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West African Food in the Middle Ages by Tadeusz Lewicki

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never left his native Spain. The reference to growing lentils in Awdaghast (p. 57) does not seem to be correct. The term used is kirisinna, which means 'cow-pea,' though it is sometimes used more elastically. If Abū 'l-Fidā' had meant lentils he would surely have used the standard Arabic word 'adas'. The reading of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (Lewicki, p. 64) faqqūs 'inānī, growing at Gao, is probably to be corrected to faqqūs 'attābī. The term 'inānī' is not readily explicable, whereas 'attābī' means 'striped' - originally of cloth, but also applied to water-melon (see R. Dozy, Supplement aux Dictionnaires Arabes (Leiden, 1881), ii, p. 93). Incidentally, I cannot understand why 'water-melon' should be an erroneous translation for biṭṭīkh (p. 64 and n. 384). It is certainly the common word used for water-melon in the Arab world (except in western Arabia and Hadramawt where ḥabbab is used.) On p. 47 there is a printing error: Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's journey to Mali was in 1352-3 r 1392-3. Burrum (p. 36) and Gando (p. 60) may not easily be recognized as being Bourem and Gwandu; the antiquated spelling is from Barth.

The book has been produced by the off-set process from typed sheets with an unjustified right margin. Footnote numbers are placed in the left margin with asterisks against the place in the text to which the note refers. But the appearance is still neat and legible, though since this format was presumably chosen on grounds of economy, it is a pity that the final price still had to remain so high. For specialists concerned with the Arabic sources for West Africa or those interested in the question of food production in the area, Lewicki's book is a useful and scholarly reference tool. In a day when too much speculation takes place in African history on the basis of too little carefully sifted evidence, the appearance of such a book is especially welcome and one may hope that it will be the harbinger of further detailed studies both by Lewicki and others.

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West African Food in the Middle Ages. Tadeusz Lewicki.

This is an interesting book. Tadeusz Lewicki brought together knowledge that was scattered across a voluminous literature. Medieval Arabic manuscripts dealing with West African geography are reviewed. The period covered is the tenth through the middle sixteenth century. Agriculture, food in markets and methods of food preparation are discussed, and compared with similar observations by sixteenth century and later European travelers. Food plants are identified, and where appropriate, origins and distributions of native West African species are discussed. The botanical names assigned to these crops, unfortunately, are not always correct, and his reliance on out-dated literature when dealing with origins can be misleading.

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The antiquity of food production in West Africa is not known. Archaeological evidence is incomplete, and historical evidence only indicates that agriculture was well established across the savanna by the beginning of the tenth century. Food plants common in markets then are still widely grown today.

The common cereals in Medieval West Africa were the native sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor* (L.) Moench), pearl millet (*Pennisetum americanum* (L.) K. Schum.), rice (*Oryza glaberrima* Steud.), and fonio (*Digitaria exilis* (Kippist) Stapf). The Near Eastern cereals, wheat (*Triticum* ssp.) and barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L.) were rarely encountered, and then only in markets. This is not surprising. They are poorly adapted for cultivation in the savanna.

Pearl millet (anil, dukhn, bulrush millet) was one of the first native West African cereals to be domesticated. It is the most drought tolerant, and is known to have been introduced into India by 1000 B.C. Arab travelers reported pearl millet from the middle Niger and adjacent countries during Medieval times. It must have been more widely distributed than reported, but was probably often confused with sorghum.

Sorghum (dhurra) was, and still is the most common cereal in the West African savanna. Its wild ancestor extends across the broad-leaved savanna from the Atlantic coast to southern Africa. However, sorghum was probably first cultivated somewhere between Mauritania and the Sudan. It became widely distributed in the Indian subcontinent by the middle of the first millennium B.C.

There are several references to rice in West Africa during Medieval times. These must refer to the native *Oryza glaberrima* rather than the Asiatic *Oryza sativa* L.. The latter species although known to the Romans by the first century, probably did not reach West Africa until the fifteenth century. The ancestor of West African rice is widely distributed across the broad-leaved savanna, and is commonly collected as a wild cereal. It was probably first cultivated around the bend of the Niger.

Three kinds of fonio are grown in West Africa. Animal fonio (*Brachiaria deflexa* (Schumach.) C. E. Hubb.) is collected as a wild cereal across the savanna, but cultivated only on the Futa-Jalon Highlands of Guinea. Black fonio (*Digitaria iburua* Stapf) is a minor cereal of Togo and northern Nigeria, while true fonio (*Digitaria exilis*) is widely grown from Senegal to Chad. Fonio is not a famine crop as sometimes suggested, but a highly valued cereal. The cereal described by al-Omari as a kind of hairy lupin with small, mustard-like, white seeds must have been fonio. It is a pilose species with white grains.

The wild grasses that were harvested during Medieval times are probably the same as those commonly collected as wild cereals today. Exactly which species are described in Arabic chronicles are difficult to ascertain. Equally unreliable are many of the identifications of species by later European explorers. Some 60 species are important wild cereals in the savanna, and several of these are referred to by the same common name among different tribal groups.

Legumes used in West Africa were the native *Voandzeia subterranea* (L.) Thouars (bambara groundnut), and *Vigna unguiculata* (L.) Walp. (cowpea). The West Asian broadbean, chick-pea and lentil were also encountered in markets. It is surprising that no mention is made of cowpea production in Nigeria, its probable center of domestication.

The hyacinth bean (Lablab niger Medic) is not botanically included in Vigna, as suggested by Lewicki, but a different legume probably domesticated in East Africa.

Yams (Dioscorea spp.) and the kafir potato (Plectranthus esculentus N.E. Br.) are common tuber crops of the broad-leaved savanna. Ibn Battuta ate a yam in Mali which made him ill. This probably was a native species of Dioscorea. Lewicki argues that South East Asian yams could have been grown in West Africa during Medieval times. Historical evidence, however, indicates that these Dioscorea taxa were introduced into Africa not earlier than the fifteenth century.

There are three references in Arabic chronicles to 'sugarcane' in West Africa. The true sugarcane (Saccharum officinarum L.) is South Asian in origin, and reached West Africa during the fifteenth century. It is far more probable that the sweet canes of Medieval times referred to sweet kinds of Sorghum bicolor. Sweet selections are known across the area of sorghum cultivation in Africa.

An array of Mediterranean fruits and vegetables were evidently widely grown in West Africa; onion, garlic, cabbage, turnip, cucumber, melon, pomegranate, peach, grape, and others were known to Arab travelers, and must have been correctly identified by them. Native wild fruits were also harvested as food, and oil was obtained from Sesamum indicum L. (sesame), and the native taxa Elaeis guineensis Jacq. (oil palm) and Butyrospermum paradoxum (Gaertn.) Hepper (karite). Lewicki suggests that the New World pumpkins (Cucurbita spp.) were known in West Africa during Medieval times. This seems highly unlikely. The gar of Arabic authors must refer to Telfairia and Lagenaria.

Travelers to Medieval West Africa saw sheep, cattle, camels, donkeys, dogs, chickens and numerous wild animals. Meat was available in the markets, as was honey. Methods of preparing food seem to differ little from ways foods are prepared today.

"West African Food in the Middle Ages" is interesting to read. It is an excellent review of agricultural activities in the West African savanna before the New World and South Asian food plants were introduced by Europeans. This book deserves a place on the bookshelf of every historian and ethnobotanist interested in Africa.

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Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade. Philip D. Curtin, Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 1975. Pp. xxvii, 456, \$15.00 and Supplement, \$15.00.

Professor Curtin examines the economic relationship between the West and Senegambia from the end of the seventeenth century to the

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