CHAPTER TWO

GEOGRAPHICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

Geographical Boundaries Of The Study

The southern Jordan Valley and desert fringes of Samaria are two neighbouring geographic units, west of the River Jordan, in the eastern part of Palestine. The southern Jordan Valley is defined as the flat land between the Samarian hills in the west and the River Jordan in the east. The northern part is the southern Beth Shean Valley, and in the south it borders on the Jordan’s outlet into the Dead Sea. The Jordan Valley is about 70 km long in this section between Nahal Bezeq and the estuary. The width of this section ranges between 5 km in the vicinity of Fass ej-Jamal, and 25 km opposite Jericho (Ben-Yosef 1979: 247).

The desert fringe of the Samarian hills is a narrow elongated stretch of land extending west of the lower Jordan Valley, and east of the scarp of the eastern Samarian hills. In the north it borders on the Beth Shean Valley, and in the south Wadi 'Aujjeh and the desert fringes of the Judean Hills. Its width varies with that of the southern Jordan Valley, and ranges between 6 km at its narrowest part in the regions of Kokhav Ha-Shahar or Duma, and more than 20 km at its widest part in the area between Fass ej-Jamal and Ras Jadir.

The boundaries of the study area were fixed in these two geographical regions (Fig. 2.1): the northern border along Nahal Bezeq (Wadi Shubash), which flows west from the Zebabdeh Valley via the southern part of the Beth Shean Valley and empties into the Jordan southeast of Tirat Tzvi; the eastern border is the Jordan between the mouth of Nahal Bezeq in the north and the mouth of Wadi 'Aujjeh in the south; the southern border was set along Wadi 'Aujjeh which flows west from the vicinity of Khirbet Marjameh to its outlet in the Jordan, east of 'Aujjeh village; and the western border passes through the lower part of the scarp of the eastern part of the Samarian hills (the monocline of the eastern hills of Samaria, Spanier 1992: 122). This scarp forms a prominent boundary between the lower eastern region (inside the study region) and the higher western one outside the study region. The western boundary also overlaps the line of average annual precipitation (250–300 mm, Shachar 1995: 28). This boundary runs along the bot-
Figure 2.1. The boundaries of the study.