

REFLEXATION THERAPY

Reflexology - Soft Tissue Therapy - Massage

Dr Chloë Cyrus-Kent

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A History of Healing Touch and the Origins of Swedish Massage

The use of body massage, essentially of applying healing touch, has been in practice since ancient times and valued independently by cultures of both East and West for promoting healing and spiritual peace.

Ayurveda (Sanskrit आयुर्वेद) is the holistic medicine system of India and there is evidence from around 3000BC that Ayurvedic traditions included the use of healing touch (as well as diet, herbalism and aromatherapy) to promote harmony in the mind, body and spirit. Healing touch was seen as a way of returning the body to its state of natural balance in order that it can heal itself efficiently.

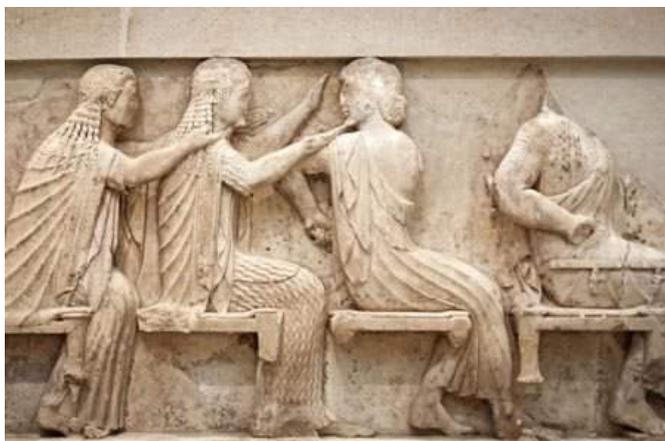
In **China** use of massage for medical benefits is recorded from around 2700BC. Chinese massage methods arise from a combination of traditional medicine, martial arts and religious practices such as Buddhist and Taoist yoga which depend on balance and touch. Chinese medicine relies on the idea of energy in the body and that illness arises from imbalances in the flow of energy along specific meridians or zones. Massage treatment aims to address the balance, similarly to acupuncture and acupressure.



The **Ancient Egyptians** used massage, combined with their knowledge of essential oils, as a healing tool. Around 2600BC the Egyptian physician **Imhotep** used massage and essential oils for healing and embalming the dead. Over time he became deified as the god Imhotep (**Imouthes** in Greece), the god of healing and medicine. From around 2500BC tomb paintings have been found showing individuals massaging each other, especially the feet, hands, legs

and the muscles of tired soldiers after battle. The goddess **Isis** is reputed to have used massage to heal ailments. In the tomb of **Ptahhotep** (a Vizier during the reign of Djedkare, 5th dynasty, Old Kingdom), Ptahhotep is depicted having his hands and feet treated and his legs massaged by a servant. A later reference to massage is in the **Kahun Medical Papyrus** (dated to the reign of Amenhotep III, 12th dynasty, Middle Kingdom): *“Examination of a woman aching in her legs and her calves after walking. [...] You should treat it with a massage of her legs and calves with mud until she is well.”* During the New Kingdom, depictions of the battle of Kadesh (Qadesh) show soldiers of Ramesses II receiving a massage after their long march and the Roman Emperor Octavian remarked on Mark Anthony's devotion to Cleopatra by noting "he even massages her feet at dinner parties”.

From around 1000BC Japanese monks studying in China brought their own version of Chinese massage to Japan. They developed traditional Japanese massage, which developed into **Shiatsu**. Shiatsu aims to raise energy levels and strengthen the physical and emotional well-being of the person being treated.



Eastern massage found its way to **Greece** by around 800BC, where athletes used massage for optimal body performance and physicians used massage and herbs or oils for health benefits. In the 5th century BCE, **Hippocrates** prescribed “friction” to treat physical injuries and instructed his physician colleagues on the benefits of massage, as well as diet, exercise and leisure to help the body heal itself.

During the 1st century AD **Galen**, a physician to many Roman Emperors began to use massage to heal physical ailments, including specific oils to benefit the skin and joints. In Roman culture, people received massage treatments at their homes from a physician or at public baths, from trainers or physicians.

Due to a tendency in the West for massage to be associated with excess and pleasure rather than healing, it declined in Western usage until around 1600. From around 1600 **scientists** began to take an interest in documenting the benefits of massage and in the 1800s a Swedish physician, **Pehr Henrik Ling** developed the **Swedish Gymnastics Movement System**, which included elements of physical manipulation. Having studied gymnastics in Denmark, P.H. Ling returned to Sweden and eventually established the Royal Central Gymnastics Institute and joined the Swedish Academy, publishing work on scientific, medically beneficial gymnastics and manual therapy based on careful understanding of anatomy and physiology. Interestingly, while his work can be directly

linked to **manual physiotherapy**, he is probably mis-labelled as the ‘father of Swedish massage’. Swedish massage foundations were in fact first defined by the Dutch practitioner **Johan Georg Mezger** (1838-1909). Mezger coined French terminology (effleurage, petrissage, massage à frictions, tapotement) to describe the system of massage strokes that we recognise as ‘Swedish’ massage today. It seems that Ling’s Swedish Movement System became labelled the Swedish Massage System in the mid-1900’s, attributing Mezger’s massage terms and system to Ling by association.

In the early 20th century massage was used to treat WWI patients and after a period of ambiguity due to the appearance of disreputable ‘massage parlours’, in the latter part of the 20th century massage has come to the fore once more as part of a Western “wellness boom”. There is great professional and cultural interest in preventing illness by maintaining physical and mental health, and many different kinds of massage are now professionally regulated with trading standards and licensing. Modern massage therapists practice techniques based on Eastern and Western holistic historical practices, sharing the same goals as those of thousands of years ago; to promote physical and emotional health.

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