

The background of the cover is a deep red color. On the right side, there is a close-up, high-contrast image of an ancient Egyptian woman's face, wearing a headdress with a cobra. On the left side, there is a stylized, layered image of the Great Pyramids of Giza. The title 'ANCIENT LIVES' is written in large, bold, light teal letters across the top half of the cover.

ANCIENT LIVES

A VIEWER'S GUIDE

Athenä:



EPISODE 1

Highlights

- Our knowledge of the tomb-makers' lives comes from the ruins of their village near Thebes, the artwork and artifacts found in their tombs, and ostraca—stone chips that the Egyptians used like notebooks.
- Rather than memorializing a pharaoh and his deeds, royal tombs served as bridges between the corporeal world and the afterlife, where the dead ruler would take his place among the other Egyptian gods.
- The artwork and sculptures in the temples and tombs required an entire community working in harmony, with everyone blending their skills and sharing a vision.

Questions to Consider

1. Why study ancient Egypt? How is archaeology relevant to modern life?
2. How do you imagine future peoples will interpret your daily life? What objects and structures will they rely on to form their conclusions?
3. Do you agree or disagree with Romer's observation that our civilization has lost the ability to create as a community? Do you see parallels between the



Deir el Medina, the tomb-makers' village

tomb-makers' work and the Internet-based collaboration of our time?

The People We Meet

Ramose: A scribe in the royal tombs from about 1275 to 1241 BCE, under Ramesses II. Ramose showed such talent as a boy that he earned a place at scribal school—a rare opportunity for a messenger's son. Scribe Huy adopted and trained him.

EPISODE 2

Highlights

- Linking heaven and earth, ancient Egyptian temples represented the reconciliation of life and death, the continuity of the state after a pharaoh died, and the annual rebirth of crops.
- In Egyptian thought, the pharaoh parceled out the land and its crops to the gods; after making a ritual offering, high priests redistributed this food to the people.
- Ramesses III lived in the royal court at the delta and left a weak bureaucracy to run Thebes, resulting in class divisions within the community.

Questions to Consider

1. How well do you think ancient Egypt's economy worked on a practical level? How did it differ from later economic communities, such as feudalism or communism?
2. Would you swap your 21st-century lifestyle for that of an ancient Egyptian tomb worker? Why or why not?

The People We Meet

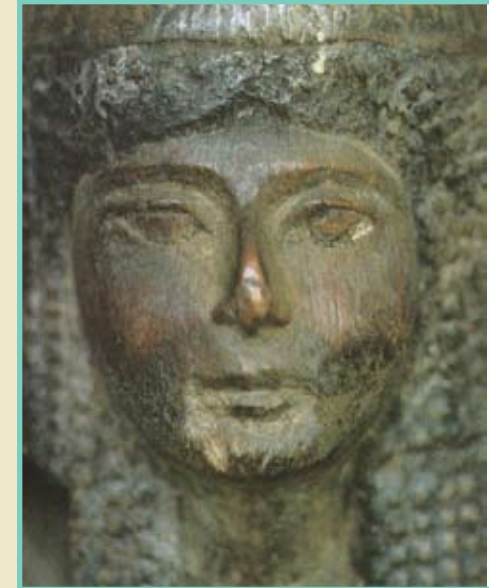
Paneb: The hot-tempered foreman of tomb workers from 1190 to 1175 BCE. His appointment sparked a feud with his predecessor's family, splitting the village into two factions. Accused of crimes ranging from adultery to theft, he was eventually executed.

Kenhirkhopeshef: Ramose's successor and senior scribe from about 1235 to 1191 BCE, he served under Pharaohs Ramesses II, Merneptah, Amenmesse, and Seti II. His extensive library contained the *Book of Dreams*, a papyrus scroll that gives great insight into the inner lives of ancient Egyptians.

EPISODE 3

Highlights

- Egyptian medical records, love poetry, and childbirth rituals demonstrate that women held relatively high status.
- Built with mathematical precision sometimes according to a Fibonacci sequence, Egyptian temples served as houses and processional venues for the gods—not necessarily as places of worship.
- Under scribe Amennakht and his son, Harshire, tomb art reached a stylistic and technical peak. However, Harshire lived to see the advent of tomb robbing, instigated by the tomb makers and their fellow villagers.



Votive statue of village woman

Questions to Consider

1. If archaeologists 3,000 years from now uncovered our medical records, birthing practices, and literature, what

- do you think they would conclude about the role of women in 21st-century North America? How would it compare with that of ancient Egypt?
2. How did Egyptian temple artwork differ, in both form and function, from later religious artwork in European churches and cathedrals?

The People We Meet

Amennakht: Senior scribe in the tomb-makers' village from about 1165 to 1135 BCE (middle years of Ramesses III's reign until Ramesses VI). Amennakht and his descendants served as scribes in the village for six generations.

Harshire: One of the senior scribes in the village during the reigns of Ramesses VII, VIII, and IX. When the vizier began to investigate tomb robberies, Harshire and his fellow scribe Pabes conspired to cover up the tomb-makers' involvement in the plundering.

EPISODE 4

Highlights

- After civil unrest during the Year of the Hyenas, Herihor restored order to Thebes. Still, scribe Djutmose and his son, Butehamun, recorded increased tomb raiding, even in remote sites.
- Tomb robbers took everything of value from burial sites, including jewelry they hacked off the corpses.
- Clues such as chisel marks on the cliffs and carefully carved footholds reveal the locations of ancient tombs in distant valleys.

Questions to Consider

1. What emotions do you imagine Howard Carter and other archaeologists felt when they crawled into long-lost Egyptian tombs for the first time? How would you feel?
2. In recent years, Egyptian authorities have requested the return or loan of certain artifacts, including the bust of Nefertiti from Berlin's Egypt museum and the Rosetta Stone from the British Museum. In your opinion, to whom do antiquities belong? Should foreign nations retain possession of past finds? Or does the home state have a greater right to discoveries?

The People We Meet

Djutmose: Senior scribe who ascended to his position during the Year of the Hyenas (1089 BCE), he led the village through some of its most difficult trials. His many surviving letters to his family demonstrate his great wit, understanding, and compassion and provide archaeologists intimate access to his life.

Butehamun: Son of Djutmose, Butehamun assumed leadership during his father's extended travels. He eventually succeeded his father as senior scribe and supervised the recovery and reburial of many kings whose tombs had been desecrated.

Herihor: A professional soldier and probably a Libyan mercenary, Herihor ruled Thebes as Southern Vizier and High Priest of Amun, appointed by Ramesses XI in 1080 BCE. Herihor attempted to restore good government at Thebes and initiated a renaissance in tomb making, wielding power in the south that rivaled that of the pharaoh himself.

AVENUES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

A huge quantity of books and articles that deal with the life and times of the villagers of Deir el Medina have appeared since *Ancient Lives* was first published in 1981. My book, which is still in print, contains a list of the basic source materials available at that time:

Romer, John. *Ancient Lives: Daily Life in Egypt of the Pharaohs*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1984. (Originally published in Great Britain under the title *Ancient Lives: The Story of the Pharaohs' Tombmakers*.)

Its bibliography, however, may now be updated at the Deir El Medina website, presently at www.leidenuniv.nl/nino/dmd/dmd.html. Further links to other authoritative Egyptological websites may also be found at www.ashmolean.org/Griffith.html.

The following are among the best of recent books that deal with the life and times of the Theban royal-tomb makers:

A.G. McDowell's *Village Life in Ancient Egypt: Laundry Lists and Love Songs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) offers a rich collection of English translations and commentaries.

"Just Like Us?," Barry Kemp's thoughtful review of McDowell's book, discusses whether or not the writings of the pharaoh's tomb workers are genuine reflections of universal human experience. (*Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 11, no. 1 (2001): 123-30.)

Edward Wente's fascinating *Letters from Ancient Egypt* also contains new translations of many of the villagers' writings. (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1990.)

Lynn Meskell's *Private Life in New Kingdom Egypt* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002) is largely concerned with life within the tomb-makers' village and represents attitudes to the subject that have arisen in Egyptology since *Ancient Lives* was made.

The sumptuous catalog of a major exhibition which was held in Paris, Brussels, and Turin during 2002–03, *Gli artisti del Faraone*, edited by Anna Maria Donadoni Roveri and Guillemette Andreu (Milan: Electa, 2003), contains very fine photographs of hundreds of things that the tomb makers made and used in daily life, and is a most splendid souvenir of that unique community.

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THE LIFE OF A SCRIBE

Learning to write put a scribe on easy street—
if he survived the training

Compared with most other ancient Egyptians, scribes had a good life. A blacksmith would have “fingers like the claws of a crocodile” and “stink more than fish roe” after work. A potter would “grub in the mud more than a pig, in order to fire his pots.” But a scribe never suffered, never lacked reward for his work—and never had to pay taxes.

Those descriptions come from *Satire of the Trades*, a famous text that scribes copied as part of their training. The slightly arrogant humor suited the scribes' special social status—not as powerful as temple priests, but higher than farmers, stonemasons, and other laborers. Scribes compiled records, tallied the harvests, and collected taxes. In the tomb-makers' village, they kept track of tools and materials, rationed food, and wrote daily reports. And as an educated class in a largely illiterate society, scribes also performed very personal services for their fellow villagers. When a peasant needed to compose a letter, formally petition for redress, or even offer a specific prayer to the gods, he went to a scribe to write it down.

Like other Egyptians, most scribes came to their occupation by following their fathers' footsteps. Training began at age five for boys. (And they were always boys; girls usually didn't learn to read and write.) They mixed pigments for ink, rubbed rough papyrus with a stone to create a writing surface, and made brushes from reeds. They mastered practical math for accounting. Most important, they memorized the Egyptians' 700-plus formal hieroglyphic symbols, as well as hieratic script. They learned by incessantly copying selected texts: sample correspondence, instructions on proper morals and behavior, and eventually manuals on government administration.






Scribe Butehamun, possible self-portrait on his coffin

The educational methods now seem downright cruel. As one scribe put it, schoolmasters beat pupils' backs so that words could enter their ears. Another recalled spending three months handcuffed in a temple—a motivational technique that apparently worked wonders. “When my hand was free,” he wrote, “then I surpassed all my comrades in books.” For their final years of training, the boys worked as apprentices to older scribes. If they did their work well, they could look forward to a life of respect and relative ease. What’s more, like the royal families and temple priests, they could become immortal. Since much of what we know about ancient Egypt we owe to the scribes, in one sense they certainly achieved their goal.

WRITE LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

The basics behind all those strange-looking symbols

If you’ve ever solved a rebus—a kids’ puzzle in which you sound out words through pictures—then you understand one of the basic principles of ancient writing.

As Romer explains in *Ancient Lives*, Egyptians of that era used two types of writing: hieroglyphics (the so-called picture-writing found on tomb walls and temples) and hieratic (the script found on documents). In hieroglyphics, some symbols represented the words that their pictures depicted; , for example, could mean literally “eye.” But the scribes communicated more abstract words by using the rebus method, in which the picture symbols represented sounds. Linguists refer to such symbols as “phonograms.” In an English rebus, for example, we might use  +  to indicate the word “belief.” Eventually, certain symbols came to represent specific consonant sounds, although the Egyptians didn’t use an alphabet in the same sense that we do. Another group of symbols, called determinatives, modified meaning or grammatical form. For instance, a particular determinant alongside the symbol for “man” might indicate its plural (“men”), while another might signify age (“young man” or “teenager”).

Egyptians read and wrote hieroglyphics vertically and horizontally. The direction the characters faced—left to right or right to left—signaled which way they should be read. Obviously, this flexibility came in handy when tomb makers had to artfully inscribe writing around doorways or down columns.

By contrast, hieratic developed as a fast, smooth way to write on stone or papyrus. Eventually, scribes used hieratic for almost everything except



From painting in the family vault of Foreman Anhirkawi and his family

army returned from Egypt with the Rosetta Stone—a relic inscribed with a government decree in three languages: classical Greek, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and demotic (a form of writing that developed in Egypt several hundred years after the era described in *Ancient Lives*). Relying on the work of previous researchers, French scholar Jean-François Champollion finally cracked the hieroglyphic code in 1822.

One thing still stumps Egyptologists, though. Neither hieroglyphics nor hieratic included symbols for vowels—so pronunciation remains a mystery.

inscriptions on buildings or monuments. Hieratic compared with hieroglyphics more or less the way cursive resembles print; it included ligatures and flourishes, simplified some complex characters, and distinguished look-alikes with diacritical marks. Unlike hieroglyphics, however, hieratic always read right to left.

How did Egyptologists figure all this out? Less than 200 years ago, scholars knew little about Egyptian writing. Then in 1799, Napoleon's

THE MAKING OF ANCIENT LIVES

by John Romer

Ancient Lives was one of the most unexpectedly happy things that ever happened to me. We shot the whole series in six weeks, working out of a Luxor hotel with a resident French chef and the best of company.

Five people shot the films. Along with two local drivers—old friends who had worked on my excavations—we walked miles every day, down into tombs and over the Theban hills, gossiping and stopping occasionally for me to do a camera piece. Usually, the eyes of TV presenters reveal hints of nervousness or agitation. There's nothing but real pleasure, though, to be seen in *Ancient Lives*; series director Peter Spry-Leverton saw to that, and Luxor was a gem, a simple and uncomplicated place whose people were helpful and considerate. I knew Thebes like the back of my hand and had worked in the Valley of the Kings for years, so we moved through that wonderful landscape with considerable ease.

Though it was not yet published and had no name, I had already spent two years writing the book of *Ancient Lives*, and I carried the original typescript with me on the shoot. (One late exhausted evening, I left it in a temple courtyard and returned the next day to find it soaked in dew and lying on a block of stone, just as I had left it.)

When I first proposed the series to the head of documentaries at Central TV, I said that I wanted to present ancient Egypt like the U.K. television show *Coronation Street*. That's apparent in the series as I take a long walk down the village's narrow high street, chatting about the people who had lived behind the front doors that I passed. I wanted to turn the ancient Egyptians back into human beings, to show the audience that the royal tombs of Thebes were marvelous and that the artists who worked on them had been real people living with their families in a real village.

Our director had previously worked on news documentaries rather than archaeological films. He brought a love of wide landscapes to the series and, above all, an insistence on a strong story line. “I’m switching off,” he would say when he thought I was straying off topic, and we’d start again. We would talk through the day’s filming at breakfast in the beautiful misty light beside the Nile, and at the “magic hour” before sunset he and our cameraman would film the golden river and the flocks of birds flying in the evening breezes.

In those days, the Valley of the Kings was little known, even less appreciated, and threatened by flooding, both by water and by an onslaught of tourists. I had much to say, and Peter let me say it; he brought a deal of skill to the finished product, so that it appears quite effortless.

Peter Greenhalgh, our ace cameraman, flew in from Cuba and did the whole shoot with a roll of Castro’s bank notes in his pocket. He began his filming career tied to the mast of a schooner sailing around the Horn. He was very proud of his profession, which he learned directly from his father, who had filmed the D-Day landings.

The films were cut in a small suite in London’s Soho. Editing was dirty work, the loose film attracting all the dust in the air. Before digitization, even simple things like fades to black had to be made by physically reshooting a projected image—sometimes over and over again to get it right. After we finished the films—which we had always called “Deir el Medina” after the ancient village—a small committee of publishers and film commissioners tried to concoct a modern title. They could not agree until my wife, Beth, finally suggested “Ancient Lives.”

At the risk of sounding immodest, the series’ effect was notable. It was the first TV series to treat individual ancient Egyptians in any depth and to put the ancient people back into their landscapes. According to a

counselor at the Egyptian embassy in London, tourism increased by 10 percent within a single season. Another bonus was the finding of the great Egyptian director Shadi Abdel Salem’s masterpiece, *The Night of Counting the Years*, from which we extracted clips for the last episode—and thus inadvertently prompted the use of actors in history documentaries. Shadi died young and most of his films were lost. Fortunately we found a good print at a London art cinema, where it had been shown on and off for many years.

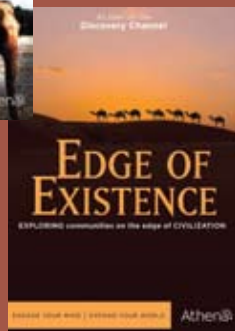
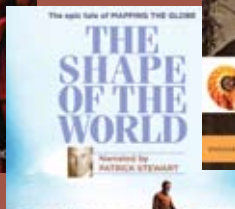
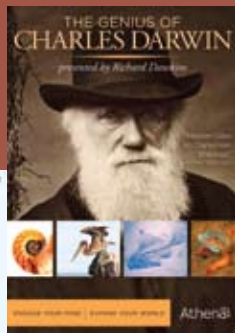
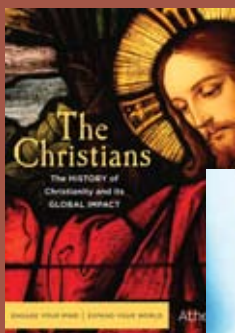
Greatest of all, however, was the impact *Ancient Lives* had on Egyptology. When we made the series, no archaeologists were working in the Valley of the Kings nor at Deir el Medina, and only a tiny number of scholars were studying the huge quantities of texts that had been written by the ancient villagers. Since then these areas have swelled into an international academic industry that has produced whole shelves of books and maintains a number of specialist websites. Most gratifyingly, several of these scholars have told me that *Ancient Lives* first inspired their interest in the subject.

As a recent academic article observed, many of these new scholars have taken the series at face value and assumed that the ancient people really were “just like us.” For myself, I never really thought they were. But it seemed vital for the conservation of those most beautiful places—which were so fragile yet had been so miraculously preserved—that they should be turned back again, away from Hollywood and academia, into real places: that they should be rejoined to humanity. This, I hoped, would be the first stage in their continuing conservation.

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