

Archaeologist: Cattle first kept in Sahara

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An archaeologist who has spent decades studying sites in the Sahara says nomads who roamed the area millennia ago were the first to domesticate cattle.

At the time, what is now desert was a vast savannah with a humid climate, Dr. Stefan Kropelin of the University of Cologne told the BBC. When the climate changed and the area became one of the driest places on Earth, its inhabitants moved into the Nile Valley.

"They brought all their know-how to the rest of the continent -- the domestication of cattle was invented in the Sahara in the humid phase and was then slowly pushed over the rest of Africa," he said. "This Neolithic way of life, which still is a way of life in a sense; preservation of food for the dry season and many other such cultural elements, was introduced to central and southern Africa from the Sahara."

The dry conditions in the Sahara, which have also left it almost empty of people and any other form of life, have had one ironic result -- its archaeological sites are exceptionally well-preserved.

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