**Excerpt from:**

**Migration and Population Movements in Ancient Mesopotamia**

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| **From:** *Encyclopedia of Society and Culture in the Ancient World*. |

The first peoples to build cities on these river banks of the Tigris and Euphrates were the Sumerians. They spoke a language that is unrelated to any other known language. The geographic origins of the Sumerians are unknown, but their ancestors probably migrated down the rivers from Anatolia or northwestern Iran. The Sumerians built cities near the combined mouth of the two rivers sometime between the sixth and fourth millennia BCE [Eridu](javascript:PrintPage('MESP0022','Ancient');) may have been their first city, though [Ur](javascript:PrintPage('MESP0069','Ancient');) and [Uruk](javascript:PrintPage('MESP0070','Ancient');) are also very ancient.

Around 3800 BCE the climate grew drier, changing the timing of the annual river floods. It became much harder to produce or find food. Many people had lived in the countryside [Zagros Mountains] surrounding the Sumerian cities, either in smaller towns or in the open as nomads. These people now moved into the cities, which had stores of grains and offered them some hope of finding food. Between 3200 and 2800 BCE huge numbers of people lived in cities; historians estimate that some 80 percent of the Sumerian population lived in southern Mesopotamian cities at this time.

Citation:

Hackney Blackwell, Amy. "migration and population movements in ancient

Mesopotamia." In Bogucki, Peter, ed. *Encyclopedia of Society and Culture in the Ancient World*. New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2008. *Ancient and Medieval History Online*. Facts On File, Inc. http://www.fofweb.com/activelink2.asp?  
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