The Origin of Towns

One of the earliest recognisable towns goes back as far as 6,000 BC. Archaeological excavation has shown that **Catal Hyuk** in south Anatolia (Turkey) had densely packed buildings covering 13 hectares. The excavation found evidence of craftsmen producing jewellery, stone tools and weapons, wooden utensils, baskets and pottery. This is around the time farming becomes established in the Middle East and it is no coincidence that farming and towns emerge hand-in-hand. Farming produces surplus food which is then traded in the towns for the goods that farmers need. However, the development of networks of towns and an urban civilization takes another two thousand years.

The **Sumerian** civilisation based around the river Tigris/Euphrates is generally acknowledged as the cradle of urban civilization. This began to develop around 3,500 BC and by 2,500 BC several of its towns had grown into cities. By then Ur had a population of 34,000, Lagash had 20,000 and Erech as much as 70,000.

Ur is an ancient city of Sumar (South Iraq) which is mentioned in the Bible (book of Genesis) as Abraham's homeland. Excavation in the early 20th century uncovered spectacular rich royal tombs dating to c. 2,500 BC. It was the leading city of Sumar until it was sacked by barbarians c. 2,000 BC. Ur was then superseded by Babylon.

Egyptian Civilization under the Pharaohs in the Nile Valley

Kahun—In 2,650 BC this town was built to accommodate the workers at the near-by pyramid. It had a residential district for workers at one end with a regular street plan, whilst at the other end were the civic buildings and temples, and the spacious houses of the wealthy. It covered an area of 20 acres.

Indian Civilization developed around the Indus river and its five tributaries, forming the Punjab, around 3,250 - 2,750 BC. The Indus civilization developed a well-organized system of inter-city and inter-continental trading—seals, beads and pottery of Indian origin have been discovered in Sumerian cities while similar goods produced in the Middle East occurred in the Indus cities.

With the emergence of towns comes

- A wide network of inter-town trading routes.

- Social stratification—workers, shop owners, merchants etc. have their own areas in the town.

- Administration—towns provide centres of law and order and other services like education, health and religion.

These are all features of towns in the Middle East, India and Egypt in the 4th century BC.

Post-Medieval Towns

In medieval times many civil, administrative, entertainment and military functions were carried out in the lord's castle. With the break down of the feudal system these functions developed independently, and many of them were located in towns. Thus, in Ireland, by the 17th century, we see separate buildings emerge to cater for functions which formerly were centered in the castle. Examples of these are Military Barracks, Police Barracks, Prisons, Court Houses, Market Houses, Theatres, Town Halls, Schools, Post Offices, Hospitals, etc.