

# THE DESERT, THE SOWN AND THE EGYPTIAN COLONY

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## Abstract

On the basis of a growing body of Egyptian Naqada III / Dynasty 0–1 objects in the Negev Highlands it is suggested that:

1. Some of the Negev Highlands sites, which thus far were approximately dated to the Early Bronze Age (henceforth EB) in general, may be attributed with confidence to the end of the fourth millennium BC (EB1b2, see Table 1 below).
2. These pastoral sites had clear connections with the Egyptian colony bordering them.
3. This is the earliest testimony for relations between urbanized and pastoral nomad entities in the southern Levant.

## THE EGYPTIAN COLONY IN CANAAN

Archaeological research carried out over the last four decades, commencing with YEIVIN's excavations at Tel <sup>c</sup>Erani (YEIVIN 1961), have unveiled an otherwise unidentified historical episode that had occurred in the southern Levant at ca. 3,150 BC – the establishment of an Egyptian colony that had functioned for approximately a century (BRANDL 1992; PORAT 1992; ANDELKOVIC 1995).

The accumulating evidence suggests that as a continuation of the lengthy process of the so-called

“unification” of Egypt (VON DER WAY 1992:4), the emerging Egyptian state had expanded to south-western Canaan and a certain amount of Egyptians had settled in that region alongside its indigenous population.

The core settlement within this entity was probably Tell es-Sakan, which apparently had been heavily fortified during the EB1b2 (Fig.1; Table 1), displaying an overwhelmingly Egyptian Naqada III / Dynasty 0–1 material culture (DE MIROSCHEJJI *et al.* 2001).

The region within a radius of approximately 40 kilometers around Tell es-Sakan witnessed the establishment of other settlements, which manifested a wide range of Egyptian popular and formal culture: The settlement at <sup>c</sup>En Besor layer III, which probably served as a lower hierarchy administrative center, contained a few structures among which an Egyptian-style bakery-brewery was identified. The ceramics of that layer are almost exclusively Egyptian (either imported from Egypt or locally made), and the Egyptian administrative apparatus is witnessed by the abundance of locally produced clay bullae, which carry Egyptian seal impressions (GOPHNA 1995). Another settlement with an excess of Egyptian (imported and locally made) materials was discovered at Tel Halif Terrace layer II; they include ceramics, bullae with Egyptian seal impressions,

Period		From	To
Levantine Terminology	Egyptian Terminology		
EB1a1	Naqada IIc	3650 cal. BC	3500 cal. BC
EB1a2	Naqada IId	3500 cal. BC	3350 cal. BC
EB1b1	Naqada IId – IIIa	3350 cal. BC	3200 cal. BC
EB1b2	Naqada IIIb–c / Dynasty 0–1	3200 cal. BC	3050 cal. BC

Table 1 Terminology and chronology of the southern Levant and Egypt during the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC (based on LEVY and VAN DEN BRINK 2002, table 1.1 and YEKUTIELI 2000, table 8.3)

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Fig. 1

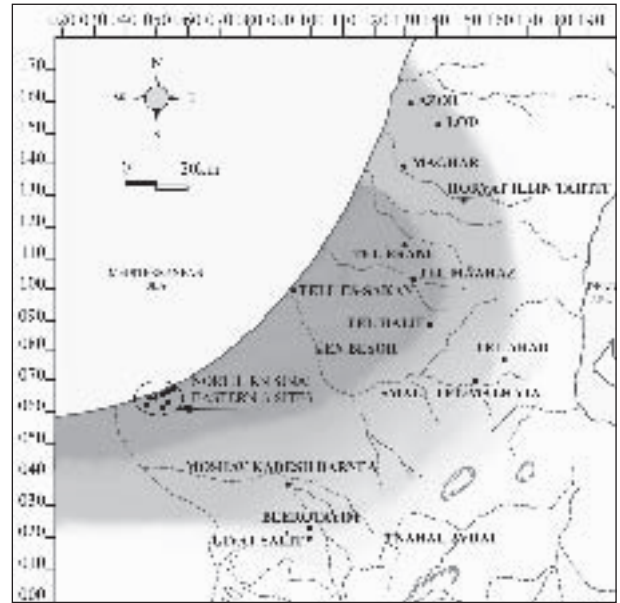


Fig. 2

graffiti of Egyptian *Serekhs*, and an Egyptian style bakery-brewery (LEVY *et al.* 1995; 1997; 2001). It is worthy of note that at this site the amount of local EB1 objects was larger than at the former two sites. A picture similar to that of Tel Halif Terrace was revealed at Tel Ma'ahaz layer I (BEIT-ARIEH and GOPHNA 1999; AMIRAN and VAN DEN BRINK 2001; 2002), and at Tel Erani layers V–VI (BRANDL 1989), which probably were additional nuclei of Egyptian hegemony in their respective regions.

Based on this accumulating data some researchers, including the author, now conclude that the Egyptian event in Canaanite EB1b2 (Table 1; above) should be understood as an early form of colonial organization – namely a colony (BRANDL 1992; PORAT 1992; JOFFE 1993:52; ANDELKOVIC 1995; to mention but a few).

Apparently this colony, as a part of the contemporary emerging Egyptian state, was a complex societal organization at a proto-urban if not a completely urban level: Heavily fortified Tell es-Sakan, located on the edge of the land bridge leading from Egypt (through North Sinai; OREN 1989; YEKUTIELI 1998; VAN DEN BRINK and GOPHNA, in press) with the smaller sites in its hinterland, shows a clear spatial hierarchical organization around a primary settlement. The centralization of power is further evidenced through the administrative apparatus that controlled commodity movements (manifested through the impressed bullae) and produced bread and beer

in a centralized mode, probably as rations for public workers (a phenomenon known from contemporary Egypt; SEIDLMAYER 1996:121). Another indication for the complex organization is the unmistakable standardization of pottery production all over the colony's territory. Finally the distribution of royal iconography such as the *Serekhs*, used to propagate the divine royal hegemony of the Egyptian sovereign even to the lowermost social classes (through its incision upon daily objects), is a clear indication of an institutional psychological assault on people's minds. This assault was meant to legitimize the hegemony of the centralized apparatus founded by the divine powers that are constantly invoked by association with these incised emblems (YEKUTIELI 2002).

### The Contact Zone

The archaeological evidence accumulating from the southern parts of Israel and the Gaza strip suggests that around the core area of the Egyptian colony there is a wide and continuous zone where one may find EB1b2 settlement and burial sites, which display local material-culture assemblages with a small, but consistently present Egyptian component. Included in this zone are Small Tel Malhata (ILAN 2002), Arad layer IV (AMIRAN *et al.* 1978), Horvat Illin Tahtit layer IV (BRAUN *et al.* 2001), Maghar (BRAUN *et al.* 2001), Lod (VAN DEN BRINK and BRAUN 2002; VAN DEN BRINK 2002), Azor (BEN-TOR 1975), Assawir (YANNAI 2002:77), and perhaps Tel Megiddo as well

(JOFFE 2000; GOPHNA 2000:101–102). It is hereby suggested to label this area – *The Contact Zone*.<sup>1</sup>

It is asserted that the direct hegemony of the Egyptian colony was limited to sites whose archaeological record presents an overwhelmingly Egyptian material culture. At present these are Tell es-Sakan, En Besor III, Tel Halif Terrace II, Tel Ma'ahaz I, Erani V–VI. The belt-like territory around the heartland of the colony – the contact zone – is the region where the colony's contacts with its surroundings (either hostile, friendly or fluctuating between the two) left clear archaeological marks.

It is assumed that there were no clear-cut borders between the Egyptian colony, the contact zone and the local Canaanite region; Instead there was a continuum covering most of the southern Levant, where on one extremity there was an Egyptian hegemonic region, and on the other, an indigenous Canaanite area. The contact zone between the two had fuzzy, dynamic and fluctuating borders (Fig. 2). In fact the mere notion of a border, which is so easily employed in modern archaeological literature and cartography, did not necessarily exist in the cognitive world of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC southern Levant (See TARLING 1998:47 for another example for this argument in a different context).

In addition to geographical significance, the concept of the contact zone stresses the notion that during the EB1b2 Canaan witnessed dynamic processes in which people, objects, ideas and modes of life were in constant move and exchange between the zones under Egyptian and under local hegemonies. It is important to notice that the exchange was not limited to the contact zone; it appears that the colony's society (which evidently consisted of both colonized and colonizers) was also a primary locus of exchange. Evidently it had reached a stage in which a hybrid culture had begun to develop. Proof for this phenomenon is to be found in a range of objects that manifest a combination of local EB1 and Egyptian traits: hybrid pottery styles and technologies (termed in numerous names such as "Hybrid A, B and C" or "Egyp-

tianizing pottery"; BRANDL 1989:372–378), intermingling of iconographic motifs (BRANDL 1989:376–378; 1992:445; VAN DEN BRINK 1998:216 and p. 218 note 23) and more. This hybridization mode, which is typical for colonial situations (e.g. BHABHA 1994), had unquestionably prominent socio-cultural meanings, but these will be expanded elsewhere.

Besides the socio-historical significance of the various levels of contact, the exchange between the local EB1 population and Egyptians has an archaeological advantage. Since the colony is a well-dated affair of more or less 100 years (YEKUTIELI 1998:226), the presence of Egyptian objects typical of the colony within the contact zone enables a regional synchronization and dating of the relevant archaeological contexts based on Egyptian chronological schemes.

### Pastoral Nomadism in the Negev Highlands

The Negev Highlands encompass the territory immediately to the south of the Egyptian colony. Rosen maintains that four phases may be distinguished in the history of that region during the last 10,000 years:

1. A baseline hunter-gatherer phase.
2. A herder-gatherer phase, in which domesticates were adopted for the first time into peripheral systems.
3. An early, pre-camel phase of pastoral nomadism.
4. A final phase of pastoral nomadism with the general adoption of the camel (ROSEN 2002:24).

The significant existence pattern in the Negev Highlands since Rosen's third phase, which he dates to the EB, is pastoral nomadism. This lifestyle was usually understood as a living-strategy in which herding of domesticated animals is the main socio-economic activity. Recently other aspects of this way of life came to the foreground of academic awareness: wage labor at neighboring settled communities, direction of trade caravans, involvement in trade ventures, conscription as mercenaries, procurement and distribution of

<sup>1</sup> Recently DE MIROSCHEJJI *et al.* (2001: 98–99 and fig. 22) suggested a tripartite zoning model; Zone 1 (which includes Tell es-Sakan and 'En Besor) is described as an area of permanent Egyptian settlement. Zone 2, further

to the north, is defined as an area of colonial Egyptian presence (from Tel Halif in the southeast to Tel Lod in the north), and zone 3 consisting of a Canaanite dominated area.

desert raw materials (such as, in our context, copper, asphalt, salt, chipped and ground stone industries) and more.

Thus, pastoral nomadic societies are now viewed as multi-resource based entities, never reliant exclusively on animal products or pastoralism (ROSEN 2002:23; 2003). This realization has led scholars to conclude that in the context of the southern Levant pastoral-nomadism that specializes in sheep and goat herding could have developed only in association with a developed urban society (MARX 1995:17).

Rosen states that the third phase distinguished by him, viz. “Pre-camel Pastoral Nomadism” (ROSEN 2002:30), was the phase during which the classic heartland-periphery or desert-sown relationship had developed in the southern Levant. He dates this phase to the EB Age in general and expresses his frustration that a more accurate dating is yet unattainable:

“Unfortunately, the ceramic sequences and periodization scheme for the Mediterranean zone are not readily applicable to the desert regions. Both the general paucity of ceramics at most sites, and a much-restricted range of ceramic types render comparisons and chronological attributions difficult. Thus, the holemouth vessels that dominate desert Early Bronze Age assemblages are typologically stable for over a millennium. Radiocarbon chronologies and lithic assemblages supplement the ceramic framework (AVNER *et al.* 1994; SEBBANE *et al.* 1993), but the difficulties in chronological attribution and periodization in the region have simply not been adequately resolved” (ROSEN 2002:30–31).

Focusing on the archaeological record of the Negev Highlands, it appears that the region is bursting with EB sites built in a “pen and room” style (a term coined by ROSEN [2002]). The landscape is full with small, unfortified settlements in which small curvilinear rooms are built around open courtyards or pens. Scholars had sorted these sites into various categories – Haiman made a distinction according to the distance from permanent water sources, between what he called ephemeral and permanent settlements (HAIMAN 1998), while Cohen divided the sites into: Central, Large, Small, Ephemeral and Caves (COHEN 1999:71). In addition to the dwellings and pens, the Negev Highlands landscape abounds with other installations. Most notable are tumuli and tumuli fields, many of which are attributed to the EB as well (HAIMAN 1990; GINI-ERIKSON 2000).

As mentioned above, the accurate dating of these EB sites has been a tough issue for many years. Initially most of them were dated to EB2, most likely influenced by the great impact of the Arad excavations and the southern Sinai explorations on researchers of the region (SEBANNE *et al.* 1993:43). However, in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s some archaeologists reached the conclusion that the EB sites of the Negev Highlands encompass the whole EB range and not only EB2. They admitted they could not pinpoint diagnostic pottery assemblages of each separate EB phase in the region, though a sample of radiocarbon dates from the Negev sites had made their case clear, as it covers the whole EB sequence (SEBANNE *et al.* 1993; AVNER *et al.* 1994).

### Egyptian objects in the Negev Highlands

Some chance finds of Egyptian materials, a close examination of published Negev Highlands survey reports, and results of new excavations testify to a growing corpus of Egyptian Naqada III / Dynasty 0–1 objects in the Negev Highlands, to be presented below.

#### Moshav Kadesh Barne<sup>a</sup>

A local resident of the western Negev brought the author a small number of items he incidentally had found, and indicated their exact provenance (Fig. 3:1–4, 6). Objects Fig. 3:1–4 were collected near the remains of a pen and room style structure on the slopes of a rocky hill surrounded by sand dunes, currently near Moshav Kadesh Barne<sup>a</sup> (Fig. 1; coordinates 09160.03625). Fig. 3:1 is a fragment of a Late Predynastic, Egyptian juglet with a narrow neck and a flaring rim. The profile is characteristic of globular juglets, such as, for example, at Abusir el Meleq late predynastic tombs 56a1 and 58c4 (SCHARFF 1926, Tafel 53:20; 54:25; 57:21–23, 31, 32). The same shape is very common in the Egyptian pottery assemblage of North Sinai EB1b2 (for chronology and terminology see Table 1) (OREN 1989, fig. 5: 15,16, 25), and the same vessels were found as imported or locally made Egyptian objects in Canaan, dated to EB1b2 (Tel Halif Terrace layer IIB [LEVY *et al.* 1995:29], <sup>c</sup>En Besor stratum III [GOPHNA 1990, fig. 9:7], and Tel Ma<sup>a</sup>ahaz [BEIT-ARIEH and GOPHNA 1999, fig. 10:4]). A similar shape of neck with a flaring rim is common also on somewhat larger jugs that have elongated bodies and flat bases, such as at El Masa<sup>d</sup>id (NEEDLER 1984, pl. 12:46) where NEEDLER dates it to the relatively long

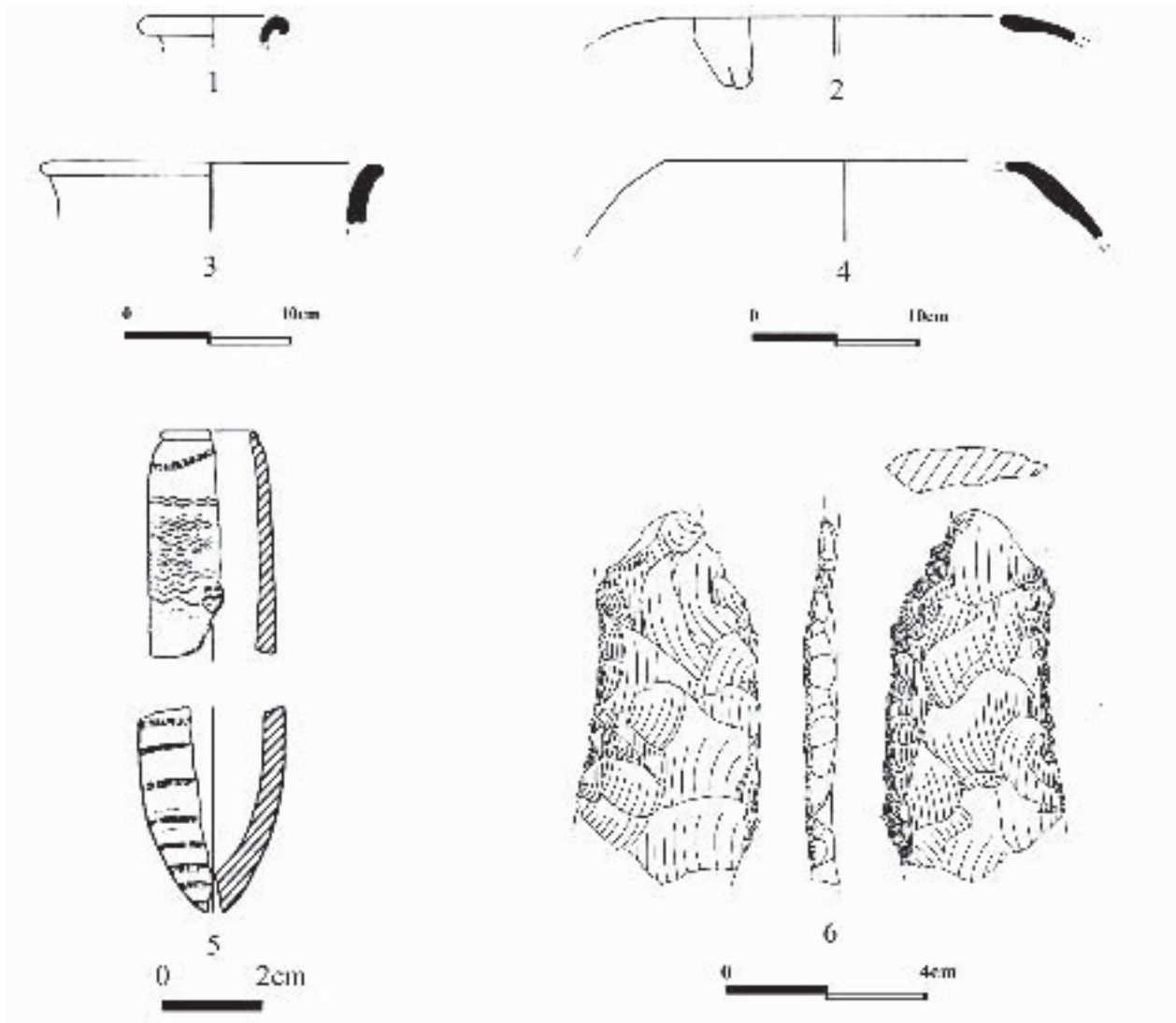


Fig. 3

range of Naqada III (1984:198), and at Diospolis Tomb U379 (PETRIE 1901, pl. XXII:199) where it is dated, using Petrie's sequence dates, to SD 67 (which equals approximately the beginning of Naqada III). This type is very common too in North Sinai (OREN 1989, fig. 5:18,19) where it is dated to EB1b2 (YEKUTIELI 1998:143). The fabric of Fig. 3:1 is reddish brown with a dark core and contains a small amount of tiny grits. Upon visual inspection it resembles Bourriau's Nile silt A (BOURRIAU 1981:14).

Fig. 3:2-4 are made of different fabrics than Fig. 3:1, and have a large number of grits, as common in EB Canaanite wares (YEKUTIELI 2000). The holemouth jars ( Fig. 3:2,4) are gray-brown in color and have medium grits, while storage jar Fig. 3:3 is light-brown with many sandy grits. The shape of the holemouth jars (Fig. 3:2, 4) is common in Canaan from EB1b to EB4. An additional feature

worthy of note are two vertical incisions made prior to firing on holemouth jar Fig. 3:2. Storage jar Fig. 3:3 has a slightly flaring rim, which is typical to Canaanite EB storage jars (YEKUTIELI 2000).

In addition to the examples drawn here, other sherds were brought from the same site. They included a few Islamic pottery sherds as well as four much earlier sherds. Of these, one is a handle of a Canaanite EB juglet rich in dolomitic sand, another is a body sherd of a Canaanite EB storage jar and the last two are body sherds, which upon visual inspection resemble pieces of late Predynastic Egyptian storage jars made of Nile silt A ware (BOURRIAU 1981:14).

#### Giva'at Sali'at

The origin of item Fig. 3:6 was within a continuous scatter of various structures, pens and tumuli in an area of ca. 250m by 1000m (northwest cor-

ner coordinates 09810.01920, and southeast corner 09870.01890) east of present day “Giva<sup>c</sup>t Sali<sup>c</sup>t”. It is a part of a bifacial Egyptian flint knife made by delicate pressure flaking on a dark grayish brown flint. A few parallels to this knife can be cited from Buto layer III dated to late Naqada II – Naqada III (SCHMIDT 1992a, fig. 3.1), from Tell Ibrahim Awad with the most similar item dated to “*early Early Dynastic*” (which means early 1<sup>st</sup> dynasty. SCHMIDT 1992b, pl. 4, fig. 10:55), from Abusir el Meleq Tomb 56a1 (SCHARFF 1926 Tafel 54:9–10), and from Minshat Abu Omar tomb 1590 (KROEPER 1988, pl. 14b) where it was described by KROEPER (1988:17) as “*typical for the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> dynasty*”. Similar objects were found as imports in the southern Levant for example one at Tel <sup>c</sup>Erani (ROSEN 1988, fig.1:1), where it was described as “*invasively retouched piece*”. ROSEN (1988:108) also noted there, as relevant to our specimen as well: “*...abrupt retouch (backing) on one edge, and flat retouch on the opposite edge*”.

In addition to the flint knife, four ceramic body sherds were brought from the same place. One is rich in dolomitic sand and according to its handmade manufacture technique is most probably EB in date. The other three pieces most probably belonged to Egyptian late Predynastic storage jars of which two were made of Nile silt A and one either of Fine Marl A Variant 1 (BOURRIAU 1981:14) or perhaps it is a locally made Egyptian vessel (such as described in PORAT 1992:433–434).

### Nahal Avdat

Another relevant item (Fig. 3:5) originated in a different part of the Negev Highlands: A few years ago Lender had published in his Har Nafha survey map (LENDER 1990) two fragments of an alabaster vase, which he had dated to the Nabatean period. These fragments originated in site 12-01/49/1, situated in close proximity to Nahal Avdat. Lender collected at the site pottery that he dated to the EB2 and to the Nabatean period (LENDER 1990:11, no. 3).<sup>2</sup> Upon examination it appears that the best parallels for this alabaster vase are to be found in Egyptian contexts dated from the Predynastic

period to Dynasty I (EL-KHOULY 1978:243, pl. 68: 1643–1646; ASTON 1994:96) rather than to the Nabatean period.

### Be<sup>c</sup>erotayim

The evidence of the stray finds mentioned above is corroborated by a discovery made recently by Saidel and Gini-Erickson during their excavation at Be<sup>c</sup>erotayim – a site within the immediate vicinity of the above-mentioned localities. At the EB1 level of the site they had identified a large Naqada III – Dynasty 0–1 Egyptian pottery sherd (GINI-ERIKSON 2000 and Saidel and Gini personal communication), which thus can be added to the collection described above.

The last indication for contemporaneous Egyptian finds in this region originates in Haiman’s surveys. Haiman reported a massive EB settlement in his survey area (Archaeological Survey of Israel, Western Negev Highlands Maps 198–200, 203; HAIMAN 1990), and noted that a few Egyptian items were included in the pottery assemblage of the sites (1990:162). In his description he does not get into EB sub-phasing, though many drawings presented in his article (HAIMAN 1990, figs. 16, 17) have good parallels in EB1 contexts and prove that at least some of the substantial activity he outlined occurred during that phase.

In conclusion, it appears that the presence of Egyptian artifacts in EB assemblages in the western Negev Highlands is not an exotic coincidence but a recurring event. Their occurrence is small but consistent. Concerning chronology, the parallels for the Egyptian objects concentrate within the Naqada III / Dynasty 0–1 range. The date of these objects serves as a clear indicator for the date of the sites in which they were found – EB1b2. This reading has a particular importance since this precise dating could not be achieved through the analysis of the local pottery, which has a wider production curve, covering the whole EB range.

A crucial question is where from did the Egyptian material arrive? The highest probability is that its origin was in the closest place with a contemporary massive Egyptian presence. This area is beyond any question the Egyptian colony bordering the Negev Highlands on their north.

<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank Tali Gini-Erikson for referring me to this case.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The occurrence of well-dated Egyptian artifacts in the Western Negev Highlands sites mentioned above has some very important implications:

1. These objects enable the dating of the respective sites to the EB1b2. Earlier research has predicted that sites of this age should be present in the region (e.g. SEBANNE *et al.* 1993; AVNER *et al.* 1994), but was unable to pinpoint regional material culture assemblages of this phase. The presence of the Egyptian objects is a key to resolving this challenge.
2. The occurrence of a small but consistent component of Egyptian Naqada III / Dynasty 0–1 objects within the local cultural sphere of the Negev Highlands (characterized by the pen and room style, tumuli fields, holemouth dominated ceramic assemblages, etc.) extends the range of the contact zone described above southwards. Up to date the contact zone was identified in the central coastal plain, the Judean foothills and the northeastern Negev. It is now apparent that it spread south, to the Negev Highlands as well.
3. The occurrence of the Egyptian objects in the Negev Highlands testifies to a connection between this region's pastoral community and the complex urban / proto-urban organization of the Egyptian colony. In fact this is the first

documented case of a direct association between a desert pastoral community and a settled urban entity in the southern Levant. According to the descriptions given above this very kind of contact is a cornerstone in the definition of Pastoral Nomadism. Therefore we may focus Rosen's observation regarding his "Pre-Camel Pastoral Nomadism Phase", from his general dating to the EB (ROSEN 2002:30) to a more exact date of EB1b2. Sharpening another of his statements there, we can now claim that the EB1b2 milieu of southern Canaan was the context in which the classic heartland-periphery or desert-sown relationship first evolved.

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