

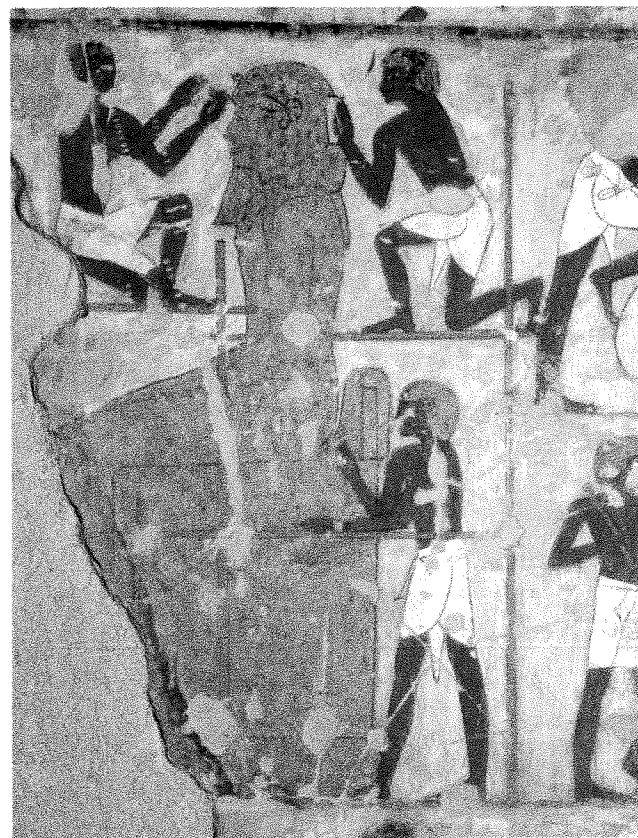
9.6 Artisans

Below the scribes on the social pyramid were the artisans. Egypt's artisans were highly skilled laborers who created some of the most beautiful art objects in the ancient world. Yet, unlike scribes, they rarely got respect from higher classes. Only the few who became masters at their craft were sometimes honored for their work.

Types of Artisans Artisans specialized in any one of a number of crafts. Workers in this class included carpenters, jewelers, leatherworkers, metalworkers, painters, potters, sculptors, and weavers. Artisans made many beautiful objects, including stunning jewelry and elegant furniture. Painters portrayed scenes of Egyptian daily life. Most artisans were men, but some women wove fabric, beaded clothing, and made perfume.

The most skilled artisans were the stone carvers. They produced the statues, engravings, and reliefs found in Egyptian temples, tombs, and monuments.

Stone carvers were some of the most skilled workers in the artisan class.

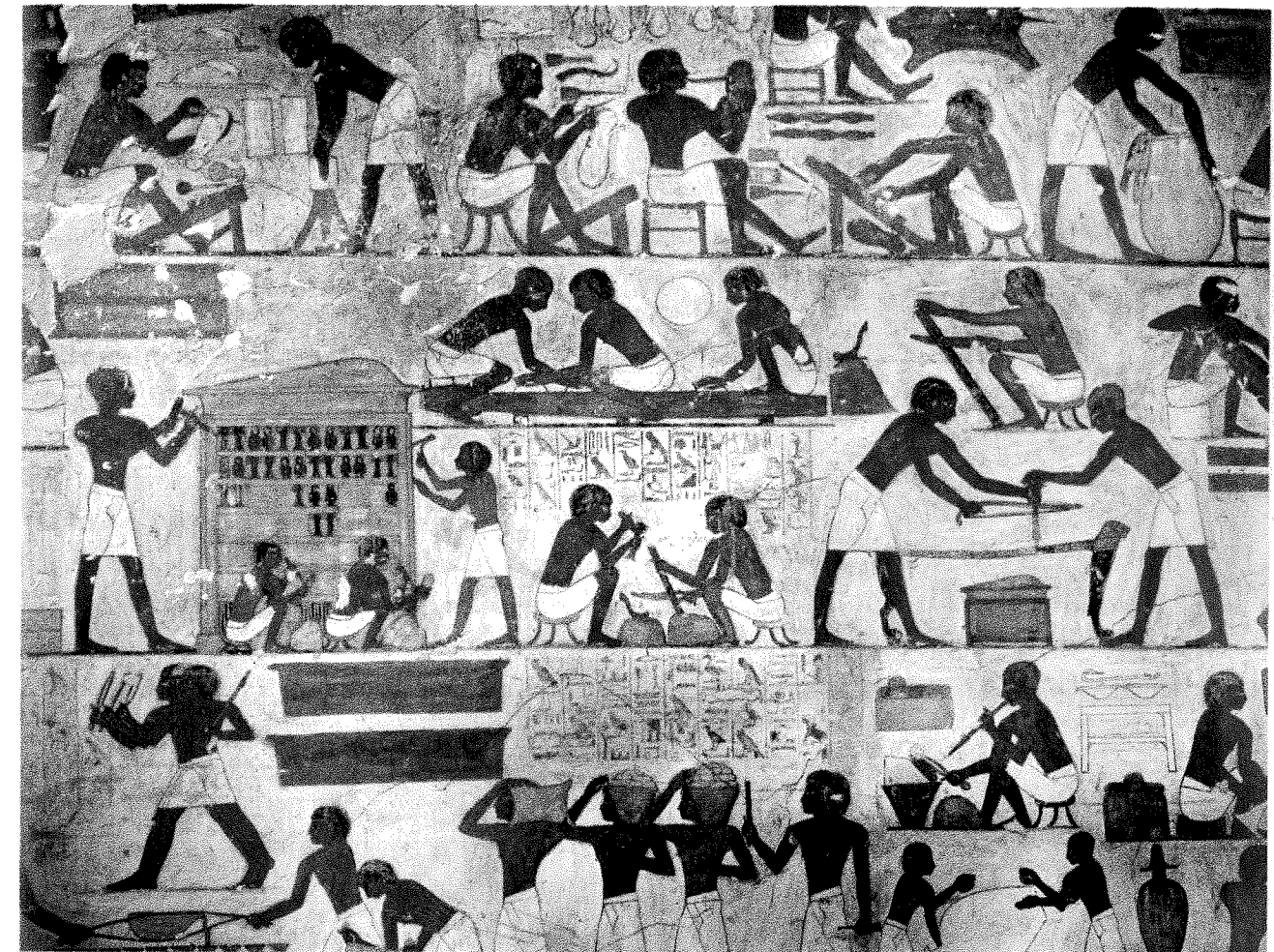


Stone carvers played an important role in tomb building. The belief in an afterlife inspired wealthy Egyptians to order elaborate tombs for themselves. Stone carvers helped equip the tombs with artworks to honor and preserve the dead. Artworks might include statues of the deceased, highly detailed wall engravings, and stone coffins.

Stone carving was demanding and time-consuming work. Carvers often worked with hard rock, such as granite. They used dolerite, another type of hard rock, to pound out an initial shape. Next, they refined the shape and carved in details, using stone tools and copper chisels. Then, they used quartz sand to smooth and polish the object. Painters often added color to the finished product.

The Daily Life and Work of Artisans

Artisans were a class toward the lower middle of society. They lived with their families in modest homes. Their houses were usually rectangular and barely 10 yards long. Three rooms stretched from front to back. The first room was used as a workroom or to house animals.



The living room came next. The final room was divided into a kitchen and a bedroom. The roof was sometimes used as another place to work or sleep.

Artisans typically worked side by side in big workshops. They usually worked for ten days at a stretch before taking time off. The workers depended entirely on their employers for food. In hard times, when food was in short supply, artisans often went hungry.

Pharaohs called upon hundreds of artisans at a time to work on royal projects. Artisans created the fine artwork that often covered temples, royal tombs, and other monuments. They worked in large groups to complete engravings, paintings, and hieroglyphics.

Despite artisans' skill and creativity, the upper classes often viewed them as little more than common laborers. Even the most talented artists were rarely allowed to sign their work. But some artists did receive recognition. Employers sometimes threw a banquet for their favorite artist. Occasionally, they honored an artist by letting him portray himself in a painting or an engraving.

This painting shows different types of artisans at work. Look carefully. What do you see?