

Crafts and Trade

You are in a workshop where ancient Egyptian artists and craftspeople are creating many fine figurines, paintings, and statues.

Artists and craftspeople in ancient Egypt were highly skilled and well respected. Using simple tools, they produced objects in a variety of crafts. Craftspeople worked as sandal makers, stone carvers, leather workers, metalworkers, sculptors, weavers, carpenters, jewelers, potters, and painters. Most of them created works of art for the pharaohs, for members of wealthy families, or for the temples. Workers made jewelry with gold and stones, created highly finished furniture, and produced statues made of bronze, glass, and clay. Sometimes common villagers were able to obtain some of these finely made objects. They might travel into towns and exchange some of their extra farm produce for such treasured objects.

Most craftspeople were men, and many of them were taught from when they were very young. They often went to school at the pharaoh's palace, along with children of royalty. Those who became master craftspeople held a high status in society. Artists who worked for the royal and wealthy families, or for the temples, were well paid in food and other goods. Many of them lived much better than ordinary members of the lower classes.

Ancient Egyptians traded their crafts and resources with other countries and empires near and far. Cities and towns along the Nile River were great trade centers. Trade was controlled by the pharaoh. Egypt traded goods such as grain, gold, copper, linen, gemstones, and various minerals. In exchange, it received things it lacked, such as timber, iron, silver, tin, and lead. Goods were not paid for with currency or coin, but rather were exchanged for other goods.

Discussion Questions: What did craftspeople do, and what kind of training did they receive in ancient Egypt? What kind of crafts and goods did Egypt trade?