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Scribe's Exercise Board with Hieratic Writing

Edward Bleiberg: Scribes were among the most important people in ancient Egypt because they were able to control the messages that were sent from one place to another. Although many kings claimed that they knew how to read and write, they seem to have always depended on their scribes to write out decrees, write out laws, do all the things that we think of lawyers doing in modern times.

Arnold Lehman: Take a look at the rectangular object in the center of this case.

Edward Bleiberg: This is a writing board that was used by a scribe to make notes on or to practice on. It's written in hieratic. Hieratic is a simplified or a cursive version of hieroglyphics, and actually it was what was used much more often than hieroglyphics by the ancient Egyptians. If you look at the first line, right in the middle, you'll see an eye. And right above the eye is a dot. The dot is like a period. The text that you see written out here is a wisdom text that gives people advice about what the proper way is to act.

In this case there is also a statue of a headless scribe who is sitting cross-legged, the typical position for a scribe. And they would put down on their lap either a piece of papyrus, like you see in this sculpture, or a writing board, like the one in this case. The scribe is holding the document so that the person facing him can read it.