

# Chapter 1

## Key issues in and the current state of research

### 1. OVERVIEW OF ISSUES IN AND THE STATE OF RESEARCH ON THE PREDYNASTIC PERIOD AND THE LOWER EGYPTIAN CULTURE

The remains of the Egyptian civilization attracted people's attention already in antiquity (*cf.* Herodotus, Strabo). In the modern times people have been primarily fascinated by monumental tombs and temples. The Near East has been wandered about by wealthy amateur travelers who published reports, memoirs and drawings from their journeys (*e.g.* David Roberts, Amelia Edwards). Popular interest in monumental relics of the past influenced the character of scientific excavation research, which, in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was practiced within temple complexes (Giza, Saqqara) as well as tombs (The Valley of the Kings). Additionally, numerous researchers of that time, including W.M.F. Petrie, the father of modern scientific archeology of the Near East, denied the existence of an Egyptian civilization before the emergence of a centralized Pharaoh's state, and the findings of Predynastic excavations were interpreted as a result of the activity of representatives of a "new race", who were believed to have arrived in the Nile Valley towards the end of the Old Kingdom period (Petrie & Quibell 1896).

The progress of research at the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century changed this view. Excavation works at Naqada, Abadaia, Hu, Abydos, Hierakonpolis as well as new publications (*e.g.* de Morgan 1896-1897; Quibell 1900; Petrie 1901; 1900-1901; 1902-1903; Quibell & Green 1902) shifted the beginnings of the Egyptian civilization to an earlier date, thus acknowledging the Predynastic period.

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw intensive excavation works in Pre- and Early Dynastic sites, *e.g.* in Saqqara (Quibell 1905), Tura (Junker 1912), Tarkhan (Petrie 1914). Those works, however, were not followed by comprehensive analyses. While numerous reports and studies were indeed published, most of them contained only that part of information which according to the researchers was the most important.

In the 1920s and 1930s excavation research spread on to the Delta area and to the Faiyum Oasis. New cultural units, older than previously known Predynastic cultures, were discovered, *e.g.* the Faiyumian culture (Caton-Thompson & Gardner 1934), the Merimda culture (Junker 1929-1940) and the Maadi culture, today referred to as the Lower Egyptian culture (Menghin & Amer 1932; 1936). An accumulation of data from the Predynastic

period paved a way to new synthetic analyses, attempts at periodization and classification systems (Petrie 1920; de Morgan 1925). The first efforts at interpreting the processes of Egyptian unification were published (*e.g.* Breasted 1931), and so were the first museum catalogues (*e.g.* Scharff 1929).

The postwar period was also characterized by progress in Early Dynastic research. Synthetic interpretations were now supplemented by materials derived from older research projects. Particular attention should be drawn to those relating to the periodization of the Predynastic period by H.J. Kantor (1944) and W. Kaiser (1957; 1958; 1961; 1964), which redefined the relative chronology of the period in question. The postwar times also saw synthetic interpretations of various aspects of Egyptian archaeology (Vandier 1952; Baumgartel 1955; 1960; Hayes 1965; Arkell 1975; Krzyżaniak 1977; 1980). All those publications were accompanied by intensive excavation works, both on new sites, such as Helwan (Saad 1969), Heliopolis, Wadi Hof (Debono & Mortensen 1988; 1990), areas adjacent to the Birket Qarun lake, Faiyum Oasis (Ginter *et al.* 1980; Ginter & Kozłowski 1986; 1989), Elkab (Vermeersch 1978; Hendrickx 1984; 1994; 1995), and on previously investigated sites in Merimde Beni-Salame (Eiwanger 1984; 1988; 1992), Hierakonpolis (Adams 1974; 1987; 1995; 1996; Hoffman 1982; Friedman 1990; 1994; 2008; 2009; Friedman *et al.* 2011) and Umm el-Qaab in Abydos (Dreyer *et al.* 1988; 1990; 1993; 1996; 1998; 2000; 2006; Hartung 2001).

The 1980s brought the discovery of new Predynastic sites in the Nile Delta area, such as the necropolis in Minshat Abu Omar (Kroeper 1988; 1989a; 1992; Kroeper & Wildung 1985; 1994; 2000; Krzyżaniak 1992a), where a great deal of Predynastic materials were found, or the settlement in Buto-Tell el-Fara'in (von der Way 1986; 1987; 1988; 1989; 1997; Faltings & Köhler 1996; Faltings 1998ab; Köhler 1998; Faltings *et al.* 2000; Hartung 2003), which shed more light on the Lower Egyptian culture, previously known from a single eponimic site in Maadi. Consequently, the name of the cultural unit in question was changed to the Maadi-Buto culture. An analysis of the inventories from the said sites showed the presence of artefacts typical for the Upper Egypt and Southern Levantine imports, both accompanying typical Lower Egyptian items. Thus, archaeologists were confronted with the issue of relationships between the Nile Delta, Lower Egypt and Levant. A number of researchers tackled the problem (*e.g.* Yadin 1955; Yeivin 1960; 1967; 1968; Amiran 1970; 1974; Gophna 1976; 1987; 1992; Ben-Tor 1982; 1986; 1991; Tutundžić 1985; 1989; Brandl 1992). Discoveries of more sites in the Delta - Tell el-Iswid, Tell Ibrahim Awad (van den Brink 1989; 1992b) and Tell el-Farkha (Chlodnicki *et al.* 1991; 1992a; 1992b) provided more research material. As a result, the culture's name was changed from the spatially-limiting Maadi-Buto culture to Lower Egyptian culture, thus stressing its broader territorial range, corresponding to the entire Lower Egypt. Intensified research in the Delta contributed significantly to understanding the cultural situation in the Lower Egypt area in the Predynastic period. However, one must not forget that some processes, such as the Lower Egyptian-Naqadian transition have not been fully explained and continue to be interpreted by and debated among researchers (*i.e.* Buchez & Midant-Reynes 2007; 2011; Köhler 2008; Mączyńska 2011).

The state of research on the Lower Egyptian culture cannot be analyzed separately from the state of research on the entire Predynastic period. The acknowledgement of the native character of Egyptian culture by 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars marked an important moment in Egypt's archaeology. It opened up the possibility to study Neolithic cultures in Egypt and moved the onset of the country's history by over a thousand years back. Further studies and publications shed more light on the key stages in Egyptian civilization. Researchers realized that without understanding those periods it would not be possible to understand the processes that ultimately led to the formation of a unified Egyptian state.

## **2. OVERVIEW OF ISSUES IN AND THE STATE OF RESEARCH ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE LOWER EGYPTIAN AND SOUTHERN LEVANTINE COMMUNITIES**

One of the key goals of this publication is to discuss the existing interpretations of contacts between Lower Egyptian and Southern Levantine communities in Pre-, Proto- and Early Dynastic periods. The said issue has appeared in archaeological deliberations as a result of the discoveries of Egyptian imports on Chalcolithic and Early Bronze sites in Canaan, as well as Southern Levantine imports on the sites in the Nile Delta and Nile Valley.

### **2.1. Relations between Egypt and the Southern Levant**

Originally, the oldest Egyptian findings in the Southern Levant were dated to the period between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, or even later (Andelković 1995: 25). It was only through the discoveries of new sites with Egyptian artefacts from Pre- and Early Dynastic period in the 1950s that a new trend in investigating the earliest Egyptian-Southern Levantine relationships began. In 1955 Y. Yadin (1955) published a provocative paper demonstrating his theory of the conquest of Canaan by Egyptians in the EB I period. From then on, as more and more sites were found, researchers have made attempts at explaining the character and the mechanisms of those contacts. The issue has been addressed at numerous scientific conferences, and proceedings published afterwards continue to be an important source for the investigators of the relationships between the two regions (*i.e.* van den Brink 1992b; Krzyżaniak *et al.* 1996; Levy & van den Brink 2002). However, the works published so far mostly concentrate on the Egyptian and Canaanite contacts in the late EB I and in EB II, *i.e.* in periods corresponding to NIII and the First and Second Dynasties. They either fail to address or only briefly mention the origins of those contacts in the Chalcolithic period (NIA-IIA) and in the beginning of EB I (NIIB-D1). New discoveries point out to the need for addressing the underlying causes of the relationships in question, as well as their functional mechanisms in the early and middle Predynastic period.

In 1995 B. Andelković (1995: 25-56) published a list of 31 sites from the South Levant with inventories featuring Egyptian imports or their local imitations. Despite such a large number of sources, materials from only six sites on the territory of today's southern Israel

(Site H, Lachish, Tel Erani, Taur Ikhbeineh, Tell Halif and Nizzanim) can be helpful in understanding the beginnings of Egyptian-Southern Levantine contacts (Gophna 1996: 311). Recent intensification of the studies by the Israel Antiquities Authority have brought about discoveries of many Early Bronze sites, such as those dated to the middle and late EB IB in Ashqelon-Barnea, Tell es-Sakan and Tell Lod, where Egyptian imports were found. However, still missing are sites with Egyptian materials dated to the early and middle Predynastic period (Braun 2002; Kansa & Levy 2002; van den Brink 2002; Braun & van den Brink 2008).

Southern Levantine imports in Lower Egypt are less numerous. This could be attributed to the state of research on the Lower Egyptian culture itself. The small number of recorded sites significantly affects the number of known Southern Levantine imports. One may expect an increase in the number of artefacts imported from Canaan as the research in the Delta intensifies. This claim has been confirmed by Tell el-Farkha, where research has been held for several years and where dozens of Southern Levantine pottery fragments dated to EB I have been found (Mączyńska 2006; Czarnowicz 2011; 2012b).

An analysis of the existing publications on Egyptian-Canaanite relationships shows the presence of four theories explaining the reasons for and the functional mechanisms of the contacts between both regions.

The first theory was presented by Y. Yadin (1955) on the basis of an analysis of representations on the Narmer palette. The theory assumes the conquest of Southern Levant by Egyptians in the early First Dynasty. Egyptians' military strength allegedly gave them power in Canaan, as a result of which Egyptian culture was imposed on the local population. According to E.D. Oren (1973), Southern Levant was to become a domain of Egypt, being a rich source of various materials. Evidence supporting this hypothesis was to be provided by research on Tel Erani site and by the cache from Kafr Monash. In Tel Erani S. Yeivin (1960) proposed a stratigraphically separate stratum V, dated by him to the end of EB I, which he claims to have been linked to a sudden and brief presence of Egyptians during Narmer's rule. This assertion was based on the findings of Egyptian pottery recorded in that stratum only, coupled with the stratum's small thickness indicating its short formation time. On the basis of the above data S. Yeivin concluded that the inventory of stratum V in Tel Erani can be explained only by an Egyptian invasion and possible brief domination of Egypt over southern Canaan.

According to S. Yeivin (1968), of similar importance for the interpretation of Egyptian-Southern Levantine contacts was the scorpion-shaped decoration on the blade of a metal saw, found in Kafr Monash. In that author's opinion, the artwork of that decoration was closely linked to the scorpion pattern engraved on the ceremonial macehead of King Scorpion. The blade was found in the company of other items originally belonging to a unit of four soldiers. S. Yeivin (1968: 47-48) is of the opinion that the soldiers' presence was linked to the military conquest of Southern Levant towards the end of King Scorpion's reign or soon afterwards.

Currently, the theory assuming an armed expedition of Egyptians to Southern Levant in EB I, aimed at conquest and exploitation is far from being the leading interpretation of the contacts between the two regions, for the lack of clear evidence. E.D. Oren (1989) considered the military conquest of Canaan by Egyptians to be unlikely, since Canaan's culture and sociopolitical organization allowed one to wield power without military intervention. The political organization and socioeconomic structure of Early Bronze communities in the region was much less developed than that of Naqadian communities. Nonetheless, E.D. Oren accepts that the Egyptian army may have been present in Southern Levant. In his opinion, a limited number of troops could be there to ensure the safety of Egyptian colonies and traders. This assertion is supported *inter alia* by knives and maceheads found in En Besor, Tel Halif, Horvat Illin Tahtit, Tel Maahaz, Megiddo, arrowheads found on Site H and in northern Sinai, as well as by a copper axe from Tel Erani.

Another theory excludes the use of military force, assuming that the contacts between Egypt and Southern Levant in w EB I were purely commercial in nature. R. Amiran (1970: 94; 1974: 10-11) and A. Ben-Tor (1982; 1986) are of the opinion that the rationale for those contacts were shared commercial interests. Southern Levant may have exported to Egypt such goods as wine, olive, aromatic oils, various sorts of resins, bitumen, copper and organic products, none of which have been preserved in archaeological materials due to their physical properties. Egyptians provided Southern Levantines with luxurious goods, such as stoneware, golden jewelry, semi-precious stones and possibly small amounts of food. Archaeologists propose a number of different interpretations of the organization of trade. A. Ben-Tor (1982: 11) believes that both Egyptians and Southern Levantines were actively involved. On the other hand, R. Gophna (1987: 16-18) claims that trade was organized by Egyptian traders staying in Southern Levant, either among the local population or in special trading posts.

By analyzing the available data some researchers concluded that Egyptian-Southern Levantine relations could not have been based on trade alone. According to R. Gophna (1992: 386), bilateral trade is possible only between societies at a similar stage of development. If one side dominates the other, as was the case in the relationship in question, such relationship should be described using a more accurate notion of economic exploitation. Similarly, N. Porat (1986/87) concluded that Egyptian-Southern Levantine relations in EB I could not have been purely economic and that Egyptian finds in Southern Levant should be attributed to the presence of a considerable number of Egyptians who – while preserving strong links to their homeland and culture – strongly influenced the local community, thus causing its “Egyptianization”.

As research works progressed, archaeologists were inclined to propose a third theory. Having assessed the hypothesis of commercial exchange between Egypt and Southern Levant, both N. Porat (1986/87) and R. Gophna (1992) concluded that most probably an Egyptian colony existed in Canaan. A similar theory was put forward by B. Brandl (1992: 441-448). He was of the opinion that the colony was founded by Egyptians, who then

peacefully assimilated to the local community. The colony's territory stretched from Rafiah in the south to the Yarkon river in the north, encompassing the coast and the lowlands in the east. The underlying reasons for establishing the colony were related to the exchange of minerals and agricultural produce. However, according to B. Brandl (1992: 447) the main cause for Egyptian presence along the northern coast of Sinai was the need to protect the maritime trade route to Byblos. For this very reason B. Brandl attributes the end of the colonization to the progress in navigation techniques, as a result of which Egyptians were able to sail directly from the Delta, without the need to follow the coastline.

Most researchers focused their efforts on determining the character of the Egyptian colony in Canaan (*e.g.* Andelković 1995: 68-72; Ben-Tor 1982; Kempinski & Gilead 1991; Stager 1992: 40). Various definitions of a "colony" were tried and referred to. One of them assumes that a colony involves a compact settlement of a group of people of the same nationality living in a foreign territory (state) while remaining loyal to their homeland (Andelković 1995: 69 after Haas 1963). More thorough source material analyses showed however that the above definition could not be used in interpreting the organization of the Egyptian colony in Southern Levant in EB I. No compact and closed settlements inhabited by Egyptians only were registered. In most settlements from the period in question Egyptian and Southern Levantine materials were found together, thus indicating coexistence of the outsiders and the local population. The only exceptions could be En Besor and Tel Maahaz, both being important Egyptian administration centers (Andelković 1995: 69-70). Another definition of a colony refers to a territory reigned not by its local community, but by representatives of a foreign territory (state), being a minority and differing from the local inhabitants in terms of culture, history, beliefs, and sometimes also race. The rulers' policy consists in imposing its own social, economic and political structure (Haas 1963). It was generally accepted, in EB I in Southern Levant the power was most probably held by Egyptians. Their culture, both material and symbolic, differed from the culture of the Early Bronze societies from Southern Levant. The presence of the Egyptian administrative apparatus is apparently confirmed by royal serekhs found on vessels and impressions of cylindrical seals (Levy *et al.* 1995). The main factor attracting Egyptians' attention to Southern Levant was the demand for copper and other mineral and agricultural materials. Originally, in EB IA Egyptians sourced those materials and reinforced their own position by settling small groups of their people in the foreign territory. In EB IB that position grew stronger and enabled them to establish a colony in Southern Levant. By and large, the coexistence of Egyptians and Southern Levantines was peaceful, although one cannot rule out the presence of a small number of Egyptian troops in Southern Levant. The colony sent to mainland Egypt such goods as copper (both metal and ore), bitumen, salt, sulfur, turquoise, resins, aromatic oils, olive, wine and other food products. It is likely that the Egyptian colony was the easternmost Egyptian outpost trading with non-colonized territories. The golden age of the colony continued for approximately 200 years. During that time Egyptians formed a network of major centers and smaller settlements all over the colony. Contacts with mainland

Egypt were maintained via northern Sinai. The likely reasons for the colony's decline included a process of political, social and economic changes in Canaan. Political and socio-economic development, population growth and the emergence of major, fortified city-states in Southern Levant turned Egypt's attention to Syria and Lebanon, both more easily accessible by sea. Isolated Egyptian finds in Southern Levant were registered also in EB II contexts, but by that period the golden age of the colony was well long gone.

Another theory explaining Egyptian-Southern Levantine contacts in early EB I was put forward by J.P. Dessel (1991; 2001) and A.H. Joffe (1991). It also assumes the existence of an Egyptian colony in Southern Levant. According to J. P. Dessel, there exist no archeological materials adequately proving the military conquest of Southern Levant by Egyptians, or regular trade between the two regions. He believes that Egyptian presence in Canaan in EB I was symbolic and ideological in nature and was more of an exercise in planning and logistics by a newly centralized elite. All Egyptian efforts made in Southern Levant were "experimental practice" preceding the actual unification and centralization in mainland Egypt. A similar theory was presented by A.H. Joffe (1991), claiming that Egyptians established an administrative system in Southern Levant whose purpose was to imitate a fully-fledged state with all its elements, such as distributable goods. The purpose of this experiment was to try out the social and political system by controlling the Egyptian colony in Southern Levant. Due to the fact that the said theory is unverifiable and rather loosely correlated with archeological data, it has won only a few supporters.

Table 6. Egyptian-Levantine relations according to L. Watrin (1998: 1215-1226).

| PHASE | EXCHANGE PATTERN    | CHRONOLOGY   | SOUTHERN LEVANT   | LOWER EGYPT                      | UPPER EGYPT                   |
|-------|---------------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1     | middleman trading   | 3900-3650 BC | late Chalcolithic | early LEC                        | Naqada Ia-b                   |
| 2     | dual access trading | 3650-3400 BC | EB IA             | late LEC                         | Naqada Ic-early<br>Naqada IIc |
| 3     | emisary trading     | 3400-3150 BC | early EB IB       | Naqada IIc-d/<br>Naqada IIIa1-a2 |                               |
| 4     | colonial enclaves   | 3150-3000 BC | late EB IB        | Naqada IIIb – Dynasty 0          |                               |

All the above theories explaining the nature of Egyptian-Southern Levantine contacts refer to relationships existing at a later stage of EB I, *i.e.* from Naqada III. Most of the above-quoted authors were of the opinion that Egyptian-Southern Levantine contacts in the late Chalcolithic/EB IA were linked to small-scale exchange of goods.

The recent years saw papers by authors setting out to present a comprehensive analysis of Egyptian-Canaanite relationships with a breakdown into phases, taking into account the temporal changes in the nature of those relationships. Relying on the exchange models presented by C. Renfrew (1975), L. Watrin (1998) identified four phases in the contacts between both regions, varying in terms of the organization of the exchange (Tab. 6). In phase 1, the

exchange was via intermediaries. Subsequently, trade was controlled by small groups of Levantine traders who settled in Lower Egypt towards the end of the Lower Egyptian culture. A similar situation occurred in Southern Levant, where the presence of Egyptian traders was registered. The next phase in the trade development process involved the presence of a larger group of Egyptians, linked to the Egyptian administration. The final phase in the development of Egyptian-Southern Levantine contacts saw the formation of an Egyptian colony in southern Canaan, accompanied by Egyptians' full control over bilateral trade.

Another model of Egyptian and Levantine relationships was proposed by T.E. Levy and E.C.M. van den Brink (2002: 18-21). They identified six phases of Egyptian-Levantine Interaction (ELI) contacts (Tab. 7). The first three phases were related to contacts between the representatives of the Lower Egyptian culture and those of the Late Chalcolithic to beginning of EB IB of Southern Levant. Due to the scarcity of materials dated to that particular period the authors merely provided a brief presentation of data, without in-depth interpretations of the nature of those contacts. The remaining phases were related to more sophisticated relationships accompanying the complicated processes of Egyptian unification and urbanization in Southern Levant.

Table 7. Egyptian-Levantine interaction phases according to T.E. Levy and E.C.M. van den Brink (2002: tab. 1.7, 1.8).

| PHASE | CHRONOLOGY      | SOUTHERN LEVANT     | LOWER EGYPT | UPPER EGYPT        |
|-------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 1 ELI | c. 3900 BC      | Chalcolithic period | Buto Ia     |                    |
| 2 ELI | c. 3650 BC      | EB IA               | Buto Ib     | Naqada IIb         |
| 3 ELI | c. 3650-3300 BC | early EB IB         | Buto II     | Naqada IIc-IIId2   |
| 4 ELI | c. 3300 BC      | middle EB IB        | Buto III    | Naqada IIIa2       |
| 5 ELI | c 3100 BC       | late EB IB          | Buto IV     | Naqada IIIb1-IIIc1 |
| 6 ELI | > c. 2900 BC    | EB II               | Buto V      | Naqada IIIc2-3     |

Another set of criteria for analyzing Egyptian-Southern Levantine contacts was applied by P. de Miroschedji (2002). Primarily based on materials from the territory of Canaan, he identified 7 phases in the development of contacts between Egypt and Canaan in Early Bronze (Tab. 8). Phase 1 was to be characteristic for infrequent contacts between both regions, aimed at investigating their respective natural resources. Phase 2 saw the first wave of Egyptian expansion, followed by the establishment of a regular exchange network in Southern Levant. In phase 3 Egyptians apparently formed a colony, whereas in phase 4 they established state administrative structures in Canaan. In the Early Dynastic period the exchange was reorganized due to the development of city-states in Southern Levant. Egyptian settlements disappeared from Southern Levant and the exchange came to be more official and first of

Table 8. Egyptian-Canaanite interaction according to P. de Miroschedji (2002: 40, tab. 2.1).

| PHASE | CHRONOLOGY   | SOUTHERN LEVANT   | LOWER EGYPT                     | UPPER EGYPT  |
|-------|--------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| 1     | to 3500 BC   | Late Chalcolithic | early LEC                       | Naqada I     |
| 2     | 3500-3400 BC | EB IA             | late LEC                        | Naqada IIa-b |
| 3     | 3400-3150 BC | EB IB             | Naqada IIc-IIIa                 |              |
| 4     | 3150-3050 BC | final EB IB       | Dynasty 0                       |              |
| 5     | 3150-3050 BC | EB II-III         | Dynasties 1-5                   |              |
| 6     | 3050-2650 BC | final EB III      | Dynasties 5-6                   |              |
| 7     | 2650-2250 BC | EB IV             | Dynasty 6, 1st Intermed. Period |              |

all more symbolic (exchange of prestigious items). According to P. de Miroschedji, the rule of the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasties could have seen Egypt's armed expedition against Southern Levant. Eventually, in EB IV the contacts between Egypt and Canaan were severed, probably due to profound political changes. The said period brought about the collapse of both the centralized Pharaonic State and the urban network of city-states in Canaan.

Thus far, the attempts at understanding the contacts between Egypt and Southern Levant from their onset in the Chalcolithic period to their termination in EB II have allowed researchers to consider the relationships between both regions in a broader cultural and chronological context. However, one must not forget about the drawbacks of those attempts. The beginnings of mutual contacts between Lower Egypt and Canaan are poorly represented in archaeological material, which is probably caused by the state of research. When compared to materials representing later stages of those contacts, materials dated to the beginning of Naqada I and the beginning of Naqada II or to the end of the Chalcolithic or early EB I are – in the opinion of most researchers – too scarce to serve as a basis for general interpretations.

In their description of the first phases of Egyptian-Levantine interactions (ELI 1-3), T.E. Levy and E.C.M. van den Brink (2002: 18-19) do not make any interpretative attempts and merely present sources, such as Southern Levantine pottery and Egyptian pottery whose forms are linked to Canaanite items, found on Lower Egyptian sites (at Maadi and Buto), as well as Chalcolithic semi-subterranean dwellings from Maadi and spikes of the Nilotic catfish and *Aspatharia rubens* shells found on Southern Levantine sites. Even though these materials are indicative of contacts between the two regions, the nature of those contacts remains unknown.

Material evidence confirming Lower Egyptian and Southern Levantine contacts was commented on also by T.P. Harrison (1993) and L. Watrin (1998). Unlike T.E. Levy and E.C.M. van den Brink, Harrison and Watrin do present interpretations of those contacts.

For both researchers, the first phase of Egyptian-Canaanite interactions involved the presence of intermediaries-traders. According to T.P. Harrison (1993: 89-90) and L. Watrin (1998: 1220-1221), the exchange between the two regions was organized by a group of independent intermediaries with a profound understanding of the needs of both sides. The exchange was a private venture, taking place between two centers - entrepôts, from where the traded goods could have been distributed to other locations. The entrepôt in Lower Egypt was Maadi, and the one in Southern Levant was either Taur Ikhbeinah or En-Besor H. According to L. Watrin (1998: 1218), also Buto could have played a major role in trade exchange between Egypt and Southern Levant. It may have been the center out of which maritime exchange with Byblos was controlled. Recent research on the organization of the Lower Egyptian culture disprove the existence of a center (or centers) that could control various activities within the entire culture. It is more likely that exchange was organized independently by each settlement for the purpose of catering for local needs (Mączyńska 2008; 2011).

An alternative view is proposed by P. de Miroschedji (2002: 39-41), who primarily concentrates on the analysis of Southern Levantine materials. According to him, the oldest contacts between Egypt and Levant are confirmed by campsites or seasonal settlements of pastoral communities in northern Sinai, where both Canaanite and Egyptian pottery was registered. The inhabitants of those campsites (seasonal settlements) allegedly were the agents of the first contacts between the two countries. Socioeconomic changes in Southern Levant towards the end of the Chalcolithic and in the early EB IA marked an important moment in the development of the contacts. The introduction of the donkey as a means of transportation, the developments in horticulture (mainly olives and vines) or mining activities in Sinai created conducive conditions for establishing a regular Egyptian-Southern Levantine exchange network. In the beginning of EB IB, the contacts became closer and more intensive, as a result of which Egyptians appeared in Southern Levant and formed a colony whose main purpose was to control trade.

Exchange mechanisms between Lower Egypt and Southern Levant were also analyzed by F. Guyot (2008), who concentrated primarily on the exchange dynamics and emulation processes correlated to the social organization of the societies under consideration. He drew attention to strong Levantine investments in Lower Egypt and the rarity of Egyptian imports in Southern Levant, apparently resulting from the establishment of the first exchange between both regions under the impetus from the Southern Levantine centers. Moreover he also proposed a more appropriate term describing the character of the exchange: "from neighbour to neighbour contacts". According to F. Guyot (2008: 713-714) the first exchange was very random and depended on inter-community alliances. Lower Egyptians only disposed of the exogenous goods randomly dispatched to them. In the middle of Naqada II period the disappearance of foreign intermediaries could be observed, however according to F. Guyot (2008: 715) the intensity of the exchange remained the same. Nonetheless, "the encounter with the Naqadian model" in the second half of Naqada II stimulated the social dynamics of the Lower Egyptian society. The Lower Egyptian centers became consumption

centers as they were organized on the same mode as the Naqadian chiefdoms. Moreover “they organized their own distribution network, turned to Southern Levant and the Mediterranean littoral” (Guyot 2008: 722-724).

An important place in the interpretations of the early Egyptian-Southern Levantine contacts is occupied by studies of materials from Lower Egyptian sites on which Southern Levantine imports were registered. According to I. Rizkana and J. Seeher (1989: 78-80) who interpreted the finds from Maadi settlement, the Delta societies imported ceramic jars, V-shaped bowls, small basalt discs, flint endscrapers, flint sickle blades, bone combs and palettes, bitumen, resins, olive, cedar wood, skins of animals (*e.g.* hippopotamuses), animals (cattle, goat, sheep), agricultural produce as well as copper and pigments. The above proposal was considered as unconvincing by K.M. Ciałowicz (1999: 123), who questioned products unpreserved in archaeological materials. In his opinion, the list presented by I. Rizkana and J. Seeher was merely a reflection of Southern Levantine exporting capabilities of the time.

In return for Levantine items Egyptians could offer pottery, basalt vessels, flintware, Nile fish whose bones were registered on Southern Levantine sites, as well as *Aspatharia rubens* shells used as containers for cosmetics or as a material for manufacturing pendants and spoons (Rizkana & Seeher 1989: 79).

According to I. Rizkana and J. Seeher (1989: 80) imports probably did not reach the Delta directly from Southern Levant and Sinai. The eastern edge of the Delta could have been an area of intensive contacts and exchange between Egyptian and Southern Levantine traders, and only from there certain products were distributed by local intermediaries to end users all over the Delta or Southern Levant. Southern Levantine products were also distributed along the borders of the Delta territory, possibly also by water routes along the river's branches. I. Rizkana and J. Seeher (1989: 80) accepted the possibility of infrequent penetrations of eastern traders into the Delta, as the semi-subterranean dwellings discovered Maadi seem to suggest. Their similarity to Chalcolithic semi-subterranean dwellings from Beersheba region in Southern Levant is often mentioned (Perrot 1955; 1984; Rizkana & Seeher 1989: 80; Watrin 1999; 2000: 173-182; Hartung *et al.* 2003). It is likely that the presence of eastern merchants in Maadi was temporary and depended on transportation conditions, affected by annual inundations of the Nile.

Excavations held in the recent years in Buto have also shown the presence of a considerable amount of Southern Levantine pottery in layers dated to the Lower Egyptian culture. Originally its presence was considered to have resulted from trade exchange between Egypt and Southern Levant. However, a more detailed analysis showed that despite foreign stylistic features the pottery was made using local Nile clay. According to E.Ch. Köhler (1993) and D. Faltings (1998ab; 2002), a group of Southern Levantine settlers apparently arrived at Buto settlement in the Late Chalcolithic (Schicht Ia). In the beginning, the newcomers retained their separate cultural identity and used local materials to manufacture pottery characteristic for their own traditions (use of a rotating device, thumb-indented bowl rims,

V-shaped bowls). Over time, however, the immigrants adapted Egyptian pottery making techniques and technologies (Schicht Ib) and eventually gave up their own cultural tradition at all (Schicht II).

The recent years have brought about the discoveries of numerous imports from Southern Levant at the site at Tell el-Farkha (Mączyńska 2006; Czarnowicz 2012b). A number of them come from layers linked to the Lower Egyptian occupation. In addition, a fragment of a copper knife, similar to knives known from Southern Levant, comes from the same period (Czarnowicz 2012a). The discoveries of imported pottery, copper, but also structures important for understanding the role of the site in the Predynastic period (*e.g.* oldest mudbrick architecture, Lower Egyptian 'residence', brewery center) allow one to claim that the Tell el-Farkha site could have been an exchange center between Southern Levant and Upper Egypt (Mączyńska *in press d*).

New evidence of the contacts between Southern Levant and Lower Egypt in the Chalcolithic and EB I was presented by E. Braun and E.C.M. van den Brink (2008). However, apart from reporting items of Egyptian origins newly found in Southern Levant, they stressed that in spite of numerous recent excavations on Chalcolithic and EB I sites in Israel, the absence of Egyptian items is remarkable. In the opinion of those authors this situation suggests the sporadic nature of contacts in this period (Braun & van den Brink 2008: 650).

## 2.2. Relations between Egypt and Sinai

Thus far it has been generally accepted that in the Chalcolithic period and in the beginning of EB I the Sinai Peninsula remained under Southern Levantine influences (Stager 1992: 33). However, the research by an expedition from Ben Gurion University in northern Sinai shows that – depending on the period – the status of Sinai vis-à-vis different neighboring territories varied considerably, as suggested by numerous new sites found – pastoral campsites dating from the Chalcolithic to EB IV (Oren 1989: 400; Oren & Gilead 1981; Yekutieli 2002). Both on Chalcolithic and EB I sites, Canaanite pottery was accompanied by Predynastic Egyptian pottery. While on Chalcolithic sites the amount of Egyptian pottery was insignificant, on EB I sites it sometimes represented as much as 80% of the entire material recovered. A detailed analysis of the data collected by researchers coupled with quantitative analyses, spatial methods and simulations allowed Y. Yekutieli (2002: 429-432) to determine the character of settling activity in the north of Sinai. In his opinion, the economy of Chalcolithic settlements was primarily based on Sinai's natural resources. However, sometimes the choice of raw material was also determined by other factors, such as distance. This is true in the case of pottery which was not made from materials available on Sinai, but rather from less distant Levantine clays. Furthermore, technological and stylistic similarities between Sinaian and Southern Levantine pottery may result from the concentration of campsites in the eastern part of northern Sinai, near the Canaan border. Sinai was a kind of its dominium. In EB I the character of settlements in the north of Sinai changed as a result

of intensified contacts between Egypt and Southern Levant. In that period the economy of the local population largely depended on the activity of the trade route connecting both regions. Egyptian-Canaanite trade exchange constituted the *raison d'être* of the Early Bronze communities in Sinai, with agriculture being an occupation of secondary importance. Given that the distance that could be traveled by a caravan of donkeys in a barren, desert landscape was approximately 100 km, there must have been some kind of stop-over sites en-route. Most of the registered settlements and campsites are likely to have served that very purpose.

Tracing the route connecting Lower Egypt and Southern Levant is another important issue related to the contacts between both regions. It is generally agreed that the said route ran through the north of Sinai (Fig. 4; Rizkana & Seeher 1989: 79; de Miroschedji 2002), as was confirmed by field surveys in the area. A map of all registered sites shows a clearly linear alignment, the most obvious in the case of sites dated to EB IA (Yekutieli 2002).

Some researches propose an alternative course of trade routes between Egypt and Canaan. I. Rizkana and J. Seeher (1989: 79) assume the existence of another route going from Wadi Tumilat and reaching the Delta in the area of today's town of Zagazig (Fig. 4). An interesting hypothesis on the presence of an alternative route from Upper Egypt was proposed also by D. Bar-Yosef Mayer (2002). Her analysis of bangles made of *Lambis truncata* shells from the Red Sea, found on sites in the south of Sinai and in Upper Egypt, led her to believe that despite considerable similarities bangles from each region were different in terms of workmanship. According to D. Bar-Yosef Mayer (2002: 132-133), the only place where such bangles were manufactured was located in the south of Sinai, near Wadi Watrin. The top-quality (perfectly round) bangles were exported to Upper Egypt, while the inferior ones (twisted or triangular) were supplied to the local community and to Southern Levantines. Oval bangles were sent to Upper Egypt directly from southern Sinai via a route running southwards through the Red Sea (Fig. 4). The evidence for the above hypothesis are triangular bangles found in the Delta area (*e.g.* at Maadi) which – in the opinion of D. Bar-Yosef Mayer (2002: 133) – arrived there from southern Sinai via southern Canaan, and then via northern Sinai together with other Canaanite imports.

Some researchers also accept the possibility that in the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC maritime routes were also used in the exchange of goods. According to I. Rizkana and J. Seeher (1989: 80), Byblos could have been the center to which traders came by sea, although they do not rule out the existence of other sea ports suitable for such exchange along the coast of northern Sinai and Southern Levant. According to K. Prag (1986), materials indicating the existence of a route connecting Egypt with Byblos only date back to the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC.

Also R. Gophna (2002) points out to the existence of an alternative maritime route along the south-eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. His research made it possible to identify more than ten sites dated to EB I along the Israeli coast. Those sites were small ports where merchant ships could have anchored. An important role in this research is played by Egyptian vessels found along the littoral. Their presence may confirm the existence of “maritime”



Figure 4. Trade routes in the Predynastic period.

exchange between Egypt and Southern Levant in that period (Marcus 2002: 407). According to R. Gophna (2002), in addition to the three main ports: Ashqelon, Tel Megadim and Jaffa, there also existed other ports, used much less frequently, in Tell es-Sakan, Yavneh Yam, Michmoret and Dor (Fig. 4; see also Fig. 2).

Due to the scarcity of evidence, the existence of a sea route between Egypt and Southern Levant in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC continues to be an open question. Field surveys along the coast as well as underwater research provide an increasing number of findings and contribute to a better understanding of the trade routes between Egypt and Canaan. It seems highly likely that in the period in question water transport was already in use, given the favorable topography of the Delta, crisscrossed with canals and river branches. Boat travel allowed traders to reach major settlements up in the Delta (such as Buto) and to exchange their goods right there (Rizkana & Secher 1989: 80).

### 2.3. Relations between Egypt and Syria/Mesopotamia

The existence of contacts between Lower Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia in the Predynastic period is questionable (Fig. 5). The existence of relationships between the Delta and the famous Uruk culture at the time of its greater expansion and colonization of neighboring territories was first suggested by T. von der Way (1988: 245-249; 1992b; 1997: 114) on the basis of a clay nail (Grubenkopfnagel) found in Buto in layers attributed to the Lower Egyptian culture (Schicht I). According to T. von der Way (1992b: 220, fig. 2, 4) the clay nail may be reminiscent of mosaic nails put in large quantities into a thick layer of plaster attached to brick walls of temples, thus creating a decorative pattern. In his opinion Mesopotamian artefacts apparently arrived to Buto as a result of the expansion of the Uruk culture society in phase 7/6, when new colonies and trading posts were established, mostly for commercial purposes. One of the more important colonies of this kind was Habuba Kebira (Fig. 5) founded in northern Syria on the river Euphrates (Strommenger 1980). In the opinion of T. von der Way (1992b: 220-221), that colony was an intermediary between the Delta and Mesopotamia, which is seemingly confirmed by a single registered fragment of Egyptian N-ware dated to Naqada IIb. The Mesopotamian interpretation of “cone nails” sparked a great deal of controversy. Today most researchers are opposed to linking these artefacts to Mesopotamian architecture. According to D. Faltings (1998b: 374-375), clay “nails” should be linked to specific ceramic forms known as “cornets”, found on nearly all Ghassulian sites in Southern Levant. Their function is unclear, although they are often considered as cultic items. Since the ceramic inventory from Buto features a large number of various miniature vessels, the Grubenkopfnagel and other clay nails could have been miniatures of cornets. So far no such nail has been found *in situ* and their number – in the light of the function proposed by T. von der Way – is too small. If they were used as mosaic elements, they should be much more common in archeological material.

Other artefacts registered in the Ia layer in Buto, which – according to T. von der Way (1992b: 221, fig. 5) – imply Egyptian-Mesopotamian contacts include pottery fragments with white spirals on the upper parts, formed by removing a whitish slip from the inside of the vessel.



Figure 5. Mesopotamia and Egypt in the Predynastic period.

Bowls of this kind were supposed to be related to Amuq F horizon pottery from the north of Syria. The later finding of several complete vessels with a white pattern made it possible to explain their origin. A detailed analysis of the decoration pattern revealed that the vessels were in fact not made using a technique characteristic for Amuq F. Instead, the spiral pattern was painted using white paint. Furthermore, similarities between these vessels and Chalcolithic pottery from Southern Levant (known *inter alia* from Beersheba region and from the north of Sinai) were identified (Faltings 1998b: 367-371).

Due to the lack of conclusive evidence, it is generally accepted in the literature that in the period of Naqada I and II direct contacts between Egypt and Mesopotamia did not exist (Moorey 1990; Cialowicz 1999: 126; Hendrickx & Bavay 2002: 69-70). Some researchers accept the possibility that such contacts took place via Canaan (Hendrickx & Bavay 2002: 73). However, it goes beyond any doubt that the trade route between Egypt and Mesopotamia was used in the following period, *i.e.* Naqada III (Mark 1999).

### 3. SUMMARY

An analysis of the above data clearly shows the relationships between the Delta and Southern Levant. However, the underlying evidence is not easy to interpret. As a result, researchers vary in their understanding of the character of those relationships. As more and more source materials became available, new hypotheses were presented, originally assuming military conquest of Canaan by Egyptians, then shifting towards trade exchange between both regions, eventually evolving to the existence of an Egyptian colony in Southern Levant. There also exist theories interpreting the Egyptian presence in Southern Levant as an attempt at developing and administering a centralized society. A certain drawback of these interpretations was the fact that they focused primarily on the late Predynastic period, after the Lower Egyptian-Naqadian transition. When interpreting the origins of Egyptian-Southern Levantine contacts at the end of the Chalcolithic and the beginning of EB IA (*i.e.* Naqada NIIB) most researchers did little more than briefly mention the sporadic nature of those contacts.

A certain turning point in investigating the earliest Egyptian-Southern Levantine relationships took place in the 1980s, when the Delta ceased to be an “uncharted territory”. Excavations provided additional materials, thus shedding a new light on contacts and presenting them from a new perspective.

This publication is an attempt at interpreting the contacts in the early and middle Predynastic period, taking into account materials sourced from both regions. All previous publications concentrated on earlier stages of those contacts, which was largely determined by the availability of source materials. The authors of those publications merely mentioned the “sporadic” nature of the relationships in Naqada I and II and sometimes listed imports known from that period. This monograph takes a different approach, because the author rejects the “sporadic” nature of early Egyptian-Southern Levantine contacts. The renewed and precise analysis of older sources and the inclusion of new discoveries require one to revise the earlier views. Doubtlessly, the contacts in the early and middle Predynastic period on the one hand and the late Predynastic period on the other differ not only in terms of quantity, but also in terms of quality. Therefore, an important aspect of this publication will be an attempt at defining the underlying reasons for and the functional mechanisms of the contacts in question. Attention should also be drawn to the fact that understanding the nature of the early stage of Egyptian-Southern Levantine relationships is of key importance for understanding the dynamics of the cultural development of the Delta in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, as well as for full understanding of the mutual relationships between Egypt and Southern Levant at the stage of the centralized state in Naqada III period.