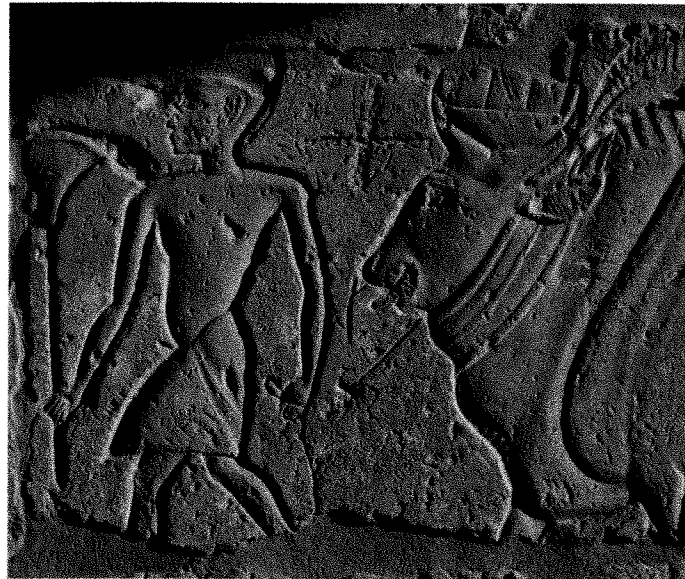


## 9.7 Peasants

Peasants made up the lowest and largest class in Egypt's social pyramid. They were generally considered unskilled laborers. Yet Egyptian society depended on their work. Peasants grew the crops that supplied everyone with food. When not busy working the fields, peasants helped build monuments like the pyramids.

**The Three Seasons of the Nile** Peasant life revolved around the Nile River. Its three seasons were the flooding season, the planting season, and the harvest season.

The flooding season lasted from June to September. During this time, the Nile overran its banks and fertilized the fields. Farmers had to wait for the waters to go down before they could work the fields. In the meantime, they labored on royal projects, such as building pyramids and temples.



This engraving shows a young peasant with his cow. Peasants worked hard to supply Egyptians with food.

In October, the planting season began, and farmers sowed their fields with seeds. The biggest crops were wheat and barley, which were used to make bread.

Peasants worked in pairs to sow the fields. The farmer softened the earth with a plow pulled by cattle. A second person, often the farmer's wife, followed behind to scatter the seeds. Throughout the season, farmers carefully irrigated the land.

The harvest season began in March. Usually the farmer's entire family helped with the harvest. The men cut down the plants with sickles (metal blades with short wooden handles). Then the women and children gathered the tall stalks of grain.

During harvest time, everyone worked from dawn to dusk. Peasants often sang songs to make the long hours of labor go more quickly. Sometimes, musicians played in the fields while the workers sang.

**The Daily Lives of Peasants** Peasants had the fewest comforts of any of the social classes. They lived in plain houses made of mud bricks. Their furniture was sparse, often just woven mats.

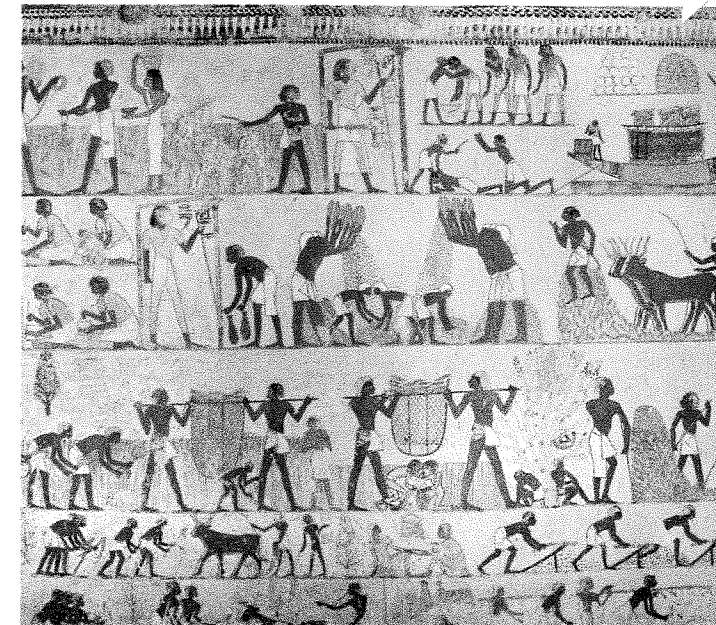
The peasants' diet was also simple. A typical daily meal might be made up of onions, cucumbers, fish, and homemade bread.

Peas and lentils were also common. Unlike the upper classes, peasants rarely ate meat. In times of famine, they often had to boil tough papyrus plants for food.

Peasants spent most of their lives working, but they did have some time for fun. Men enjoyed a river game that involved knocking each other off papyrus rafts. Holidays were celebrated before planting and after the crops were harvested. Peasants also took part in festivals held to honor the Egyptian gods.

An important time of year for peasants was the end of the harvest season. As a reward for their hard work, they were allowed to gather up any leftover grain and keep it for food.

But farmers could also be punished for a poor harvest. They had to pay taxes in the form of crops. If a harvest came up too short to pay the required tax, a farmer might be brutally beaten.



This painting shows peasants cutting and gathering the wheat harvest.

## Chapter Summary

**In this chapter, you learned about Egypt's social pyramid. Their social class determined the daily life of ancient Egyptians.**

**Government Officials** This was the highest social class after the pharaoh. Many officials were nobles who inherited their jobs, but some rose to power. Three key officials were the vizier, the chief treasurer, and the general of the armies.

**Priests** Priests were powerful and respected. They advised the pharaoh, oversaw religious ceremonies, took care of temple gods, and prepared bodies for the afterlife.

**Scribes** Scribes were Egypt's official writers and record keepers. They were well paid and respected. They trained for many years in special schools to learn hieroglyphs, Egypt's writing symbols. Boys from several social classes could become scribes.

**Artisans** These highly skilled laborers created beautiful objects but got little respect. Stone carvers were among the most skilled and important artisans.

**Peasants** This lowest and largest social class grew crops that supplied food and also helped build monuments such as the pyramids. Peasants' lives revolved around the three seasons of the Nile River.