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Faidherbe, Louis: *See Senegal: Faidherbe, Louis and Expansion of French Senegal, 1854–1855.*

Famine: *See Drought, Famine, Displacement; Ethiopia: Famine, Revolution, Mengistu Dictatorship, 1914–1991.*

Fante: *See Akan States: Bono, Denkyira, Wassa, Akyem, Akwamu, Fante, Fifteenth to Seventeenth Centuries.*

Farming: Stone Age Farmers of the Savanna

Farming in much of Sub-Saharan Africa is based on management of animal herds, together with cultivation of a range of indigenous savanna crops. These savanna crops include a wide range of small-seeded grasses (various millet species), sorghum, African rice, as well as pulses native to the savanna-forest margins (cowpea, hyacinth bean, Bambara groundnuts). These species, however, represent numerous distinct domestication events in different regions across the Sub-Saharan savanna belt. The full process of the domestication of these species, from their wild exploitation by foragers to cultivation and morphological change, is incompletely documented.

Important precursors to savanna farming are to be found in the foraging societies of Sahara under wetter conditions, 7,000–4,000BCE. Sites from the Western Desert of Egypt (such as the Nabta Playa cultural complex) and southwest Libya (the Early Acacus to Early Pastoral tradition) provide ample evidence for the exploitation of wild harvested grasses. With the exception of wild sorghum from sites in western Egypt, the grasses exploited at this time were not

species subsequently domesticated, but their exploitation attests to a delayed-return foraging economy that probably included storage, an essential prerequisite for the development of cultivation. These societies began to manufacture pottery, much of which shared dotted-wavy line decoration, which suggests wide-ranging contacts among these mobile societies. It is also among these hunter-foragers of the Saharan grasslands that pastoralism became established. The spread of sheep and goats of Near Eastern origins occurred rapidly by the sixth millennium BCE, while cattle that spread during this period may have derived from indigenous domestication in the eastern Sahara as much as a millennium or two earlier. These societies would have been seasonally mobile and focused on perennial oasis water sources in the dry season, where use of cached wild grains would also have been important. As climate change caused the desertification of the Sahara, such groups would have been increasing forced southwards or into the Nile Valley. Evidence from Nabta Playa in southern Egypt and from southwest Libya both indicate that the desert had been abandoned by around 3,000BCE.

It is during this period of aridification that food production was adopted in the Sudanese Nile Valley. While the Early Khartoum tradition, which included dotted-wavy line ceramics, had subsisted by fishing, hunting, and foraging, the Shaheinab Neolithic, which emerged in the region north of Khartoum from around 4,000BCE, added evidence for domestic herd animals. Evidence from ceramic plant impressions and common quernstones attest to the use of wild grains, including wild sorghum. These communities were seasonally mobile, exploiting the Nile during the dry season and ranging into adjacent savannas during the wet season. Increasing reliance on pastoral production by these communities provided a basis for systems of wealth and hierarchy, which is evident in burials

beginning in the later fourth millennium BCE. While some scholars have argued that it was among these communities that sorghum was first cultivated, the available evidence is inconclusive, and these archaeological traditions end around 3,000BCE without subsequent evidence for settlements with cultivation in this area. The earliest finds of domesticated sorghum are not until the first millennium BCE on sites well established by sedentary farmers further north in Nubia. From the third millennium, the village to urban tradition of Kerma emerged, but it remains unclear whether this was based solely on the production of introduced wheat and barley cultivation in the Nile flood plain or also included summer cultivation of sorghum.

In West Africa, semisedentary communities of cultivators emerged in the early second millennium BCE among pastoralists who had retreated south from the drying Sahara. One such tradition emerged in the palaeolake and wadi systems of southeast Mauretania in the Tichitt Tradition. Here ceramics begin around 2,000BCE and incorporate chaff-temper from the local processing of domesticated pearl millet from around 1700BCE. Large communities are indicated by stone remains of town and village sites with large domestic compounds focused on water sources. While summer cultivation and storage probably focused on these settlements, pastoral mobility remained important, as indicated by surface scatters of campsites. In the Niger bend regions, the sites of Karkarichinkat South and Winde Koroji indicate established village farming traditions with pearl millet by the mid-second millennium BCE. Further south in northern Burkina Faso, the sites of Orusi and Ti-n-Akof indicate the establishment of millet cultivation and pastoral production on stabilized sand dunes of northern savanna. Genetic evidence suggests that southwest Mauretania and these Niger bend sites could relate to two distinct domestications of wild pearl millet populations. The currently available dates from these sites, however, provide only the minimum age for the end of the domestication process, as equivalent or slightly older dates are available beyond the wild pearl millet range, including finds from India.

The Kintampo culture, known archaeologically from Ghana, indicates the adoption of savanna agropastoralism among forest margin hunter-gatherers. Evidence for domesticated pearl millet from around 1700BCE, as well as domestic fauna, at Birimi in northern Ghana attests to the importance of millet cultivation among some groups, while Kintampo sites further south in Ghana lack millet but have yielded abundant evidence for oil palm exploitation from the forest edge environment as well as probable early cowpea.

Pastoralism, possibly accompanied by some crop cultivation, also spread eastward and southward from

the Sudan from the mid- to late third millennium BCE. The Nderit ceramic tradition of the Lake Turkana region is associated with evidence for domesticated sheep and goats, while contemporary Eburran tradition hunter-gatherer sites further south have produced small quantities of ceramics and sheep/goat bones. The slow spread of domestic fauna in this region during the second millennium BCE is due in part to the presence of disease threats to domesticates, as well as established hunter-gatherer adaptations. In the mid-first millennium BCE, Pastoral Neolithic societies were much more widespread and domesticates had begun to spread into southern Africa. On present evidence it is unclear the extent to which cultivated crops played a role in these eastern African food production economies. Similarly requiring further research is the establishment of food production in more coastal East Africa, where some sites with ceramics may also date back to as early as the mid-third millennium BCE. In the uplands of Ethiopia, evidence from Gobedra and Lake Besaka for domesticate cattle dates from the mid- to late second millennium BCE, while early crop evidence remains elusive. In southern Africa domestic livestock were adopted among Khoisan-speaking groups, perhaps in Namibia and the Zambezi River Valley in the last centuries BCE, with subsequent dispersal southward. Later iron-using farmers made a more noticeable impact. Evidence for plant cultivation comes from the third century CE, when pearl millet is known from Silver Leaves in eastern South Africa.

The patchy evidence for early farmers in African savannas contrasts with traditional models of the beginnings of farming developed from Near Eastern archaeology. While in the Near East sedentary hunter-gatherers took up cultivation, then animal domestication and then pottery, in Africa ceramics first occur among mobile foragers, and animal herding preceded plant cultivation and sedentary settlement.

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Further Reading

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Northern
Burkina
Faso:
Orusi