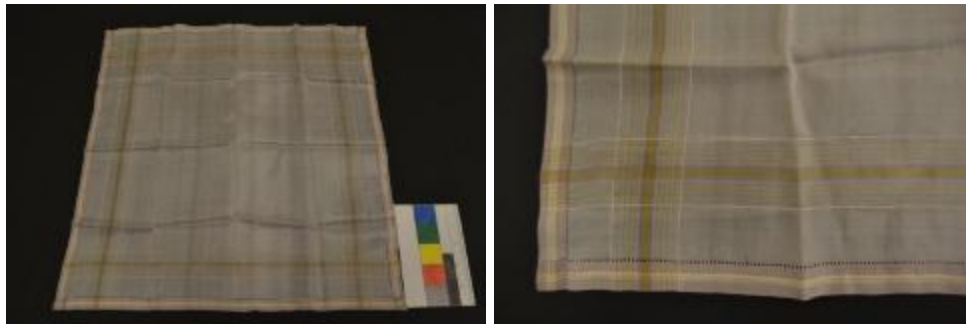




OBJECT ID F2014.165

OBJECT NAME Handkerchief

MATERIAL Silk

ACCESS POINTS Person Gear
Purple
Silk
Yellow

OBJECT DESCRIPTION

Larger, square handkerchief. Background color is cream and has decorative colors of light purple and yellow. The half inch of the trim is decorated with two parallel strips of light purple, in the middle of these two purple strips are three very thin yellow lines (the outer two sit on the edge of the purple). Starting one and a half inches away from each corner is a 1.25 strip of pattern. It consists of eight thin lines of yellow and the in the very center is a line that is purple and yellow in color (purple-yellow-purple). There is a slightly raised cream line that defines these patterns. Since this pattern starts by each corner they do interest about an inch and a half from the start.

ORIGIN

Was held within F2014.159, along with a number of other handkerchiefs.

A square of cloth, smartly decorated, becomes a fashion accessory, a bandage, a tissue, a flag, a small basket, or a love token. Handkerchiefs are useful, if somewhat old-fashioned, but utility isn't even the half of it. The first written reference to hankies comes from the Roman poet Catullus in the 1st century AD. Called sudarium from the root sudor (to sweat), Romans used hankies to wipe the sweat from their brows, and to shield their heads from the sun. The start of the Roman games was signalled by dropping a handkerchief. High linen costs made sudarium an accessory for the rich, who waved them like flags to show excitement during gladiator matches.

The English called it a 'coverchief' (for covering the head) and then 'hand coverchief' for the smaller version meant to be carried. They were imported from France in great numbers in the 14th and 15th centuries. In the 16th century, Italy, well known for its exquisite 'Venice lace,' began producing richly embellished handkerchiefs for the well-to-do all over Europe. Ladies and gentlemen posed for paintings clutching lace handkerchiefs as a sign of wealth and prestige. Italian noblewomen, outraged that prostitutes were flaunting the accessories they felt should be exclusive to nobility, pushed to regulate the availability of hankies through price-setting in major cities like Florence and Milan. Queen Elizabeth I in England was particularly fond of handkerchiefs embroidered with real silver and gold, and was gifted many by admirers hoping to curry her favor. With its increasing popularity, the value of the hanky rose to astronomical heights. Henry IV gave two handkerchiefs, worth 1000 francs and 900 francs, to his mistress in 1594. They were so valuable that he asked for their return after her death! In 1785, Louis XVI issued a decree forbidding anyone from making handkerchiefs that were not square.

Through World War II, handkerchiefs were an important part of European and American societies. They were perfumed, and used to veil the face and mask the odors of pre-plumbing Europe, kept in special 'sweet bags,' given away as love tokens, and used as props for elaborate flirting rituals. During both World Wars, pilots would wear silk kerchiefs printed with maps of the areas they flew over: if they were shot down, they were wearing an escape map. Hundreds of hankies were printed specifically for soldiers.

Ultimately, it was Kleenex's "Don't carry a cold in your pocket" ad campaign that signaled the slow demise of the hanky. No longer a symbol of wealth

and prestige, modern advertising turned the handkerchief into a terrible breeding ground for filth and disease.

CITATION

Handkerchief, *National Hellenic Museum*, <https://collections.nationalhellenicmuseum.org/Detail/objects/>. Accessed 09/13/26.
