Dear Alice,

When was the first dildo invented and what was it originally used for?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Excavations of many ancient civilizations have revealed stone objects that are clearly sculptures of penises. The archeologists who made the discoveries (and the historians who wrote about them) tell us that they were used symbolically in religious or fertility rituals. Chances are the archeologists (many of whom lived during the ultra-conservative Victorian era) were just a little too embarrassed to report back to the scientific community that they had discovered the world's first sex toys.

Women (and surely some men) in Ancient Greece enjoyed using *olisbos*, which were phallic shaped objects made of wood or leather. Back in those days, olive oil wasn't just a staple of the Greek diet; it doubled as the best lube available. A play from the third century BC tells of a lonely woman who wants to borrow her friend's *olisbo* and becomes distraught when she discovers it has been lent to another lonely friend. The Greeks believed that a lack of sperm caused "hysteria," or a wandering uterus, in women. Greek men who left home for long periods of time to fight in wars often gave their wives *olisbos* to prevent hysteria (the link between hysteria and sex toys would last well into the 20th century and play a role in the invention of vibrators, as well).

Other ancient texts from around the world, including the Arabian Nights, mention fruit, vegetables, and other penis-shaped objects being used for sexual stimulation and fulfillment. Italians gave us the word *diletto*, meaning "to delight," from which the modern English word "dildo" evolved. By the time of the Renaissance, its creation had become an art form. Members of the upper classes had dildos custom made from silver, ivory, and other precious materials.

Today we have a seemingly unlimited array of materials to choose from when selecting dildos (not to mention sizes, shapes, and even vibrations). Online stores, such as Babeland offer a wide variety of toys, and great information about how to use them!

Alice!

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