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. In addition, the results of a number of small excavations were checked. 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).