

Life in Ancient River Valley Civilizations

What do you suppose life was like five thousand years ago in the first river valley civilizations for everyday people? Below is a list of terms associated with that time period. We are going to examine the words and see if we can come up with several hypotheses about what life was really like.

Loess — rich soil from flooding	Dynasty — a ruling family	Mesopotamia — ancient civilization
river	Yangtze River	Yellow River (Huang He)
Afterlife	Fertile Crescent — fertile area in Mesopotamia	Book of the Dead — Egyptian book
Ur — ancient city in Mesopotamia	King Tutankhamen — King Tut	Feudalism — political system
India	Ziggurat — step pyramid	Tigris & Euphrates Rivers
Hittites—empire used iron weapons	River Valley	Pharaoh — king in Egypt
Hammurabi — Babylonian King	Harappa — ancient city in India	Mohenjo-Daro — city in ancient India
Cuneiform writing	Shang Dynasty — ruling family in ancient China	Code of Hammurabi — first written law code
Flooding	King	Oracle Bones - used by ancient Chinese to consult the gods
Calendar	Landholders	
Priests	Hieroglyphics - Egyptian writing	Merchants - traders
China	Giza — locations of the great pyramids in Egypt	Rosetta Stone — used to decipher hieroglyphics
Ramses II — King/Pharaoh in Egypt	Epic of Gilgamesh — ancient story	Zhou Dynasty — ruling family in China
City-state — a city and its surrounding area	Family	Sumeria — area in Mesopotamia
Ra — Sun God in Egypt	Indus River/Indus Valley	Anubis — Egyptian god
Sewers	Peasants/farmers	Delta — mouth of a river
Polytheism — belief in many gods	Pyramid	Cradle of Civilization-
Gentry — wealthy class in ancient	Anyang — first city in ancient China	Mesopotamia
China	Irrigation — system of man-made ditches to carry water from river to crops	Mummification
Nile River	Egypt	Spirits - gods
Slaves	Scribes — people who write	Papyrus — Egyptian paper made from reeds
Silt — rich soil from flooding river	Wheel	
Bronze — metal	Weapons	Mandate of Heaven — power to rule in China from the gods
<i>Epic of Gilgamesh</i>	Cotton	Nobles
Social mobility — ability to move up to a higher social class	Jewelry	Silk
Iron	Chariot	Metal use
Tombs — burial place for the dead	Mathematics	
Hebrews — Jewish people		

Directions: After examining the words above, try and come up with six different categories the words might go in to. For example: geography etc... Assign a category to each box below and write it on the line above the box. Place each term from above in an appropriate box below. You must place every term from above in a box. You may put the same word in multiple boxes.

Directions: Using the categorized boxes above, generate THREE inferences or hypotheses about life in these ancient river valley civilizations and write them in the **HYPOTHESIS** column. In the column on the right marked **Evidence For:** write several words from the boxes above that support your hypothesis.

Hypothesis	Evidence For:
Example: Religion played a major role in the cultural and political structures of ancient river valley civilizations.	Afterlife Priests Polytheism Tombs Hebrews Spirits Mandate of Heaven
1.	
2.	
3.	

Directions: read the brief descriptions below regarding life in three different ancient river valley civilizations. Then complete the tasks below using the information gathered from the readings.

Life in Ancient River Valley Civilizations

Life in Sumerian Society

With civilization came the beginning of what we call social classes. Kings, landholders, and some priests made up the highest level in Sumerian society. Wealthy merchants ranked next. The vast majority of ordinary Sumerian people worked with their hands in fields and workshops. At the lowest level of Sumerian society were the slaves. Some slaves were foreigners who had been captured in war. Others were Sumerians who had been sold into slavery as children to pay the debts of their poor parents. Debt slaves could hope to eventually buy their freedom. Social class affected the lives of both men and women. Sumerian women could work as merchants, farmers, or artisans. They could hold property in their own names. Women could also join the priesthood. Some upper-class women did learn to read and write, though Sumer's written records mention few female scribes. However, Sumerian women had more rights than women in many later civilizations.

Life in Egyptian Society

Like the grand monuments to the kings, Egyptian society formed a pyramid. The king, queen, and royal family stood at the top. Below them were the other members of the upper class, which included wealthy landowners, government officials, priests, and army commanders. The next tier of the pyramid was the middle class, which included merchants and artisans. At the base of the pyramid was the lower class, by far the largest class. It consisted of peasant farmers and laborers. In the later periods of Egyptian history, slavery became a widespread source of labor. Slaves, usually captives from foreign wars, served in the homes of the rich or toiled endlessly in the gold mines of Upper Egypt. The Egyptians were not locked into their social classes. Lower- and middle-class Egyptians could gain higher status through marriage or success in their jobs. Even some slaves could hope to earn their freedom as a reward for their loyal service. To win the highest positions, people had to be able to read and write. Once a person had these skills, many careers were open in the army, the royal treasury, the priesthood, and the king's court. Women in Egypt held many of the same rights as men. For example, a wealthy or middle-class woman could own and trade property. She could propose marriage or seek divorce. If she were granted a divorce, she would be entitled to one-third of the couple's property.

Life in Chinese Society

In the Chinese view, people who lived outside of Chinese civilization were barbarians. Because the Chinese saw their country as the center of the civilized world, their own name for China was the Middle Kingdom. The culture that grew up in China had strong unifying bonds. From earliest times, the group seems to have been more important than the individual. A person's chief loyalty throughout life was to the family. Beyond this, people owed obedience and respect to the ruler of the Middle Kingdom, just as they did to the elders in their family. The family was central to Chinese society. The most important virtue was respect for one's parents. The elder men in the family controlled the family's property and made important decisions. Women, on the other hand, were treated as inferiors. They were expected to obey their fathers, their husbands, and later, their own sons. When a girl was between 13 and 16 years old, her marriage was arranged, and she moved into the house of her husband. Only by bearing sons for her husband's family could she hope to improve her status. Shang society was sharply divided between nobles and peasants. It was very difficult to move up in social status (class), you were usually tied to your class by birth. If your father was a peasant you would remain a peasant during your life. A ruling class of warrior-nobles headed by a king governed the Shang. These noble families owned the land. They governed the scattered villages within the Shang lands and sent tribute to the Shang ruler in exchange for local control.

List *two* ways life in all three of these societies was similar:

1.

2.

List *two* ways they were different:

1.

2.

1. Women had little to no rights in ancient river valley civilizations.

Agree

Evidence for:

Evidence against:

Disagree

2. There was little or no social mobility in ancient river valley civilizations.

Agree

Evidence for:

Evidence against:

Disagree

