



# Hand Fans: An Illustrated History: A Timeline of Events, Materials, Arts and Technologies That Have Influenced Fans

*Kathryn Finnegan*

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This timeline of the evolution of hand fans provides a look at the following:

How the most ordinary found objects evolved into highly sophisticated and ornamented ones, becoming symbols of authority and privilege, imbued with ceremonial – and for some, even mystical significance.

How artifacts such as carvings, pottery, murals and paintings bear witness to the early use of fans where the written record is scant or non-existent.

How the early arts of sericulture and paper making figured prominently in the development of the fan.

How other arts, esp. the carving of ivory, mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell, as well as the treatment of animal skins, developed over many centuries in widespread geographic areas, would find full expression in the beautiful fans of the 18th and 19th centuries.

How the powerful guilds of Europe that arose during the Middle Ages eventually affected all phases of fan production till the end of the 18thC.

How 15thC Western Exploration re-started trade with the Far East & brought new fan types to Europe.

How first Chinoiserie and later Japonisme influenced Western art, including fans.

How fans in Europe went from being expensive novelties used to show off wealth and prestige to becoming common accessories available to the middle classes.

How technological developments changed social interactions and the uses of the fan.

How the gradual development of different forms of printing led to the mass production of printed fans.

How every important movement/period in Western art played a role in fan decoration.

How, inevitably, “fans followed fashion” in style, size, materials and subject matter.

How and where the fan, one of the oldest utilitarian/ceremonial objects invented by man, is still in use and vitally important in disparate cultures and geographic areas.

How and why fan use declined rapidly in the West and how interest in fans is being kept alive in areas where fan use is no longer common.

This 142-page book begins with a useful Glossary of Fan Types, illustrated with 32 photographs. The text has another 200+ photographs representing fans from the past two centuries and concludes with a Glossary of fan-related terms and an extensive Bibliography.

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