

Preface

The ability to farm, to cultivate plants and to raise domestic animals has been the basis of every civilization known to man. The question of where, when, and how farming began has, therefore, long been a major concern of archaeologists. It is the traditional view that both plants and animals were first domesticated in the Levant in the early Holocene, and that this led rapidly to settled village life, and eventually to more complex societies. This view has been challenged by recent excavations in Northeast Africa which have indicated that the processes of both plant and animal domestication were under way in Africa at least as early as in the Levant, and perhaps earlier. It is also evident that basic changes, not only in the economy but also in social organization, occurred among these early framers and herders in Northeast Africa at a much earlier period than was previously believed.

These new data and the changes they have caused in our perceptions of Northeast African prehistory formed the central theme of a conference held at Dymaczewo (near Poznań, Poland) from September 9 to 13, 1980. The conference was organized by the Archaeological Commission of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Poznań Branch, and was held under the auspices of the Commission on Terminology of the Prehistory of the Near East and North Africa of the International Union of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences.

There were 77 participants from 14 countries at the conference, and they included prehistorians active in northern and eastern Africa as well as egyptologists and nubologists. It was an unusual opportunity for interaction between those who work in the same areas but have a diversity of intellectual goals and interests.

The idea for the conference originated with Lech Krzyżaniak and Michał Kobusiewicz, who also did a superb job in bringing this diverse group together and in keeping the discussions focused on the central theme. The daily conference program consisted of morning and afternoon sessions, at which formal papers were presented, each being followed by a brief discussion. These formal papers, subsequently revised, are presented in this volume. For more extended discussions the group reconvened each evening after dinner. These evening sessions were free-wheeling, far-reaching, and very animated. After each, the conference would then divide itself into smaller study groups who adjourned to the bar and kept up the good work until far into the night.

The Dymaczewo conference center was an ideal setting for our meetings. It is located on a large state farm several kilometers from the nearest village or other distraction. This quiet and delightfully pastoral locale served to concentrate our thoughts to the task at hand. All of the participants lived, ate and drank at the rest center throughout the conference.

The organization was superb. The enormous logistical problems of assembling, transporting and caring for this large group proceeded without a single difficulty, much to the credit of the organizers of the conference, and the staffs of both the Polish Academy of Sciences, Poznan Branch, and the Dymaczewo Centre. It was a delightful and extremely informative period in the lives of all of us who were privileged to be present.

Fred Wendorf

President

Commission on Terminology of the
Prehistory of the Near East and
North Africa