

Archaeologists have found over 100,000 oracle bones. Since many questions were asked about daily life, we know something about this civilization. The thing is, they didn't exactly ask, "Will it rain tomorrow?" Oracle bones say things like: "If we sacrifice ten men or five oxen, will it rain tomorrow?" The Shang kings sacrificed a great number of people to talk to their ancestors. Some of those sacrificed were enemies, captured in war. Some were slaves or people who were sick or deformed. Some were merchants, craftsmen, or farmers who had upset the nobles. Some were nobles who had upset the king.

Shang & Chou kings and nobles: The rich lived in large homes and palaces made of mud and wood. They had tall bronze candlesticks. They used bronze drinking cups. (Shang leaders were famous for their drinking bouts.) They loved to hunt. Their bronze weapons were decorated with elaborate designs. Horseback riding was very popular, both as a sport and, in late Chou times, as a method of war. (Chariots had not worked very well as the landscape was rather bumpy and rugged.) The nobles wore elaborate gowns of silk and lived in large, brick homes with tiled roofs. They were lavishly decorated and furnished. Jugs of wine lined the walkways. The air was scented with flowers in the gardens and spices from pots of food steaming on stoves. They were buried in lavish tombs. Unlike the ancient Egyptians, the Shang and Chou were buried with living people. In their tombs, archaeologists have found entire chariots, objects of art, and the remains of guards and dogs who accompanied kings to their graves.

Warriors: The leaders of different clans were continually waging war with each other. Warriors were knights in bronze armor who went to battle in horse-drawn chariots made of wood and bronze. They wore bronze helmets, and carried daggers, spears, and axes. Each chariot had a driver, a spearman, and an archer. Behind them, came the foot soldiers, who were usually peasants, forced to leave their fields. Foot soldiers wore tunics and trousers.

Farmers: Most people were farmers (peasants). Their life was very hard. Farmers lived in nearby villages. Their homes were very simple. In the summer, peasants lived on the land near their fields. Summer homes were made of bamboo branches. In the winter, they moved to their permanent homes in the villages. Winter homes were drafty. They were one room houses with thatched or tile roofs, dirt floors, and no furniture. The walls were made of mud. Doors faced south. Each family had their own winter home.

They farmed small plots of land with primitive stone and wood tools. They did not own the land. They worked the land assigned to them by the royals and the nobles. They had to give the nobleman part of the food they grew. They were also expected to give gifts to the nobleman of wine or silk. They worked without pay on the noble's house, roads, and bridges. They pretty much worked all the time.