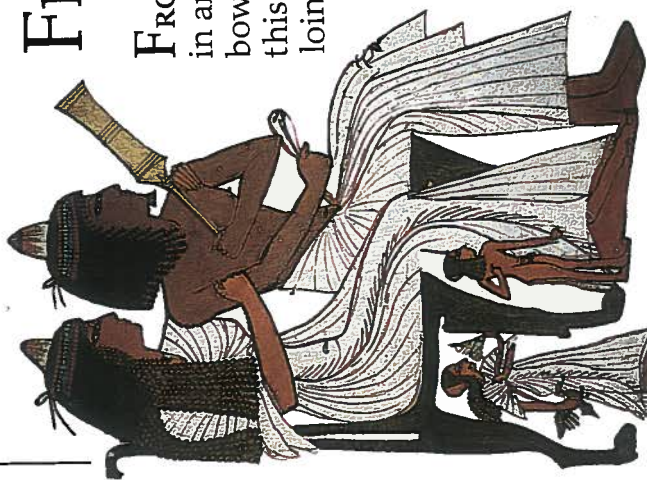


From fabric to finery

FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES, flax provided linen for clothes for everyone in ancient Egypt. The earliest picture of a loom in Egypt is on a pottery bowl dated to c. 3000 BCE, and flax was used for thousands of years after this. A pharaoh would have exceptionally fine linen; workers wore loincloths of coarser fabric. They had clever ways of avoiding wear on linen clothes—soldiers would cover the rear of their kilts with leather netting; domestic servants wore nets of cheap but colorful beads over their dresses. The basic courtier's kilt consisted of a linen cloth wrapped around the waist and secured by a knot—often elaborately tied. Cloaks gradually developed for use as overgarments. Women wore long, close-fitting dresses, often with beautifully pleated cloaks. There are still only vague ideas about how the Egyptians put pleats into their clothes—perhaps they used a board with a grooved surface. The number of pleats is probably exaggerated in many statues. The Egyptians learned the art of dyeing their clothes in colored patterns from the Middle East, but the technique was never widely used.



MAN AND WIFE

This worker on a royal tomb wears a pleated calf-length kilt; his wife wears a cloak. The finely braided wigs have perfume pomades.



LEATHER SANDALS

These sandals are made from strips of ox leather stitched together with papyrus twine. Leather is an unusual material for Egyptian footwear.

Reinforced edge

REED SANDALS

Papyrus and other reeds were the most common materials for sandals. These materials were in plentiful supply, and reed sandals were worn at all levels of society, including priests who were forbidden to wear any other material on their feet.



WIGS

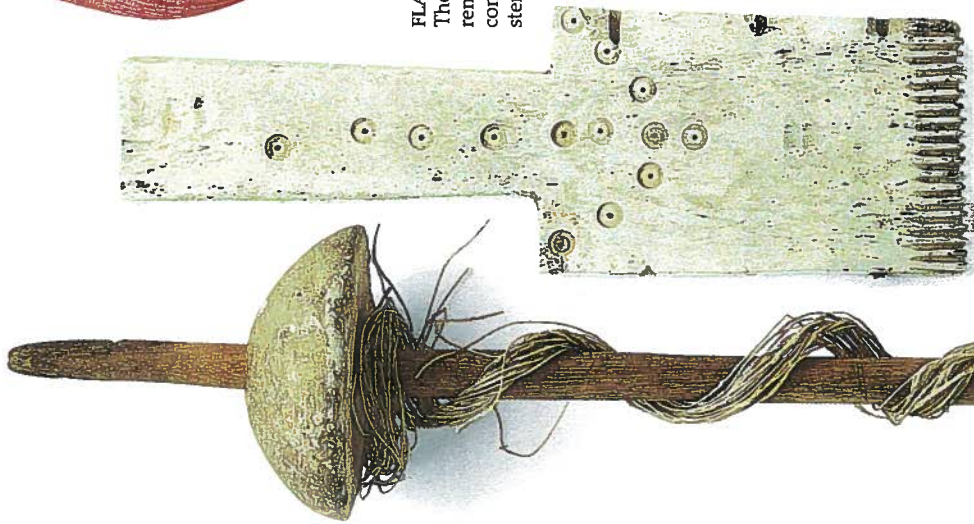
These courtiers on a wall relief at Memphis are wearing typical wigs and costumes with billowing sleeves. The wigs were made of human hair that was stuck in place with beeswax.

Twine securing strap

PRINCESS OR QUEEN? This statue is one of many intriguing works of art that survives from the reign of Akhenaten (p. 10). It represents Akhenaten's queen, Nefertiti, or one of her daughters. She is shown wearing a very fine garment of royal linen. The number of pleats may have been an artistic exaggeration, but the dress certainly would have many of them.



IN THE GROOVE This grooved board may have been used for pleating. The damp garment would be pressed into the grooves.



FLAX COMB

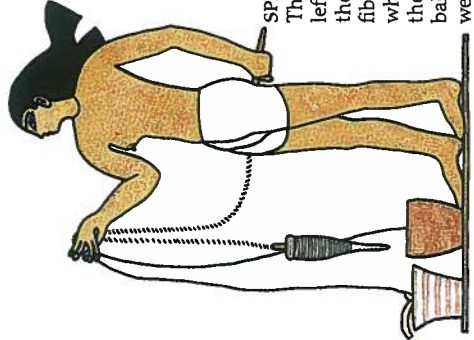
The first stage in making linen was to remove the flax heads with a long comb like this one. Then the flax stems were soaked and beaten to separate the fibers from the stalk for combing again to prepare them for spinning.

LINEN SHEET

Types of linen in ancient Egypt ranged from coarse material like this, which most people would have used, to the finest gauze worn by kings and queens.

SPINDLE

The flax fibers were spun on sticks, or spindles, which had a weighted circular whorl on one end. Whorls dating from early dynastic times have been discovered.



SPINNER

This girl is using her left hand to draw out the twisted slivers of fibers (the rove), which are attached to the rotating spindle balanced by the whorl.