

MESOPOTAMIA

While Jericho and Çatal Hüyük were growing, great things were happening in another part of the Fertile Crescent, in the region historians call Mesopotamia - which means 'the land between the rivers' in Greek. This vast, fertile plain lying between the mighty Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Iraq, was the birthplace of one of the world's earliest civilizations. The most exciting changes began in the southern part, in an area called Sumer.

PRECIOUS WATER

Every spring the Euphrates river swelled with rainwater from the surrounding hills and flooded its banks. The farmers learned how to make their land more fertile by trapping the floodwater in shallow lakes, and digging irrigation channels to carry it to their fields during the hot, dry summer months.

THE FIRST TRADERS

With these new more efficient irrigation methods, farmers could grow far more crops than they needed. This meant they could trade surplus food with people in the surrounding hills, exchanging it for valuable things they didn't have, such as copper, stone and wood. The earliest farmers of Sumer are sometimes known as Ubaidians, after one of their settlements, Tell al-Ubaid.

This village on the banks of the Tigris is inhabited by river dwellers known as Marsh Arabs. The houses they live in, made of woven reeds, are not so different from the ones the first farmers lived in - about 7,000 years ago.

