

# Chapter 1

## History of the Textile Industry in Egypt

**Huda Mohamed**

*Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo University, Egypt*

### ABSTRACT

*Egypt is one of the most famous countries in the textile industry, this industry has flourished as a result of availability of many factors helping the industry prosper throughout its history. Therefore, this chapter aims to study the history of archaeological textiles in Egypt from Pharaonic era through Coptic and Islamic periods. The study begins with the raw materials of natural fibres used in textile's industry, technical methods from spinning and threads preparation, dyes, weaving on looms, and types of looms. Then, it looks at decorative methods used in textiles. In addition to studying the history and development of Islamic textiles in Egypt, decorations, and fabrics produced during Islamic age, it will also study the most important centers in industry and trade textile during that period.*

### INTRODUCTION

Egypt has known the textile industry since ancient times. This industry has developed considerably through its various historical eras as a result of the availability of raw materials, whether in its territory, grown in fields, or imported. In addition to the weavers who specialized in the process of weaving, other craftsmen were involved in this industry and workshops. Moreover, the care of the state and rulers for this craft through control and supervision played a role. Technical methods, decorative methods, and new types of fabrics emerged. The industry was influenced by the political, social, and economic conditions in Egypt during the different periods. Civilization, culture, and religion also had a great effect on the designs and decorative elements carried on textiles. The textile industry in Egypt thrived by Egyptian weavers in various industrial centers, whether in Cairo, Delta cities, or Upper Egypt, which still practice this industry so far. Many textile fragments made in Egypt and its cities throughout the ages, especially the Islamic period, are preserved in Egyptian, Arab and international museums and private collections.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-4811-0.ch001

## **RAW MATERIALS**

The sources of raw materials used in the textile industry in Egypt varied and included plants, such as linen and cotton, animals, such as silk and wool, and mineral sources, such as gold and silver, accompanying the industry. This diversity had a significant impact on the variety of fabrics.

### **Linen**

Linen was one of the natural plant fibers used in the textile industry in the Islamic world. Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia were the main centers of linen production (Bloom and Blair, 2009). Linen is the only plant with the oldest fibers in the spinning and weaving industry in the earliest times of historical Egypt (Maher, 1977). Egyptian linen fabrics were found dating back to 5000 B.C. (Baker, 1995).

Egypt was famous for cultivating, spinning, and exporting linen products to different parts of the world (Supreme Council of antiquities [SCOA], n.d.). Then, it continued in the Greco-Roman and Byzantine periods in weaving linen in addition to the use of wool. In the early centuries of the Christian period, Egypt maintained its reputation as a textile center specialized in the manufacture of fine linen and wool garments decorated with scenes of daily life and Christian elements (Gillow, 2010). The Egyptian linen textiles were distinguished by their quality, as the remaining Pharaonic, Coptic, and Islamic textiles indicate.

Fayoum and its villages, especially Laboush and Boussir, were famous for spinning and producing linen from early historical periods (SCOA, n.d.). During the flourishing period of the Egyptian linen industry, its products were used in the manufacture of garments, table covers, tents, and cover of the Ka'ba (Kiswa). Egyptian linen industry began to decline at the beginning of the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> H./ 13<sup>th</sup> G. century when factories of Tennis, Damietta, and Daibik were closed (Donze et al., 1997).

### **Cotton**

Cotton is one of the cellulosic fibers, consisting of superficial bristles growing on the seeds and one cell in one direction. It has many properties, such as ease of manufacture, durability, and lack of change; it does not lose its shape and can be spun into fine yarns to make good textiles (al-Nagauwy, n.d.).

The weaving process is preceded by stages of preparation of the yarns and differs from others according to the type of thread. It passes some stages before reaching the spinning. After harvesting, the ginning process comes, which is the separation of the seeds from the bristles (Nasr, 2005). Then, the women take it to spin; the process of spinning depends on the direction of spinning (Abu-Hashim, 2002).

Although there are no surviving examples of cotton textiles from the early Islamic period in Egypt, many historical references mention that cotton was known in Egypt from the Pharaonic period. As for Iraq and Yemen, it was planted before the Islamic conquest of Egypt in 640-641 AD, and it might enter Egypt through the Arabs and their trade with Yemen (SCOA, n.d.). Some evidence also states that cotton cultivation in Egypt was in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> H./ 8-10<sup>th</sup> G. centuries, and some documents indicate that cotton cultivation in Egypt was under the patronage of Fatimids (Bosworth et al., 1986).

21 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:  
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/history-of-the-textile-industry-in-egypt/315833](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/history-of-the-textile-industry-in-egypt/315833)

## Related Content

---

### Oxidative Degradation of Cellulosic Fibers in Historical Textiles

Madian Hamed Abdel Hady (2023). *Preservation and Restoration Techniques for Ancient Egyptian Textiles* (pp. 164-204).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/oxidative-degradation-of-cellulosic-fibers-in-historical-textiles/315840](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/oxidative-degradation-of-cellulosic-fibers-in-historical-textiles/315840)

### Investigation and Analysis of Ancient Dyed Textiles

Maha Gouda, Mostafa Atiaaand Omar Abdel-Kareem (2023). *Preservation and Restoration Techniques for Ancient Egyptian Textiles* (pp. 93-118).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/investigation-and-analysis-of-ancient-dyed-textiles/315837](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/investigation-and-analysis-of-ancient-dyed-textiles/315837)

### Deterioration Mechanisms: The Role of Science and Technology in the Preservation and Sustainability of Egyptian Historical Textiles – A Case Study

Harby Ezzeldin Ahmed (2023). *Preservation and Restoration Techniques for Ancient Egyptian Textiles* (pp. 205-223).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/deterioration-mechanisms/315841](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/deterioration-mechanisms/315841)

### Global Climate Change by Wetland Greenhouse Gas Fluxes: Mechanisms, Effects, and Control

Madhavi Konni, Vara Saritha, Pulavarthi Madhuri, K. Soma Sekharand Manoj Kumar Karnena (2022). *Handbook of Research on Monitoring and Evaluating the Ecological Health of Wetlands* (pp. 182-196).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/global-climate-change-by-wetland-greenhouse-gas-fluxes/295747](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/global-climate-change-by-wetland-greenhouse-gas-fluxes/295747)

### Efficacy of Acquiring and Transferring Indigenous Medicinal Knowledge Among Its Owners and Practitioners in uMhlathuze in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Nokwanda Charity Khanyile, Petrus Nhlavu Dlaminiand Tlou Maggie Masenya (2023). *Digital Preservation and Documentation of Global Indigenous Knowledge Systems* (pp. 142-158).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/efficacy-of-acquiring-and-transferring-indigenous-medicinal-knowledge-among-its-owners-and-practitioners-in-umhlathuze-in-kwazulu-natal-south-africa/327932](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/efficacy-of-acquiring-and-transferring-indigenous-medicinal-knowledge-among-its-owners-and-practitioners-in-umhlathuze-in-kwazulu-natal-south-africa/327932)