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NOTABLE NOTES

Patterns From the Past—Laurel Wreaths and Comb-overs

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Male pattern baldness remedies date as far back as 1550 BC, when the Egyptians suggested a 4-day topical application of fats from a hippopotamus, crocodile, lion, and snake, mixed with onions, alabaster, red lead, and honey.^{1,2} Across various cultures and time frames, the strong emphasis on hair has surpassed simple aesthetics and has come to signify one's status, strength, and sexuality.

Within the ancient culture of Gaul, long hair was associated with male dignity and liberty.¹ When conquered by Julius Caesar (100-44 BC), the men were required to cut their hair as a token of submission.¹ Unfortunately for Julius, his expanding empire coincided with a receding hairline.¹ Attempting to correct his androgenic alopecia, Julius Caesar would grow his hair long in the back and comb the rest over his bald spot, touting the comb-over.¹ Caesar's consort, Cleopatra, even concocted a mixture of ground horse teeth and deer marrow as a topical treatment.¹ As the hair loss progressed, he began using a laurel wreath to obscure his hair loss.^{1,2} Although many would assume that the laurel wreath was simply a cultural symbol, its origins have more to do with the preservation of Julius' manhood, power, and receding hairline.¹

In 17th century France the origin of wearing long wigs was akin to that of the laurel wreath in Greece.^{1,2} Louis XIII began using wigs to cover his thinning hair; this practice made wigs a symbol of wealth and power.^{1,2} Louis XIV was known to pose with his signature long, dark brown wig and in time, the height, length, and bulk of wigs increased.¹ Giant powdered wigs predominated in the French court,¹ and wealthy Americans adopted the status symbol up until the American Revolution.¹

Many of the ancient practices failed to address the root cause of hair loss. However, Hippocrates (460 BC), the father of western medicine,

came close to a solution.¹ Although he attempted to treat male pattern baldness through a topical ointment of opium, horseradish, pigeon droppings, beetroot, and spices, he also conceived the idea of castration as a treatment after realizing that eunuchs never experienced this type of baldness.^{1,2} Since then, emerging research has defined a fundamental role of prostaglandins in modulating hair function.³ Androgenic alopecia remedies today consist of low-level light therapy and platelet-rich plasma injections, used synergistically with finasteride or minoxidil to bolster medical management of hair loss.³ The development of robotic hair transplantation has also shown promise and appeals to patients who want to avoid linear occipital scars.³

The importance of hair in human civilization still resonates to this day, and modern-day science has attempted to fill the gaps where the past treatments could not.

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