

The Slave

The slave sits up on a mat on the floor with his wife and children. It is early in the morning, and he has little time to get ready to work on the village mayor's fields. He puts on a coarse linen kilt, and cuts his hair short. He and his family put a little make-up around their eyes, and put on very plain clothes. His wife and two daughters hurry to a weaving shop to make linen for the mayor.

He stands in a long line of men while the mayor's servant counts them. After the servant finishes, some female slaves hand out small bags of bread and skins of water for them to have while they work.

As they walk to the mayor's fields, he eats his bread, and remembers to save some of the water for later. He chats with others about the weather, and as they approach the fields some leave to look after cattle, and he and the others collect wooden sickles to cut corn.

The slave spends the entire morning working, and takes a break when the sun is high. He finishes his bread and water, and fills his skin with water from a pool on the mayor's estate.

In the afternoon, he works with different teams to pick vegetables, which they put in baskets and carry to the noble's storehouse. The servant tells them to work quickly because the mayor is coming.

The mayor wears a very fine kilt. He says, "The harvest looks good this year."

The servant bows to the ground and says, "Thank you master."

At the end of the day, the slave returns home to catch fish in the Nile, and his wife and daughters bring home some grain and a few vegetables for dinner.

Early Egypt acquired slaves through war, trade, and people who sold themselves into slavery because of debt. Slaves could not own property, and their children became slaves of the owner. Although slaves were the lowest class in Egyptian society, they were better treated than in other societies. The most fortunate ones did menial work for royal families or high officials such as city mayors. On the fields of estates, they were often better off than free peasants who had to pay a portion of their produce as taxes. The least fortunate slaves worked in gold or copper mines, where some died.