CHAPTER NINE

'EIN HILU – A CHALCOLITHIC SITE
ON THE DESERT FRINGES OF SAMARIA

INTRODUCTION

During February-June 2006, an excavation was conducted at the site of 'Ein Hilu. The site (Israel Old Grid Map ref. 1981/1922, 40 m below sea level) was discovered during the survey of the Manasseh Hill Country in 1988, and was recorded in Volume II of the survey report (Zertal 2008: 557–561). The site's size was estimated to be 1.2 ha, and traces of walls were visible on the ground. In October 1988, a small trial excavation was conducted at the site under the direction of Zertal. The partial remains of a broad house were exposed, and indicative finds that were dated to the Chalcolithic period were retrieved. A decision was made to continue the excavation as part of the author's PhD thesis.

ENVIRONMENTAL BACKGROUND

The site is located on a hill slope overlooking the Wadi Malih fault, east of the modern Tubas-Mehula-Beqa'ot Junction, and west of the convergence of the desert fringes of Samaria and the Jordan Valley (Figs. 9.1–9.2). The spring of 'Ein el-Hilu, from which the site receives its name, is located some 500 m north-east of the site. This is the only fresh water source in the vicinity.

The site is situated in a semi-arid region with present-day average annual rainfall of about 250 mm (Shachar 1995: 28). The site is dominated by Irano-Turanian vegetation; the flora consisting mostly of annual garigue with a few, mainly small, bushes. No trees are found here (Sabah 1992), and the only tall shrub is the Ziziphus spina-christi.

The dominant geomorphological formation in the area is the Far'ah Anticline, which borders the Shechem Syncline to the east. This anticline is the northern continuation of the Judah and Ephraim chain of anticlines. It is defined by a broad, subterranean axis and a relatively

---

1 This chapter is based on a paper published by the author and others in the Journal of the Israel Prehistoric Society (Bar et al. 2008).
narrow upper axis. The slanted blocks of the Far’ah Anticline slope moderately west, while the eastern branch drops sharply towards the Jordan Valley. The anticline is intersected by faults, forming river valleys and wide ravines. The longest of these faults underlies the valley of Wadi Far’ah. The site of ‘Ein Hilu is situated about 20 km to the north of Wadi Far’ah in the valley of Wadi Malih. Thus, the site is set within a hilly terrain incised by deep wadis running from the Samaria hills in the west to the Jordan Valley in the east. South of the site, there is a small valley of 30 ha. North-east of the site, along the banks of Wadi Malih, more terrain is available for dry farming.

The area to the west of the northern part of the Far’ah Anticline and the desert fringes of Samaria is conspicuously devoid of Chalco-

Figure 9.1. General location.