The way people store their yields in traditional agricultural societies can be an important indicator of social and economic organization. The starting point for the following study was Israel Finkelstein’s discussion of pits and grain storage in his classic work *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Finkelstein 1988: 264–269). Having additionally benefited from Israel’s careful guidance as my dissertation advisor, it is with great pleasure that I contribute this study to a *festschrift* in his honour.

**Concerning Pits**

Iron Age I remains were found in all excavation areas at Tel Dan (Fig. 1). All the Iron Age I levels contained pits—more in Stratum VI (Fig. 2), less in Stratum V (Fig. 3) and even less in Stratum IVB (Ilan 1999: Plan 6). The pits of Iron Age I Tel Dan—their construction, distribution, and their contents—allow us to arrive at a number of historical and socioeconomic inferences. The first step is to establish a hypothetical framework that will enable us to invalidate or substantiate various interpretive options. People dig pits for a number of reasons and several hypotheses can be forwarded for the function of pits in the Iron Age I context (Currid and Navon 1989 and further literature there). Of course, a given pit may have been subject to more than one use. Below are several possible pit functions and expectations for evidence that might support each interpretation:

*Grain storage:* For the most part pits are considered grain-storage facilities. In Borowski’s typology of grain-storage facilities those most commonly found in Iron Age I contexts are “grain pits,” while only the much larger (and by inference, public) storage facilities like the famous
example at Megiddo Stratum III receive the appellation “silo” (Lamon and Shipton 1939: 66–68; Borowski 1987: 72). Borowski’s definitions are adopted here. Given ethnographic and literary evidence such pits are usually identified as grain pits. However, carbonized grain in the requisite quantities has been found (and reported) at only a few Iron Age I sites: Shiloh Stratum V, Silos 1400 and 1462, Tell Keisan Stratum 9a (probably coeval with Dan Stratum IVB), and Aphek Stratum 8 (the later being an early Iron Age IIa context, coeval with Dan Stratum IVA) (Kislev 1980; 1993: 354; Lederman and Finkelstein 1993: 47–48; Gadot 2003: 80–82). Despite the dearth of unequivocal evidence, I accept the grain-pit interpretation as the likely one for most, though perhaps not all pits, at all periods.

**Subfloor Storage of Other Commodities:** Many commodities would not have left obvious traces. It is documented, for example, that pits are often used to store fodder and make silage (Reynolds 1979: 77–79; Finkelstein 1986: 126 and references there). Perhaps phytolithic analysis can detect high proportions of fodder plants, but I know of no investigation yet carried out in the Levant with this goal in mind. In the making of silage, residues of lactic acid might form, which could be detected if looked for (Reynolds 1979: 78). Otherwise, one has no expectation of fodder plants being preserved in the archaeological record and an empty pit is to be expected. Other possibilities are salted meat (for which chemical analysis of side or base material could detect higher salt levels than is normal), short-term water storage (of which no signs will remain except for basal sedimentation that cannot be differentiated from post-use water-deposited silting).¹

**Storage of Household Items** (pottery in particular, while the owner is absent): In this case, one would expect to find assemblages that are restorable, if broken, into complete objects, with no missing parts. Moreover, it seems unlikely that more than two or three pits for this purpose per extended household would be found.

**Rubbish Disposal:** This was certainly the final use of some of the Iron Age I pits at Tel Dan, and a few at Shechem, Aphek, and Sasa (see

¹ These are just some examples; for others, see Finkelstein 1986: 79; Currid and Navon 1989: 70–71.