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Hair in the Classical World Ritual and Rites of Passage Wall Text

Bellarmino Museum of Art

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RITUAL AND RITES OF PASSAGE

Age and rites of passage were signaled through the quantity of hair and how it was arranged. As early as the Aegean Bronze Age (1800–1200 BCE), a system of hair grown or shaved became a marker of phases within childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. This tradition can be traced to contact through trade between Egyptians and Minoans from Crete, and may be a legacy of Aegean Bronze Age societies that carried into the historic period of ancient Greece. Greek girls and boys often wore a braid along their central part, which they would cut and dedicate to the goddess Artemis. Young men and women dedicated locks of hair in temples prior to marriage, as attested by the ancient Greek traveler Pausanias. Rituals of hair-cutting were also conducted by warriors departing for battle and by women in mourning.

In Roman written sources, the most familiar rite of passage involving hair was marriage, although there are few images that give us visual information. The groom's hair was not transformed, but the bride wore a yellow or orange hairnet the night before the wedding. The bride's hair was covered by a flame-colored veil (*flammeum*) during the ceremony. What her hairstyle looked like under the veil is not known with certainty, but writers report that traditionally it was parted with the point of a spear.