

Ancient Egypt – The Economy (handout)

1) Agriculture

- Most important economic activity in Ancient Egypt b/c majority of population took part in farming.
- Farmers were paid by receiving a small portion of the crop (usually wheat or barley)
- Nile dictated everyone's life: At beginning of year, Nile flooded.
 - o Dams and canals had to be repaired/maintained in order to retain as much water as possible after the flood waters receded
 - o Flood waters also left behind fertile soil and as soon as surveyors marked out land with ropes (determined what landowners owed in taxes) and then labourers sowed seeds
 - o If Nile flooded too little = famine
 - o If Nile flooded too much = water destroyed dams and irrigation and could delay planting.
- during growing season, farmers had backbreaking jobs of moving water from irrigation canals onto existing fields.
- Often dug ditches that were separated from main canals by sluices.
- When tax assessor arrived to estimate potential crop yield and to calculate amount of taxes, men would go to work cutting grain with sickles and then carted them away in baskets for threshing.
- Even though grain farmers were most important, farmers also grew other crops as well: lettuce, beans, onions, figs, dates, grapes, melons, and cucumbers.
- Castor seeds and sesame seeds provided oil for cooking and skin lotions
- Many farms raised domestic animals such as cattle, ducks, geese, goats, and pigs for meat and donkeys for beasts of burden.



Fig. 1 – Ploughing the land



Fig.2 – Harvesting crop with Sickle

2) Industry

- Craftspeople operated small shops in towns and cities.
- Took advantage of resources and materials close at hand and produced much of the goods for the home and export markets.
- Furniture makers used local wood to make chairs and beds, weavers used local flax to make linen and other textiles.
- Potters used clay to produce bowls, vases and plates and brickmakers used mud from the banks to mould their bricks.
- Other urban craftspeople included carpenters, stonemasons, silversmiths, goldsmiths, boat builders and jewelers.
- Egyptians also worked as miners in rural areas and mined precious gems and metals which was important in many of their rituals.

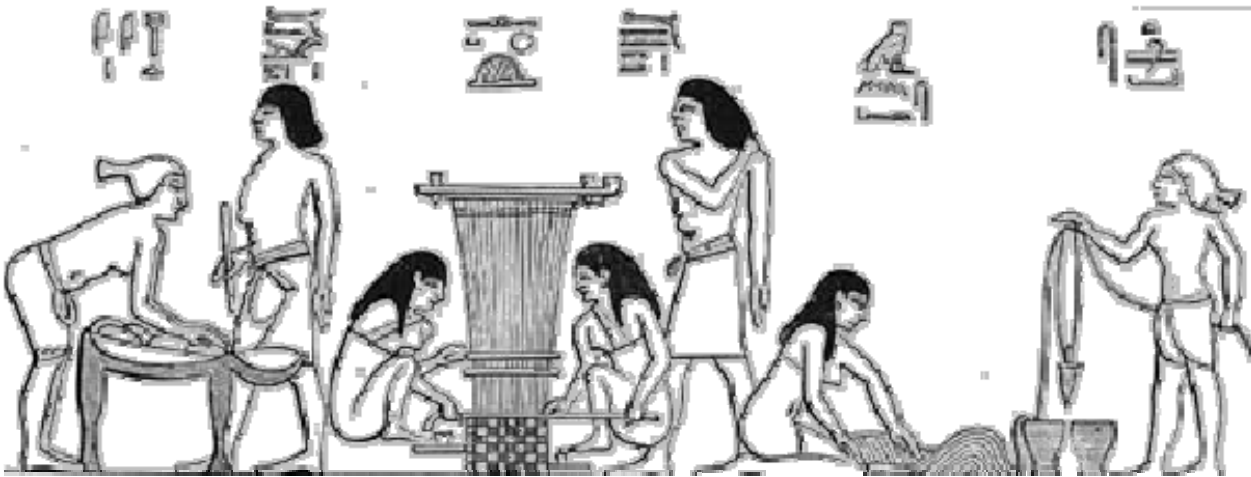


Fig.3 Tomb picture depicting weaving process.

3) Trade

- merchants working on behalf of the pharaoh or rich nobles began crossing the deserts by caravan, venturing up and down the Nile, and sailing to lands bordering the Aegean, Mediterranean, and Red Seas.
- Exchanged ideas and goods with Egypt's neighbours.
- Egyptian goods included: barley, wheat, wines, papyrus sheets, gold and other minerals.
- In exchange, received: silver, iron, horses, cedar logs, ivory, leopard skins, copper, cattle and spices.
- Trade allowed Egyptians to come into contact with peoples from Lebanon, Crete, Syria, Sumer and other parts of Africa and Asia.
- As people from different cultures met, enriched each other's civilization.

