Egyptian Elements and Influence on the Early Bronze Age I of the Southern Levant. Recent Excavations, Research and Publications

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In Memoriam Ornit Ilan (1955-2002).

ABSTRACT
Recent archaeological activity has yielded much new information and many new data on the degree of Egyptian influence in the material culture of the Early Bronze I period in the southern Levant (ca. 3500 BC to 3000 BC). This paper briefly discusses major increments in knowledge of this subject derived from the archaeological record, while outlining both old and new directions in research derived from them.

Overview
In a contribution to the Proceedings of the 7th International Congress of Egyptologists, van den Brink (1998) tentatively suggested a 3-tiered hierarchy of interaction for south Levantine-late EB I sites with Egyptian affiliations. This division was primarily, though not exclusively, based on estimated ratios of locally produced, typical south Levantine EB I pottery as compared to late Protodynastic/Early First Dynasty Egyptian imports and locally (i.e. south Levantine) produced imitations thereof (see below, Tiers 1-3). Shortly thereafter, the 1998 Jerusalem conference, Egypt and the Levant: Interrelations from the 4th through the Early 3rd Millennium BCE (see van den Brink & Levy 2002) became a watershed in research in this area. Since that conference there has been such additional activity in this same field that the authors take this opportunity to offer an update and brief review of relevant new discoveries and publications.

An Edward C. M. van den Brink and Elliot Braun

A hierarchy of Egyptian influence

Latest research on sites and artefacts

In accordance with van den Brink's hierarchy the following order of sites is suggested, based on incremental information. In addition to the three tiers suggested earlier, a fourth tier (recommended by Braun), consisting of sites within the potential sphere of Egyptian influence, but entirely devoid of Egyptian finds, is further suggested.

Tier 1

Artefact assemblages in which Egyptian imports and their local imitations are the predominant, nearly exclusive element (i.e. almost no local EB I pottery present) that suggest a dominance of ethnic Egyptians in the population. All these sites date to the latest phases of EB I and possibly continue into the earliest phase of EB II.

• Tell es-Sakan: A recently discovered site on the north bank of the Wady Ghazzeh (Nahal Besor), just south of Gaza City, has yielded evidence of a succession of major EB I and EB III occupations fortified with a mudbrick wall, known as Tell es-Sakan. Levels A-9 to A-6, sounded and partially excavated in two seasons, are described as an Egyptian occupation / colony / city (de Miroschedji & Sadek 1999a, 1999b, 2000a, 2000b, de Miroschedji et al. 2001, Faltings 2002). The date of the founding of this site remains uncertain, but the presence of a diagnostic pottery handle of a type associated with Stratum C at Tel Erani (de Miroschedji et al. 2001: 87: Fig. 12: 8) suggests it could be at least as early as Naqada IIIa 2. However, the Egyptian published pottery samples from Tell es-Sakan (e.g. de Miroschedji et al. 2001: 86, Fig. 11; i.e. especially wine and cylindrical jar fragments) all point to a later date, one very close to or contemporary with the reign of Horus Narmer at the very end of EB I (Braun 2001). That the site was occupied during the reign of Narmer is virtually corroborated by a surface find, a pottery sherd incised with a serekh bearing his name (e.g. de Miroschedji et al. 2001). Van den Brink further suggests that a name within a representation of a fortification on a fragment of an ebony label found in the tomb of Narmer (Petrice 1901: pl. 2.4; 10.1), read by Kaplony (1963: 286 and n. 1552) as Sm3, the City of the Wild Bull, could actually refer to a south Levantine town. Notably, these hieroglyphs appear to the left of Horus Narmer's name, while the lower, unconnected part of this same label is adorned with what appears to be a two-handled south Levantine jar, perhaps suggesting the town's location in that region. The Egyptian nature of Tell es-Sakan invites further speculation that the reference is specifically to Levels A6-7 at the site, which are likely to be contemporary with the reign of this king.

• Tel Ma‘ahaz I: Three recent offerings provide more detailed information on the Egyptian and Egyptianized finds from the site. However, it should be noted that the site was only exposed to a very limited degree and it is unsure to what extent the excavated portion is representative of the entire site. Amiran and van den Brink (2001) have produced a study of complete pottery vessels from the site and a statistical evaluation of all pottery fragments derived from the limited excavations (Amiran & van den Brink 2002). A third work by other scholars treats with an impressive array of similar material looted from the site prior to excavation (Gophna & Beit-Arieh 1999).

• 'En Besor III: The "Egyptian" Stratum at 'En Besor III, generally acknowledged to be a small garrison or enclave of ethnic Egyptians, continues to attract scholarly attention, decades after its discovery. The most recent offering is by P. Kaplony (2002, in preparation) who provides a major re-assessment of the cylinder seal impressions, based on an intensive study of the original objects. In addition, a petrographic exami-
nation of a large, coarse-ware ceramic basin from this stratum proved, somewhat surprisingly, to be an import from the Nile Valley rather than a locally made imitation (Gophna & Buzaglo 2000).

- "Rafiah": Two Egyptian storage vessels purportedly part of a cache of similar objects looted from a site in 'Rafiah' (on the border of Egyptian Sinai and the Gaza Strip) were long known (Amiran 1970a, Gophna 1970). Recently, two more vessels, purported to derive from this same cache have been brought to the attention of scholars and are being studied (van den Brink & Gophna in prep.). Notably, three of these protodynastic wine jars have plain serekhs incised on their shoulders, while the fourth bears a potter's mark on its base. (For an overview of pottery-incised serekh-signs found in the southern Levant in Late EB I see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Number of serekhs</th>
<th>References</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palmahim Quarry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Braun et al. 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horvat Illin Tahitit</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Braun et al. 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel Ma’ahaz</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Amiran &amp; van den Brink 2001, 38-41 and Fig. 3.5: nos. 4-5, Pl. 36.b</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tel Halil</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Levy et al. 1995, Levy et al. 1997, Levy et al. 2001: Fig. 22.14: no. 11, Seger 1996: 5, Fig. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'En Besor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Schulman 1976: 25, Fig. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel Arad</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Amiran 1974: 5, Fig. 1, Pl. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Tel Malhata</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ilan 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel Lod</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>van den Brink &amp; Braun 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel es-Sakan (Gaza)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>de Miroschedji et al. 2001</td>
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Evidence suggests that this activity is confined to the latest phases of EB I and possibly continued into the earliest phase of EB II.

- Tel Erani D-C: Strata D and C at Tel Erani, Area D II were originally reported as yielding Egyptian and Egyptianized ceramics by Kempinski and Gilead (1991). A recent, exhaustive study of the ceramic material by Yekutieli (2002b) is a refutation of any clear Egyptian component in the ceramic assemblage of those levels, more or less contemporary with Nagada IIIa 2 (cf. Braun & van den Brink 1998, Braun 2001). Braun (2002) further suggests that any attempt to claim Egyptian associations for mudbrick architecture without stone foundations (contra Brandl 1992:445) seems highly unlikely.

- Tel Halif Terrace: Reconsiderations of the evidence from the Tel Halif Terrace (Silo Site, Str. IIb) suggest that the "Egyptian" tomb-feature within the cave (see Levy et al. 2001) does not have any such exotic association (Braun 2002). In addition, Braun (2002, in press) offers an interpretation on the Egyptian and Egyptianized assemblage of artifacts somewhat different from that suggested by the excavators (Levy et al. 1995, 1997). Kansa et al. (2002) offer a more detailed study of the so-called "reed-decorated pottery" (fig. 1) and their Egyptian affiliations.
Tel Lod: Several seasons of salvage excavations at Tel Lod in the central Shephela (piedmont) of Israel have yielded evidence of a highly significant, albeit small Egyptian and Egyptianized component in the otherwise typical, indigenous material culture of this large, Late EB I occupation. The most spectacular finds include nine pottery-incised serekhs: one of [Horus] Ka, seven of [Horus] Nar[mer] and one that cannot be identified (fig. 2; van den Brink & Braun 2002, Yannai & Marder 2000). In addition, there are numerous fragments of imported wine jars, cylinder vessels and bottles, as well as evidence for locally made vessels of Egyptian mien, including small jars, bread molds, bottles and so called lotus shaped bowls. Work on the imported and locally produced, “Egyptianized” pottery is still in progress, while the entire “Egyptian” repertoire of ceramics has yet to be culled from the enormous quantities of pottery recovered from the site.

Small Tel Malhata: Egyptian finds from Small Tel Malhata have been studied in detail. They include a total of 129 potsherds attributed to perhaps 20 vessels (fig. 3). This assemblage is published in a posthumous work by O. Ilan (2002), to whose memory this paper is dedicated.

**Tier 3**

Ceramic assemblages in which a local Canaanean component is the predominant, nearly exclusive element, but in which are found minute quantities of imported Egyptian vessels and/or their local imitations. These objects are thought to have been obtained through some mode of exchange of a somewhat spurious nature. These sites are grouped according to the quantity of Egyptian and Egyptianized material recovered in a somewhat crude attempt at quantification.¹

**Tier 3A**

sites with a modicum of Egyptian material, but considerably less than that found at Tier 2 sites.

Megiddo: The biblical city of Megiddo, now known to have reached its apogee in Late EB I times (Finkelstein et al. 2000), and noted for some Egyptian associations (Braun 1993), has yielded a cache of 16 locally produced imitations of Egyptian vessels (Joffe 2000, Ilan & Goren in press), possibly associated with a cultic installation. This cache is of uncertain date and is alternately suggested as deriving from EB I or EB III deposits.

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¹ No precise information is available; most of this is based on impressions, hearsay and indications from preliminary publications.
Ein Assawir: A cemetery associated with the site of Ein Assawir yielded a small quantity of Egyptianized objects cursorily published by Dothan (1970: Fig. 27) in an obscure periodical. Additional work in this Late EB I cemetery at Ein Assawir has yielded several small ceramic vessels of Egyptian origin or inspiration and one rectangular slate palette and a small alabaster vessel (cf. Yannai & Braun 2001, Yannai 2002), both of obvious Egyptian origin.

Palmahim Quarry: The large, Late EB I site of Palmahim Quarry is notable on the one hand for not yielding even a single sherd of Egyptian origin, but excavations there do have the distinction of producing a complete serekh incised on a locally produced storage jar prior to firing, one of only two such examples in the southern Levant. The significance of this object, in terms of interaction between the local populations and Egyptians remains an anomaly, especially within the context of the region (Braun et al. 2001). A nearby site, known as Giv'at Ha-esev, somewhat serendipitously yielded two Late EB I, locally made ceramic vessels, one of which is a drop-shaped bottle, obviously an imitation of an Egyptian morphological type (Braun et al. 2001).

Horvat 'Illin Tahtit: The small, Late EB I site of Horvat 'Illin Tahtit has yielded a minute quantity of items of Egyptian origin, including a serekh fragment on a highly polished vessel as well as a fragment of the only other serekh (see above: Palmahim Quarry) on a vessel of local manufacture so far found

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2. The finds were observed on the surface of the site after a storm denuded a small area of its sandy cover. To date no excavations have been conducted on the site, which lies at the mouth of the Soreq Brook, within the borders of Kibbutz Palmahim.
Considering the relative scarcity of Egyptian finds at this site, the significance of this find is difficult to interpret.

- Arad: The site of Arad (Amiran 1974, 1978) has yielded only a small quantity of Egyptian artifacts from EB I and II levels, but, so far as is known, no evidence for local imitations. They include a large portion of a wine jar with a serekh of Narmer found in Strata IV and II contexts.

Fig. 2b1-b2
Unpublished sherd with incised serekh of Nar[mer].

TIER 3B: Sites with statistically inconsequential quantities of Egyptian and/or Egyptianizing artifacts or imported objects.

- Beth Shemesh: Excavations at ancient Beth Shemesh/Tell Rumeileh in the early 20th century produced a report with evidence for early occupations (Late Neolithic and Early Bronze I, represented by Stratum VI) that contained a rim fragment of a stone (amphibolite?) bowl (Grant & Wright 1938: pl. LIV: 65) of obvious Egyptian origin. Another, intact example of a Proto- or Early Dynastic-type (diorite?) bowl from this site (Grant 1932: pl. XLVII: 3), almost forgotten, remains something of an anomaly. Its context is generally thought to be a tomb of the Middle Bronze period, but that attribution is uncertain (B. Routledge personal communication). In any case, this sole intact example of an Egyptian Proto- or Early Dynastic stone bowl from the southern Levant has no clear context and may, or may not have bearing on the present discussion, dependent upon whether it was imported as an antique in the MB Age, or was brought during EB I and re-utilized in a later period.

- Ghor es-Safi: Portions of a similar type stone vessel in black and white (amphibolite?) were retrieved from a much-looted EB I cemetery at Ghor es-Safi, Jordan. For the present no other finds of Egyptian origin are known from this site (Konstantine Politis pers. comm. 2002).

- Beerotayin: A small site at Beerotayim on the Israel-Egyptian border, rather far inland from the Way(s) of Horus and thought only to have an EB IV occupation, has yielded a fragment of a rim of a wine jar of indubitable Egyptian origin (T. Gini & B. Saidel pers. comm. 2002) and morphology. The site has only been subject to a small sounding and so the significance of this sole Egyptian object cannot be further evaluated at the present.

- Bāb edh-Dra': A cylinder seal, purportedly of “pink alabaster” is the sole Egyptian object known from another much-looted cemetery in the region of the Dead Sea at Bāb edh-Dra’. A design it bears is particularly noteworthy for the possible associations it has with the iconography of a figure on an Egyptian jar from Tel Erani and additional incised figures on a stone pavement apparently associated with a sacred precinct at EB I Megiddo (Braun 1993).

- Tel Dalit V-IV: Notably, excavations at Tel Dalit, only a short distance from Tel Lod with its significant Egyptian associated assemblage of artifacts, have produced only a single Egyptian sherd (R. Gophna pers. comm. 2000) from contemporary contexts.

- Tel Aphek Stratum B VIIIa: Tel Aphek, a large, walled, EB I settlement, extensively excavated, has similarly yielded only a few Egyptian sherds (Beck 2000: Fig. 8.4: 8-9).

- Tall abu-al Kharaz Phase I: A recent publication indicates that the small, Late EB I
walled settlement at Tall Abu al-Kharaz, in the mouth of the Wady Yabis, Jordan also yielded a few items of Egyptian origin (Fischer 2002).

- Atlit Bay: Although predating the majority of finds mentioned in this paper, the find spot of a jar of a type known at the Predynastic site of Maadi (fig. 4) containing 18 Nile River molluscs (Chambardia rubens arcuata, formerly called Aspatharia rubens; Sharvit et al. 2002) is notable. It was recovered in underwater diving operations by the Israel Antiquities Authority inspectors off the coast of Israel in North Atlit Bay, a likely, protected anchorage. It is hoped that the find, dating to the early EB I may presage additional, related discoveries. It should be noted that this find predates the majority of findings mentioned in this paper.
- Afridar, Ashqelon: The Afridar quarter of Ashqelon on the southern coast of Israel has been subjected to a series of salvage excavations that have yielded evidence for a cluster of settlements (labeled Areas) apparently dating to all phases of EB I. Fragments of two cylindrical jars (Gophna 2002b) were recovered from Area B that may date to somewhat late in EB I. In an Early EB I context (Area F), H. Khalaily (in press) recovered two so-called “Clayton rings” (Riemer & Kuper 2000, Riemer Archeo Nil 12) and disks (one inside a ring) produced from local clay (H. Khalaily and A. Cohen-Weinberger, IAA, pers. communications.). The Egyptian association of this type of artifact and its relative dating were first brought to the authors’ attention at Cracow (Riemer 2002). Several additional examples of Chambardia rubens arcuata have recently been identified in Area G (D. Bar-Yosef, pers.comm.) in a very early (i.e. initial) EB I context. For an overview of molluscs imported from the Nile Valley and recovered from EB I contexts in the south Levant, see Table 2. To date no other evidence of Egyptian material has been associated with this poorly known phase of EB I in the southern region. However, a disk of the type associated with a “Clayton ring” is included in the artifacts recovered from the same site (i.e. Area G).

### Table 2. List of EB I sites yielding Chambardia rubens arcuata (Cailiaud, 1823), sweet water mollusks from the Nile, formerly called Aspatharia rubens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>References</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'En Besor Str. III</td>
<td>Bar-Yosef Mayer 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel Lod Str. IVa</td>
<td>van den Brink 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palmahim Quarry</td>
<td>Braun et al. 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azor</td>
<td>Ben-Tor 1975: 28 and Pl. 24:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomb 40 at Ein Assawir</td>
<td>Yannai 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel Megadim</td>
<td>S. Wolff, IAA pers. comm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Atlit Bay</td>
<td>Sharvit et al. 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell es-Sakan</td>
<td>de Mroschchedji et al. 2001:90</td>
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Fig. 2
Egyptian jar found in North Atlit Bay.
Gezer, Lachish, Ai (et-Tell), and Tel Erani: Two reconsiderations of the identification of supposed “Egyptian” elements, especially pottery (Braun 2002, Yekutieli 2002b), at sites with Chalcolithic (Gezer) and EB III occupations (Lachish, Ai and Tel Erani), suggest that much or even most artifacts claimed as of Nilotic inspiration by Brandl (1992:449-469), are likely not to be.

TIER 4
Sites within the general range of diffusion of Egyptian and Egyptianized artifacts and objects, but that have failed, to date, to yield any evidence for them. For purposes of discussion they are considered important for negative evidence of Egyptian influence.

Numbers 1 through 3 lie within the same region as Tier 2 sites, suggesting the likelihood that Egyptian interest was aimed at specific sites, while others were either excluded or subjected to only desultory contacts. Sites numbered from 4-11 are located in more easterly and northerly regions where Egyptian influence was obviously more limited, and so the absence of imports and/or local imitations at these sites is of no special import.

1. 'En Besor IV, II (Gophna, ed. 1995)
2. Hartuv (contra Mazar and de Miroshedji)
3. Yarmouth (latest EB I or earliest EB II)
4. Moza (Eisenberg 1993a)
5. Sataf (Gibson et al. 1991)
6. Tel en-Nasbeh (McCown 1947, Wampler 1947)
7. Ai (Amiran 1970b)
8. Tel Kiton (Eisenberg 1993b)
10. Beth Shan (FitzGerald 1934, 1935)
11. Tel Beth Yerah (E. Eisenberg, IAA, personal communication)

3. The excavators suggest that two types of locally made bowls (Mazar & de Miroshedji 1996: 23-24, Fig. 17:26-29) have “Egyptian affinities” but neither their forms nor their technical characteristics indicate a uniquely Nilotic inspiration for them.
4. This material is virtually identical to that from the nearby Late EB I site of Horvat Illin Tahtit (Braun in press).
5. This does not include the Egyptian alabaster vessels found in an EB III context (Amiran 1970b).
6. This does not include the EB II materials with Egyptian affiliations.

Authors’ comments on new directions of research
Certainly the most exciting evidence for Egyptian influence in the southern Levant is found at Tell es-Sakan. If the primary indications of its excavators are truly representative of its material culture, then the site appears to have hosted a major settlement occupied by a majority of people with a culture derived from the Nile Valley. The existence of what may well have been a (royal?) colony there helps to explain, by offering a likely source for inspiration and production, the presence of copious quantities of locally made, Egyptian style pottery found there and at other south Levantine (especially Tier 2) sites.

These ceramics appear to reveal part of a distribution system operating on an intraregional level (directed from Tell es-Sakan?), one that was quite possibly concerned with supplies for an ethnically Egyptian population element perhaps dispersed at sites throughout the region in cohabitation with predominantly indigenous peoples. The presence at Tel Lod, the northernmost Tier 2 settlement, of appreciable quantities of Egyptian style pottery, fashioned from loessy clays of south Levantine origin, is an instructive example of this system. The source for this material is minimally located 40 km to the south of Lod and well within the core area where Egyptian material culture artifacts are found in their greatest quantities (i.e. at Tier 1 and 2 sites).

Egyptian interest in the southern Levant and vice versa seems likely to have developed from what may have been desultory episodes of trade and movements of peoples in Chalcolithic and in early EB I times, as indicated by the appearance of Chambardia shells from the Nile in relevant south Levantine contexts and the presence of S. Levantine dwellers at Buto, Str. Ia (Faltings 2002)
during the Late Chalcolithic and at Maadi during the early EB I periods. Presumably early and continuing contacts (through overland and maritime routes) with peoples of the southern Levant (Gophna & van den Brink 2002, Hartung 2001: Ch. 2, 2002) aroused the interest of a developing Egyptian elite as its position evolved and it gained control of what was to become a sophisticated, hierarchical polity. This elite class would have been interested in obtaining certain commodities as is attested in the imported vessels that were used for storing wine, known from various tomb in Cemetery U, Umm el-Qaab at Abydos (cf. Hartung 2001). Perhaps the modest, but growing collection of Egyptianized administrative tokens, cylinder seals and clay sealings sometimes bearing cylinder seal impressions, found at some of the Tier 1 and 2 sites, is evidence that a systematic attempt at intercourse with the inhabitants of the southern Levant was put in place at one time by a royal Egyptian polity.

Such royal interest may be assumed from the growing number of pottery-incised serekhs found widely distributed in the southern region, at the full spectrum of sites with Egyptian related finds (i.e. Tiers 1-3). The discovery of two locally produced serekhs, apparently the earliest in the assemblage of these royal symbols in the southern Levant, as well as that of [Horus] Ka from Tel Lod (a king whose name is otherwise unattested in the region with the exception perhaps of certain cylinder seal impressions from 'En Besor, Str. III), suggests a system that developed and was maintained over a span of time. If the ratio of serekhs to named kings in the southern Levant is truly representative, then it indicates what appears to be a waxing and particularly intense royal interest in the region during the reign of [Horus] Nar[mer]. The total absence of such objects in later contexts and of later kings’ names, suggests that either during or shortly after [Horus] Nar[mer]’s reign, the importation to the southern Levant of wine jars and other objects bearing the royal symbol abruptly ceased. Considering our knowledge of south Levantine imports in the First Dynasty royal tombs of Abydos, there is a suggestion of a different form of relationship in EB II, one for which we have only evidence from Egypt. Such a scenario appears to fit with the disappearence of an Egyptian colony at Tell es-Sakan; apparently the site was abandoned in that period.

In short, the sum of evidence suggests that a regular system of intercourse between Egypt and the southern Levant was in place for a not inconsiderable period of time during the second half of EB I (i.e. approximately the last quarter of the 4th millennium BCE). Egyptian interaction, probably radiating from Tier 1 sites, appears to be most concentrated within the southern region and, most notably, at selected (i.e. Tier 2) sites. This is indicated by the vastly different quantities of Egyptian and Egyptianized artifacts encountered in excavations of such contemporary Tier 2 settlements as Tel Erani, Tel Halif, Tel Lod, compared with Tier 3 sites such as Palmahim Quarry, Horvat Illin Tahiti, Tel Dalit and Tel Aphek. The existence of Tier 3 and 4 sites suggests that the thrust of Egyptian interest, even within its sphere of greatest influence, was directed at specific sites (and not at others) and therefore, any suggestion of military domination seems unwarranted. While the archaeological record is not yet revealed enough for us to fully understand the complicated relationships between Nilotic peoples and the indigenous inhabitants of the southern Levant in its full panoply, it is quite clear that it was multi-leveled and must have evolved over the span of time represented in the existence of such sites as Tell es-Sakan.

The discovery of mudbrick fortifications at Tell es-Sakan has ramifications for our understanding of socio-political developments in the southern Levant, in particular with the southern region in this period. More indirectly, it is significant for developments in contemporary Egypt. As additional data on this site become available, researchers will be able to more properly evaluate and integrate them into perceptions of the archaeological record. As a corollary to this disco-
very we suggest that further research on the major site of Tel Erani, directed at determining the date or dates of its fortifications, is especially warranted.

Another area of particular interest derives from recent evidence that supports Gophna's (1996) thesis, originally based mainly on intuition, that proposed the existence of a maritime route with anchorages along the Mediterranean littoral between Egypt and the Southern Levant during EB I. The finds from North Atlit Bay indicate it was operative at least in its very early phases, while Nilotic shells from nearby Tel Megadim hint at continuity with a later phase of this period.

**Conclusion**

In short, only a scant 5 years have passed since the Jerusalem conference, yet they have witnessed an extraordinary burst of discovery and activity in attempts to wrestle information about the relationship between Pre- and Protodynastic Egypt and the southern Levant from the archaeological record. These years have provided scholars with enough new information to radically alter our perceptions of this relationship. This information is set out as if it were part of an increasingly well-stocked buffet and we invite the researcher, at her or his pleasure, to sample from it.

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