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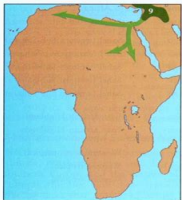


FIGURE 7-2 Dispersal of Fertile Crescent agriculture into Mediterranean North Africa and the Nile River valley. [Adapted from P. Bellwood, *First Farmers: The Origins of Agricultural Societies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); and M. D. Pongracz and D. Q. Fuller, "The Nature of Selection During Plant Domestication," *Nature* 457 (2009): 843–848, doi:10.1038/nature07995.]

7,000 years ago, and an organized political state by 6,000 years ago. The Nile was also the pathway along which Fertile Crescent agriculture and livestock domestication penetrated southward into the highlands of Ethiopia.

In recent millennia, the harsh barrier of the Sahara Desert has limited north-south contact among African populations, but between 10,000 and 5,000 years ago, much of the Sahara was not the hyperarid area of today. At that time, stronger summer monsoons sent rains much farther north (see Chapter 2, Figure 2-5), creating a grass-covered landscape dotted with lakes and seasonal waterways. The lower and wetter regions hosted hippos, crocodiles, rhinos, and turtles, while the intervening grasslands held gazelles, hares, and other game.

Early on, pastoral people grazed livestock on these grasslands, including cattle prior to 7,500 years ago and, later, sheep and goats as well. These people lived nomadic lives, constantly moving in search of water and grass and slowly dispersing westward from the Nile region across North Africa. The population densities of these nomadic groups were never high because of the extreme aridity of the environment, and the contribution of their livestock to the atmospheric methane trend was likely negligible.

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