

# WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

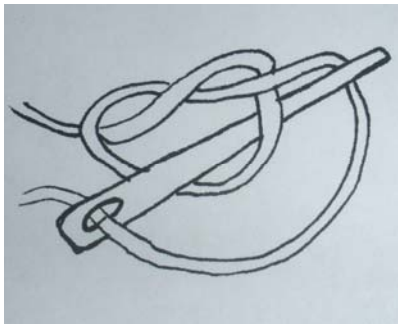
## Nålbinding Coptic Socks

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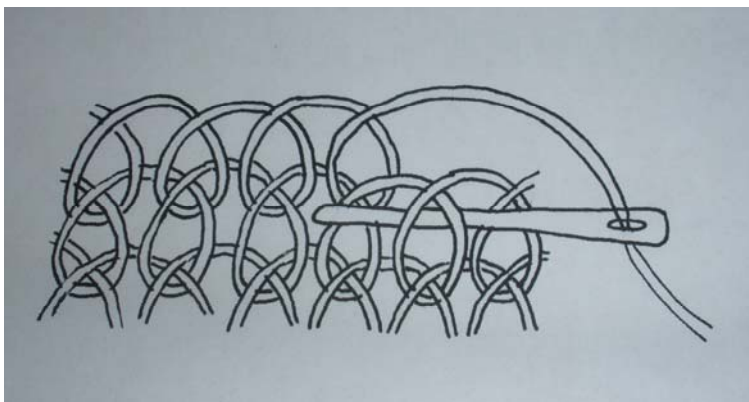
Nålbinding is an extremely old method of constructing fabric by creating interlocking loops with a single needle. The earliest known artifact dates from 6500 BCE. This style of sock dates from circa 300 CE. When the socks were first found, they were thought to be knitted. It was a close examination of the mistakes which proved that it was nålbinding.

### The Coptic Stitch

The Coptic stitch is one of the easiest nålbinding stitches. Unlike other stitches, it is not constructed on the thumb, so care should be taken to ensure an even tension. The socks begin at the toes, so begin by making a small loop around your fingers and make 8 to 10 buttonhole stitches on the loop. Pull the loop tight.



Buttonhole Stitch



Coptic Stitch

For the second row, begin the Coptic stitch. Place your needle behind the post of the buttonhole stitch from right to left, keeping the needle in front of the working thread. Continue around in a clockwise direction. Increases are made by adding a buttonhole stitch between two Coptic stitches. For this row, increase between every stitch. Continue around, adding stitches as needed until the circle is about the size of a quarter. Be careful to pick up all of your increases – they tend to hide behind the Coptic stitches.

## The Toes

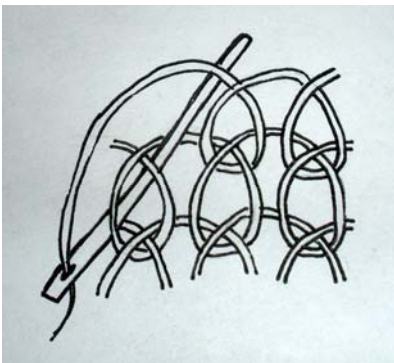


The toes are constructed separately, and joined at the ball of the foot. When the piece is about the size of a quarter, begin to pull it in. This is done by reducing the number of stitches added in a round. As the piece grows, test it against your big toe. When it fits easily, but snugly over your toe, stop adding stitches and continue around until it is as long as your toe.

The second toe is constructed a little differently, since it fits over four toes. The finished shape is a trapezoid, with one straight side and one sharply angled side. This shape can be made by keeping all your increases at one end, similar to shaping a knitted piece. Another way to do it is with short rows. This changes the angle of the stitches, and creates the trapezoid shape more quickly. To make a short row, you need a variation on the Coptic stitch.

### The Reverse Coptic Stitch

The reverse Coptic stitch is made by placing the needle behind the cross of the stitch from left to right. The needle stays behind the working thread. Work progresses in a counter-clockwise direction.



Reverse Coptic Stitch

When your piece for the second toe is about the size of the quarter, begin shaping. On one side of the circle do not add stitches. On the other side add 2 stitches on each side of the center. As you come around again, stop at about the  $\frac{3}{4}$  point and reverse direction. When you have gone half way around in reverse, turn again and make Coptic stitches. This time, complete the round, remembering to pick up your increases as you

go. Continue around again, adding no stitches on the short row side, and 2 or more stitches on the increase side. Construct a second short row, and then complete the toe with the Coptic stitch, adding stitches as needed to fit your foot. Try the toe on often and adjust the shape as needed.

### The Body of the Sock

The body of the sock is constructed as a tube. First you need to join the toes. As you come around the second toe approaching the straight side, instead of continuing around the circle, pick up a stitch from the first toe. Continue around the first toe until you get back to the second toe. Leaving 2 stitches from each toe, pick up the next stitch from the second toe. Those stitches left behind account for the depth of your foot. You will come back later and sew them together. Now the work continues as a tube. As you come around the second time, try the sock on. If needed, add a stitch or two so that it comfortably fits the ball of your foot. When the tube reaches your ankle, stop.

### The Heel

To complete the sock, you will again need to use the reverse Coptic stitch. Decide if you are making a left sock or a right sock. Try the sock on and mark with safety pins or stitch markers the width of your heel. As your stitches reach the second marker, make a buttonhole stitch. Reverse direction until you reach the first marker. Make a buttonhole stitch. Reverse direction again. The buttonhole stitch is important because it keeps your edge straight. Continue in this way until the sock is about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch less than the length of your foot. To make the end of the sock taper in to match the curve of your foot, stop making the buttonhole stitches at the end of the rows. This will decrease each row by one stitch. When the sock equals the length of your foot, stop.

### The Ankle

Working from left to right, pick up the first stitch from the body of the sock, and the first stitch from the heel. Continue around the heel, adding a Coptic stitch in each buttonhole stitch. As you come to the taper, you may want to add a stitch, if your thread between stitches seems too long. When you have gone all the way around the heel, pick up the first stitch on that side of the sock and reverse direction. If you added stitches at the taper, when you reach them on row 3, stitch two together. At row 5, decrease a stitch at the tapers again. This will pull the ankle section up to the vertical position.

After several rows, try the sock on. There will be a point where the sock should stop going straight up, and will need to curve around your foot. Mark that row with a stitch marker. (For me, it is approximately 10 rows. It will vary depending on the size of your foot and the gauge of your yarn.) When you have reached your stitch marker doing alternating rows of Coptic stitch and reverse Coptic stitch, continue completely around the sock, picking up the remaining stitches from the body of the sock as you go along.

Continue around for about 10 rows. When you reach the center of the sock, add a buttonhole stitch and reverse direction. Continue back and forth around the sock, adding a buttonhole stitch at each end, until the sock is as tall as you like. Add a piece of yarn at each side so you can tie the sock together.



The completed socks



Detail at the heel

**References:**

Hald, Margrethe, *Ancient Danish Textiles from Bogs & Burials*, translation by Jean Olsen, National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen, 1980

Rutt, Richard, *A History of Hand Knitting*, Interweave Press, Loveland, CO, 2003

Medieval & Renaissance Material Culture – [www.larsdatter.com/nalbind.htm](http://www.larsdatter.com/nalbind.htm)

Victoria & Albert Museum – <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O107787/pair-of-socks>