

EARLY URBAN HEARTHS

As Figure 3.1 illustrates, there is evidence of early city growth in four areas of the Old World and one area of the New World:

1. *Mesopotamia*. The first cities are thought to have begun around 3500BC in lower Mesopotamia (Sumer) around the Tigris and Euphrates

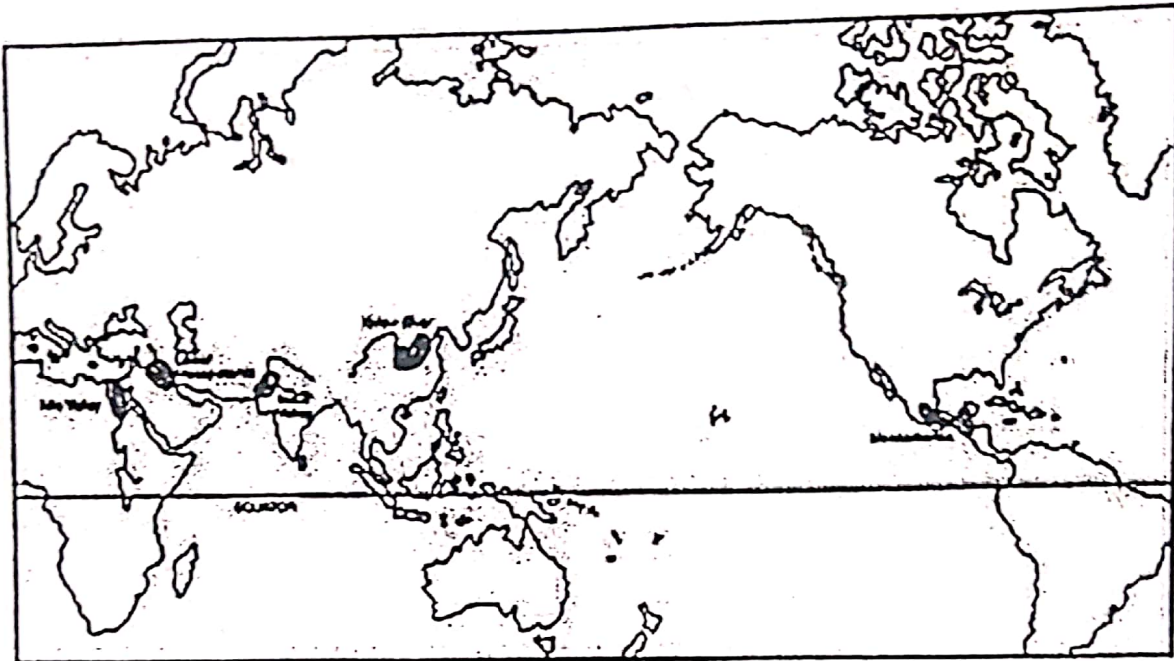


Figure 3.1 Early urban hearths

ivers (Figure 3.2). One of the earliest cities was Ur, which from 2300 BC to 2180BC was the capital city of the Sumerian Empire, which extended north along the Fertile Crescent, possibly as far as the Mediterranean. In 1885BC Ur and the other southern cities were conquered by the Babylonians⁹ (Box 3.3).

2. *Egypt.* There is a long-standing debate in archaeology over theories of urban diffusion or independent invention but it is most probable that agricultural and other technologies, possibly including city-building, spread along the Fertile Crescent, then south-west into the Nile valley. By 3500BC a number of the Neolithic farm hamlets along the lower Nile had risen to 'overgrown village' status and were clustered into several politically independent units, each containing large co-operative irrigation projects. The transition from settled agricultural communities to cities occurred around 3300 BC when the lower Nile was unified under the first pharaoh, Menes.

The early Egyptian cities were not as large or as densely settled as those of Mesopotamia because:

- The early dynastic practice of changing the site of the capital, normally the largest settlement, with the ascendancy of a new pharaoh limited the growth opportunity of any single city.
- The security provided by extensive desert on both sides of the Nile meant that once the valley was unified politically, Egyptian cities, unlike those of Mesopotamia, did not require elaborate fortifications and garrisoned troops for protection.