CHAPTER FOURTEEN

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This study presents an analysis of the settlement patterns in the Chalcolithic and EB I periods in the southern Jordan Valley and the desert fringes of Samaria. The data from 102 survey sites were reviewed, and those of 30 new sites were analyzed. Five sites were excavated in order to answer specific questions concerning this subject.

This chapter summarizes the surveys and excavation data to give a general picture of the settlement pattern, according to trends and key processes.

TRENDS IN POPULATION FLUCTUATION IN THE CHALCOLITHIC AND EB I PERIODS

The Chalcolithic and EB I were periods of peak settlement in this region. Similar peaks were only recorded in later periods, particularly in the Iron I–II and the Roman-Byzantine periods (Zertal 2005; 2008).

A sequence of several sites (Sites 45, 67, 86–87, 108–109, 113) from earlier periods (Pottery Neolithic B/Early Chalcolithic) was identified for the first time in this study. In addition, there are three known sites that border on the region: Tel Tsaf, the Bezeq Channel (Site 6) and Tell Far’ah (North), which can also be ascribed to the Early Chalcolithic, based on ceramics (Miroschedji 1993).

Of the 10 early sites, seven also existed in the Chalcolithic, when more than 45 new sites were established. It is clear from this that a significant increase in settlement occurred in the Chalcolithic, the reasons for which we can only assume. Fifty-three sites from the Chalcolithic were discovered (40 of which have medium or higher levels of probability). However, a decrease occurred again at the end of the period: in only seven of the sites with a medium or higher level of probability were there EB I finds (which does not meant there was stratigraphic continuity).

Fifty-six sites were discovered from the EB I (46 of which have a
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medium or higher level of probability). Using survey data alone it is difficult to associate the sites with the different phases of the period: it appears that a substantial portion of the sites existed mostly in the EB Ib. This seems to be the period when numerous settlements flourished and new ones were founded (80% of the sites were new), the majority of them at the base of tells, or at sites that would be fortified at the end of the period (nearly two-thirds of the tells in the Jordan Valley and desert fringes were founded during this period; See similar results in northern Israel in Esse 1991, and in the entire southern Levant in Joffe 1993: 50).

Only a third (31.5%) of the EB I sites, with a medium or higher level of probability, also existed in the EB II. The rest (68.5%), in contrast, were abandoned by the end of the period. A significant decrease in the scope of settlement occurred in the EB II (from 82 sites in the EB I to 24 sites in the next period, a trend that has already been identified throughout the country, e.g. Esse 1991; Joffe 1993; Portugali and Gophna 1993).

A destruction layer at the end of the EB I was found at some of the sites close to this region (Tel Kitan – Eisenberg 1993; Bab edh-Dhra’ – Rast and Schaub 2003; and Tel Yaqush – Esse 1993). The fortified settlement at Tel Shalem was deserted, Tell Um Hammad shrank, etc. It therefore seems that the region underwent changes in the end of the EB Ib, when almost all the major settlements in the western Jordan Valley were abandoned or violently destroyed, and others shrank significantly. This phenomenon was not as drastic in the eastern Jordan Valley, where many settlements continued to exist (e.g. Tell es-Sa’idiyeh and Tell Abu el-Kharaz). The settlements in the Samarian foothills actually continued to exist, and the sites at Tell Far’ah (North), Tel Za’anuni, Juraish and Khirbet Rahiyeh reached the height of their power during this period.

The Settlement Model – Types of Sites, Area Estimates, Topography, and Relevant Geographical Data

Four types of sites were discovered in the Chalcolithic period: the most common was the settlement site (and its variants) – 27 sites (79.5% of all the sites). Open sites (four sites – 11.5%), work sites (two sites – 6%) and enclosures (one site – 3%) were uncommon. Cave sites (common in the Judean Desert, south of the study region), and burial sites (much more common in the EB I) were absent from the sites with a medium