# Source 2: Settling in villa­­ges

Humankind had taken two great steps along the path to civilisation. People in the Near East had learned how to grow crops and how to keep animals. The conditions were now right for an even greater step to be taken. Instead of living in temporary campsites, people began to build permanent places in which to live. These places were the world’s first villages, the most ancient of which is 11,000 years old.

As people settled in villages, the population began to increase. New tools were invented to help farmers with their crops, such as sickles for reaping wheat and barley, and ploughs to till the fields. People discovered how to build ovens in which to bake bread and from this invention the idea of baking clay to make pottery was explored.

People learned how to extract linen from the flax plant. They spun flax and wool, weaving them into clothes, bedding and sails. They found out that beer could be made from barley, and wine from grapes. Since there was no longer any need for people to move from campsite to campsite as they had done before they lived in villages, they acquired more possessions such as furniture.

The process of learning how to grow crops and raise animals is called domestication. Among the many different kinds of wild grass that grew in this area were einkorn and emmer wheat. They both have large seed heads, packed with good sized grains but they suffer from brittle ears that snapped easily and both shed their grains quickly. This made them bad for growing as a crop. But then an accident of nature happened – wild emmer wheat crossed with wild goat grass. The result, known as a hybrid, was a plant with tough ears that could hold on to its grains. When the people realised the advantages of the new plant, they chose it as their main crop. This is how wheat became domesticated.

At about the same time that the first farmers were domesticating plants, they were also taming wild animals. Young animals were taken from the wild and raised to guarantee supply of meat and milk. As they reproduced, their numbers increased. The farmers soon realised that large numbers of animals could be kept together in flocks or herds. Large, aggressive animals were killed before they could breed. By doing this over a long period of time, wild animals evolved into domesticated breeds which became more docile than their wild ancestors.

*(J. Madden, Mesopotamia and the Near East, Evans Brothers, London, 1999)*