RECORDS AND RECORD KEEPERS ON THE NILE

"Adoration to the Nile! Hail to thee, O Nile! Who manifest thyself over this land, Who cometh to give life to Egypt!"

Hymn to the Nile (c. 2100-1500 BCE)

I. Introduction

In our previous discussion we traced the rise of civilization in Mesopotamia. We also focused on how historians use laws to reconstruct the past. Today's discussion will examine the rise of civilization in Egypt. Egypt, like Mesopotamia, was a river valley civilization. The most dominant feature in Egypt was the Nile River. Its annual inundation was the source of life. Egyptians called the Nile Valley Kemet (the black land) because of the black silt deposited by the flooding of the Nile. The Greek historian Herodotus (c. 490-430 BCE) wrote in his *Histories* that Egypt "is, as it were, the gift of the river." Egypt was unified under one ruler and would have one of the longest lasting civilizations in the history of humankind. By the end of this discussion you should be able to do the following:

1. Identify ancient Egypt's historical periods.
2. Explain how historians have reconstructed Egypt's past.
3. Describe how the urban revolution was represented in ancient Egypt.
4. Explain what historians can learn about Egyptian society from the *Papyrus Lansing*.

II. The Periods and Sources of the Egyptian Past

A. Like Mesopotamia, Egypt too was located next to an abundant water supply, the Nile River. Its annual inundation was the source of life.

Map 322m01

1. Egyptians called the Nile Valley *Kemet* (the black land) because of the black silt deposited by the flooding of the Nile.

2. The Greek historian Herodotus (c. 490-430 BCE) wrote in his *Histories* that Egypt "is, as it were, the gift of the river." The Nile River was Egypt's lifeline.

3. Cultivated strips of land resided on both of its banks and its waterway served as channel of communication between settlements. Some of the earliest cities to appear in Egypt include Hierakonpolis, Memphis, and Thebes.

B. In contrast to Mesopotamia’s political history, Egypt moved early in its history toward the territorial state model.

1. The Archaic period witnessed the unification of Lower and Upper Egypt by Menes/Narmer (c. 3100 BCE).
2. The convention of dividing Egyptian history into dynasties has been derived from a variety of sources. Perhaps the most important source for this periodization was Manetho who lived in the 3rd century BCE.

**Timeline: Egyptian Periods/Dynasties**

**Archaic Period (c. 3150-2686 BCE) - Dynasties 0-2:** witnessed the unification of the unification of Lower and Upper Egypt by Menes/Narmer (c. 3100 BCE).

**The Old Kingdom (c. 2686-2181 BCE) - Dynasties 3-6:** Djoser (c. 2667-2648 BCE) was perhaps Egypt's most successful ruler during this period. Djoser's reign witnessed a major architectural achievement as the mastaba evolved into the step pyramid (Sakkara). This innovation, attributed to Imhotep (architect, advisor), set precedent for the Dynasty IV pyramids at Giza: Cheops (Khufu), Chefre (Khafre), and Mycerinus (Menkaure).

**The First Intermediate Period (c. 2181-2040 BCE) - Dynasties 7-11:** This period marked the collapse of central authority in Egypt. A breakdown of central authority allowed for nomarchs to become localized rulers.

**The Middle Kingdom (c. 2040-1782 BCE) - Dynasties 12-13:** Mentuhotep II (c. 2060-2010 BCE) brought unity to Egypt once again. Egyptian foreign policy focused during this period focused on Nubia. Senworsett III (1862-1843 BCE) conquered large sections of Nubia and established an Egyptian presence through the construction of forts.

**The Second Intermediate Period (1782-1570) - Dynasties 14-17:** Beginning at about c.1650 BCE, Egypt's eastern border was invaded by a people referred to as Hyksos. Scholars believe that Hyksos were a Semitic-speaking people who originated in the Near East. Their incursion into Egypt was perhaps driven by the search for food.

**The New Kingdom (c. 1750-1069 BCE) - Dynasties 18-20:** This period marked Egypt's imperial age. Fueled by the Hyko invasion, Egyptian rulers reorganized the military and went on the offensive. Campaigns were renewed in Nubia and military expeditions were sent into Palestine. The New Kingdom produced Akhenaten (Amenophis IV: r. 1379-1362 BCE), a ruler who introduced the cult of Aten (sun-disc/henotheism) and the period known as Amarna to Egypt's history. Egypt's most effective female ruler, Hatshepsut (1479-1457 BCE), also reigned during this period. She led a commercial expedition to Punt (Sudan).

**The Third Intermediate Period (1069-656 BCE) - Dynasties 21-25:** A Nubian Dynasty (772-656 BCE) headed Egypt during this period.

**The Late Period (656-332 BCE) - Dynasties 26-31:** Persian control of Egypt took place during the during the 27th and 31st dynasties. Egypt's final dynasty gave way to the Ptolemaic Period (c. 332-30 BCE), the Roman Period (c. 30 BCE-323 CE), the Eastern (Byzantine) Roman Period (c. 323-642 CE), and the Arab conquest (c. 642 CE).

a) His work *Aegyptica* divided Egypt's history into 30 dynasties, beginning with Menes and ending with Nectanebo II. These dynasties (two more have been added to Manetho's divisions) have been subdivided into "kingdoms". Unfortunately, no copy of *Aegyptica* has survived to the present.
b) We know about Manetho through the writings of Josephus's (c. 70 CE) *Against Appion*, Sextus Julius Africanus (c. 3rd CE), and Eusebius (c. 4th CE). Each has preserved parts of Manetho's work in them.

3. Collaborating evidence for parts of Manetho's dynastic breakdown can be found on the Palermo Stone (from Menes to Dynasty V), on the Karnak Table (c. 14th BCE), on the Abydos King List (c.13th BCE) and on the Canon of Kings (c. 13th BCE).

**Images 323i03/04: Palermo Stone and Abydos King List**

C. The discovery of the Rosetta Stone by the French in 1799 at the port of el Rashid/Rosetta was crucial to recovering knowledge about ancient Egyptian writing.

1. It is a Granite slab with hieroglyphs, demotic, and Greek inscribed on it.

   **Image 323i05: Rosetta Stone**

   a) The Greek section revealed that the text was a decree dated to the reign of Ptolemy V (196 BCE). It provided details about the lands and holdings of Egyptian temples.

   **Map 323m02**

   b) Credit for the final decipherment of hieroglyphs was given to Jean-Francoise Champollion (1790-1832).

2. Like with Mesopotamia, historians have a vast array of written sources available to them for reconstructing Egypt's history.

   a) For example, king lists such as the Palermo Stone (c. 2494-2345 BCE) and Saqqara/Sakkara Tablet (c.1306-1185).

   b) Also available are royal texts/inscriptions, decrees, instructions (teachings and prudent maxims), and literature.

3. The Written Language of the Egyptians

   **Hieroglyphic and Hieratic**

   The term hieroglyph comes from the Greek *hiero*, meaning "sacred," and *glyphika*, meaning "carvings". This script was primarily found on temples and religious structures. Several thousand individual signs were created, however, only about 800 were commonly used. Clearly, hieroglyphs were time consuming to produce and not truly an effective way to document everyday activities. Consequently, the Egyptians also used a cursive script known as *hieratic*. This term comes from the Greek word *hierattikos*, "priestly". Evidence suggests that scribes learned hieratic before progressing to hieroglyphs. The earliest extensive hieratic document dates back to Dynasty 5 (c. 2600 BCE) and the latest to the third century CE.
**III. The Socioeconomic and Political Organization of Egypt.**

A. The majority of Egypt's population was engaged in the production of food. Grain (barley and emmer wheat) production was the main agricultural activity. Craftspeople formed another sector of the population. They learned their trade through apprenticeships. Men held most craft positions. However, women did work in the textile industry and as potters.

**Image 323i07a/07b: Sculptors and Fishing**

1. Sources suggest that social mobility could primarily be achieved in two ways: literacy and military service.

   **Image 323i08a: War against Nubians**

2. Literacy opened a wealth of opportunities for advancement. The Papyrus Anastasi V notes that "Better is that trade [writing] than any other, it makes men great. He who is skilled in it is found fit to be an official."

   **Image 323i08b: Scribes**

3. Bravery in combat was another avenue for mobility as honors were bestowed upon those who fought valiantly in battle.

B. Egypt was a patriarchal society. Public life (government, civil service) was primarily the realm of men while a woman's domain was in private life.

1. Women in charge of large households managed a substantial community. Many of these households contained scores of servants, workshops for weaving, preparing food supplies, and making clothes, fruit and vegetable gardens, and so on.
2. Women in Egyptian society shared in the economic stability of the country. What made this possible was that women could inherit land. This also meant that women could be independent.

3. Women and men were equal before Egyptian law. We see this in text such as the following:

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Reading the Past

The Passing of Judgment

Year 1, Month 2 of the Summer Season, last day. On this day, the Citizeness Isis complained against the Workman Khaemipet, the Workman Khaemwast, and the Workman Amon-nakht, saying: "Let be given to me the property of Panakht my husband." Inquiry was made with regard to the opinion of members of the court and they said: "The woman is right." So she was given the property of her husband; in other words, she was taken for him.
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C. The Egyptian belief system and the Mesopotamian belief system shared many characteristics. For example, Egypt's belief system had a pantheon of gods (polytheistic) that were anthropomorphist. In the Egyptian world, rulers were presented as members of the divine order. In fact, the Egyptian ruler was an integral member of both the divine and human world as the maintainer of *Maat* (truth, right behavior, correct balance). Through Maat, he guaranteed the cosmic order.

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Table 1: Egyptian Gods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amon</td>
<td>State God of Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anubis</td>
<td>God of the Dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atum</td>
<td>Creator God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horus</td>
<td>Falcon God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isis</td>
<td>Great Mother Goddess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ptah</td>
<td>Patron of Craftspeople</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re</td>
<td>Sun god</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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1. Egyptians were very concerned with the afterlife. Death for Egyptians was a transition from life to eternal existence. Consequently, tombs for rulers and graves for commoners were prepared with items and foodstuffs to be used in an afterlife.

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Table 2: Composition of Soul

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soul</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ka</td>
<td>Life energy of a person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ba</td>
<td>Maintained link between the living world and the afterworld. It took the form of a bird with a human head.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Akh  Spirit that survived death and mingled with the gods.

a) Scholars believe artificial mummification was practiced as early as Dynasty 3. The soft organs were placed in canopic jars and the body was packed with dry natron (sodium carbonate).

b) Egyptian sources on mummification are scarce forcing historians to rely on classical authors such as Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus (c. 90-21 BCE) *Library of History* for details about the process. Below is a description of the mummification process in Herodotus's *Histories*.

### Reading the Past

**Herodotus, *Histories***

The mode of embalming, according to the most perfect process, is the following:- They take first a crooked piece of iron, and with it draw out the brain through the nostrils, thus getting rid of a portion, while the skull is cleared of the rest by rinsing with drugs; next they make a cut along the flank with a sharp Ethiopian stone, and take out the whole contents of the abdomen, which they then cleanse, washing it thoroughly with palm wine, and again frequently with an infusion of pounded aromatics. After this they fill the cavity with the purest bruised myrrh, with cassia, and every other sort of spicery except frankincense, and sew up the opening. Then the body is placed in natrum for seventy days, and covered entirely over. After the expiration of that space of time, which must not be exceeded, the body is washed, and wrapped round, from head to foot, with bandages of fine linen cloth, smeared over with gum, which is used generally by the Egyptians in the place of glue, and in this state it is given back to the relations, who enclose it in a wooden case which they have had made for the purpose, shaped into the figure of a man. Then fastening the case, they place it in a sepulchral chamber, upright against the wall. Such is the most costly way of embalming the dead. If persons wish to avoid expense, and choose the second process, the following is the method pursued:- Syringes are filled with oil made from the cedar-tree, which is then, without any incision or disembowelling, injected into the abdomen. The passage by which it might be likely to return is stopped, and the body laid in natrum the prescribed number of days. At the end of the time the cedar-oil is allowed to make its escape; and such is its power that it brings with it the whole stomach and intestines in a liquid state. The natrum meanwhile has dissolved the flesh, and so nothing is left of the dead body but the skin and the bones. It is returned in this condition to the relatives, without any further trouble being bestowed upon it. The third method of embalming, which is practised in the case of the poorer classes, is to clear out the intestines with a clyster, and let the body lie in natrum the seventy days, after which it is at once given to those who come to fetch it away."

2. The *Book of the Dead* is composed of funerary texts for the benefit of the dead. It includes spells, incantations, hymns, litanies, and prayers. It was mean to secure the safe passage of the deceased to afterlife. Below is a fragment from a chapter from *The Book of the Dead*.

**Image 323i09: Book of the Dead**
Reading the Past

*Book of the Dead, Chapter 25: The Negative Confession*

Hail, Usekh-nemmt, who comest forth from Anu, I have not committed sin. Hail, Hept-khet, who comest forth from Kher-aha, I have not committed robbery with violence. Hail, Fenti, who comest forth from Khemenu, I have not stolen. Hail, Am-khaibit, who comest forth from Qernet, I have not slain men and women. Hail, Neha-her, who comest forth from Rasta, I have not stolen grain. Hail, Ruruti, who comest forth from heaven, I have not purloined offerings. Hail, Arfi-em-khet, who comest forth from Suat, I have not stolen the property of God. Hail, Neba, who comest and goest, I have not uttered lies. Hail, Set-qesu, who comest forth from Hensu, I have not carried away food. Hail, Utunesert, who comest forth from Het-ka-Ptah, I have not uttered curses. Hail, Qerrti, who comest forth from Amentet, I have not committed adultery . . . Hail, Khemiui, who comest forth from Kaui, I have not transgressed [the law] . . . Hail, Ari-em-ab-f, who comest forth from Tebu, I have never stopped [the flow of] water. Hail, Uatch-rekhit, who comest forth from Sau, I have not cursed God. Hail, Neheb-ka, who comest forth from thy cavern, I have not acted with arrogance. Hail, Neheb-nefert, who comest forth from thy cavern, I have not stolen the bread of the gods. Hail, An-tf, who comest forth from Maati, I have not snatched away the bread of the child, nor treated with contempt the god of my city. Hail, Hetch-abhu, who comest forth from Ta-she (the Fayyum), I have not slain the cattle belonging to the god.

c. During Dynasty 18, Akhenaten elevated the Aten to supreme place in the pantheon of gods (henotheism). Many scholars argue that Akhenaten attempted to move Egypt towards monotheism. Below is a hymn to Aten inscribed on the West wall of the tomb of Ay at Tell el-Amarna. This hymn is often compared to Psalms 104.

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Image 323i10: Aten

Reading the Past

*The Great Hymn to the Aten*

"When you set in western lightland, Earth is in darkness as if in death; One sleeps in chambers, heads covered, One eye does not see another, Were they robbed of their goods, That are under their heads, People would not remark it, Every lion comes from its den, All the serpents bite; Darkness hovers, earth is silent, As their maker rests in lightland. Earth brightens when you dawn in lightland, When you shine as Aten of daytime; As you cast your rays, The Two Lands are in festivity. Awake they stand on their feet, You have roused them; Bodies cleansed, clothed, Their arms adore your appearance. The entire land sets out to work, All beasts browse on their herbs; Trees, herbs are sprouting, Birds fly from their nests, Their wings greeting your ka, All flocks frisk on their feet, All that fly up and alight, They live when you dawn for them. Ships fare north, fare south as well,
Roads lie open when you rise; The fish in the river dart before you, Your rays are in the midst of the sea. Who makes seed grow in women, Who creates people from sperm; Who feeds the son in his mother's womb, Who soothes him to still his tears. Nurse in the womb, Giver of breath, To nourish all that he made, When he comes from the womb to breathe, On the day of his birth, You open wide his mouth, You supply his needs. When the chick in the egg speaks in the shell, You give him breath within to sustain him; When you have made him complete, To break out from the egg, He comes out from the egg, To announce his completion, Walking on his legs he comes from it.

D. Egyptian rulers (Greek: Pharaoh = *per-a'a*: Egyptian word for residence of ruler) were central to both government and religion.

1. They were the Son of Re and the maintainer of *Maat* (truth, right behavior, correct balance).
   
a) They were the incarnation of sacred power and guaranteed the cosmic order.

b) The vizier headed Egyptian administration. Departments of state aided in the administration of the Egyptian state.

   **Table 3: Examples of Departments**

   - Overseer of the treasury
   - Over-seer of all the works of the king
   - Overseer of the granaries
   - Overseer of the king's documents

   **Image 323i11**: Egyptian Administrator

2. At the local level, Egypt's government was composed of a series of administrative districts called *sepats* (nomes).

   a) The *Abu Sir Papyrus* (dated to the reign of Niuserre: Dynasty 5) notes that Egypt was divided into forty-two sepats. Sepats were headed by chief administrators (nomarchs).

   b) Essentially, the sepat was a miniature version of the state, with its own treasury, court of justice, land office, service for the maintenance of dikes and canals, militia and a host of scribes who compiled records for the provincial archives.

3. Egypt's economy was primarily agriculture based. Egypt had no coinage (currency) and transactions were made through barter, or by using grain. Much of what was taxed was redistributed to farmers who also served as laborers.
a) Trade was controlled by the state. Egyptians traded with a variety of regions. In many cases, they served as the middle person between Africa and the Near East.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: What was Traded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nubia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byblos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV. Papyrus and Scribes

A. At about 70 CE, the Roman Pliny the Elder wrote the following: "The nature of papyrus too is to be recounted, for on its use as rolls human civilization depends, at the most for its life, and for its memory."

1. Scholars believe the term papyrus is derived from pa-en-peraa meaning "material of Pharaoh."

2. Egyptian papyrus was manufactured from a sub-species of *Cyperus Papyrus* that no longer is with us today. Egyptians referred to it as *mehyt* or *tjufy*.

B. Scholars estimate that 1 to 5% of the population was literate in Egyptian society. Education was cherished in the Egyptian world for obvious reasons. It was a means of accessing social mobility or economic security. The scribal profession appears to have been open to all Egyptian males.

Image 322i12: Scribes

1. A scribe could participate in the civil service as mid-level managers where work attendance, wages paid, kinds and quantities of spoils seized, and accounts of Egyptian stocks and reserves all needed to be recorded. This made taxation and redistribution of goods possible.

Image 322i13: Rhind Math Papyrus

2. In the private sector, scribes served the ordinary Egyptian by drawing up wills and marriage contracts, purchases, loans, and sales. Letters and other private documents were also handled by the scribe for the illiterate masses.

C. Below is a fragment from a papyrus referred to as *Lansing* (c. 1200 BCE). This source not only gives us insights about the Egyptian scribal profession, but it also gives us a peek into the lives of other professions as well. As you analyze this source, be sure to address the following questions:

1. What type of source do you believe the Papyrus Lansing is?

2. Why do you believe it was written?
3. What can historians learn about Egyptian professions from this source?

**Papyrus Lansing**

[Beginning of the instruction in letter-writing made by the royal scribe and chief overseer of the cattle of Amen-Re, King of Gods, Nebmare-nakht] for his apprentice, the scribe Wen-emdiamun.

Praise of the Scribe's Profession

[The royal scribe] and chief overseer of the cattle of Amen-Re, King of Gods, Nebmare-nakht speaks to the scribe Wenemdiianun. [Apply yourself to this] noble profession .... You will find it useful .... You will be advanced by your superiors. You will be sent on a mission .... Love writing, shun dancing; then you become a worthy official. Do not long for the marsh thicket. Turn your back on throw stick and chase. By day write with your fingers; re-cite by night. Befriend the scroll, the palette. It pleases more than wine. Writing for him who knows it is better than all other professions. It pleases more than bread and beer, more than clothing and ointment. It is worth more than an inheritance in Egypt, than a tomb in the west.

Advice to the Unwilling Pupil

Young fellow, how conceited you are! You do not listen when I speak. Your heart is denser than a great obelisk, a hundred cubits high, ten cubits thick. When it is finished and ready for loading, many work gangs draw it. It hears the words of men; it is loaded on a barge. Departing from Yebu it is conveyed, until it comes to rest on its place in Thebes.

So also a cow is bought this year, and it plows the following year. It learns to listen to the herdsman; it only lacks words. Horses brought from the field, they forget their mothers. Yoked they go up and down on all his majesty's errands. They become like those that bore them, that stand in the stable. They do their utmost for fear of a beating.

But though I beat you with every kind of stick, you do not listen. If I knew another way of doing it, I would do it for you, that you might listen. You are a person fit for writing, though you have not yet known a woman. Your heart discerns, your fingers are skilled, your mouth is apt for reciting.

Writing is more enjoyable than enjoying a basket of... and beans; more enjoyable than a mother's giving birth, when her heart knows no distaste. She is constant in nursing her son; her breast is in his mouth every day. Happy is the heart of him who writes; he is young each day.

The Idle Scribe Is Worthless

The royal scribe and chief overseer of the cattle of Amen-Re, King of Gods, Nebmare-nakht, speaks to the scribe Wenemdiianun, as follows. You are busy coming and going, and don't think of writing. You resist listening to me; you neglect my teachings.

You are worse than the goose of the shore, that is busy with mischief. It spends the summer destroying the dates, the winter destroying the seed-grain. It spends the balance
of the year in pursuit of the cultivators. It does not let seed be cast to the ground without
snatching it? In its fall? One cannot catch it by snaring. One does not offer it in the
temple. The evil, sharp-eyed bird that does no work!

You are worse than the desert antelope that lives by running. It spends no day in plowing.
Never at all does it tread on the threshing-floor. It lives on the oxen's labor, without
entering among them. But though I spend the day telling you "Write," it seems like a
plague to you. Writing is very pleasant!...

All Occupations Are Bad Except That of the Scribe

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 neighbors' 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 the bog.

The cobbler mingles with vats. His odor is penetrating. His hands are red with mad-der,
like one who is smeared with blood. He looks behind him for the kite, like one whose
flesh is exposed.

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 de-part
from Egypt for Syria, and each man's god is with him. (But) not one of them says: "We
shall see Egypt again!"

The carpenter who is in the shipyard carries the timber and stacks it. If he gives to-day
the output of yesterday, woe to his limbs! The shipwright stands behind him to tell him
evil things.

His out-worker who is in the fields, his is the toughest of all the jobs. He spends the day
loaded with his tools, tied to his tool-box. When he returns home at night, he is loaded
with the tool-box and the timbers, his drinking mug, and his whetstones.

The scribe, he alone, records the output of all of them. Take note of it!

The Misfortunes of the Peasant

Let me also expound to you the situation of the peasant, that other tough occupation.
[Comes] the inundation and soaks him .... he attends to his equipment. By day he cuts his
farming tools; by night he twists rope. Even his midday hour he spends on farm labor. He
equips himself to go to the field as if he were a warrior. The dried field lies before him;
he goes out to get his team. When he has been after the herdsman for many days, he gets
his team and comes back with it. He makes for it a place in the field. Comes dawn, he
goes to make a start and does not find it in its place. He spends three days searching for
it; he finds it in the bog. He finds no hides on them; the jackals have chewed them. He
comes out, his garment in his hand, to beg for himself a team.

When he reaches his field he finds <it> ? broken up? He spends time cultivating, and the
snake is after him. It finishes off the seed as it is cast to the ground. He does not see a
green blade. He does three plowings with borrowed grain. His wife has gone down to the
merchants and found nothing for ? barter. ? Now the scribe lands on the shore. He
surveys the harvest. Attendants are behind him with staffs. Nubians with clubs. One says
(to him): "Give grain." where is none." He is beaten savagely. He is bound, thrown in the
well, sub-merged head down. His wife is bound in his presence. His children are in
fetters. His neighbors abandon them and flee. When it's over, there's no grain.

If you have any sense, be a scribe. If you have learned about the peasant, you will not be
able to be one. Take note of it!...

The Scribe Does Not Suffer Like the Soldier

Furthermore. Look, I instruct you to make you sound; to make you hold the palette freely.
To make you become one whom the king trusts; to make you gain entrance to treasury
and granary. To make you receive the ship-load at the gate of the granary. To make you
issue the offerings on feast days. 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 king. Male
and female slaves are about you. Those who are in the fields grasp your hand, on plots
that you have made.

The southern border of ancient Egypt stopped at the First Cataract, near present-day
Aswan. This area was known as Nubia, to which the Egyptians traveled for trade in oils,
spices, and gold during the Old Kingdom. Later, during the Middle and New Kingdom,
the Egyptians ruled Nubia as a province.

Look, I make you into a staff of life! Put the writings in your heart, and you will be
protected from all kinds of toil. You will become a worthy official.

Do you not recall the (fate of) the unskilled man? His name is not known. He is ever
burdened <like an ass carrying> in front of the scribe who knows what he is about.

Come, <let me tell> you the woes of the soldier, and how many are his superiors: the
general, the troop-commander, the officer who leads, the standard-bearer, the lieutenant,
the scribe, the commander of fifty, and the garrison-captain. They go in and out in the
halls of the palace, saying: "Get laborers!" He is awakened at any hour. One is after him
as (after) a donkey. He toils until the Aten (sun) sets in his darkness of night. He is
hungry, his belly hurts; he is dead while yet alive. When he receives the grain-ration,
having been re-leased from duty, it is not good for grinding.

He is called up for Syria. He may not rest. There are no clothes, no sandals. The weapons
of war are assembled at the fortress of Sile. His march is uphill through mountains. He
drinks water every third day; it is smelly and tastes of salt. His body is ravaged by illness.
The enemy comes, surrounds him with missiles, and life recedes from him. He is told:
"Quick, forward, valiant soldier! Win for yourself a good name!" He does not know what he is about. His body is weak, his legs fail him. When victory is won, the captives are handed over to his majesty, to be taken to Egypt. The foreign woman faints on the march; she hangs herself <on> the soldier's neck. His knapsack drops, another grabs it while he is burdened with the woman. His wife and children are in their village; he dies and does not reach it. If he comes out alive, he is worn out from marching. Be he at large, be he detained, the soldier suffers. If he leaps and joins the deserters, all his people are imprisoned. He dies on the edge of the desert, and there is none to perpetuate his name. He suffers in death as in life. A big sack is brought for him; he does not know his resting place.

Be a scribe, and be spared from soldiering! You call and one says: "Here I am." You are safe from torments. Every man seeks to raise himself up. Take note of it!