

LOVE POEMS
AND SONG LYRICS,
EBERS PAPYRUS,
LADY NAUNAKHTE,
THE TALE OF A SHIP-
WRECKED SAILOR,
THE STORY OF THE
ELOQUENT PEASANT,
AND HERODOTUS

IN STYLE ALONG THE NILE

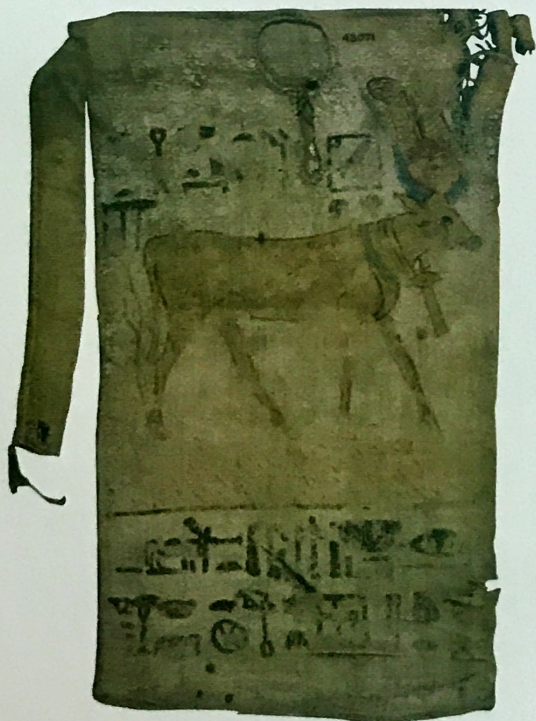
DAILY LIFE

Ancient Egyptians didn't worry about ending up on the worst-dressed list. No one appeared in carvings on the temple walls with a blurry blob over his face to mask the identity of a "fashion don't." But that's not because Egyptians weren't into grooming. The Greek historian Herodotus wrote that they were obsessed with it. The Egyptians weren't concerned about what to wear because, unlike today, where styles change every season, Egyptian fashion remained the same for thousands of years.

So what would an Egyptian fashion magazine look like (other than the fact it would be written on papyrus, need only one issue every 1,000 years or so, and could only be read by a few people since only about 1 percent of Egyptians could read)?

The cover girl's head would be shown in profile—that was how Egyptian artists drew people. She would be wearing a simple linen tube called a *kalasiris* that fell loosely to just above her ankles. If a man posed for the cover, he'd be dressed in a linen skirt, or *schenti*, that wrapped around his hips. That's what people wore, rich or poor. *How* the outfit was made could be quite different, though. If you happened to be royalty, your *kalasiris* or *schenti* would be woven from the finest plants, called flax, into a sheer, flowing, baby-soft linen. Weavers might then embroider the linen with thread of spun gold. If you happened to be an unskilled laborer, your clothes would be a bit scratchy because the fabric was woven from coarse vegetable fibers.

An ancient fashion magazine would certainly have ads for jewelry. Ancient Egyptians loved their jewelry, especially rings. They wore two or three on every finger. Even the poorest class wove grass and wildflowers for necklaces, bracelets, and rings. Jewelry wasn't just for women. Men



Egyptians had no word for "art." Everything decorative had purpose or meaning. On this tunic the painted cow walking east—away from the tombs west of the Nile—represents the goddess Hathor being reborn.

were just as fashion conscious. Many male mummies have pierced ears. The king awarded his soldiers and faithful followers with large hoop earrings and gold jewelry known as “Gold of the Brave.”

One good reason to accessorize was that jewelry had supernatural powers. Egyptians believed that gold was the flesh of the sun god, Re. And silver, which was rare in Egypt and even more precious than gold, was thought to come from the bones of the moon god. Heavy golden collars were engraved with spells. The enchanted collars brought joy, health, and strength to the wearer. Jewelry could protect the wearer from dangers, too. Children wore fish-shaped jewelry in their hair to prevent drowning. The cobra on the king’s crown symbolically spit venom at his enemies. Now that’s a fashion accessory!

What would a fashion magazine be without those scratch-and-sniff perfume ads? Priests in ancient Egypt were the first chemists, concocting secret fragrance formulas and creamy eyeliners to sell to those who could afford them. The priests’ perfumes were popular with everybody who was anybody and became a valuable export for Egypt. There was no money yet, but the priests traded for whatever they needed—linen, oils, even land. Scented body oils were so valued that they were often used as wages for workers. Popular fragrances were cinnamon, lily, and vanilla, but the priests didn’t just use oils from plants, they used oils from hippos, crocodiles—even cats. To be the hit of any banquet, you needed a scented wax cone to tie on top of your head. As the evening wore on the wax melted down the sides of your face and wig, perfuming the air.

A wax cone on your head wasn’t the only “must have” party accessory. Men and women showed up at banquets with their cosmetic chests, keeping them nearby to touch up their makeup. The chests themselves were works of art with inlaid jewels and painted scenes. Inside, the Egyptians kept a mirror called a “see-face” made from polished copper—or if you were really rich, silver. Wealthy women carried their see-face in a mirror bag over their shoulders. You might pack your cosmetic chest with bronze tweezers to



King Tut had several pairs of earrings placed in his tomb to wear in the afterlife. It was not unusual for men in ancient Egypt to have pierced ears and wear earrings.

FINE JEWELRY

Egyptian jewelers used semiprecious stones. Diamonds, rubies, and emeralds had not yet been discovered.

A wig as elaborate as this one would only be worn by the wealthiest Egyptians. In this case it was fit for a queen—literally.



pluck your eyebrows and hairpins made of ivory. You would definitely include a flat stone palette to crush black and green rocks into powder for eyeliner. Everyone wore heavy eyeliner. Men and women were already wearing eye makeup by the time the pyramids were built. As a popular New

Kingdom love poem says, “I wish to paint my eyes, so if I see you my eyes will sparkle.” So much for the natural look. Chemists from modern cosmetic companies have found that ancient Egyptians used the same proportion of fat as they do today to give their eye makeup that luxurious creamy texture.

What would our ancient fashion magazine say about hair? It would probably advise us to get rid of it. Men and women either shaved their heads or kept their hair cropped very short. In a climate where fleas and head lice thrived, this was practical hair-care practice. Archaeologists found a wig workshop at Deir el-Bahri along with several wigs. Like clothing, the quality of the wig depended on your station in life. The best wigs were shoulder length, made from as many as 120,000

“ New Kingdom love poem, about 1570–1070 BCE



Hand mirrors were not only functional, they had meaning, too. The round mirror symbolized the sun. The handle, in the shape of a papyrus stalk sprouting the face of the fertility goddess Bat-Hathor, represents rebirth.

human hairs woven into a mesh cap and fixed in place with beeswax. Some were ironed straight, others curled into ringlets, and for the really wealthy, braided with beads and jewels. If you weren't able to afford a good wig, yours might be made from palm fronds.

Although Egyptians kept their hair short, they were concerned about what hair they did have. The Ebers Papyrus has recipes for hair care. To strengthen hair, a mixture of crushed donkey teeth and honey is recommended. To prevent graying, it advises applying the blood of a black animal accompanied by a spell that transfers the black from the animal to the hair. For hair loss it says: "Recipe to make the hair of a bald person grow: fat of lion, fat of hippopotamus, fat of crocodile, fat of cat, fat of serpent, and fat of ibex are mixed together and the head of the bald person is anointed therewith." A more straightforward cure for baldness was the application of chopped lettuce to the bald spot.

You would think a place where people went out and about with chopped lettuce on their heads would have absolutely no "fashion don'ts," but there were definite no-nos.

Fashion don't: Wool or leather in temples or in front of the king. Remember, the gods were often part animal. It was not in good taste to be wearing animal parts to worship. Wool from sheep and goats was considered unclean, so it was never worn next to the skin. Although cloaks were made of wool, they were always worn over linen.

Fashion don't: Wearing shoes outdoors. Always carry your shoes on a journey and put them on when you arrive at your destination.

Fashion don't: Facial hair. Beards were considered unclean (remember the fleas and lice) and the mark of a barbarian. The one exception to this fashion don't was the braided fake beard worn by the pharaoh—but then who is going to criticize the pharaoh's fashion sense?

It is no wonder Herodotus thought that Egyptians were obsessed with their appearance. Tomb walls show their dedication to grooming. A nobleman who lived nearly 4,500 years ago is shown getting a pedicure. At Deir el-Bahri there is scene after scene of royal cosmetic rituals. The number

66 Ebers Papyrus, about 1550 BCE

FOOTWEAR

Egyptians went barefoot even at the fanciest parties. But if they wore shoes, they would most likely be sandals. Sandals found in one king's tomb had pictures of his enemies on the soles. When the king walked, he trampled them.



and quality of cosmetic containers and palettes found in tombs is more evidence of the importance Egyptians placed on good grooming. One fabulous makeup jar was carved so delicately that the alabaster is nearly transparent. This 6th dynasty (about 2345–2180 BCE) cosmetic container is in the shape of a female monkey cradling her baby in such a way that it looks as if it is in her womb.

“ Ebers Papyrus, about 1550 BCE

The Ebers Papyrus also has practical advice on how to manage body odor. “To expel stinking of the body of man or woman: ostrich-egg, shell of tortoise and gallnut from tamaris are roasted and the body is rubbed with the mixture.” For those looking for a simpler deodorant, the trend was to roll incense into a ball and mash it into your armpits. From body oils to body paint, Egyptians had a bounty of beauty hints—honey for anti-wrinkle cream, mint for fresh breath, beeswax for hair gel.

If ancient Egyptians had an advice columnist, it would likely be “Dear Bes.” Bes was the mischievous god of the family. Picture a god that is part dwarf, part lion—stocky, with a big head, bugged-out eyes, sticking his tongue out at you. That’s Bes. Bes rarely walked. He skipped, hopped, or danced—and none too gracefully—while playing his tambourine. Everyone loved Bes.

“ Last will and testament of Lady Naunakhte, about 1151–1145 BCE

Dear Bes,

“I am a free woman of Egypt. I have raised eight children, and have provided them with everything suitable to their station in life. But now I have grown old and behold, my children don’t look after me anymore.” What should I do?

Sincerely,
Geezer from Giza

Dear Geezer,

This is Egypt. Women have more legal rights than anywhere else in the world. You own your own property and can do what you want with it. Cut the ungrateful kids out of your will.

Bes

Dear Bes,
My neighbor keeps stealing the grain we
keep up on the roof. Is there anything
we can do to stop her?

Sincerely,
Hungry in Hermopolis

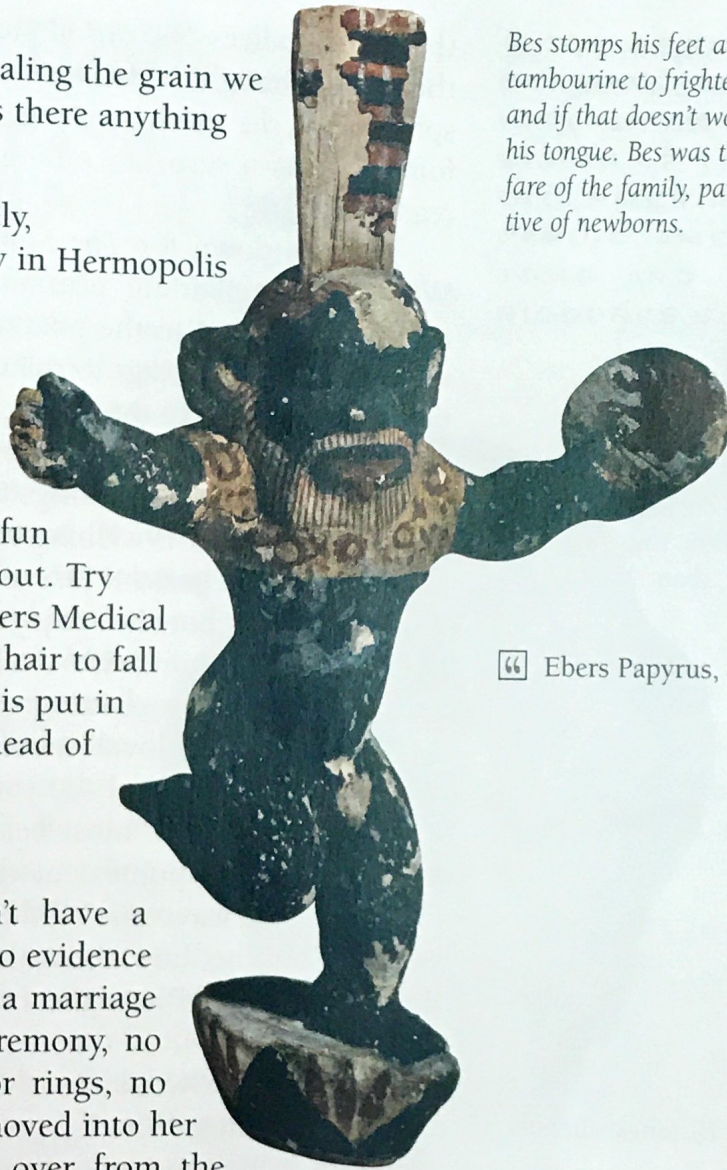
Dear Hungry,
Theft is a big problem
in village life. You
probably can't stop
her from stealing, but
you could have a little fun
and make her hair fall out. Try
this recipe from the Ebers Medical
Papyrus: "To cause the hair to fall
out: burnt leaf of lotus is put in
oil and applied to the head of
a hated woman."

Bes

Our magazine wouldn't have a
wedding section. There is no evidence
that ancient Egyptians had a marriage
ceremony—no religious ceremony, no
legal ceremony, no vows or rings, no
wedding gown. A woman moved into her
husband's house and took over from the
mother the title of "woman of the house." Bes would get a
lot of letters asking advice about how to get along with the
mother-in-law! A marriage contract listed what the woman
brought with her so that if there was a divorce the property
could be split up properly. If divorced, women were entitled
to what they brought into the marriage plus a share of the
joint property.

Our magazine would have book reviews. Thumbs up
for *The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor*, the action-packed
adventure of a sailor marooned on a deserted island. Or is
it deserted? When a giant human-headed serpent appears

*Bes stomps his feet and shakes his
tambourine to frighten off evil spirits,
and if that doesn't work, he sticks out
his tongue. Bes was the god of the wel-
fare of the family, particularly protec-
tive of newborns.*



“ Ebers Papyrus, about 1550 BCE

“” *The Tale of a Shipwrecked Sailor*, 12th dynasty manuscript, about 2000 BCE

“” *The Story of the Eloquent Peasant*, Middle Kingdom manuscript, about 2040–1782 BCE

“” New Kingdom love song lyrics, about 1570–1070 BCE

“” Herodotus, *Histories*, about 450 BCE

the sailor realizes he’s not alone. “Then I heard a noise of thunder; I thought it was a wave of sea, for the trees were splintering, the earth shaking. I uncovered my face and found it was a serpent coming.” Twist ending leaves the reader hanging.

Thumbs down for *The Story of the Eloquent Peasant*. Whining, complaining peasant makes a meteoric climb from poor peasant to the pharaoh’s right-hand man in this unbelievable tale of rags to riches. After the ninth time, the peasant complains to the pharaoh about all the injustices he has suffered, the reader identifies much too closely with the line “while for him who longs to see it come, death comes slowly.” The reader is wishing for a crocodile to come along and swallow the peasant just to shut him up. The pharaoh must be terribly bored to enjoy the peasant’s story so much that he rewards him with wealth and status. At least the peasant stopped complaining.

The Egyptians loved music, so there surely would be music reviews. “When I see you my eyes shine and I press close to look at you, most beloved of men who rules my heart. Oh, the happiness of this hour, may it go on for ever! . . . Never leave me!” If those love-song lyrics don’t get your toe tapping, how about these lyrics from a New Kingdom love song? “Oh, night, be mine forever, now that my lover has come.”

No magazine would be complete without a horoscope. Herodotus writes, “The Egyptians have ascertained the god to whom each month and day is sacred and they can therefore tell, according to the date of the child’s birth, what fate is in store for him, how he will end his days, and what sort of person he will become.” The calendar had lucky days and unlucky days. The unlucky days were “days of the demons.” But if you were born on the 10th day of the 4th month of the Inundation, your destiny was to live to a ripe old age—now that’s a lucky day.

That’s it for this issue. Look for the next edition next millennium, when fall fashions take on a Greek look.