CHAPTER THREE

THE BEGINNINGS: A-GROUP LOWER NUBIA AND
THE EMERGING EGYPTIAN STATE (C. 3700–2800 BC)

Is it Nubians? Then we will protect ourselves. There are plenty of fighters to repel the Bowmen.¹

1. Before Political Frontiers

The history of the Lower Nubian frontier zone starts in an age in the larger part of which the notion of political frontier does not make sense.² What we may discern in the archaeological record of the Neolithic of the Middle Nile Region³ are cultural entities (i.e., socio-economic, technological, and ideological complexes) confined within a certain geographical range. We also may discern contacts or transitions between such entities and influences exerted by one cultural entity on another one.

Egyptology and African archaeology adopted the concept of Neolithic of nineteenth and twentieth century European archaeology. This concept is based on the occurrence of at least three out of four traits, viz., polished stone implements, pottery, agriculture, and the domestication of animals. More recently, students of African archaeology strongly argue against the use of the concept and the term of Neolithic. They suggest that the term as a time marker became irrelevant with the advent of radiocarbon dating. Yet they also warn that

[i]t is not to be supposed that, by dropping the term ‘neolithic’ and substituting phrases such as ‘pastoral’, ‘agricultural’, ‘farming’, ‘crop-raising’, ‘food-producing’ or any other expressions, all problems will be solved. Such terms only relate to one aspect of one parameter of living…

The understanding of the complex issues involved in sedentism, semi-sedentism, nomadism, territorial occupancy and the myriad forms of food production and food usage cannot be assisted by oversimplifying terminology.

While one can only agree with this, so far no new terminology has been suggested that could adequately describe the prehistoric cultures of the Middle Nile Region (presumably because we do not know them sufficiently). Therefore I shall use Neolithic for orientation as a chronological/archaeological term under the presumption that the deviations of Middle Nile Neolithic cultures from the traditional notions of European and Near Eastern Neolithic are nevertheless obvious to the readers of the more recent literature.

Unlike the course of Neolithization in other parts of the world, cereal-based agriculture played only a limited role, and only in certain areas, in the transition from hunting and gathering to food-producing.\(^5\) Sedentism developed in several different forms on the Middle Nile and in the interior.\(^6\) The motor of the transition was animal husbandry the spread of which was part of the long-distance exchange connecting the cultures of the Middle Nile Region with each other and with those of the Lower Nile, the Eastern Sahara, and the Kassala region. The direction(s) and manner(s) of the spread of animal husbandry in Egypt, 

---

\(^4\) Sinclair \textit{et al.} 1993 7f.—Cf. also Wengrow 2006 1ff.
