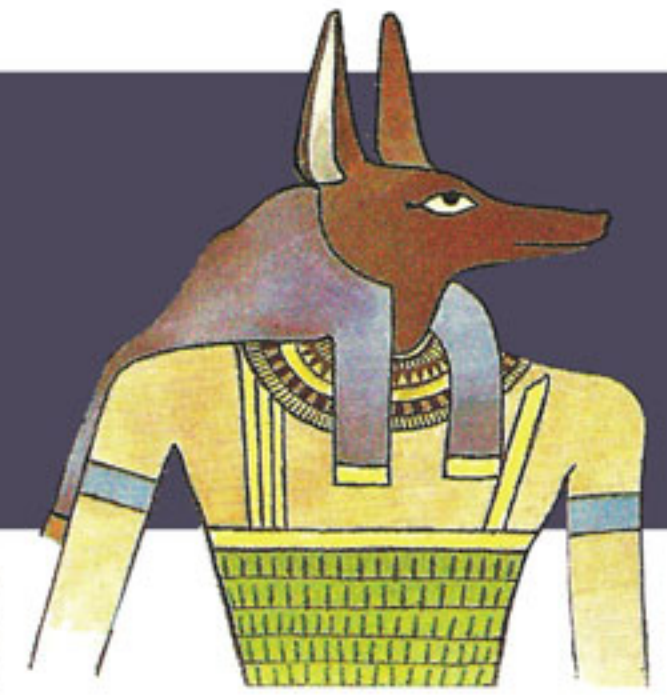


ARTS AND CRAFTS OF ANCIENT EGYPT



Painters, sculptors and carpenters were all considered craftsmen in ancient Egypt, although there was not a separate word for artist. Each was a specialist, and it took several specialists to create a piece. To make a statue it needed a quarryman to cut the stone block, a sculptor to shape it, an inscriber to add the crucial hieroglyphs, a metalworker to insert the rock crystal and amethyst eyes and a painter to finish it, for all statues were painted.

ARTISTS

The names of the artists whose works filled the tombs, temples and palaces of ancient Egypt are almost all lost because they did not sign their names. We know one name by accident - in one tomb scene he painted himself decorating a statue. An admirer later copied the painting and added his name: Houy.

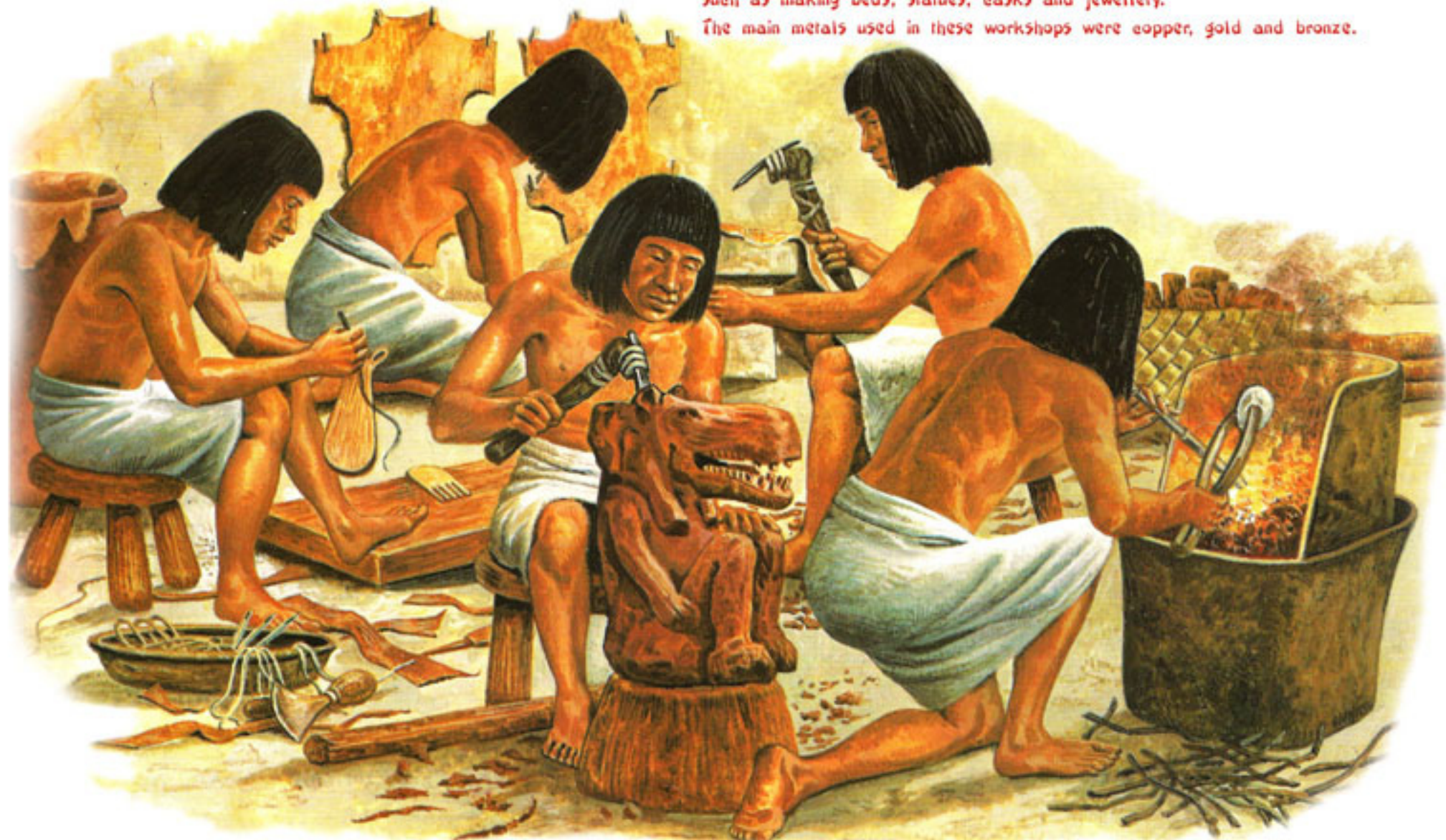
In tomb paintings craft workshops look clean and well-organized. In reality they must have been hot, noisy and crowded with crucibles of copper or pots of glue smoking over charcoal fires, dust from grinding drills filling the air and half-finished pieces passing from one worker to another. Most workshops were attached to temples or palaces, the craftsmen making pieces in their own time to sell privately.

There would have been a great deal of noise and dirt in a craft workshop. The craftsmen would be employed on a number of different crafts, such as making beds, statues, casks and jewellery. The main metals used in these workshops were copper, gold and bronze.

JEWELLERY

Everyone loved jewellery and wore as much as they could afford. Favourite stones were blue lapis lazuli, red carnelian and greenish-blue turquoise. A cheap substitute for lapis lazuli was made by firing copper ore and silica together to make rough glass, powdering it, sprinkling it into settings and melting it to make shiny inlays. When this powder was mixed with natron (sodium carbonate) and painted on clay dishes or beads and fired it was called faience.

Gold was mined in Nubia and the Eastern Desert where conditions were so terrible that criminals sent there to work rarely returned. All gold was sent to the pharaoh's workshops because it all belonged to him to do with as he pleased.



In the most expensive tombs the pictures were first etched on the walls and then painted. Most, like Sennedjem's, were just painted. Some were not finished in time for the person's burial, and parts of the red squares can still be seen on the walls of excavated tombs.

TOMB PAINTINGS

Tombs were also decorated by teams of craftsmen. First the wall was smoothed and coated with gesso. Then a grid of squares was marked by holding a length of twine coated in red ochre taut against the wall and giving it a twang. The size of the squares was based on the hand of the main painted figure - his hand filled one square. The outline scribe then drew the figures following rules made in about 3000 BC. Each part of the body fitted a certain number of squares. The whole figure was 18 squares high from the feet to the hairline. Arms were one square wide, eyes three-quarters of a square, legs from knees to feet were six. Tomb paintings were thought to be partly magic. Things painted were believed to become real in the afterworld so they had to be shown as clearly as possible. You could see the detail of animals, fish and trees best from the side, garden pools from above. Painters showed



baskets and tables from the side and piled the food up sideways into the air. Faces and legs faced the side, one eye, shoulders and chests faced the front and both big toes were put on the same side. In this way they could show all the important features at the same time.

For carved walls, squares were marked and outlines drawn as for painting. On outside walls the artists carved the outlines deep into the stone so the sun could make strong shadows. Inside, they carved away the background. All carved walls were painted but most paint has now worn away.

WOOD

Good quality wood from Lebanon was very expensive. Poor Egyptian-grown wood was made into statues but they had to be coated with gesso, a mixture of chalk and glue, to make a smooth surface for painting. Wooden furniture was often painted or inlaid with slivers of

ebony or ivory.

THE MEANING OF COLOUR

Paint was a mixture of glue and powdered minerals which is why it has not faded. Each colour had a meaning. Red (iron ore) meant evil, green (copper ore) resurrection, white (chalk) hope. Statues of the dead were painted black (lamp soot), meaning life in the afterworld, and the gods' flesh yellow (iron ore) to signify their golden skin.