

civilization a society marked by developed arts, sciences, government, and social structure

social structure the way a civilization is organized

technology the use of tools and other inventions for practical purposes

Which characteristics of a civilization do these artifacts represent?

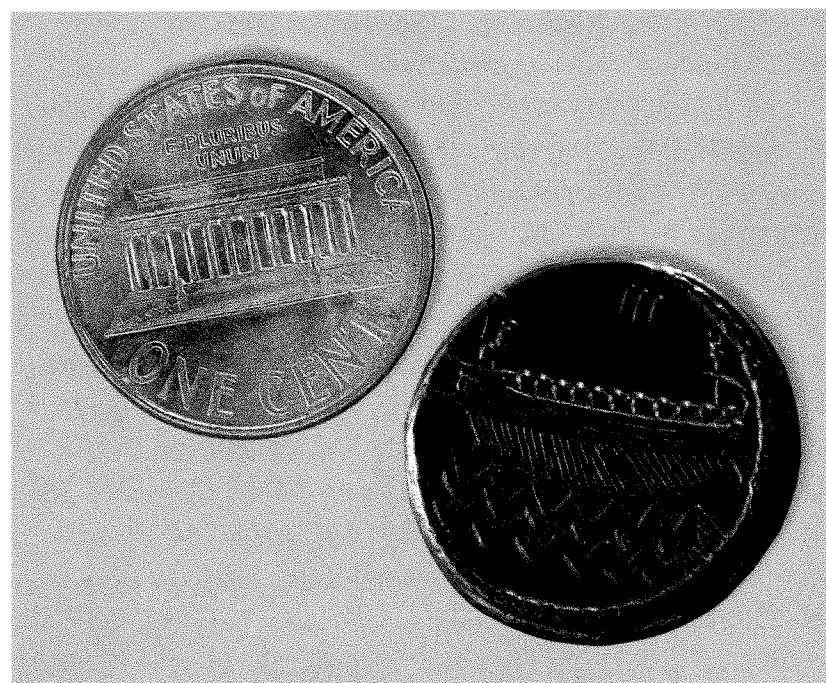
5.2 Characteristics of Civilization

Sumer was a challenging place to live. It had hot summers, little rain, and rivers that flooded the plains in the spring. Yet the Sumerians were able to overcome these **challenges**. They built complex irrigation systems and large cities. By 3000 B.C.E., most Sumerians lived in powerful city-states like Ur, Lagash (LAY-gash), and Uruk (UH-ruhk). But what did the Sumerians do to **create a civilization**?

To answer this question, we need to examine what *civilization* means. What characteristics make a society into a civilization? Historians name several such characteristics, including these:

- a *stable food supply*, to ensure that the people of a society have the food they need to survive
- a **social structure** with different social levels and jobs
- a *system of government*, to ensure that life in the society is orderly
- a *religious system*, which involves both a set of beliefs and forms of worship
- a *highly developed way of life* that includes the arts, such as painting, architecture, music, and literature
- *advances in technology*
- a *highly developed written language*

Did Sumer have these characteristics? Let's find out what the evidence can tell us.



5.3 Stable Food Supply

Civilizations need a stable food supply. A complex society can thrive only if its members have the food they need to survive.

The Sumerians invented two key things 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 supply of water.

Their second invention was the plow. A plow is a tool used for tilling, or turning, the soil to prepare it for planting. Before the plow was invented, farmers used animal horns or pointed sticks to poke holes in the earth. Then they would plant seeds in the holes. This was a very slow way to farm. 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 pushed and pulled the plow along the ground, or they used animals such as oxen to pull it.

The Sumerians invented the plow. Today, some people in Iraq, the present-day location of Sumer, still use plows to farm the land.