have an interest in fashion,

part of fashion history is HISTORY, which she doesn't seem to have a grasp on. This was evident in the beginning right from the chapter on Egypt. I kept cringing every time she confused Nefertiti for Nefertari, it made me wonder what else in the book she got wrong. I definitely would not recommend this book to anyone that already has a lot of knowledge of fashion history, her inaccuracies will probably piss you off (and her partiality to Byzantium). I also would not recommend this book if you are just getting started in studying fashion history because why start out with misinformation. But if you are like me, neither an expert or complete novice, you don't work in the industry, like me you are just obsessed with clothes, and if you find this book on sale for less than 5 dollars, have at it (really, don't pay more than 5).

The information is just plain wrong in hundreds of instances and the images and text are frequently not connected. In general if a book says it is a Complete History of Costume from the dawn of time to yesterday, it is probably to be avoided, but this one is truly, truly bad!

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