Shang People

The Priests and Government Officials

The priests and government officials were of paramount importance to the king and ruling family, and because of this, they also enjoyed a very comfortable lifestyle nestled safe within the walls of the city.

The priests, who were skilled writers, worked as scribes for the king. They would carve the king's questions onto 'oracle bones' and then heat the bones up during a special ceremony. The king would ask his dead ancestors to provide the answers and then he would interpret the heat cracks which appeared in the bones as divine messages from them.

The government officials did important administrative work for the king. They recorded events like the reclaiming of land and strategies for war and they also documented the names of people who had committed crimes and the tribute payments the king received. These records were written on bamboo using ink and a brush and were crucial in helping the king to run an organised society.