

Priestess

Today is a festival day at an ancient Egyptian temple, and the priestess wakes in her mud brick house after only a few hours of sleep. Standing by a pool, servants help her wash and rub scented oils on her skin. She shaves her eyebrows and the hair on her head, and puts on a wig made of human hair. Then she dresses in a long fine linen dress, and puts on make-up and perfume.

She eats quickly in her courtyard and puts on a pair of white sandals. She walks to the outside of the temple looking carefully at the sun. She is the Wenuty (hour-watcher) priestess, and she has spent many years studying for this position. It is her responsibility to make sure that temple rituals are performed on time.

When the sun is fully visible in the morning sky, she enters the temple and tells the high priest it is time to begin the festival. Several priests and priestesses begin to place offerings of food before a statue of the temple's god.

She returns to watching the sun, while the priests start to chant. When the sun is high overhead she tells the high priestess to begin other ceremonies. They begin with a ritual bath in an outer chamber of the temple, and then enter an inner chamber to dance and pray to the temple god.

In mid-afternoon, she washes her face and hands outside the temple, and has a large bowl of geese soup and wine, with some other priests and priestesses.

Then the priestess offers her own private prayers to the temple god, and returns home to her bed for an early sleep.

In the evening, she wakes up and goes back to the temple. She lights an oil lamp and puts water into a special water clock. As water drips out of a hole in the bottom, she checks the water level to know when to perform temple rituals at night.

The pharaoh appointed priests and priestesses, or they were born into their positions. High priests and priestesses administered the temples, and like the

pharaoh were representatives of the gods on earth. Below them, a series of priests and priestesses had specialized duties such as writing, studying, or watching the time or the positions of the stars. Some priests collected taxes or served as local government administrators, while older priests sometimes became trusted royal advisors. Priests and priestesses frequently rotated positions allowing women to attain high positions. Throughout the history of ancient Egypt, women had a status a near equal to men in each social class.