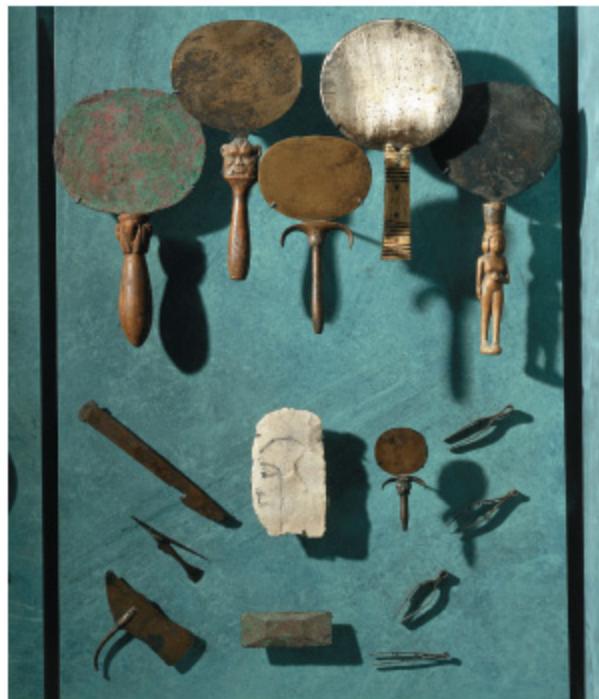


The Beard and Shaving

With the razor being such a defining tool for barbering, the history of shaving, as well as caring for the beard in general, deserves a second look. Since the practice of shaving predates the written word, it is difficult to determine just when this form of hair removal began.

Excavations of early stone razors or scrapers from the Upper Paleolithic period (40,000 to 10,000 BC) indicate that early man may have used these tools for hair removal as well as for the skinning of animals. By the time of the Neolithic period (8000 to 5000 BC), early man had created settlements and begun to farm and raise animals. Artwork of this period shows examples of clean-shaven men, but it is unknown how the hair was removed. In Egypt, however, pyramids from around 7000 BC have yielded flint-bladed razors that are known to have been used by the ruling classes to shave their heads as well as their faces, and by 4000 BC, a form of tweezers was also used (see Figure 1-7).

Figure 1-7



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Selection of ancient Egyptian barbing tools, including mirrors, razors, and tweezers.

It stands to reason that the nomadic nature of many early groups helped spread the practice of shaving throughout the rest of the world. Mesopotamians of 3000 BC were shaving with obsidian blades, and by 2800 BC, the Sumerians were also clean shaven. Likewise, Greek men of 1000 BC are seen in works of art visiting their local barber for shaving services.

In early times, most groups considered the beard to be a sign of wisdom, strength, or manhood. In some cultures, the beard was a sacred symbol. For example, in Rome, a young man's first shave, on his 22nd birthday, constituted a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood and was celebrated with great festivity. To this day, among Orthodox Jews, the beard is a sign of religious devotion, and to cut off one's beard is contrary to Mosaic law (Figure 1-8).

Figure 1-8



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The beard is a sign of religious devotion for Orthodox Jews.

Beards have been removed throughout the centuries at the command of rulers and priests. Alexander the Great, as mentioned earlier, ordered his soldiers to shave so their beards could not be seized in battle. The Archbishop of Rouen in France prohibited the wearing of a beard in 1096, spurring the formation of the first-known barber guild in France. Peter the Great encouraged shaving by imposing a tax on beards. During the spread of Christianity, long hair came to be considered sinful and the clergy were directed to shave their beards. Although the shaving of the beard was still forbidden among Orthodox Jews, the use of scissors to trim or shape excess growth was permitted. Muslims took great care in trimming their facial hair after prayer and the removed hair was preserved so that it could be buried with its owner.

Did You Know?

During Medieval times, tradesmen learned their craft through apprenticeships. Guilds, similar to associations, were formed by tradesmen to control the practice and training of their professions. Trade guilds eventually led to the development of schools and universities.