

News about King David

Commentary for January 17, 2015 — ... and Toi, King of Hamath

As I covered in the January 1, 2015 article, "[Israel and Judah: 6. David's Foreign Wars](#)," King David defeated Hadadezer, King of Zobah. A ruler of a neighboring realm in Syria named Toi (also spelled Tou in the King James Version), King of Hamath, had been at war with Hadadezer. Israel's victory over Hadadezer solved that problem for King Toi, who sent his son Hadoram to negotiate a treaty between the kingdoms of Hamath and Israel. Toi sent rich gifts to David, which likely indicated his acceptance of becoming a subservient vassal of David and Israel.

A December 15, 2014 press release reported on recent research published by Professor Gershon Galil, Professor of Biblical Studies and Ancient History at the University of Haifa. Prof. Galil presents new inscriptions that mentions King Toi of Hamath.

"The History of King David In Light of New Epigraphic and Archeological Data"

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In two articles recently published in leading journals (*Ugarit Forschungen* and *Semitica*), Prof. Gershon Galil of the University of Haifa (Department of Biblical Studies) presented important information about the period of David's reign, based on new archaeological and epigraphic data unearthed in northwestern Syria and southern Turkey.

Prof. Galil points out that King David halted the Arameans' expansion into the Land of Israel on account of his alliance with the southern Philistine kings, as well as with **Toi, king of Hamath**,¹ who is identified with Tai(ta) II, king of Palistin (the northern Sea Peoples).

"The Empire of David is a realistic historical phenomenon and the biblical description of its formation and consolidation is possible and reasonable," says Prof. Galil.

"It reflects the great struggle between the Arameans and the Sea Peoples for the inheritance of the territories, which were previously part of the Egyptian and the Hittite Empires. David took advantage of these conflicts to unite the northern and the southern Sea Peoples against the mutual enemy, Hadadezer king of Aram-Zobah. David defeated the Arameans and created a regional empire from the Sinai Peninsula to the Euphrates."

"Eight inscriptions recently discovered at different sites clearly indicate that a large kingdom named Palistin existed in northwestern Syria and southern Turkey. It encompassed the cities Hamath, Aleppo and Carchemish," Prof. Galil says. **"This kingdom was inhabited by different groups including Sea Peoples. They invaded the Levant in the 12th century BC, conquered vast areas, destroyed kingdoms and took over their lands."**

¹ On the map below, it is spelled Ḥamât. The city is known today as Hama on the bank of the Orontes River.

“The inscriptions of Ramesses III, king of Egypt (1182-1151 BC), indicate that he conquered cities in northern Syria and seized control of ‘the lands of Plst.’ However, hitherto there was no evidence that Philistines had lived in northern Syria, so scholars assumed that the Egyptian scribes exaggerated, describing places which didn’t really exist,” Prof. Galil explains.

“The discovery of the northern kingdom of Palistin helps us understand the Egyptian inscriptions and the reality of northwestern Syria in those distant days.”

Prof. Galil adds that a few inscriptions form a direct link between the archaeological and epigraphic data unearthed in northern Palistin and the Bible: “Some open with the words ‘I am Tai(ta) the Hero, King of Palistin.’ Given our philological and historical knowledge, it’s clear that Tai(ta) should be identified with Toi, mentioned in the Book of Samuel and in Chronicles,” he says.

“The alliance between David and Toi, king of Hamath, against Hadadezer, king of Zobah, is clearly attested in the Bible,” says Prof. Galil, “We know for sure now that Toi of Hamath existed, and that he was indeed a historical

figure. The biblical text in the Book of Samuel is therefore well supported by the historical reality of the 10th century BC.” He stresses in particular II Samuel 8:10:

“When Toi, king of Hamath, heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer, he sent his son Joram to King David, to greet him and to congratulate him on defeating Hadadezer in battle — for Hadadezer had been at war with Toi.”

Prof. Galil thus proposes the following scenario. Relations between David and the southern Philistines (particularly the people of Philistine Gath) were close during David's reign in Hebron. But after the unification of Israel and Judah, a war broke out between the Philistines and David, as described in the Bible. At this stage the Arameans' advance led by Hadadezer king of Zobah, results in an alliance between David and Toi king of Hamath, in the sense of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

The alliance between David and the northern Philistines ultimately leads to a pact with the



southern Philistines as well, since they too were threatened by the Arameans. With their joint forces, the Israelites and the Philistines defeated the Arameans and seized their lands.²

Prof. Galil notes that the close relationship between David and the Philistines is also demonstrated by the fact that during Absalom's rebellion, all Israelites rebelled against David. Only a few people supported him, primarily Philistine fighters: David's royal garrison, consisting mainly of Philistines known as **"the Cherethites and the Pelethites"**; and **"Itai of Gath,"** who came to David's aid from Philistine Gath with 600 soldiers.³

After his great victory over the Arameans, achieved with the help of his allies, David established an empire from the Sinai Peninsula to the Euphrates (see map above). **END**

The two journals mentioned in the first sentence of the article, *Ugarit Forschungen* and *Semitica*, are two professional, peer-reviewed publications. This means that Prof. Galil's evidence will receive extensive scholarly criticism.

The map does not show the location of the powerful city of Tyre. It would be located just south of the city of Sidon at the central eastern Mediterranean seacoast.

The findings put forth by Prof. Galil, will be controversial and critiqued by other scholars, particularly those who are termed "minimalists." Minimalist scholars believe the biblical record has very little historical validity. They think the sparse archeological evidence indicates a small Davidic kingdom. This refutes biblical evidence of a powerful kingdom which they consider promotional or propagandist. They believe Israel in the time of David was not a major regional power with other kings subservient to David.

King David was, in fact, a kind of emperor (or a "king of kings") who indirectly ruled other kings who owed him tribute, service by their soldiers of their military, or other services of fealty due to a superior. Treaties have been found in royal archives, particularly in Ugarit, in Assyrian cities, Babylon, and Egypt to name a few. These documents show various ways that parties contract and try to bind each other to fulfill their treaty obligations.⁴

² As we shall see in the next installment, "Israel and Judah: 7. ..." the Philistines had not yet given up their desire to destroy Israel. They tried again in the future.

³ **"The Cherethites and the Pelethites"** became David's personal bodyguard, aside from his "mighty men," of which Itai was one. It is possible the Pelethites may have been Israelites living at Gath, like Obededom the Gittite who housed the Ark for a period of time (2 Samuel 6: 10–12 and 1 Chronicles 13: 13–14). The Cherethites do seem to be Philistine soldiers who were loyal personally to King David. This was not uncommon for ancient royalty to have foreign bodyguards. Foreign troops had loyalty to the leader only, and had fewer relationships and interests in common with native-born people. Therefore, their loyalty was to King David alone to whom they owed their future advancement and social standing. See 2 Samuel 8: 18, 15: 18–19, 20: 7, 23; 1 Kings 1: 38, 44; and 1 Chronicles 18: 17.

⁴ Besides making treaties with inferior kingdoms, David and Solomon also made treaties with kings they considered to be their equals. These treaties were actually alliances. One such relationship was with the King of Tyre who assisted both Israelite kings.

An arranged marriage of a princess bride given by an inferior to a superior king often cemented alliances. These were political marriages. This was the case with King Solomon, who married several foreign wives (1 Kings 11:2–8), and Ahab, King of Israel, **“he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians”** (1 Kings 16:30–31).

In the first paragraph in page 2 above, Prof. Galil states, **“hitherto there was no evidence that Philistines had lived in northern Syria.”** As a coincidence, the November/December 2014 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review* (vol. 40, no. 6) has an article titled “The Other Philistines.”⁵ That article presents different evidence from Galil’s, about Philistines who occupied lands **north** of the southeast coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

It makes good sense that the Philistines were more widely distributed than just at the southeast coast of the Mediterranean. Only in the southeast Mediterranean coast did the Philistines drive out other indigenous people. Farther north, those Philistines assimilated better with the native populations.

This understanding of an enlarged living area for Philistines gives an additional reason to why Hiram, King of Tyre, sought an alliance with Israel with both David and Solomon. The Philistines were seafarers and competitors in sea trade with the Phoenicians of Tyre. The Philistines were generally more warlike and predatory than the Phoenicians, especially in the early period of their occupation of eastern Mediterranean coastal areas. It is likely that Philistine piracy of Phoenician shipping took place. As we will read in Kings and Chronicles, King Hiram and King Solomon sent out trading fleets to distant shores. Fleets are less vulnerable than individual ships.

Remember also that Hiram’s alliance with David and Solomon secured Tyre’s landward side from Philistine attack. Metropolitan Tyre was an offshore island with trading anchorages on the mainland. Oceangoing trade came to Tyre, and then was sold and distributed to the land routes to Mesopotamia, to Anatolia (Turkey today) and to Israel. Israel’s army protected Tyre’s land facilities and interior trade routes. Tyre’s navy helped protect Israel’s flank by the sea from attack by Philistines or other seafaring peoples, even by the Egyptians who occasionally sent ship to support their army marching along the Mediterranean coast.

In 2010, Professor Galil made a controversial announcement when he declared that the oldest example of biblical text in Israel had been found. See the internet article, [“Most ancient Hebrew biblical inscription deciphered.”](#)

As further information comes out about King David and Israel, we will see more and more confirmation of the biblical record. While the Bible does not need to be “proven” to be accepted, it is nonetheless useful when facts told in the biblical text can be demonstrated by sources outside the Scriptures.

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⁵ A preview web article is presented as [“The ‘Philistines’ to the North.”](#)