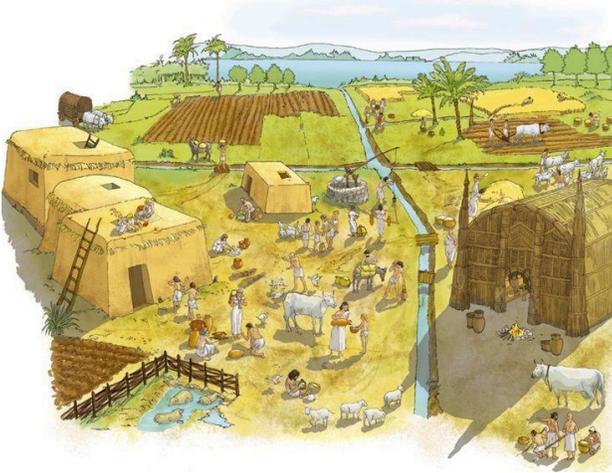


# 1 - Stable Food Supply



Civilizations need a stable food supply since a complex society can only thrive if its members have the food they need to survive. The Sumerians invented two key ideas to help them create a stable food supply. One of these inventions was their complex irrigation systems. The

Sumerians built networks of canals, dams, and reservoirs to provide their crops with a regular water supply.

Their second invention was the plow, which is a tool used for tilling, or turning, soil to prepare it for planting. Prior to the plow's invention, farmers used animal horns or pointed sticks to poke holes in the earth, where they would plant seeds. This was a very time-consuming process, and farmers needed a faster way to prepare the land for planting. The Sumerians made the first plow

out of wood. One end of the plow was bent for cutting into the ground to turn the soil. Farmers themselves either pushed and pulled the plow along the ground or used

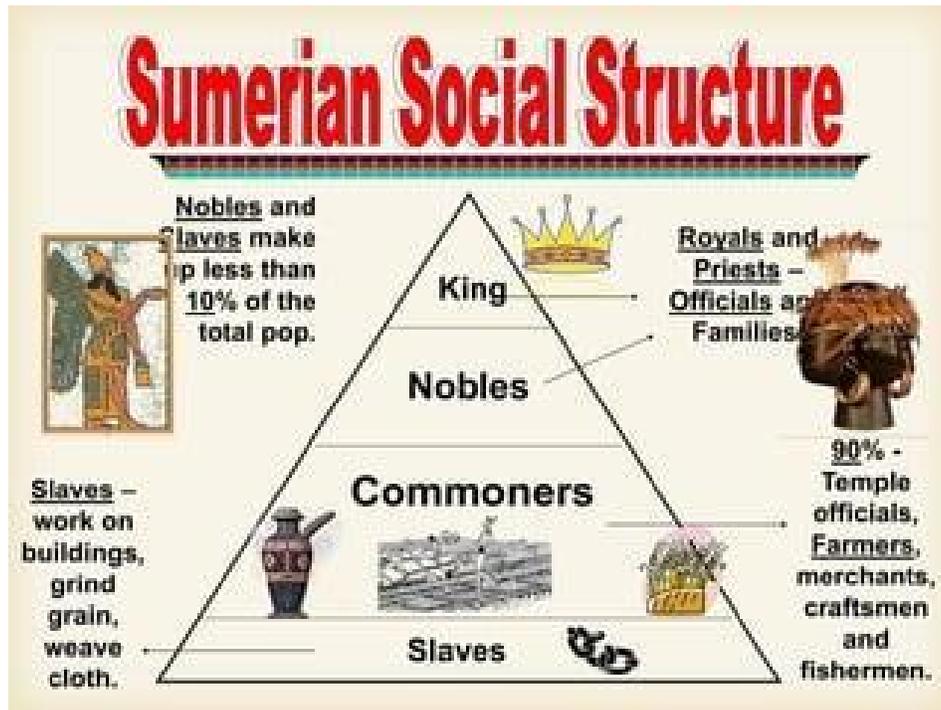
animals such as oxen to pull it.



## 2 - Social Structure

Civilizations have a complex organization, or social structure, including different jobs and social levels. People at higher levels have greater status than others. Archaeologists have found evidence suggesting that several classes of people lived in Sumer. At the highest level were priests, kings, nobles, and government officials. These top members of society had the largest and most luxurious homes near the center of the city. Evidence suggests that these mud houses had whitewashed walls and were typically two stories high.

At the middle level were merchants and artisans. Among the artisans were skilled metalworkers, who used such metals as gold, silver, tin, lead, copper, and bronze. Since Mesopotamian land had few minerals, Sumerians imported these materials from Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) and the Elamites on the Iranian plateau. Out of these materials, they could create swords and arrowheads for the army. They engineered tools, like plows and hoes, for farmers, as well as luxury items, such as mirrors and jewelry, for the upper class. The middle class also included farmers and fishers living in small, mud-brick houses at the edge of the city. Farmers often worked to build or repair the irrigation systems. At the bottom level of the social structure were slaves. Most slaves were enemies that the Sumerians had captured during war.



## 3 - Government

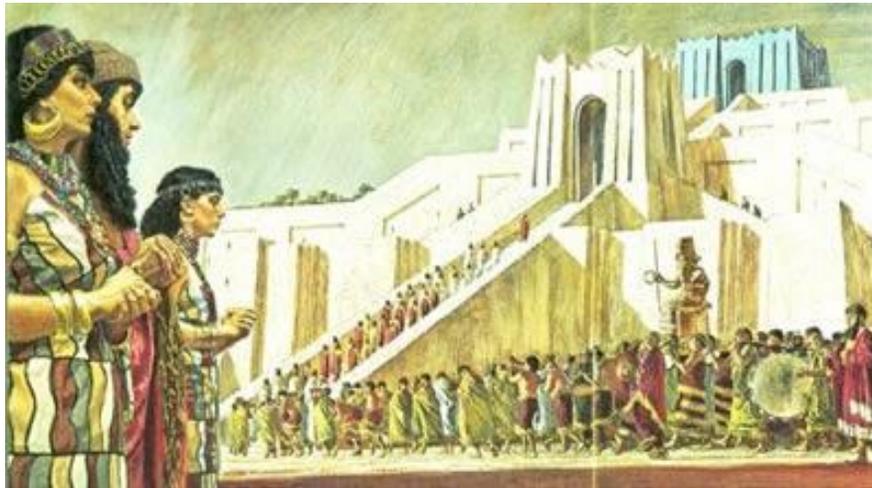


All civilizations have a system of government to direct people's behavior and make life orderly. Kings ruled the Sumerian city-states. The Sumerians believed that their gods supported these kings. This belief made kings very powerful. It also helped to reinforce

the social order because obeying the will of the gods was one of the Sumerians' strongest beliefs. Sumerian kings enforced the laws and collected taxes. They built temples and made sure irrigation systems were maintained.

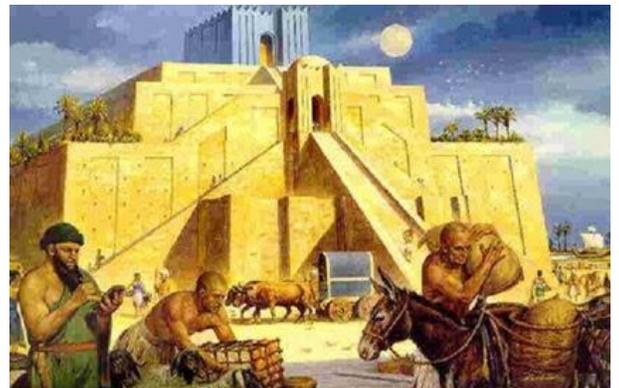
A king also led his city-state's army. All the city-states needed armies for various reasons. Some were defending land boundaries and others were fighting over the use of water. Leading the army was one of the king's most important jobs. A Sumerian army included both professional soldiers and temporary citizen-soldiers. Some were foot soldiers, while others drove

chariots, which were wheeled vehicles pulled by oxen. Kings appointed officials to help with certain duties. Governors ruled the outlying towns, and scribes helped record laws as well as contracts. The Sumerians were the first people to develop a system of written laws.



## 4 - Religion

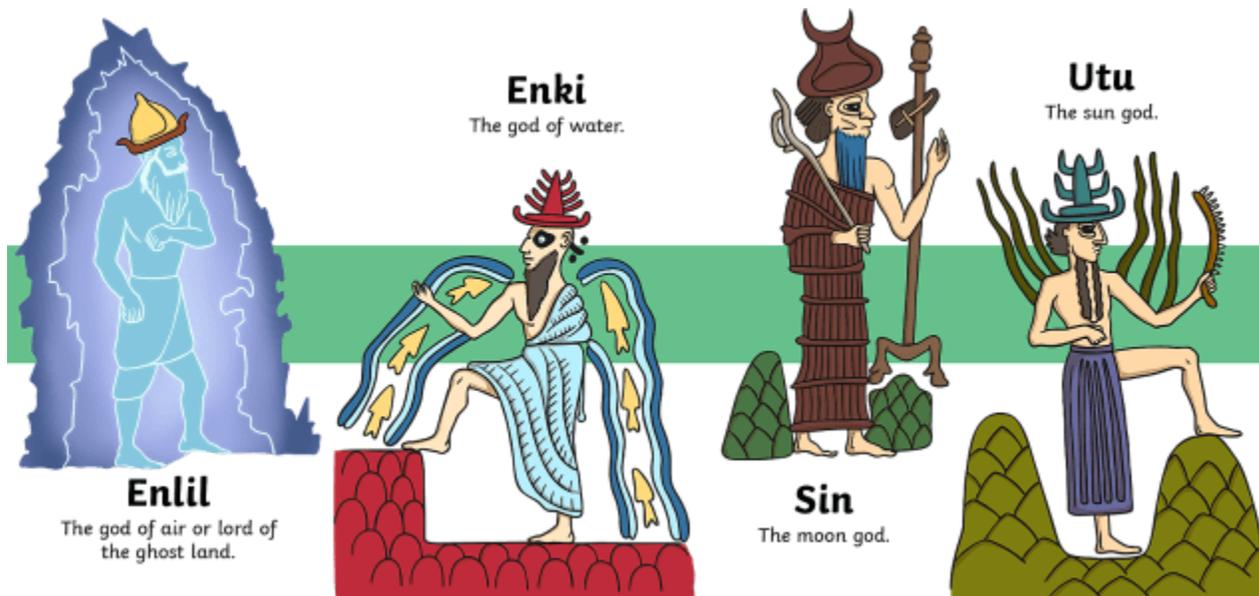
In Sumer, religious beliefs influenced many parts of daily life. The Sumerians tried to please their gods in every aspect, from growing crops to settling disputes. Religion created a common way for people to connect with one another. Constructing temples and religious towers called ziggurats (ZIHG-guh-rats) was one way the ancient Sumerians expressed their religious beliefs. It was the king's duty to build and



maintain these ziggurats. The towers were platforms made of mud bricks, with shrines on the highest tier. Ziggurats were so large that they could be seen from miles away. Some were as high as 7 stories and as wide as 200 feet. The Sumerians may have believed that their gods lived in the ziggurats, most likely in the special shrines at the top. Attached to the outside walls of each ziggurat was at least one long staircase that some think was created so that the gods could climb down to Earth. Kings and priests likely stood inside the towers to ask for the gods' blessings.

Sumerian statues also expressed religious beliefs. Many of these statues were detailed and lifelike. They showed people worshipping the gods, often with wide-eyed gazes.

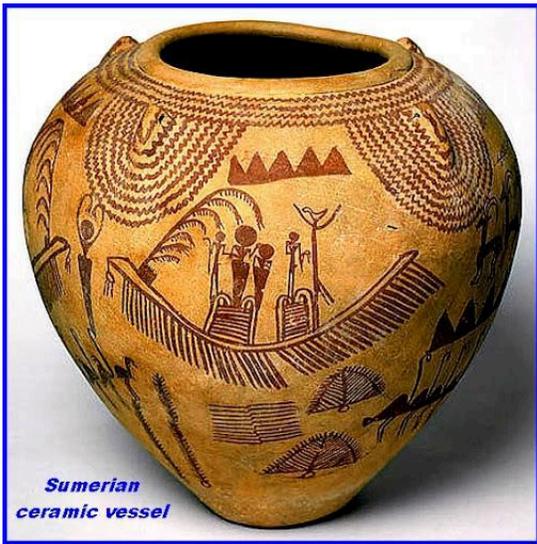
The Sumerians may have believed that the gods were pleased when people showed these signs of devotion, or love and obedience. The Sumerians had many kinds of religious ceremonies. Often, musicians played at these events. Some ceremonies may have involved human sacrifice, the ritual killing of a person as an offering to the gods.



## 5 - The Arts

All civilizations have a highly developed culture, including the arts. Arts include creative forms of expression such as painting, architecture, and music. There were many kinds of artists and artisans in ancient Sumer. Metalworkers made objects like weapons and cups, as well as decorative items, such as mirrors and jewelry. Architects designed temples and ziggurats. Sculptors carved statues that adorned temples or were used in rituals. Music was another influential art in Sumer. The Sumerians may have believed that music brought joy to gods and people alike. Musicians sang and played instruments during temple ceremonies. They wrote love songs and entertained guests at feasts. Sumerian musicians played a variety of instruments, including drums and pipes. One favorite was a small harp called a lyre, a wooden instrument made of a soundbox and strings. A wooden bar held the strings in place at the top. Lyre makers often decorated their instruments with precious stones and carvings made of horn. These decorations demonstrate how much the Sumerians valued music.

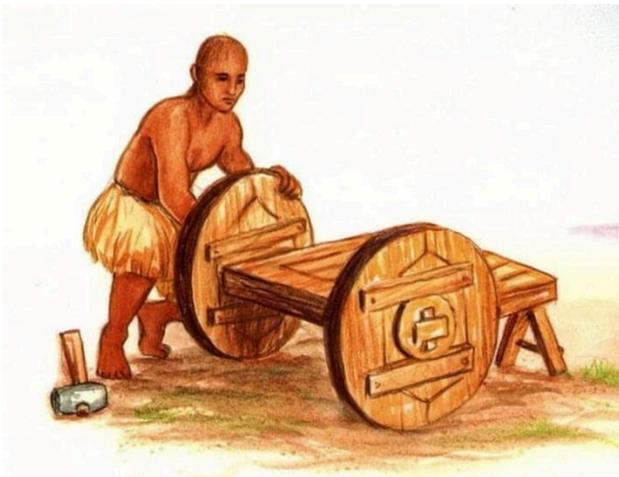
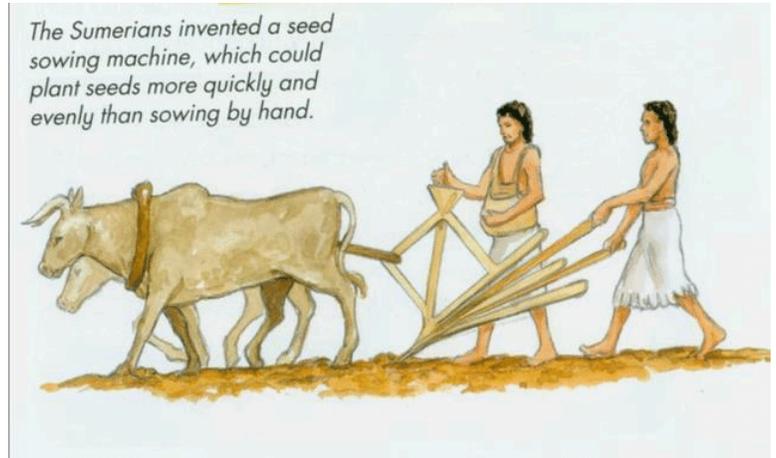




## 6 - Technology

All civilizations create new forms of technology. The Sumerians made several technological advances, the most important being the wheel. The earliest examples of the wheel date back to 3500 B.C.E. when Sumerian potters, or pottery makers, used them as a surface for shaping clay into pots. A potter's wheel would spin, flat side up, on an axle. The Sumerians discovered that a wheel could be rolled forward when flipped onto its edge. They used this discovery to create wheeled carts for farmers and chariots for the army. They constructed the wheels by clamping pieces of wood together. It would be hard to discover a more powerful invention than the wheel. Before its invention, people had to drag their goods on flat-bottomed carts called sledges. Wheeled carts made it easier to move goods over long distances because they did not get stuck in mud and could support heavy loads, unlike the earlier sledges. Oxen could pull much more weight on wheeled carts than on sledges. Another technological advancement was the arch, an inverted (upside-down) U- or V-shaped structure built above a

doorway. To build arches, the Sumerians stacked bricks, made of clay and straw, to rise from the walls in steps until they met in the center. Arches added strength and beauty to Sumerian buildings. They became a common feature of temple entrances. Some historians say that the arch is the Sumerians' greatest architectural achievement.



## 7 - Writing

A final characteristic of civilizations is a highly developed written language. The Sumerians created a written language called cuneiform. This name comes from the Latin word for “wedge.” The Sumerians used a wedge-shaped stylus (a sharp, pointed tool) to etch their writing on clay tablets. Sumerians developed cuneiform around 3300 B.C.E. The earliest examples of cuneiform show that it

was used to record information about the goods people exchanged with one another. At first, cuneiform writing may have contained as many as 2,000 symbols to stand for sounds, words, and phrases. Over time, this number was reduced to about 700. Cuneiform was based on an earlier, simpler form of writing that used pictographs. Pictographs are symbols that stand for real objects, such as a snake or water. Scribes used a sharpened reed to draw the symbols on wet clay. When the clay dried, the marks became a permanent record.

