

## Chapter 8

# Conclusions

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The aim of this study was to identify the origins of Lower Egyptian Neolithic pottery which emerged in the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC in Lower Egypt. The point of departure was determined by two existing hypotheses assuming either a Levantine or Saharan origin of Lower Egyptian Neolithic pottery. Comparative analyses of ceramic assemblages from the three regions concerned (Lower Egypt, central and northern part of the Western Desert and southern Levant) dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> millennia BC were aimed at verifying these hypotheses, and thus at determining the direction from which pottery was introduced to Lower Egypt.

Given the current state of research on pottery production in the three above-mentioned regions, none of those hypotheses can be either disproved or considered more likely than the other. Indeed, the arguments presented in both hypotheses are very much alike. Furthermore, both hypotheses assume that pottery was an innovation introduced from outside by newcomers. In the Levantine hypothesis, pottery was part of the Neolithic package introduced to Lower Egypt together with domesticated plants and animals. However, the desert hypothesis sees pottery production as a technology introduced to the northern part of Egypt by refugees from the eastern Sahara as part of their African heritage. Both hypotheses are based on technological and typological similarities, including vessel forms, surface treatments or decoration patterns. Meanwhile, although detailed analyses confirm the similarities between ceramic assemblages, they also demonstrate that these similarities are highly general. Furthermore, they are accompanied by a number of differences.

The available archaeological and linguistic evidence does not confirm any direct connection between Lower Egypt and the southern Levant or Lower Egypt and the Western Desert, or the presence of migrants from the eastern Sahara or the Near East in the northern part of Egypt. Although DNA studies indicate a possible genetic influx from the Near East dated to the Neolithic period, such evidence is insufficient to link the introduction of pottery with the arrival of Levantine groups to north-eastern Africa.

The origins of Lower Egyptian pottery are clearly not a new research problem, as one which has been raised nearly from the beginning of research on the Neolithic period in Lower Egypt. The coexistence of pottery with domesticated plants and animals was well suited to the model assuming that farming and animal husbandry had spread outside the core area of the Near East. Thus, the Levantine origin of Lower Egyptian pottery became ostensibly obvious, with the publications of many authors sustaining this view for years. Although explorations in the eastern Sahara began in the 1970s, it was only in the 1980/90s that the first hypotheses began to suggest some loose links between the desert occupation and the Neolithic occupation both in the Nile Valley and Delta. Research carried out in both regions has been strikingly divided until today, with only some scholars drawing attention to the cultural links between them. The purpose of combining the Levantine and desert hypotheses in the model presented in this monograph is to go beyond the rigid framework of studies in the desert or the Nile Valley and Delta and to address possible interactions between them. Thus, a broader cultural context of such research may be beneficial for a better understanding of the prehistoric occupation in north-eastern Africa.

The results of analyses discussed in the monograph show that Lower Egyptian Neolithic pottery has both Levantine and desert roots. In the model of the introduction of pottery production into Lower Egypt created on the basis of these analyses, pottery was introduced into Lower Egypt from the Western Desert, although its development was influenced by the Levantines during the course of the Neolithic. This model assumes the presence of visitors from both the desert and the east. It is based not only on the technical and typological similarities of pottery but also takes into account the cultural, as well as environmental factors that influenced the organisation of pottery production, namely lifestyle, subsistence strategies, and the environment they occupied. This model is not just an artificial attempt to reconcile two different views on the origin of Lower Egyptian Neolithic pottery. It is the result of viewing Lower Egyptian Neolithic in a broader context, taking into account not only the Near East but also north-eastern Africa. Key to this model were the results of the latest research conducted in Lower Egypt, specifically, in the Fayum or in Wadi Gamal, which showed Lower Egyptian Neolithic communities in a completely new light and made it possible to go beyond

the framework of the Near Eastern model of farming communities imposed on them nearly a century ago. This is particularly evident in the case of the groups that occupied the northern shore of Lake Qarun which, in terms of way of life and subsistence strategies, are more reminiscent of the hunter-gatherers and herders of the eastern Sahara than Levantine farmers. However, in conducting research on the Lower Egyptian Neolithic period, one cannot ignore the links connecting it with the southern Levant, including, in particular, the Near Eastern origin of domesticated plants and animals. Moreover, the Near Eastern elements of the Lower Egyptian Neolithic are very important because their introduction initiated important social and economic processes leading to the formation of complex farming communities that occupied the Nile Valley and Delta in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC.

Admittedly, the proposed model is not perfect and many of its elements need to be further studied. Indeed, our limited knowledge of both the Neolithic occupation of Lower Egypt and the Middle Holocene occupation of the Western Desert, based on limited archaeological evidence, does not make conducting research any easier. In addition, the southern Levantine Pottery Neolithic requires further studies explaining its cultural diversity.

Finally, the author is aware that new discoveries may have a significant impact on the value of the model proposed here. However, for now, it may serve as a starting point for further works and discussions on the problem of the origin of the Lower Egyptian Neolithic period. Whether it is confirmed or disproved in the course of further studies is, for better or worse, beyond the author's control.