

## 5.6 Religion

All civilizations have some kind of religious system. A religious system includes both a set of beliefs, usually in a god or gods, and forms of worship.

In Sumer, religious beliefs influenced every part of daily life. The Sumerians tried to please their gods in all things, from growing crops to settling disputes. Religion bound the people together in a common way of life.

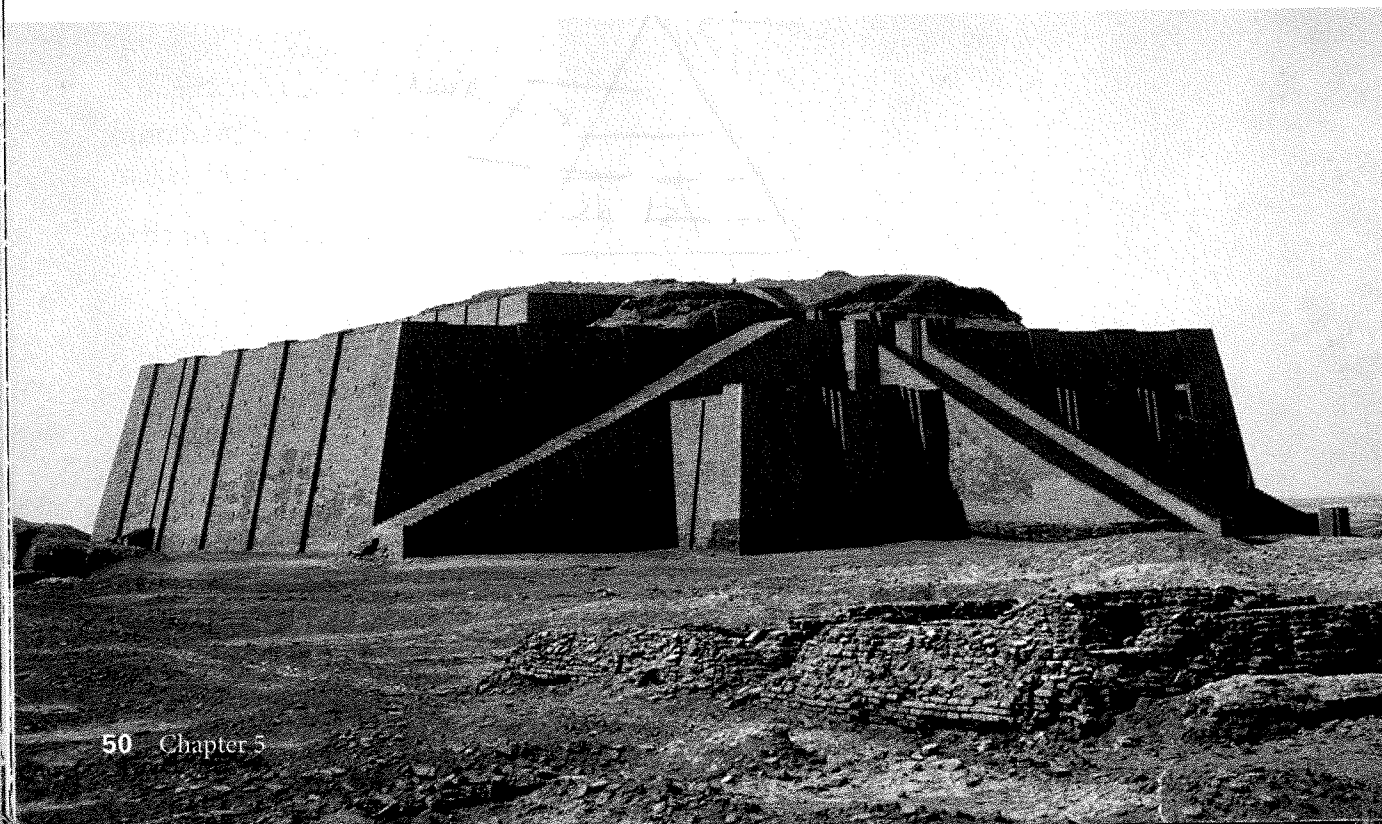
The ancient Sumerians expressed their religious beliefs by constructing temples and religious towers called **ziggurats** (ZIHG-guh-rats). It was the king's duty to build and maintain these ziggurats. The towers were platforms made of mud bricks, with shrines on the highest tier. Ziggurats were so large that they could be seen from 20 miles away. Some were as high as 8 stories and as wide as 200 feet.

The Sumerians 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 a long staircase that the gods could use to climb down to Earth. Kings and priests 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 eyes gazing upward. The Sumerians believed that the gods were pleased when people showed these signs of devotion, or love and obedience.

**ziggurat** an ancient Mesopotamian temple tower with outside staircases and a shrine at the top

This is a reconstruction of the ziggurat that once rose over the ancient city of Ur.



The Sumerians had many kinds of religious ceremonies. Often, musicians played at these ceremonies. Some ceremonies may have involved human sacrifice, the ritual killing of a person as an offering to the gods.

## 5.7 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. They made decorative items, such as mirrors and jewelry, too. Architects designed temples and ziggurats.

Music was another important art in Sumer. The Sumerians 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*. Lyres were wooden instruments made of a sound box and strings. A wooden bar held the strings in place at the top. Lyre makers often decorated their instruments with precious stones and with carvings made of horn. These decorations show how much the Sumerians valued music.

This fancy lyre has the head of a bull decorating its sound box. A musician would strum the strings to play musical notes.

**culture** a characteristic of civilization that includes the beliefs and behaviors of a society or a group of people

