Social Structure

Civilizations have a complex organization, or social structure. A social structure includes different jobs and social levels. People at higher levels have greater status than others.

Archaeologists have found evidence that several classes of people lived in Sumer. At the top level were priests, landowners, and government officials. These people had the largest and most luxurious homes, near the center of the city. Their houses were two stories high. Evidence suggests that these mud houses had whitewashed walls.

At the middle level were merchants and artisans. Among the artisans were skilled metalworkers. They worked with such metals as gold, silver, tin, lead, copper, and bronze. Out of these materials, they made swords and arrowheads for the army. They made tools, like plows and hoes, for farmers. They also made luxury items, such as mirrors and jewelry, for the upper class.

The middle class also included farmers and fishers. They lived in small, mud-brick houses at the edge of the city. Farmers often worked to build or repair the irrigation systems. In times of war, they were forced to serve in the army.

At the bottom level of the social structure were slaves. They lived in their owners' homes and had no property of their own.