

A Day in the Life: Pharaoh

<http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/special/lifeas/pharaoh.html>

The sun rises on yet another bright day in ancient Egypt. A man wakes up, but this isn't any ordinary man: this is the pharaoh.

This is the last time he will be alone for hours. He has many officials, servants and slaves to make sure he is always safe and perfectly presented.

His day begins with cleaning and dressing by servants including the splendidly named "Chief of the Scented Oils and Pastes for Rubbing His Majesty's Body". When he is clean, he is dressed and adorned with a huge amount of jewelry. After all, he's the pharaoh. He owns vast amounts of gold and he needs to look the part.

The pharaoh then walks to the "audience chamber" to hold his daily meetings. As guests enter the room they prostrate themselves in front of him. He is a Divine Majesty - they are mere mortals. As usual, there are ambassadors who are offering tributes from foreign countries, generals talking military matters, the usual nobility and some special envoys from across the empire.

The day's audiences completed, he leaves for the temple. As pharaoh, he must pay tribute to the chief god, Amen-Re. It's a pain but, if he doesn't do it, the empire could lose its divine order, or Maat. It could descend into Isfet (chaos) and he would be held responsible. It's not worth the risk.

Accompanied by the high priest, the pharaoh walks through the great temple to the sanctuary, enjoying the cool air and smelling the thick incense. Inside, he approaches the statue of Amen-Re. He asks the god some questions and receives answers from the high priest. The questions over, he is presented with a large bull. After prayers, the sacred butcher cuts the bull's throat as a sacrifice to the gods.

Afternoon

There's nothing like a slaughter to work up a big appetite, so the pharaoh returns to his palace for some lunch. Afterwards, he jumps into his royal chariot for a tour of the city. This is long before photos. Few people know what he looks like, so crowds of Egyptians gather in the streets to catch sight of their divine ruler.

Surrounded by bodyguards, he visits some construction sites where magnificent new buildings are being constructed in his honor. Back at the palace, he gets a welcome break. After a day surrounded by people, he can finally be alone and wander through his beautiful gardens.

Evening

His final daily duty comes in the late afternoon. He returns to the temple for a ceremony that marks the setting of the sun and the end of the day.

After that, he goes back home for an early night. After all, even divine majesties need their beauty sleep!

A Day in the Life: Nobleman

<http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/special/lifeas/nobleman.html>

It's another new day in Egypt. In a bedroom inside a splendid townhouse in one of Thebes' most desirable neighborhoods, a nobleman and his wife stir beneath their fine linen sheets.

Remmao gets out of bed and puts on a long white linen robe before hitting a small gong. This is the signal for his secretary to bring him his schedule for the day on a piece of papyrus. When she has gone, other servants help him wash and shave, before he dresses in a fine linen kilt and leather sandals.

His wife, Kemisi, is also getting ready with the help of her own servant. Wearing a linen dress and glass jewelry, she puts on her makeup – some black kohl powder on her eyelids – and goes downstairs for breakfast.

Egypt is too hot for heavy breakfasts, so there are no pancakes or waffles. Instead, Remmao and Kemisi, sit on some cushions at a low table for a simple meal of bread and fruit.

Then it's time for work. Remmao leaves Thebes by chariot and heads for his estate on the banks of the Nile. He meets the estate overseer, who gives him the latest figures on his cattle and geese, and updates him on their expectations for the harvest.

The two men then go on a tour, watching slaves carrying baskets full of grapes and pomegranates. The grapes are taken to the wine press where they are crushed underfoot, before being put into clay vessels and taken to the cellars – where they will eventually become wine.

Afternoon

After the morning's work, Remmao joins his overseer for lunch and some of the estate's wine, before he takes a siesta to avoid the worst of the afternoon's heat. It's a tough life!

Back home, Kemisi is supervising preparations for a banquet this evening. Everything's going well, so she goes out into the garden to enjoy the shade and watch her children play.

At the estate, Remmao meets up with a friend. Together they go to the river to hunt wildfowl, but today they have little luck and Remmao goes home empty handed.

He gets back to find Kemisi getting ready – as usual, she’s taking forever. Her servant brushes and curls her favorite wig, and then helps her into her best clothing. Her jewelry is made from gold and semi-precious stones. Remmao changes quickly and they head downstairs.

Evening

One by one, their guests arrive. Some come in chariots. Others are carried on decorated litters – covered couches – by servants. As the villa becomes fuller, the small cones of scented wax placed on guests’ wigs gradually melt, releasing their perfume.

It’s soon time for dinner – a feast of geese and ducks, fresh fish, roasted ox, goat and gazelle. For dessert, there’s grapes, melon, figs, dates, pistachio nuts and pomegranates, all served on golden plates. The wine flows freely and the guests love the music and dancers provided by their hosts.

Finally, the evening comes to an end. The guests stagger out of the villa and go home. The place is a mess, but that’s what servants are for. Tired but happy, Remmao and Kemisi make their way to bed.

A Day in the Life: Craftsmen

<http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/special/lifeas/craftsman.html>

It's early morning and the sun is rising over Thebes, one of the great cities of the ancient world. Nebtawi is still asleep. He lives in a simple house, set among tradesmen, craftsmen, metalworkers, scribes and stonemasons.

Nebtawi is a master craftsman, so he gets a little extra time in the morning because he doesn't have to show up at work until the others have all arrived. Finally he gets up, gets dressed and joins his family for breakfast. As usual, they sit on the ground and eat with their fingers. Their breakfast is typical: figs, dates and bread, butter and honey, all washed down with fresh milk.

The kids go off to school, then it's time for Nebtawi to go to work. He opens the door to the sounds and smells of the nearby butchers, bakers and shopkeepers getting ready for the day.

Like most other Egyptians, Nebtawi walks to work – a building site where he is supervising the construction of a new temple. The building is complete now, so the site is swarming with artists, who are decorating the fresh plaster on the walls.

It's another hot day and, by mid-morning, Nebtawi needs a break. He finds some shade and drinks some cool wine from a pitcher. But soon he's back on site, checking on the work and stopping occasionally to give some advice or correct some mistakes.

Afternoon

Lunchtime has always been important for site workers and Thebes is no different. Nebtawi joins some other workers for bread and fish, caught earlier that day from the Nile.

Then it's off to a meeting with other master craftsmen, who are working on a number of different projects throughout the city. Before he knows it, work is over. Nebtawi packs up and walks home. When he gets back, he finds his two sons doing their math homework on small pieces of papyrus.

Evening

It's time for dinner and the family sits down to a good meal of roasted meats, lentils and carrots. By the time they're finished, it's getting dark, so Nebtawi lights a small oil lamp and sits back with a cup of beer.

His kids persuade him to play senit, a popular board game. Each player has six wooden cones and must get them to the other side of the board and then back again. They throw four wooden sticks to determine how far each piece can move at any one time.

His sons are getting better at this game and Nebtawi is lucky to win. By the time they finish, it's time to put his boys to bed. Then he and his wife blow out the lamp and hit the sack: time for sleep.

A Day in the Life: Priest

<http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/special/lifeas/priest.html>

It's still dark when Itennu gets up. He's a middle-ranking priest at the great temple to Amen-Re. He has to be ready by dawn, when the assistant high priest gives him his instructions for the day.

As the sun first appears, every priest chants the dawn hymn, "Awake in peace, great god." The most senior priest unseals the sanctuary and says a ritual prayer four times over the image of the god. This gives the god his soul, so that he can take his physical earthly shape again.

The image is then carefully cleaned and rubbed with oil. Incense is burned as its old clothes are removed and the image is re-dressed in white, red, blue and green linen. The dressing is completed with perfume, make-up and jewels.

Now that the god is dressed, it's time for his breakfast. This is a meal of bread, roast meat, fruit and vegetables. Beer and wine are also laid out. Once the priests think the god has eaten all he can handle, the food is removed. It goes back to the kitchens, where Itennu distributes it to the temple staff as part of their wages.

Water is now sprinkled over the sanctuary and the image. The priests wave around more incense and put natron cleansing salt and resin on the floor. They then leave, sealing the sanctuary ahead of the pharaoh's daily visit.

Now Itennu and the other priests practice their chanting while they wait for the pharaoh. Once the visit is in progress, Itennu takes the bull and leads it into the sanctuary. Here, it will be presented to the pharaoh before being ritually slaughtered as a sacrifice to the god.

Afternoon

Once the pharaoh has gone, Itennu and his fellow priests sit down to a lunch of pea and lentil soup, accompanied by fresh bread. Then it's time for an afternoon nap – chanting is surprisingly tiring work.

Nap over, it's back to work. He has to officiate at the funeral of a VIP. Because the man was an important courtier, he may be buried in the highly prestigious Valley of the Kings.

Itennu boards the funeral barge carrying the coffin. It sails across the Nile, is placed on a sled and is then pulled by two oxen to its new home. Itennu supervises the funeral arrangements. He then accompanies the coffin to the tomb, where he says his final prayers. The coffin is then sealed by the masons.

Evening

Back at the temple, Itennu crosses the river again, this time he is going to the "City of the Dead." This is the home of the Egyptian funeral industry. A member of the royal family has died and custom dictates that a priest must oversee the mummification of the body. By sunset it is time to go back to the temple and straight to bed – tomorrow will be another long day.

A Day in the Life: Soldier

<http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/special/lifeas/soldier.html>

Standing very still, Mdjai watches the sun rise, but the only thing on his mind is how his new sandals make his feet hurt and how much longer he can hold his spear steady. As a soldier and one of the pharaoh's elite bodyguards, he has already been up for hours.

In another hour, he's relieved for breakfast. It's the same every day - a piece of bread. No peanut butter or jelly for Mdjai, just bread. If he's lucky it won't be too stale. The officers always get the best rations.

After breakfast, Mdjai does drill practice on a plain outside Thebes. After his unit has been yelled at by their superiors, they go on maneuvers, practicing charges and battle formations with the rest of his division - a total of 5,000 men.

The entire division is on the plain in battle formation of centers and wings. Everyone is involved - Mdjai and the other elite archers, the spearmen (always the first to die in battle) and the chariots. It's tiring but fun: the excitement of battle, but none of the danger. After a bad start to the day, finally Mdjai feels like a soldier again.

Afternoon

After the maneuvers, the soldiers stop for lunch. Today, the rations are lentils and garlic, with some Syrian bread - popular in the army since they discovered it while on service there years ago.

As Egypt is currently at peace, there is little fighting to do. So after lunch, his company of 200 men is deployed to work on a government project.

Today, they are digging an irrigation canal on farmland belonging to one of the big temples. It's hot work and Mdjai can feel the sweat trickling down his back. Still, it could be worse - his friends in another company have been told to carry stones up a mountain for the pharaoh's tomb.

Evening

After a short break in the late afternoon, the company marches back to its barracks to clean their kit and get some supper. The sun is now beginning to go down but the day is far from over for Mdjai. Instead, it's ending as it began: on sentry duty at the palace, guarding the pharaoh.

A Day in the Life: Farmer

<http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/special/lifeas/farmer.html>

Life for a farmer is governed by the sun. As it rises on another hot day in the Egyptian countryside, Shenti wakes up and throws off the rough linen sheet that was woven by his wife.

He crawls out of bed to wash, shave and get dressed. Unlike people today, he doesn't have to think long about what to wear, because it's always the same - a coarse linen kilt and a pair of reed sandals.

After breakfast of bread and fruit, Shenti goes to work and his wife lights the fire and begins grinding the wheat to make bread - the main part of their daily diet.

Shenti doesn't have to worry about a long commute, because his workplace is minutes away, in the fields behind his house. This has been a good year and he's reaped a large harvest.

Some of this needs to be given to the temple as payment for use of its land. Today is that day. He fills several baskets and loads them onto donkeys, then delivers them to the temple with his two field workers.

Afternoon

On the way back to work, Shenti and his workers stop for a quick lunch of bread, meat and beer. They then work all afternoon through the hottest part of the day, in the fields, Shenti is working on his crops and tending his few cattle and ducks. He sees the sun slowly go down and, after a tiring day, makes his way home.

Evening

He arrives back to find supper's almost ready. Once again, he's eating bread, meat and beer - there's not much variety to be had. But Shenti isn't used to anything else and, anyway, he's hungry and thirsty, so is happy enough.

As the sun goes down and night sets in, Shenti lights the small oil lamp. He and his wife put their children to bed. It's thousands of years before the discovery of electricity, so there's little to do except go to bed and get some much needed sleep before another hard day's work.

A Day in the Life: Women

<http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/special/lifeas/woman.html>

Just outside Thebes, the sun is rising on a small house near the Nile. Nafrini is already up - with a farmer as a husband, plus three small children, she's got a lot to do.

She starts by preparing breakfast of bread and fruit for her family who, judging from the noise, are all now out of bed.

Like most Egyptian women, she's wearing a rough linen dress and has a reed necklace with an amulet to the pregnant goddess Tawaret - believed to help during the danger of childbirth.

Although they aren't wealthy, Nafrini and her husband, Sebi, can still afford a servant, Akana, who helps around the house and with the children. Once her husband has left for work, Nafrini leaves the kids with Akana and goes to the market. She needs to stock up the store cupboard - basics like lentils, chickpeas, lettuce, onion and garlic. She might buy meat for a special occasion, but it's much too expensive to eat every day.

When she gets back, she sprinkles water and natron cleansing salts to keep the insects away. She puts down charcoal and powdered bebet-plant to kill the fleas.

Today is laundry day, so Nafrini gathers up the bed linen and the children for a trip to the river. She quite likes this job. The day isn't too hot yet and she gets the latest news and gossip from her friends - always keeping one eye on the kids.

She normally puts the laundry in the river and pounds it against a large stone - this is long before detergent or soap. But today, all the best stones have been taken, so she has to tread the laundry against pebbles in the shallows. When everything is clean, she lays it out to dry in the sun.

While she waits, she tells the children to look for some reeds, straw and dried dung to fuel the fire. When the washing is dry, she fills her large water-pot and they all go home.

Afternoon

After putting away the laundry, she sits down with Akana and the children for a light lunch of bread and lettuce. The children are arguing and pulling each other's

hair, so she tells them to go out and look for wild honey, which she uses to sweeten food - sugar won't be discovered for thousands of years yet.

With the house now quiet, Nafrini can get on with some cooking. She lights the conical mud fire and starts grinding emmet wheat to make flour for the bread. She adds water to make dough, which she rounds off into flat loaves and then puts in the oven.

While the bread is baking, she starts on the beer. From the oven, she takes some partly-baked barley dough and crumbles it into a large vat. She adds some water and date juice, and leaves it to ferment.

Evening

The bread is baked, the children have brought back some honey and Sebi will soon be home, so Nafrini starts on dinner. Today, the Tutanwhatsit family is having a stew of lentils, chickpeas and onion. Nafrini knows Sebi will be happy, because the night before he had been grumbling about eating nothing but bread. Everything is put in a clay pot and goes into the oven.

Sebi arrives home and the family sits down to eat. By the time they've finished, it's six o'clock and the sun has almost set. With no electricity, their day follows the rise and fall of the sun. They all go to bed and are soon fast asleep.