

The Sumerians

Society and Political Organization
in Sumer: Understanding Ancient
Mesopotamian Civilization





Learning Objectives

- Analyze the social structure of ancient Sumer
- Examine daily life in Sumerian cities
- Understand the role of different social classes
- Explore the significance of Sumerian innovations



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Do now..

- 1. What daily activities do you think were most important for people living in the first cities like Sumer?
- 2. What is a “social class”?



Introduction to Sumer

Located in southern Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq)



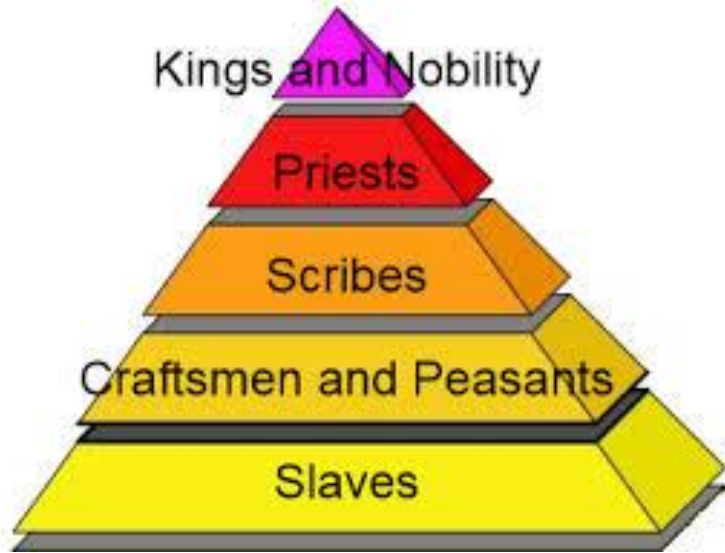
World's first urban civilization (4500-1750 BCE)

Developed first writing system (cuneiform)

Created complex city-states

Advanced irrigation and agricultural systems

Sumerian Social Pyramid



King/Ruler (En or Ensi)

Priests and Nobles

Scribes and Merchants

Craftsmen and Artisans

Free Commoners

Slaves

The Role of Kings

- Political and military leaders
- Considered divine representatives
- Responsible for:
 - Building and maintaining temples
 - Organizing public works
 - Leading military campaigns
 - Enforcing laws
 - Managing trade relations



Religious Leadership

- Priests held significant power
- Managed temple complexes (ziggurats)
- Controlled temple resources
- Performed religious ceremonies
- Acted as educators and record keepers
- Maintained astronomical observations

- Scribes:
 - Mastered cuneiform writing
 - Kept important records
 - Enjoyed high social status

The Middle Class

- Merchants:
 - Conducted trade
 - Managed business contracts
 - Traveled between city-states





Craftsmen and Artisans

- Specialized skills:
 - Metalworking
 - Pottery making
 - Weaving
 - Jewelry crafting
 - Boat building
- Passed skills through generations
- Formed guilds and workshops



Daily Life in Sumer

- Houses built from mud bricks
- Central courtyards for family activities
- Separate rooms for sleeping and cooking
- Streets arranged in grid patterns
- Public gathering spaces near temples
- Markets for trade and commerce



Family Structure

Patriarchal
society

Extended family
units

Arranged
marriages
common

Children helped
with family work

Education
primarily for boys

Women could
own property and
conduct business

Education and Schools

- Formal schools called tablet houses
- Students learned:
 - Writing and reading cuneiform
 - Mathematics
 - Literature and history
 - Religious texts
- Mainly for upper-class boys
- Training for scribal profession

The Sumerians invented writing during the Uruk Period (4100-2900 BCE) c. 3500 BCE as a means of communication for long-distance trade. Trade in ancient Mesopotamia had, by this time, expanded from local exchange to long-distance commerce, and merchants needed to be able to communicate clearly with their representatives and clients in distant regions.



Education



Terracotta Tablet from Nippur
Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin (Copyright)

Agriculture and Economy

- Farming was primary occupation
- Main crops:
 - Barley
 - Wheat
 - Dates
 - Vegetables
- Irrigation systems
- Animal husbandry
- Trade and barter system



Technology and Innovations

The wheel

Potter's wheel

Bronze tools

Mathematical system

Calendar

Legal codes

Architectural advances

Astronomy and Astrology

Medicinal Drugs and Surgery

Cities

The Sail



City Life and Urban Planning

- Walled cities for protection
- Ziggurats at city centers
- Organized neighborhoods
- Drainage systems
- Public buildings
- Markets and workshops

Legacy of Sumerian Society

- First urban civilization
- Writing system influence
- Mathematical concepts
- Legal precedents
- Architectural innovations
- Religious practices
- Social structure model



Exit Ticket



What do you think about Summerians?