

Making oneself up in ancient Egypt

In ancient Egypt both men and women wore makeup. To prepare it they would crush berries and **pigments** in mortars using pestles and put them in granite kohl pots [[Body Beautiful 37 and 47](#)]. The most common pigments used in makeup were: malachite for the popular **green** lines around the eyes, kohl or **black** eyeliner, made of powdered antimony, burnt almonds, black copper oxide and **brown** ochre, **red** ochre for lips and cheeks and **henna** to decorate nails and dye hair. Egyptians mixed pigments to form new shades, on palettes similar to the ones used by scribes [[Body Beautiful 39 and 46](#); [Education 35](#)]. They kept scented oils and ointments in small pots of various shapes [[Body Beautiful 38](#)]. To see the final result of their efforts the Egyptians looked at their reflection in **mirrors** made of polished bronze or copper [[Body Beautiful 34 and 55](#)].

Rich people, with more time and money to spend on their looks, had servants to do their makeup and hair, to prepare them **to** show off their wealth and power. Every inch of their body was massaged with scented ointments, tweezed to eliminate unwanted hair [[Body Beautiful 29](#)] and decorated with jewels like rings, bracelets and necklaces [[Body Beautiful 62, 59 and 61](#)].

Almost all Egyptians would shave off their head, to prevent lice infestations, due to old age, or simply to make the desert heat bearable. In public they wore wigs made of human or animal hair (expensive) or vegetal fibres (cheap). Wigs were always treated with great care, combed regularly [[Body Beautiful 28](#)] and decorated with hair rings [[Body Beautiful 35](#)] and hair pins [[Body Beautiful 33](#)].

The objects the Egyptians used for makeup tell us much about their lives. The leftover pigments give us clues as to what materials they used. Images on tomb and temple walls tell us where they put each colour. We can understand their realities better when we compare the physical objects to the images they made.

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