CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The second half of the 5th millennium and the 4th millennium BCE – the Chalcolithic period and the EB I – have recently become a significant and important, and sometimes controversial, topic in the archaeology of Israel and the southern Levant.

Numerous fundamental questions confront researchers who deal with these periods, and we will present just a few:

– What was the nature of these periods? What settlement pattern was unique to each of them? What was the sociological character of the inhabitants? What was the inhabitants’ economy based on? What sets the periods apart?

– Until now the transition from the Chalcolithic to the Early Bronze Age (EB) has been a gap in archaeological research. Can any new data be presented regarding the nature of this transition? Was there cultural-settlement continuity? Was there material continuity?

– How did the urbanization process that characterizes the EB II begin? Had it already begun in the EB I, or was it a product of the EB II?

This book will address these questions and others, and will propose a number of characteristics and new ideas which will aid researchers in formulating a more firmly based view with regard to the time and the region of the study.

The aim of the study is to examine the settlement pattern and its characteristics from standpoints of both chronology (Chalcolithic and EB I) and geography (the western Jordan Valley and the desert fringes of Samaria).¹

Two parameters make this study unique:

The first involves geography: this is the first study conducted in the field over an extensive area in the western Jordan Valley and desert fringes of Samaria. This area has rarely been investigated in the past, giving an opportunity to introduce a new, wide-reaching, and so far unknown collection of data. The idea that in the Jordan Valley there was an important centre and a main transit route in the southern Levant,

¹ This region, covering an area of about 750 km², stretches from Nahal Bezeq in the north to Wadi ’Aujjeh in the south, and from the Jordan River in the east to the lower part of the scarp of the eastern hills of Samaria in the west.
from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period (and probably earlier) to the end of the Bronze Age, is not new. Our study emphasizes the importance of the region, and from this, makes possible inferences about processes, and draws conclusions about the entire southern Levant.

The second parameter is defined by the methodology. Two methods were combined to ensure reliable results. Firstly, it employed the Manasseh Hill Country Survey, a high-resolution archaeological survey of the region that encompassed an exceptionally large area. No surveys of this scale have been carried out elsewhere in the southern Levant, and therefore it had the advantage of providing a complete picture of the sites from these periods over the whole area of the study. Secondly, the results of the five excavations the author conducted at sites dated to the sub-phases of the periods discussed in this book significantly expanded the database, and allowed a more accurate picture of the phases of these periods. The survey and excavations produced data that supplemented each other, allowing us to analyze a variety of components related to the structure of the society, its economy, etc.

In order to answer the fundamental questions, a number of steps were taken.

Firstly, the survey results of 93 relevant published sites and 30 unpublished sites were analyzed.\(^2\) In addition, the results of a number of small excavations were checked.\(^3\) In the next stage all the boxes of artifacts from the different surveys were examined and reprocessed, apart from about 10% which could not be located. At the same time the exist-

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\(^2\) The surveys used were: the Manasseh Hill Country Survey (Zertal 2005; 2008), the Emergency Survey (Gophna and Porath 1972; Bar-Adon 1972), the Samaria Survey II (Porath 1968 – not yet published, but the data from it was examined within the framework of this study), the surveys of Tzori in the southern Beth Shean Valley (1962; 1977b), the Survey of Ephraim (Finkelstein et al. 1997), the Mittmann survey in the southern Beth Shean Valley (Mittmann 1970), the Glueck survey in western Jordan (Glueck 1951), and surveys by researchers of the Archaeological Staff Officer of the Judea and Samaria (not yet published).

\(^3\) The excavations checked were: a salvage excavation conducted by Porath in a building from the Chalcolithic period in the settlement at Fazael (Porath 1985); a salvage excavation by Peleg in a building from the Chalcolithic period in the same settlement (Peleg 2000); a salvage excavation by Hizmi in the settlement of Yitav (Hizmi 2003); a salvage excavation by Sadeh and Gophna in a Chalcolithic site north of Mehula (Sadeh and Gophna 1991); cleaning of a section containing material from the Chalcolithic period in Wadi Far’ah by Mellaart (Leonard 1992); excavations conducted at Tell Tsaf by Gophna and Sadeh (Gophna and Sadeh 1988–89) and Garfinkel (Garfinkel et al. 2007), which proved that the tell was settled in the earlier, rather than the later, phases of the Chalcolithic period (for this reason it is not dealt with in the regional analysis); and a salvage excavation conducted by Eisenberg at a fortified EB Ib settlement near Tel Shalem (Eisenberg 1996).
ing sites were comprehensively surveyed, based on new environmental parameters (these are presented below), and the chronology of their periods was re-defined and its reliability was reviewed (see The Principle of Probability, below). Following the initial reprocessing of the surveys, a regional ceramic typology was created for the two periods. Simultaneously with the research and the renewed chronological segmentation of the sites, excavations were initiated and directed by the author at five sites in the study region:

– ’Ein Hilu – the first Chalcolithic site excavated in the desert fringes of Samaria. The purpose of the excavation was to learn about the Chalcolithic period in this unknown region. The site was radiometrically dated to the third quarter of the 5th millennium BCE.

– Fazael 2 and Fazael 7 – Chalcolithic sites in the Fazael Valley, in the southern part of the study region, which were excavated for the purpose of learning about the pattern of settlement at the end of the Chalcolithic period. Fazael 2, radiometrically dated to the first quarter of the 4th millennium BCE, is one of the latest sites of the period in the Jordan Valley, and might constitute the beginning of the transitional period between the Chalcolithic and EB I.

– Sheikh Diab 2 and Fazael 4 – Two EB I sites in Wadi Fazael which were excavated in order to examine the settlement pattern and rural settlement planning in the EB I.

The new excavation data, after processing, improved the accuracy of the chronological segmentation of the survey.

Next, the excavation and survey data were integrated to construct a preliminary settlement picture, which presented parameters of spatial analysis that were previously unknown. Here the environmental components derived from the renewed detailed survey were added, thus combining the ecosystem (water, soil, topography, orientation, etc.) and the settlement distribution. This was done by means of statistical analyses, together with GIS, for comparing and analyzing the connection between the distribution and the ecology. For example, discussions were held regarding the influence of sources of water on settlement distribution, the grouping of settlements, the selection of the location and its surroundings, etc. The integrated results present a reliable picture of the settlement pattern and its structure in detail, such as issues related to domestic architecture and the finds in it. These new data allowed us

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4 The name is sometimes written Fasaël, but in this book Fazael is used. The name is the modern Hebrew name of a village about 1.5 km north of the Bedouin village Fusail (ancient Fasaelis).
to analyze the society and economy of each period separately, compare the periods, and make a comparison with the present data from Jordan.

**Structure of the Book**

The book consists of 15 chapters:

Chapters 1 to 4 are an introduction to this research, and include a General Introduction; geo- and palaeo-data concerning the Jordan Valley and the desert fringes of Samaria; the history of the archaeological research of the Chalcolithic and EB I in the region explored; and the research methodology.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the settlement patterns in the region in the two periods. Chapter 7 compares both sides of the River Jordan during the periods under discussion, followed by an analysis of the pottery of these periods (Chapter 8).

Chapters 9 to 13 present the results of five excavations carried out by the author as part of this research. These are followed by a general summary (Chapter 14), and the Site Catalogue of all the sites analysed (Chapter 15).

The Reference List of the entire study completes the book.

**Notes:**

1. The reader will notice some inconsistency in the place-names: e.g. 'En Esur - 'Ein Assawir; 'Ein Hilu - Ein Hilu; Beth Yerah - Bet Yerah. These different spellings were used in the cited publications, and it was felt that it would be easier to retain them to assist literature searches.

2. Sites are referred to by Site number, which appears in the Site Catalogue, Chapter 15. Note that site numbers quoted from Zertal's list are written with lower case ‘s’ to avoid confusion.