

“Egypt: Gift of the Nile”
Sources: History Safari

We know much about the exploits of the pharaohs from their almost obsessive practice of recording the details of their lives in stone. But what about the daily comings and goings of the ordinary people? How did they dress? What did they eat? What were their dreams and their desires?

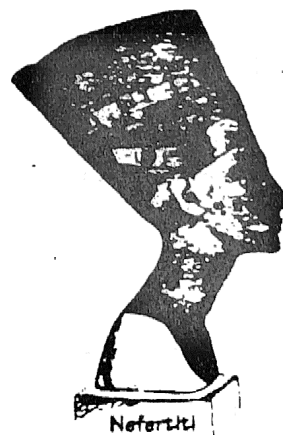
In the hot, dry climate of Egypt, it was not necessary to wear very much clothing. Most of the time, men and women wore short skirts made of linen, tied in front like a loincloth. On special occasions, women wore long pleated linen skirts with shoulder straps. Dressed in this fashion, a well-to-do Egyptian woman might go to dinner at a friend's house, where she would be considered impolite if she did not eat and drink until she felt sick. Just like today, the quality of the linen used in clothing depended on the wealth of the wearer. The finest and most costly linens were so light and comfortable that they were almost transparent. The poor laborer, on the other hand, would usually wear a simple loincloth made of animal hides or coarsely woven plant fibers. For lunch he might have three loaves of bread, two jugs of beer, and a couple of raw onions.

Egyptian men and women were extravagant in their use of jewelry, which they wore both to enhance their beauty and to invoke magical powers. The quality of the bracelets, necklaces, earrings, hair ornaments, and headdresses with which they bedecked themselves gave some indication of the class and wealth of the individual. Priests and other dignitaries often shaved their heads, and the rich never appeared

in public without a cloth head covering that hung to the shoulders, or some other type of wig or headdress.

The Egyptians were known to be among the world's cleanest people. They bathed several times a day and rubbed their bodies with many kinds of oils and perfumes. Egyptian women were the first to use lipstick, and they started the custom of painting their fingernails and toenails red. They also stained the palms of their hands and soles of their feet. Men and women alike were accustomed to using heavy blue eye makeup. One trick of the beautiful people of ancient Egypt which thankfully has not survived through the ages was that of wearing a cone of animal fat soaked with perfume on the tops of their heads. As the sun melted the fat, it dripped down into their hair, emanating a delightful fragrance.

How do we know so much about these ancient people? The answer to this complicated question can be found, like a secret code, hidden in three simple words: the Rosetta stone.



The Rosetta stone gave the French scholar Champollion the key to Egyptian hieroglyphics.



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What did women wear in Ancient Egypt?

What were some ways that you could distinguish between the wealthy and the poor? Why were they considered to be the cleanest of the world? What were some unusual customs? How do we know about their lives? What is the significance of the Rosetta Stone?