

# Free prime movers driving the shift to sedentism and the domestication of plants ...

[Environment](#), [Animals](#)



## **Introduction**

The human species are claimed to have existed for hundreds of thousands of years. According to history, years ago people used to be nomadic pastoralist who moved from one place to another thus did not have a permanent home. A transition occurred, which caused the people to change their nomadic lifestyle where they used to hunt and gather fruits and began doing agriculture. This transition caused them to change and start staying in one place. The transition from the old ways of nomadic movement to the point where the people are actually staying in one place is what is described to be sedentism. The domestication of animals as well as agriculture cannot be simply stated that it began in one region. The fact is that sedentism occurred in different parts of the world nearly at the same time (Smith). The reason for stating this is because of the archaeological evidence that can be seen from different parts of the world.

Some of those regions that are claimed to have changed the old ways of nomadic lifestyle were China, United States of America and Mexico, Mesoamerica, India and Sub-Saharan Africa especially New Guinea. These are among the first few places but later on, the whole world changed and were doing agriculture. There have been many questions asked by researchers regarding what led on to the emergence of agriculture and livestock keeping. This question is what has caused many people in the world especially the archaeologist to do researches in order to come up with the answer. The introduction of agriculture is what brought about trading and the formation of cities and towns. People started knowing how to write and read. The transition caused people to teach and learn new agriculture

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methods and brought about the formation of technology that become useful for agriculture. There are many theories about how agriculture and domestication of animals came to be in history. The wealth and political powers that can be seen in the modern world is what brought about the early food production in the world.

## **Climate change**

According to most researches, they believe that climate change is one of the main reasons that led to the transition. The researchers believe that the climate changed in that it become favorable for plants to grow in large quantities as well as the food for the animals was in abundance. It was observed that during the ice age period the temperatures were unfavorable for agriculture to take place (Maloney & Charles). When the ice age period ended, the land become wet and the weather conditions become stable. The good weather conditions made it easy to for there to be abundant crops and the animals also grew in large numbers. The food supply for the humans become high thus brought about the increase of the population of people. The abundance of food made life very easy for the people especially in the Southwest of Asia.

It is claimed that about 13, 000 years ago the climate changed in that there was dry weather. This change in the weather is called the Younger Dryas. This weather caused a dry spell in, which the food became scarce while the animals went to other regions. The people then began to occupy in one place where the weather conditions seemed to be a little better and there was a little bit of food. The fact that the weather conditions were harsh caused the

people to settle in one place and then it is stated that, that is when the first signs of agriculture began. According to this statement, it is clear that the people made the transition to agriculture because of the harsh conditions that they were faced with due to the dry climate (Browman). This harsh conditions made them think of ways to get food and thus began doing some little bit of agriculture in order for them not to die of hunger. The weather conditions however, reversed and it became good again therefore, the people continued with their forms of agriculture and animal domestication, which it spread throughout the whole region thereby increasing the population due to abundance of food. Agriculture now became a norm and most people were practicing it. This is all stated to have been in the southwest of Asia.

### **Oasis hypothesis**

According to this hypothesis, it claims that when the climate changed and brought about the dry spells that caused the people to move to areas near oasis so they can get food and water. In these areas, they were able to come into close contact with the animals. The close contact caused the human beings to take the animals and domesticate them. The fact that they were living near oasis made it easy for them also to use the crops and later began planting them thus were able to start agriculture in this manner (Browman). These two hypotheses have been wildly used by many and some have stated that in the oasis hypothesis there isn't enough proof or evidence to claim about the climate change that is claimed to have occurred. In the first hypothesis, there are many evidences that show that the climate changed

two times, which caused people to start doing agriculture in order for them to be able to get food and survive.

## **Plant domestication**

The plant domestication began over 10, 000 years ago. The first forms of plants that have been documented were the wild squash, which consists of pumpkins and the cereals. Most of the plants were first started to be cultivated in the Southwest Asia. The early forms of cultivation in Southwest Asia can be found in the sites of the region. This is the reason why the anthropologists and archeologists have come up with the conclusion that Southwest Asia was among the first places where the first and earliest forms of cultivation took place. The Abu Hureyra village is also another place that has been documented to have the earliest form of cultivation. The village is located near the Euphrates River. In the modern world, the village would be located on the Northwest of Syria. The place is claimed to have started its cultivation of wild crops in 13, 000Bp. There are many evidence of the cultivation process taking place earlier especially when there is a reappearance of the lentils in the region. It has been claimed because of the introduction of cultivation there was an increase of the population.

## **Animal domestication**

The domestication of the animals came later on after plant domestication. The reason for this was that the animals at that time were not used to being controlled and thus were wild and lived that way. When there was a dry spell, the animals and people were hurdle in the same surroundings. People began to exploit the animals and plants surrounding them in order to benefit

their needs (Smith). The first animals that were domesticated were the small animals such as the goats, chicken and sheep. These animals were easily to be controlled by the people due to their size; therefore, they were manageable and good for the people. The bigger animals at that time were not that easy to manage and, therefore, the humans hunted them to get food. Documents show that the pigs became domesticated at about 10, 000 years ago. The pigs become good for producing meat. The domestication of the goats, pigs and sheep were done in the Fertile Crescent (Maloney & Charles). As time went by the animals and human beings interacted a lot in that the bigger animals started adjusting to the humans and later on the humans were able to capture some of the bigger animals such as cows and domesticated them for their meat.

## **Early development**

It is a fact that when it comes to when exactly agriculture began then it will be another story because no one fully knows how it all started. The reason for stating this is that during those times people had no idea of how to read and write therefore, they could not document what was happening. The archeologists and anthropologist have claimed that countries such as North Africa and Southwest Asia have shown evidences that the wild grains were planted and cultivated during the Paleolithic era.

## **Ancient China's domestication of plants and animals**

There are some claims of evidence that showed that Ancient China was involved in the domestication of plants and animals. This evidence is said to be documented during the Han Dynasty, Warring States and Qin Dynasty.

The fact has been shown from a picture that was created that showed the use of the granary systems. Chimin Yaoshu is claimed to be one of the earliest forms of books concerning agriculture of the lands. This book was written in 535CE by a person called Jai Sixia (Higham & Bernard). In the book, it is claimed that some of the words that were quoted came from some of the books that were written earlier but in the modern world did not exist. The book talks in detail of how the people did their agriculture and the methods that were used by the Chinese people. Some of the process of agriculture that was written in the book includes the cultivation methods, animal husbandry, seeding and how they did the land preparations at that time. This book gives a clear picture of the domestication of animals and plants by ancient china. In the book, it shows how the people who were doing agriculture how they were able to become wealthy in the means of how they did trading in the region. The modern China is well for the advanced ways in, which they do their agriculture by using the modern technologies. They have improved technology in that they have made it easier for cultivation and land preparations (Higham & Bernard).

## **Agriculture in ancient Greek**

In looking at history, it is quite clear that Ancient Greek is well known for their thriving domestication of animals and agriculture. According to the statistics, it has been stated that at least about eighty percent of the people in the region were involved in agriculture. In the ancient Greek, the animals that were mostly reared or domesticated were goats, chicken, oxen, sheep and mules. The mules and donkeys were mostly used for the main purpose

of tilling the land or for transportation purposes (Maloney & Charles). The goats and the sheep in the country were used for meat, milk and cheese purposes. The horses were mostly raised by the rich in the society whom they used for fighting and leisure purposes.

## **The Roman Empire**

In the Ancient Rome, agriculture was a way of life. This was also stated by Cicero who claims that farming should be considered to be the best form of occupation. He believes that agriculture is one the most profitable and fulfilling jobs there ever is in the world especially in Rome. Since the fact that agriculture was one way of becoming wealthy then the ownership of a land in the society is what brought about the division between the common people in Rome and the aristocrats. The larger the land a person owns at that time the higher their ranking in the society would be. In the ancient Rome, it is claimed that the small families in the land were the ones who owned the land and thus they cultivated on the land. In looking at the records, it has been stated that one of the earliest forms of farming practices that were used was the crop rotation (Gregg).

The farming methods in the region were improved when the Romans encountered the Carthage and the Hellenistic people from the east. The arrival of these two different cultures brought about the improvement of the agricultural system in Rome. The improvement brought about the high productivity of plants and animals, which on the other hand caused the empire to have an increase in wealth. The increase in productivity also brought about the social injustices where two classes of people came to be in



Rome. Rome had the rich who were the aristocrats and the poor who were claimed to be the common people. The aristocrats bought or acquired the land from the poor who seemed not to be able to care for the land thus were unable to make a living or end meat. Ancient Romans used the cows for the main purpose of producing the milk and meat. The mules and the oxen have been stated to have been used for tilling the lands before plantations. The other animals that were domesticated were the sheep's and goats.

According to the researches, it was stated that these animals were merely used for the main purpose of producing cheese (Gregg). The increase of economy in the Roman Empire brought about the slave trade. The slaves were used in the plantation fields. The aristocrats and the rich were the ones who had slaves to till their lands and plant the crops. The Romans are also claimed to have had technologies that were useful in agriculture such as the aqueducts. The aqueducts were used to water the plants in the field. There is some evidence that show that the mills were widely used to grind the wheat in order to make the wheat flour. It is a fact that bread was a very essential food for the Romans at that time.

## **Domestication of cattle in North Africa**

When it comes to the domestication of plants and animals it is quite clear and evident that the hunters and gatherers continued even after the colonization of Africa. According to the evidence collected, it was stated that North Africa was among the first places to have domesticated the cattle's. The hunters and gatherers were the ones who caused the domestication of animals because they were in close contact with one another. However, most

people have a hard time accepting this evidence. According to the research conducted by Wendorf, it shows that there has been found evidence in the Eastern Sahara side in places such as Bir Kiseiba and Nabta there were cattle bones that were found in the region. The bones have been preserved for archeological reasons. Evidences show that the early domestication of cattle's did not occur on the Nile valley (Harlan).

## **Mesoamerica**

Mesoamerica is claimed to have been one of the first places where agriculture began. The earliest forms of domestication of plants and animals can be dated back during the Archaic period. In this time of period the people living in the area had began to stop hunting gathering and instead began to plant the wild animals and domesticate some of the wild animals. The land had started to experience dry seasons therefore the people began to bring the wild plants near where they were staying and began to plant them in order not to go further in search of food. When they began cultivating the crops the people fell in love with this method because they were able to get food easily and it was enjoyable to do the work. This became a very important thing to do in the society.

The need for more food brought on the subsistence form of farming. The people were also doing some little hunting to supplement their cultivated food. Hunting of animals caused the people discover more land, which they took over and used it to increase their lands. The lands were used for farming. The agriculture became big in that the people began to build their permanent homes in the lands. The permanent residence of the homes

brought about structure in the villages from either the social and labor areas. The population also increased dramatically and thus political systems began to be formed (Browman). In looking at the crops, that were domesticated in the area was maize, which was first, cultivated in the Tehuacan Valley. This was in 5000 BC in Mesoamerica. When the maize cultivation was begun, it became one of the staple foods for the region. The maize was a very important crop for the people in Mesoamerica.

The main reason why the maize was loved by many people was because it could last longer. Meaning that it could have been stored for longer periods and it could be grounded and made into flour, which can be used later. The other food that was mostly cultivated in Mesoamerica was the squash. The squash was the first form of crop that was discovered first in the region. The first documentation of the squash was that it was first cultivated about 10000 years ago. The place that it was cultivated was in Oaxaca. The squash is made up of different types such as the pumpkin. Research shows that the pumpkins were mostly liked because of the seeds of the pumpkins, which are claimed to be easily transported (Browman). The other documented plants that were cultivated in Mesoamerica were avocado, pear, tomatoes, chili peppers, agave and guavas.

In conclusion, sedentism has been defined as the process in, which the nomadic lifestyle has been transformed and people begin to live in permanent places where they do agriculture. There are any theories that have been formulated regarding how the domestication of plants and animals truly began. The archaeologists and anthropologists have conducted numerous researches in order to find the proof of how they started. Some of

the sites that have provided some little proof are from Southwest of Asia and Syria. Some of the most notable hypothesis of how agriculture started was when there was a dry spell that ended and fertile season came where there was an abundance of food. Then another dry season came that was much worse than the first one this dry season caused people to live their nomadic way of life and settled in one place where they began to cultivate food (Gregg). This hypothesis has been claimed that it could be true. The earliest forms of domestication of plants and animals are documented to have started in the Southwest of Asia and in Abu Hureyra. The first forms of animals that have been reported to be domesticated are the sheep and goats. The reason for this is that they are not a hassle to domesticate if compared to the other animals. At that time, the animals used to run wild in that the people had to hunt them down to get meat.

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