

The Pharaoh

In a great palace, the pharaoh wakes with one of his wives beside him. Servants enter the room, and help him and his wife prepare for the day. The servants are wearing simple kilts and dresses, because they can not wear the same clothes as the pharaoh or royalty. They wash him in a side room with drains in the floor, and rub scented oils and perfumes into his skin.

After he washes, the servants cut his hair short, and put on a wig made of human hair. They darken his eyelids with a black paint called kohl, and he puts on an elaborate fine linen kilt and sandals made of feather. Finally, he puts on a gold pendant around his neck.

When the pharaoh and his wife are dressed, they sit on cushions in a courtyard and eat a small meal of bread and fruit at a low table.

His wife leaves to look after their children and organize a dinner party for the evening. He goes to meet with some foreign merchants.

In his throne room, the merchants bow humbly to the ground before him. They want to trade wood and spices in his kingdom. They offer him gifts of gold and ostrich eggs. He waves to a servant to take the gifts, and welcomes them.

Next, a royal official needs the king's approval to expand irrigation along the Nile River. After speaking with the official for a while, the Pharaoh dismisses him and has his main mid-day meal with his wives and children. They are served a meal of beef, figs, vegetables, and fine wine.

After lunch, servants carry him to inspect the irrigation project, and he meets with a high priestess who advises him to approve it. In the afternoon, he relaxes with his oldest of nine sons, and plays a board game called Dogs and Jackals. At the end of the day he joins his wives and guests for an evening of eating and dancing.

In ancient Egypt, the pharaoh controlled all the land and resources. With absolute

authority, he oversaw annual harvests, built monuments to honor the gods, and made decisions about government, law, trade, and foreign policy. The pharaoh had to mirror the goddess Ma'at, who represented balance, justice, and truth in the universe. A large priesthood helped maintain this order by running the temples, performing rituals, and organizing festivals. They often held administrative positions in government, and sometimes became the pharaoh's trusted advisors. Since the pharaoh was unable to govern most regions of Egypt directly, he delegated various positions and responsibilities to royalty, advisors, and appointed officials. They were in theory directly responsible to him, but local mayors or temple priests and priestesses were sometimes quite powerful.