

A Brief History Of The Earlier Civilizations That Thrived In The Famous Sahara

The Sahara is considered as the largest hot desert in the world. It is also the second biggest desert in the world – next only to the icy desert of Antarctica. The Sahara sustained several civilizations that thrived in its arid environment. Up to now, amidst its vast, dry and hot façade, it is very popular, especially in the field of research.

The Sahara is considered as the biggest hot desert in the world. It is also the second biggest desert in the world, following Antarctica. With an area of more than 9,000,000 sq km, it is estimated as able to cover a majority of the northern part of Africa. This would include some areas that stretch from the infamous Red Sea, portions of the vast Mediterranean coasts, and the Atlantic Ocean's beautiful outskirts. The Sahara is said to be similar to the size of continental US and very much larger as compared to Australia.

Moreover, when it comes to the history of the Sahara, it is as intermittent as it is three million years ago. With regards to its name, Sahara is an Arabic word for "Sahra" which means "desert". This means that calling it "Sahara Desert" is being redundant.

Hence, the history of the Sahara is as interesting as it sounds. Around 6000 BC, some pre-dynastic Egyptians who were in Egypt's southwestern corner were herding some cattle and were constructing some large buildings. At this time, the subsistence in permanent and organized settlements predominantly centered on animal agriculture and cereal. Animal agriculture would include goats, cattle, sheep and pigs. Metal objects are already replacing stone objects. Weaving, pottery and Tanning of certain animal skins were also common at this time. Reports also indicate that the Al Fayyum's temporary or seasonal occupation pertaining to food gathering, hunting and fishing were practiced.

Furthermore, the pre-dynastic Egyptians had scrapers, knives and arrowheads already. Their burial items included jewelry, pottery, hunting and farming equipment, along with assorted foods like fruit and dried meat. Their dead were buried in such a manner that they faced due west.

Around 3400 BC, the Sahara is noted to be dry as compared to its situation today. Due to this, it was very much impenetrable to the earlier Egyptians or to any human being for that matter. The only settlements were found scattered along its oasis. Even so, only little commerce and trade was present throughout this desert. The only exception for this would be along the Nile Valley. However, there are several cataracts of this river that was impassable. This is why trade as well as boat contact was very difficult.

Thus, by the Neolithic era, prior to the desertification onset, the central portion of the famous Sahara had a rich environment that supported a huge population that ranged across the barren desert that it is now. A good example is what they called Wadi el-Qa'ab.

Around the fifth millennium BC, people inhabiting the area called Nubia now were already full participants of the so-called "agricultural revolution". They lived and settled with a lifestyle that domesticated animals and grew plants. They were called the early Nubians.

Saharan herdsman and cattle rock art that were found earlier in the famous Sahara suggested that there were cattle cult, similar to the ones found in Sudan, were prevalent at that time. This is also like the current pastoral societies of Africa. With regards to the megaliths that were found in Nabta Playa, they were considered as overt examples of the first recognized Archaeoastronomy devices in the world. This predated the Stonehenge by a few thousand years. Thus, as per noted observations in Nabta Playa, the complexity and expression of various levels of the society's authority at that time formed their structure's basis for both Nabta's Neolithic Society and Egypt's Old Kingdom.

Later on, the Phoenicians or Phoenicia's residents who were around between 1200 up to 800 BC made a so-called "Confederation of Kingdoms" all over the Sahara and even up to Egypt. Generally, they settled within the regarded Mediterranean coast and the Sahara, This is also amongst the Ancient Libyan people, who were noted as the Sahara and North Africa's Berber Language ancestors. This is also along with Central Sahara's Tuareg community. Other adaptations of North Africa's ancient Libyans were the recorded Phoenician alphabet and the Tifinagh, which is still being used these days by Central Sahara's "Tuareg camel herders" that still speak the Berber language.

Then, around 633 BC up to 530 BC, the renowned "Hanno the Navigator" was noted to have either reinforced or established the Western Sahara's Phoenician colonies. However, all the ancient remains somehow vanished without any recorded trace whatsoever.

Thus, around 500 BC, the Greek influence arrived. This is with the spread of Greek traders along the desert's eastern coast and consequently establishing their trading colonies within the coast of the Red Sea. It is indicated that the Carthaginians were the ones who explored the Sahara's Atlantic coast. However, with a lack for markets and disturbing water turbulences, no extensive presence thrived farther than the modern Morocco we see now. Then again, there were already indicated centralized states that surrounded the Sahara through its northern and eastern portions but they remained beyond the states' control. For those living by the desert's edge, their constant concern at that time were raids made by the nomadic Berber

natives.

Thus, after the Phoenicians, another urban civilization known as the Garamantes arose in the Sahara's central area. This is along a valley they currently call Wadi al-Ajal situated in Libya's Fazzan region. The Garamantes was noted to achieve a stronger kind of development via digging some tunnels farther into the region's mountains. This is in order to flank the valley and tap some fossil water they can bring to the fields they made. As the Garamantes became populous and strong, they even conquered their neighbors and captured several slaves. These slaves were the ones who worked on extending their tunnels.

This is one reason why the early Romans and Greeks regarded the Garamantes as "uncivilized nomads". Even so, they continued their trade with the Garamantes. In fact, along Garama's Garamantes capital, a Roman type of bath was discovered by Archaeologists. Aside from this, eight major towns as well as various other significant settlements were found along the regarded Garamantes territory. As per reports, the civilization of the Garamantes eventually collapsed due to the fact that they already depleted all the available water within the so-called aquifers. With this, they could not sustain the task of extending their tunnels in order to go further and deeper into their mountains.

This is how the Sahara sustained several civilizations that thrived in its arid environment. Up to now, amidst its vast, dry and hot façade, it is very popular, especially in the field of research, where in, it is believed that valuable ancient artifacts, relics and even fossils of the ancient civilizations is hidden there, somewhere.

About the Author

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