

Sahara was once green, hosted early dairy farms

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Washington: The sandy dunes may have made the Sahara a desolate desert now, but about 7,000 years ago, it was full of greenery that hosted early African dairy farms, according to a new research.

A team from University of Bristol, who analysed fossilized bones and colourful rock art discovered there, found that by the sixth millennium BC (or about 7,000 years ago), cattle, sheep and goats roamed over green savanna.

By analysing pottery fragments, Dunne and her colleagues have now shown that these early herders were not only milking their livestock, but also processing that milk into products like yogurt, cheese and butter.

"The most exciting thing about this is that milk is one of the only foodstuffs that gives us carbohydrates, protein and fat," all in one substance, Dunne told LiveScience.

"So it was incredibly beneficial for prehistoric people to use milk."

Dunne and her colleagues analysed tiny fragments of pottery taken from the Takarkori rock shelter, a prehistoric dwelling in the Libyan Sahara. They ground up small pieces of the pottery, conducting



HOW GREEN WAS MY DESERT

chemical analyses to investigate the proteins and fats embedded in the shards.

By doing so, the researchers could see what the pots once held. They found evidence of a varied diet, with signs found for plant oils and animal fat.

The most common fats were from animals, Dunne said, with some deriving from flesh and others from milk. The most dairy-fat rich pottery shards came from the same time periods when more cattle bones are found in the cave layers, the researchers reported in the journal *Nature*. PTI