

Domestication of plants and animals



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The domestication of plants and animals lead to great change in the development and structuring of communities, as the hunter-gatherer lifestyle was slowly replaced by permanent settlements of farmers and villages. We can see that the communities varied greatly dependent on their local ecology, the resources available, and the time period within which their community was based.

The road to agricultural way of life in the Middle East is characterized by Four distinct stages. It was during the Kebaran period, and Geometric Kebaran in which hunter-gatherers began to utilize the plant and animal resources of the region. Architecture became a prominent feature of the Natufian period, as communities began to transition to village life from that of hunting-gathering. Though it was during this period that material culture began to appear, and artifacts such as sea shells and beads were found traded long distances from the Red and Mediterranean Seas. During the Natufian period, agriculture had not yet taken hold, though the domestication of dogs was seen to have occurred at both Hayonim Terrace, and Mallaha, as the skeletons of these creatures were found with human remains. It was during the Early Neolithic period of Middle Eastern history during which people began to live in villages and accept agriculture as a means of subsistence. It was the appearance of communal structures during this period which helped to permeate a sense of community planning and directionalism.

The community in a sense had the ability to act as a group, as evidence of community activity was found in several structures which were used in ritual functions. It was during Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period in which the size of settlements increased drastically, as was the change to rectangular houses

from those that were round? This change in shape allowed higher density in villages, and showed the natural progression towards planning and future development on the part of the community. One of these sites was Abus Hureyra, which during the end of the Early Neolithic, had a population of nearly 5000 people living in up to 1440 houses.

It is possible that a social hierarchy was created when such densely packed communities were created, as now human interaction became all the more important, as the relationships between neighbors, and social groups would most likely create tension in the situation. It was also during the time of the Early Neolithic in which the first clues of plant domestication began to appear. Though it was the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period in which domesticated crops including wheat, barley, lentil, peas, and legumes were found. These domesticated grains showed an increase in size and durability. Animal domestication was quick to follow, as Sheep were found to be domesticated in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, while the reduction in size of the animals, and the discovery of the animals outside their habitat became common finds.

Finally, it was during the Late Neolithic period in which a reduction in the number of large villages across the Middle East began. We can see the shift toward a way of life focused on the grazing of domesticated animals, as villages began to shrink, and the population became once again scattered across the land. It was also during this period in which a decline in the role of hunting for subsistence became apparent, as well as Late Neolithic societies reliance on plants that were domesticated during the Early Neolithic periods.

We can see from this that the origin of agriculture in Europe came from the usage of Middle Eastern domesticated plants and animals. It was the movement of populations in which incoming farmers began to replace the hunter-gatherer societies that existed in Europe. It was these Mesolithic hunter-gatherers with their complex societies who are many times accused of adopting domestication through their own sophistication, were able to gradually yet effectively alter the direction of their communal lives. The result of this is that there is a clash in ideas representing the existence of domestication in Europe. An example of this is the interaction between Linear Band Keramik cultures, and Mesolithic groups, as LBK's utilized middle eastern plants and animals, yet lived in villages consisting of large community structures and traded with other Mesolithic groups, sometimes bringing on violence.

In Mesoamerica, the domestication of plants has had little effect on these hunter-gatherer societies except for adding additional sustainability to the community. The Teosinte, a wild grass found in the Mexican highlands is the ancestor to Maize, otherwise known as corn. The Maize and squash agricultural revolution began to spread north towards the current United States. During the Late ARchaic period, almost 3000 years ago, intensive maize agriculture began in the American Southwest. These agriculture societies lived in large Villages, and built large terraces and canals to feed their crops, however the theory of optimal foraging can better explain the variation in the distribution of domestication as ecological factors also affected its spread.

To sum it all up, the complex process involving the spread of domestication took its own sweet time. In the southwest United States, maize agriculture was taken up by hunter-gatherers who had taken the trade from those farmers moving north. In many of these cases, large villages were formed, whereas in others, temporary living environments were upheld. This is in direct comparison to what occurred on the Eastern Coast of North America, in which hunter-gatherer groups managed to domesticate a number of plant species even before maize agriculture became prevalent, though it still may exist that this type of agricultural architecture had preceded actual village establishments. This complex process of agriculture was adapted to local societies in different ways, and did not have any immediate effects on those societies. This is different from what had occurred in Europe through which the indigenous people played an active role in the usage of agriculture.

It seems that in much of Africa, that the use of domestication for animals was used before plants, and that these animals had been successfully integrated into mobile societies called pastoral societies. Though it is clear that domesticated animals existed in such societies which did not utilize plants around 8000 years ago. Another interesting occurrence was the creation of pottery in the form of small jar, with imprinted designs.

Many of the communities of New Guinea were found to have indigenously domesticated crops of yams, bananas, and possibly sugarcane. Though they were not found to have domesticated pigs, even though the exchange of pigs became an essential element in gaining power. IN comparison to other cases of domestication, New Guinea is very poorly understood. The transition for these people from hunting-gathering to agriculture was both slow along <https://assignbuster.com/domestication-of-plants-and-animals/>

with the fact that only plants became involved. The use of Ground Stone Tool Technology became prevalent as well as the introduction of pottery, though pottery had no usefulness in the agricultural system of the day.

Much the same as what had occurred in Africa, the creation of Pottery came long before the development of Agriculture. Just like in the Middle East and in Africa, Hunter-Gatherers lived in large settlements and constructed houses. It was found that the domestication of plants and animals occurred at the same time as well as the accompanying rise in population. It is a current theory, that domestication is directly linked to the formation of large villages. During the Neolithic period, human society began to transform with the advent of agriculture, and the domestication of animals.

In all of the regions above, the transition to agriculture was gradual and not sudden. Villages were created before the advent of agriculture in China, Africa, and the Eastern Asia, but not in Mesoamerica, the Andes or in New Guinea. The creation of Pottery occurred before domestication in Africa and China, but not till much later in the other regions. Plants were also domesticated before animals in the middle east, New Guinea, and after animals in Africa, and the Andes, but only at the same time as Animals in China.

The development, spread, and persistence in agriculture and domestication involves both biology, human nature, ecology, and the natural organization of human societies. I feel that in this way we can see the flexibility which is required when communities undergo the necessary change towards the domestication of plants and animals.