

A 2,000-year-old secret is out

March 9 2005

A beauty product with a difference will be put to the test in a unique experiment at Bristol University later this month. A 2,000-year-old Roman cosmetic, discovered in an archaeological site in London, will be recreated using modern technology to give an insight into Roman beauty habits.

Members of the public will have the opportunity to see how the mysteries of the Roman cosmetic were eventually unravelled in an interactive talk by Richard Evershed, Professor of Biogeochemistry in the School of Chemistry.

The ancient cosmetic was analysed by Professor Evershed and his research team to identify its various ingredients. Preparation of the cream from modern ingredients yielded a cream which produced a white layer with a powdery texture when rubbed onto the skin. “We assume the cream would have been used by fashionable Roman women for cosmetic purposes,” said Professor Evershed. The results of the analysis indicate several similarities to the ingredients used in today’s modern cosmetics.

Professor Evershed said: “It shows how the technological sophistication of the Romans extends to a surprising level of understanding of the behaviour of organic and inorganic materials.”

Professor Evershed will introduce the methods involved in the chemical analysis of archaeological materials, including embalming agents in Egyptian mummies and food residues in ancient cooking pots, before presenting the Roman cosmetic. The talk will take place on Monday 21 March at 2 pm and is organised by the University’s Public Programmes

Office and aimed at members of the public.

Source: Bristol University

Citation: A 2,000-year-old secret is out (2005, March 9) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2005-03-year-old-secret.html>

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