

From the Organizers and Editors

The unique role played by northeast Africa in the development of human culture is known to all us. While the importance of the ancient Egyptian and Nubian complex societies in this development seems generally to be well understood, comparatively little was known until recently about the cultural process which led to the formation of these civilizations. It seems that a particular phenomenon could have been associated with the beginnings of this long process: the introduction of the food producing economy. There is no need to explain the importance of this behavioural change in the course of human history, but it may be useful to remember that the developed form of this subsistence economy was the basis for the functioning of the earliest complex societies.

The span of time between the introduction of the production of food and the formation of the first state on the lower Nile (*i.e.* complex society with its written form of communication) comprises, as it now seems, such periods as the Late Palaeolithic, Neolithic and Predynastic. Although these have been studied since the last century, particular intensive and fruitful research took place in the last two decades. As a result, a completely new picture of the later prehistory on the Nile and in the adjacent parts of Africa has emerged. The prehistorians working in this part of Africa now have reasons to believe that the outcome of this research contributes greatly to the general theory of the development of the later prehistoric societies. The prehistorians, egyptologists and nubilogists feel that it could also help to understand the process of the origin and shaping of the earliest complex societies on the Nile.

Our idea was to undertake an attempt at gathering the scholars of different disciplines studying the later prehistory of the northeast Africa, particularly those investigating the origins of the production of food, to create an opportunity to allow them to present and discuss the results of the latest field works and different studies stemming from these, as well as to organize a place for an exchange of ideas. We also felt that it would be in the interest of this conference to invite prehistorians working on the Neolithic of the Sahara, the Maghreb and East Africa, *i.e.* the regions adjacent to the Nilotic zone, as well as a group of egyptologists and nubilogists who show a clear interest in the studies on the origins of the earliest complex societies on the Nile.

It remains our hope that the papers presented at the symposium, which comprise



Members of the Symposium

these Proceedings, the discussions held and the personal contacts made by its participants will contribute to better understanding and further research of this important period of time in the past of northeast Africa.

The symposium would not have taken place without the encouragement and support which we received from a number of senior scholars in different countries. The late Kazimierz Michałowski, as well as Jan Żak, Fred Wendorf, J. Desmond Clark and Peter L. Shinnie are only a few of them. We also wish to express our gratitude to Professor Fred Wendorf who agreed to hold this symposium under the auspices of his Commission on the Terminology of the Prehistory of the Near East and Africa of the International Union of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences.

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