

3 PRIMARY SOURCES: THE APPRENTICE SCRIBE

Ancient Egypt needed many scribes. They recorded all kinds of information, such as quantities of crops harvested, mathematical calculations for pyramid building, quantities and types of imported and exported products, religious writing in temples and tombs and much more.

See for yourself with your own eye. The occupations lie before you.

The washerman's day is going up, going down. All his limbs are weak, [from] whitening his neighbours' clothes every day, from washing their linen.

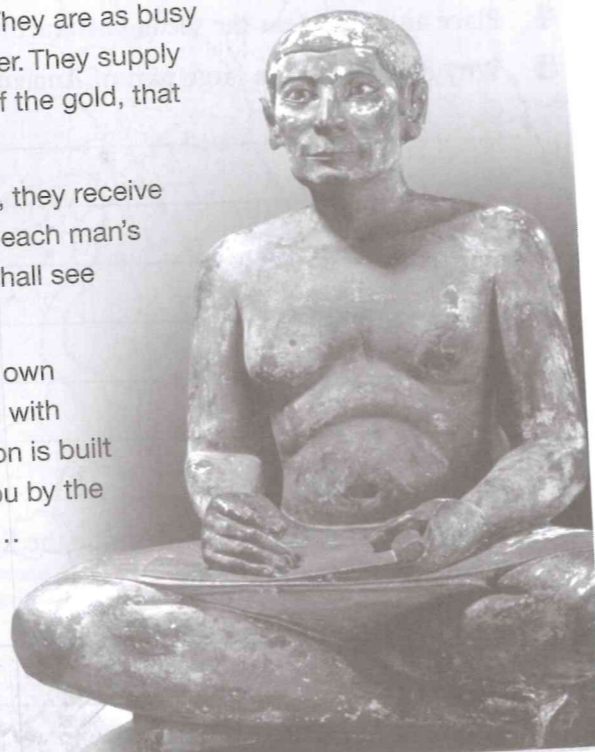
The maker of pots is smeared with soil, like one whose relations have died. His hands, his feet are full of clay; he is like one who lives in a bog.

The watchman prepares garlands and polishes vase-stands. He spends a night of toil just as one on whom the sun shines.

The merchants travel downstream and upstream. They are as busy as can be, carrying goods from one town to another. They supply him who has wants. But the tax collectors carry off the gold, that most precious of metals.

The ships' crews from every house [of commerce], they receive their loads. They depart from Egypt for Syria, and each man's god is with him. [But] not one of them says: 'We shall see Egypt again!'

Imagine this, you are dressed in fine clothes; you own horses. Your boat is on the river; you are supplied with attendants. You stride about inspecting. A mansion is built in your town. You have a powerful office, given you by the pharaoh. Male and female slaves are about you ... Put the writings in your heart, and you will be protected from all kinds of toil. You will become a worthy scribe.



SOURCE 3 An apprentice scribe compares his job with other jobs in Ancient Egypt. The extract is from Papyrus Lansing, twelfth century BCE, now held at the British Museum. The photo shows a seated scribe, 25–24th century BCE.

1 List all the occupations mentioned.

2 What was the disadvantage of being a washerman?

3 Identify and write two words or phrases used in the extract that make the work of the pot maker appear unpleasant.

4 The description of the potter's work makes reference to an Egyptian death custom. What was that custom?

5 What is a modern-day watchman called? Why do you think the scribe used this as an example of an undesirable job?

6 What did a merchant do to earn his income? What was the disadvantage of this job?

7 What does the scribe mean when he writes of ships' crews that 'not one of them says: "We shall see Egypt again!"'?

8 List all the advantages of earning an income by being a scribe.
