

The Laborer

The manual laborer begins his day by bathing in the Nile River. He shaves his face and does not shave his balding head because he does not have a wig. He puts on cheap make-up around his eyes, and goes barefoot.

He puts on a coarse short kilt, which was woven by his wife, and his wife and children prepare a small meal of bread and fruit. After eating, he gets up and goes to a field behind his house with his two sons.

The laborer and his sons spend the better part of the morning turning the soil with a wooden plough and planting seeds by hand. While he is working with his son, his wife and daughters grind wheat for bread, and spin wool into fabric.

At noon, he and his sons carry several bags of grain to the home of a local priest. The priest greets them, and counts the bags. "There are only 10 bags here," he exclaims. "The high priestess asked for 14 bags."

The laborer bows to the ground and says, "I'm sorry sir, but I have no more to give you." The priest hits the man on the back with a stick and says, "Pay me 4 bags tomorrow or I will take you to the local judge!"

The laborer returns home with his sons for a late mid-day lunch of bread, and fish soup. He tells his wife the bad news, and they return to the fields to pick dates.

At night, his wife lights a small oil lamp, and he and his family have a meal of bread, fish, and watered down beer.

In Ancient Egypt, men and women could own land, and be taxed. Families had to pay a high produce tax to support the local temple, and the elite, or face a severe punishment. Because Egypt had no hard currency, this tax was paid in produce such as grain. Free men could also be taxed in the form of labor on monument or temple constructions throughout the year. Older theories held they were the work of slaves, but new theories suggest that it was largely the work of skilled artisans and conscripted free laborers. In a land where the pharaoh was regarded as a god, this work would have been honorable. At the height of pyramid building in Giza, some families of free laborers were conscripted to live on the construction sites year round.

Normally, the change might not make any difference. But in this changing environment, the bigger bills allow these few birds to feed on the bigger, harder seeds from another plant. As a result, this new variety of "big beaks" become healthier and are able to produce more big-beaked offspring than their smaller-beaked brethren. Eventually, over a long period of isolation, the small beaks die out and only the big beaks remain. A new species has evolved.