

מפלשת ועד לפלסטינה

אבנר רמו (יליד פלשטינה)

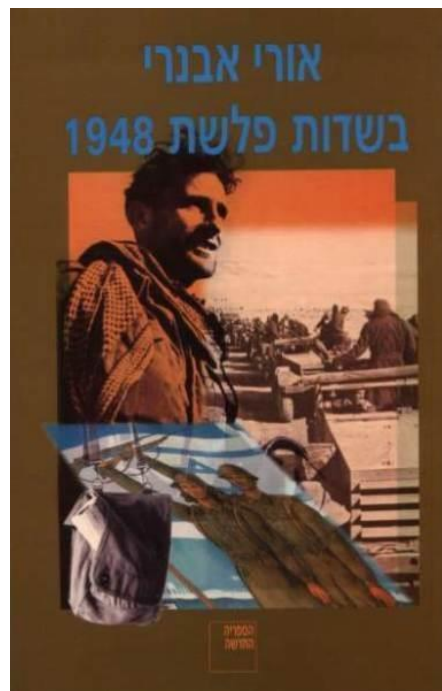


1947

On May 14, 1948 the name of the British mandatory Palestine was replaced by a new name: "The State of Israel."



1949



Book cover of "In the Fields of Philista 1948"

After the Israeli Independence war, Uri Avnery (Helmut Ostermann) who served in a reconnaissance unit named: שועלי-שמשון - “Samson’s foxes”, and was badly injured apparently in his lower torso, published the book: 1948 בשדות פלשת - “In the Fields of Philista 1948.” This book, which describes the brusque raids of a unit of jeep mounted troopers against the Palestinian Arab forces and the Egyptian army in the plains around Ashdod and Ashkelon, gained an immediate success.

In 1855 the French Egyptologist Emmanuel de Rouge coined the expression: “peoples de la mer.” Forty years later Gaston Maspero indicated that although the “Sea Peoples” were migrating to the eastern Mediterranean shores, from Anatolia to Egypt, since the 14th century BC, their devastating impact became critical only in the 12th century BC.



“People of the Sea” on the North wall of the mortuary temple of Ramesses III

The first record mentioning the Philistines, as one of these peoples, is in a mortuary temple in Medinat Habu, Egypt, describing the fifth year of the reign of Ramesses III (c. 1150 BC; Although erroneously spelled there as PRST instead of PLST; see also: Papyrus Harris). We may therefore conclude that the Philistines settled in Canaan’s coastal area about a century prior to the reign of King Saul.



The Philistines Pentapolis

In the Book of Joshua there is only one account that mentions the Philistines, but it is the most detailed one of all those that appear in the Bible:

ויהושע זקן בא בימים ; ויאמר יהוה אליו, אתה זקנתה באת בימים, והארץ נשארה הרבה-מאד לרשתה.

זאת הארץ הנשארת: כל-גלילות הפלשתים, וכל-הגשורים. מן-השיחור אשר על-פני מצרים, ועד גבול עקרון צפונה-לכנעני תחשב; חמשת סרני פלשתים, העזתי והאשדודי האשקלוני הגתי והעקרוני, והעוים.

“And Joshua was old and well stricken in years; and *YHWH* said to him: You are old and well stricken in years, and there remains yet very much land to be possessed. This is the land that yet remains: all the regions of the Philistines, and all the Geshurites; From the Shihor, which is before Egypt, even to the border of Ekron northward--which is counted to the Canaanites; the five lords of the Philistines: the Gazite, and the Ashdodite, the Ashkelonite, the Gittite, and the Ekronite; also the Avvim” (Jos 13:1-3).

A supportive explanatory note appears in the Book of Deuteronomy:

והעוים הישבים בחצרים עד-עזה-כפתרים היצאים מכפתר השמידם וישבו תחתם.

“And the Avvim, that dwelt in villages as far as Gaza, the Caphtorim, that came forth out of Caphtor, destroyed them, and dwelt in their stead” (Deu 2:23).

The Prophet Amos tells us: **הלוא את-ישראל העליתי מארץ מצרים, ופלשתיים מכפתור**

“Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor” (Am 9:7; see also: Gen 10:14; Jer 47:4; 1 Ch 1:12).

On the other hand, the Prophet Ezekiel (and also Zephaniah) tells us:

לכן כה אמר אדני יהוה, הנני נוטה ידי על-פלשתים, והכרתי את-כרתים; והאבדתי את-שארית חוף הים.

“Therefore thus my Lord *YHWH*: Behold, I will stretch out My hand upon the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites, and destroy the remnant of the sea-coast” (Eze 25:16; see also: Zep 2:5).

The Greek translator wrote here: “Cretans” and it is not clear whether **כרתים** (*krethim*) is the same place as **כפתור** (*kaphthor*). It should also be noted that when **כפתרים** - “Caphthorim” appear in the Book of Genesis (Gen 10:14) it was just transliterated to Greek as: “Kaphthorieim.”

In the first chapter of the Book of Judges we read:

וילכד יהודה את-עזה ואת-גבולה, ואת-אשקלון ואת-גבולה, ואת-עקרון ואת-גבולה. ויהי יהוה את-יהודה וירש את-ההר: כי לא להוריש את-ישבי העמק כי-רכב ברזל להם.
“Also Judah captured Gaza with the border thereof, and Ashkelon with the border thereof, and Ekron with the border thereof.

And YHWH was with Judah; and he drove out the inhabitants of the hill-country; for he could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron” (Jud 1:18-19).

This is astonishing information, because these Philistine towns were on the coastal plain, and in fact later, in the Book of Judges, Gaza and Ashkelon are described as Philistine towns (Jud 16:1, 2, 21, and Jud 14:19, respectively). Furthermore, in the Book of Samuel we read:

ואלה טחרי הזהב אשר השיבו פלשתים אשם ליהוה: לאשדוד אחד לעזה אחד, לאשקלון אחד, לגת אחד, לעקרון אחד. ועכברי הזהב, מספר כל-ערי פלשתים לחמשת הסרנים-מעיר מבצר, ועד כפר הפרזי;
“And these are the golden emerods which the Philistines returned for a guilt-offering to the YHWH: for Ashdod one, for Gaza one, for Ashkelon one, for Gath one, for Ekron one; And the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fortified cities and of country villages” (1 Sam 6:17-18).

It seems that this discrepancy was already noticed by the Greek translator of the Book of Judges, and he therefore translated (and corrected) verse Jud 1:18 to: “And Ioudas did not inherit Gaza and its territory, and Ascalon and its territory, and Akkaron and its territory, and Azotus and its surrounding lands.” We may also wonder why the Greek translator found it necessary to add here **אשדוד** - “Ashdod” but not **גת** - “Gath”, while both towns are not mentioned in the Hebrew version of the Book of Judges.

If at least some of the events described in the Book of Genesis and Exodus have historical basis, they must have occurred several hundred years prior to the appearance of the Philistines in Canaan. Yet the Philistines are mentioned eight times in the Book of Genesis (10:14; 21:32, 34; 26:1, 8, 14, 15, 18), and three times in the Book of Exodus (13:17; 15:14; 23:31).

We also read in the Book of Genesis: **“And the border of the Canaanite was from Zidon, as you go toward Gerar, to Gaza”** (Gen 10:19).

The remarks about the Philistines in the Book of Genesis and Exodus seem to be anachronistic, and were probably inserted by a late scribe. Yet we have to wonder why in this book (but nowhere else in the Bible) the place-name: **גרר** - “Gerar” is associated with the Philistines (Gen 10:19; 20:1, 2; 26:1, 6, 17, 20, 26). In fact, except for the Hebrew version (but not the Greek one) of the 2nd Book of Chronicles, it is never mentioned again. Yet there is a remote possibility that the term: **גלילות הפלשתים** (*geliloth hapelishthim*) is a **ר** (r) - **ל** (l) erroneous exchange of

גֵרָר הַפְּלִשְׁתִּית (*gerar hapelishthith*) - “the Philistine Gerar” (Jos 13:2; Joel 4:4).

Alternatively, וְכָל-הַגְּשׁוּרִי (*vechol hageshuri*) - “and all the Geshurites” (Jos 13:2) is a letter-substitution error of וְכָל-הַגְּרָרִי (*vechol hagerari*) - “and all the Gerarites.” This suggestion is further supported by the reading about the Philistine: אַחִישׁ בֶּן-מַעֲכָה מֶלֶךְ גַּת - “Achish, son of Maacah, king of Gath” (1 Ki 2:39), and we are told that: מַעֲכָה, בַּת-תַּלְמִי מֶלֶךְ גְּשׁוּר - “Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur” (2 Sam 3:3). These verses suggest that “Geshur” - “Gerar” was probably also a Philistine town.

In the Book of Deuteronomy we read:

כִּי יָבִיאֲךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה בֹא-שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ; וְנָשַׁל גּוֹיִם-רַבִּים מִפְּנֵיךָ הַחַיִּי וְהַגְּרִגְשִׁי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי, וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי-שְׁבַע גּוֹיִם רַבִּים וְעֻצּוּמִים מִמֶּךָ. וְנָתַנְם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְפָנֶיךָ-וְהִכִּיתָם: הַחֵרֶם תַּחְרִים אֹתָם, לֹא-תִכְרַת לָהֶם בְּרִית וְלֹא תִחַנֵּם.

“When *YHWH* your God shall bring you into the land whither you goes to possess it, and shall cast out many nations before you, the Hittite, and the Gergashite, and the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite, seven nations greater and mightier than you;

And when *YHWH* your God shall deliver them up before you, and you shall smite them; then you shall utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, nor show mercy to them” (Deu 7:1-2; see also: Jos 3:10; 24:11).

The genealogy of all these nations, except for the Perizzite, is described in chapter ten of the Book of Genesis (Gen 10:15-17). However, the fact that the Philistines appear there (Gen 10:14) suggests the possibility that פְּרִזִּי (*perizi*) is a ל (l) - ר (r) exchange, a ש (sh) - ז (z) sibilant exchange, and a ת (th) deletion error, of פְּלִשְׁתִּי (*pelishthi*) - Philistine.”

In the Book of Judges the Philistines are mentioned thirty-four times. Except for five remarks (Jud 3:3, 31; 10:6, 7, 11) they are all related to the narrative about Samson. Yet this event is never referred to in any other biblical book.

In the Book of Jeremiah we read: כִּי כָל-הַגּוֹיִם עֲרֻלִים - “for all the nations are uncircumcised” (Jer 9:25), yet all the uncircumcised people that are mentioned in the Books of Judges, 1st Samuel, and 2nd Samuel, are Philistines. In the Book of Samuel Goliath is referred to as: הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי הָעֲרֻל - “the uncircumcised Philistine” (1 Sam 17:26, 36), and David betrothed the daughter of King Saul Michal בְּמֵאָה עֲרֻלוֹת פְּלִשְׁתִּים - “for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines” (1 Sam 18: 25, 27; 2 Sam 3:14). In several other verses of these books the word “uncircumcised” appears as a synonym of “Philistines” (Jud 15:18; 1 Sam 14:6; 31:4; 2 Sam 1:20), and no other nationals are referred to as “uncircumcised.” In no other biblical book the Philistines are described as “uncircumcised” (except for 1 Ch 10:4 which is a copy of verse 1 Sam 31:4).

Half of the 292 biblical references to the Philistines appear in the 1st Book of Samuel. Thirty-three of them are in regard to the days of the Prophet Samuel before the anointment of Saul to be the leader over Israel.

This pre-regnum period ends with the comment:

ויהי שמואל מעלה העולה, ופלשתים נגשו למלחמה בישראל; וירעם יהוה בקול-גדול ביום ההוא על-פלשתים ויהמם, וינגפו לפני ישראל.
ויצאו אנשי ישראל מן-המצפה וירדפו את-פלשתים; ויכום עד-מתחת לבית כר.
ויקח שמואל אבן אחת וישם בין-המצפה ובין השן, ויקרא את-שמה אבן העזר; ויאמר, עד-הנה עזרנו יהוה.
ויכנעו הפלשתים ולא-יספו עוד לבוא בגבול ישראל; ותהי יד-יהוה בפלשתים כל ימי שמואל.

ותשבנה הערים אשר לקחו-פלשתים מאת ישראל לישראל מעקרון ועד-גת, ואת-גבולן הציל ישראל מיד פלשתים;

“And as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel; but *YHWH* thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten down before Israel.

And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Beth-car.

Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying: Hitherto had *YHWH* helped us.

So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more within the border of Israel; and the hand of *YHWH* was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even to Gath; and the border thereof did Israel deliver out of the hand of the Philistines” (1 Sam 7:10-14).

In contradiction to this statement we hear God telling Samuel:

ויהוה גלה את-אזן שמואל יום אחד לפני בוא-שואל לאמר.
כעת מחר אשלח אליך איש מארץ בנימן, ומשחתו לנגיד על-עמי ישראל, והושיע את-עמי מיד פלשתים: כי ראיתי את-עמי, כי באה צעקתו אלי.

“And *YHWH* had revealed to Samuel a day before Saul came, saying: Tomorrow about this time I will send you a man out of the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over My people Israel, and he shall save My people out of the hand of the Philistines; for I have looked upon My people, because their cry is come to Me” (1 Sam 9:15-16).

Yet the Prophet Samuel does not reveal to Saul what God’s purpose was when he anointed him to be the leader of Israel, and instead he tells Saul:

ויאמר שמואל אל-שואל, אתי שלח יהוה למשחך למלך על-עמו על-ישראל; ועתה שמע לקול דברי יהוה.

כה אמר יהוה צבאות, פקדתי את אשר-עשה עמלק לישראל-אשר-שם לו בדרך בעלתו ממצרים.

עתה לך והכיתה את-עמלק, והחרמתם את-כל-אשר-לו, ולא תחמל, עליו; והמתה מאיש עד-אשה, מעלל ועד-יונק, משור ועד-שה, מגמל ועד-חמור.

“And Samuel said to Saul: *YHWH* sent me to anoint you to be king over His people, over Israel; now therefore hearken you to the voice of the words of *YHWH*.

Thus said *YHWH* of hosts: I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he set himself against him in the way, when he came up out of Egypt.

Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass” (1 Sam 15:1-3).

Yet we read: **ותהי המלחמה חזקה על-פלשתים כל ימי שאול** - “**And there was sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul**” (1 Sam 14:52).

The following event indicates that Saul’s was utterly devoted to the mission that God laid upon his shoulders:

Once, Saul, who believed that David was constantly challenging his authority, succeeded to surround him and was close to capture him, yet as a messenger came and told him “**the Philistines have made a raid upon the land**” (1 Sam 23:27), Saul straightaway called off the pursuit of David and “**went against the Philistines**” (1 Sam 23:28).



David hoists the severed head of Goliath as illustrated by Gustave Dore (1866)

The injustice of history is that while Saul fought with the Philistines all his days and finally paid with his’ and his sons’ lives for the effort to secure the independence of the Israelites, yet it was David who after slaying Goliath, one of the Philistine champions, earned the accolade:

וידוד ברבבתיו הכה שאול באלפו, ודוד ברבבתיו - “**Saul had slain his thousands, and David his ten-thousands**” (1 Sam 18:7; 29:5).

Yet, even within the Book of Samuel there are other voices that tell a different story.

In the Book of Samuel we read:

ותהי-עוד המלחמה בגוב עם-פלשתים; ויך אלחנן בן-יערי ארגים בית הלחמי את גלית הגתי, ועץ חניתו כמנור ארגים.

“**And there was again war with the Philistines at Gob; and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim the Beth-lehemite slew Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam**” (2 Sam 21:19).

To dash even the slightest doubt that this was the famous Goliath, we are told here that: “**the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam**” (see 1 Sam 17:7 where instead of **עץ** (*e'ts*) we read: **חץ** (*khe'ts*) - “shaft”).

This verse apparently upset the pious Chronicler to such a degree that when he copied it, he replaced the slayed Goliath with that of his supposed brother:

ותהי-עוד מלחמה [] את-פלשתים ; ויך אלחנן בן-יעור (יעיר), את-לחמי אחי גלית הגתי-ועץ חניתו כמנור ארגים.

“**And there was again war with the Philistines; [] and Elhanan the son of Jair slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam**” (1 Ch 20:4).

It should also be noted that when David thanks God for delivering him from “the hand of all his enemies” he does not mention Goliath (2 Sam 22:1-51; Ps 18:1-51). While David is mentioned in the book of Psalms eighty-seven times and the Philistines five times (Ps 56:1; 60:10; 83:8; 87:4; 108:10), the Psalmist does not refer even once to David's, “against all odds” victory. In fact, no other biblical writer ever mentions it either.

We are told that David escaped (or defected?) from Saul to the Philistine town of Gath (1 Sam 21:11; 27:2-7).

Now we hear Achish the King of Gath reasoning:

ויאמן אכיש בדוד לאמר : הבאש הבאיש בעמו בישראל, והיה לי לעבד עולם.

“**And Achish believed David, saying: He had made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant forever**” (1 Sam 27:12).

ויאמר אכיש אל-דוד, לכן שמר לראשי אשימך כל-הימים.

“**And Achish said to David: Therefore will I make you keeper of my head forever**” (1 Sam 28:2).

Even the Psalmist who was a sworn devotee of David felt the need to explain this “relocation” of David, and he tells us: **לדוד מכתם : באחו אותו פלשתים בגת - [A Psalm] of David; Michtam; when the Philistines held him in Gath**” (Ps 56:1).

Furthermore, we read:

ויקבצו פלשתים את-כל-מחניהם אפקה ; וישראל חנים בעין אשר ביזרעאל.

וסרני פלשתים עברים למאות ולאלפים ; ודוד ואנשיו עברים באחרנה-עם-אכיש.

“**Now the Philistines gathered together all their hosts to Aphek; and the Israelites pitched by the fountain which is in Jezreel.**

And the lords of the Philistines passed on by hundreds, and by thousands; and David and his men passed on in the rearward with Achish” (1 Sam 29:1-2).

The Chronicler, another of David's admirers, apparently found this treasonous action of David hard to stomach and he wrote:

וממנשה נפלו על-דויד, בבאו עם-פלשתים על-שאול למלחמה-ולא עזרם : כי בעצה

“Of Manasseh also there fell away some to David, when he came with the Philistines against Saul to battle, but they helped them not []” (1 Ch 12:20).

However, a more stringent translation of the Hebrew text here is: “and he did not help them but with advice.”

This is the only original remark about the Philistines found in the 1st Book of Chronicles. All the other twenty-eight are in verses that were copies from other biblical verses (Gen 10:14; 1 Sam 31:1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 11; 2 Sam 5:17, 18, 19, 22, 24, 25; 8:1, 10-11; 21:18, 19; 23:11, 12, 13, 14, 16).

In the 1st Book of Samuel we read:

וישב דוד עם-אכיש בגת הוא ואנשיו, איש וביתו: דוד ושתו נשיו, אחינעם היזרעאלת, ואביגיל אשת-נבל הכרמלית.

“And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's wife” (1 Sam 27:3)

Yet in the Beginning of the 2nd Book of Samuel we find:

וילדו (ויולדו) לדוד בנים בחברון; ויהי בכורו אמנון, לאחינעם היזרעאלת. ומשנהו כלאב, לאביגל (לאביגיל) אשת נבל הכרמלי; והשלשי אבשלום בן-מעכה,

“And to David were sons born in Hebron; and his first-born was Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess;

And his second, Chileab, of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah” (2 Sam 3:2-3).

As Maacah was also the name of the mother of Achish King of Gath (2 Ki 2:39) it appears that David third son - Absalom may have been a half-brother of the Philistine Achish.

In the 2nd Book of Samuel, the Philistines are mentioned thirty times. Already in the third chapter of this book we read:

ודבר-אבנר היה עם-זקני ישראל לאמר: גם-תמול גם-שלשם הייתם מבקשים את-דוד למלך עליכם.

ועתה עשו: כי יהוה אמר אל-דוד לאמר, ביד דוד עבדי הושיע את-עמי ישראל מיד פלשתים, ומיד כל-איביהם.

“And Abner had communication with the elders of Israel, saying: In times past you sought for David to be king over you;

Now then do it; for YHWH had spoken of David, saying: By the hand of My servant David I will save My people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies” (2 Sam 3:17-18).

It is not explained how Abner learned about the supposed God’s commission of David to save His people from the Philistines. Alternatively, it could have been Abner’s own device for enticing the elders of Israel to shift their allegiance from Ish-bosheth son of Saul to David.

Notwithstanding, two chapters later we read:

ויאמר יהוה אל-דוד עלה, כי-נתן אתן את-הפלשתים בידך.

ויבא דוד בבעל-פרצים, ויכס שם דוד,

“And *YHWH* said to David: Go up; for I will certainly deliver the Philistines into your hand.

And David came to Baal-perazim, and David smote them there” (2 Sam 5:19-20).

ויעש דוד כן כאשר צוהו יהוה; ויך את-פלשתים מגבע עד-באך גזר.

“And David did so, as *YHWH* commanded him, and smote the Philistines from Geba until you come to Gezer” (2 Sam 5:25).

The Greek translator wrote here: “from Gabaon to the Land of Gazera.” When the Chronicles repeats this information he writes: “מגבעון ועד-גזרה - **“from Gibeon even to Gezer”** (1 Ch 14:16). The Greek translator wrote there “from Gabaon to Gazara.”

We are told that in both these events the Philistines were actually in **עמק רפאים** - “**the valley of Rephaim**” (2 Sam 5:18, 22). According to the Book of Joshua this valley was on the border between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (Jos 15:18; 18:16). It is also rather odd to read eighteen chapters later that in spite of these victories still: **וחית פלשתים חנה בעמק רפאים** - “**and the troop of the Philistines were encamped in the valley of Rephaim**” (2 Sam 23:13). It seems that even the writer of the Book of Samuel was not sure about the certainty of these victories of David.

We should also note that Geba and Gezer were not within the traditional Philistine territory.

Three chapters later we read:

ויהי אחרי-כן, ויך דוד את-פלשתים ויכניעם; ויקח דוד את-מתג האמה מיד פלשתים.

“And after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them; and David took Metheg-ammah out of the hand of the Philistines” (2 Sam 8:1).

The name **Metheg-ammah** is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, and in fact the Greek translator did not consider these words as a place name. When the Chronicler repeats this information he writes: **גת ובנתיה** - “**Gath and its towns**” (1 Ch 18:1). Here the Greek translator wrote: “Geth and all its villages,” but it is not clear whether the Chronicler had real information or just made a name to replace the odd Metheg-ammah.

It should also be noted that while Gath and the Gittites are mentioned eleven times in the 2nd Book of Samuel (2 Sam 1:20; 6:10, 11; 15:18, 19, 22; 18:2; 21:19, 20; 22), it is never in the context of war between David and the Philistines.

We may conclude that there is no biblical evidence that David ever conquered any part of the traditional Philistine territory, or that he captured any of their five major cities. In fact, beside Gath, the only other Philistine town that is mentioned in the 2nd Book of Samuel is Ashkelon (once) and that is in David’s eulogy after the death of Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:20).

However, David modest victories apparently were sufficient for the people to say about him: **המלך הצילנו מכף איבינו, והוא מלטנו מכף פלשתים** - “**The king delivered us out of the hand of our enemies, and he saved us out of the hand of the Philistines**” (2 Sam 19:10).

In the next campaign against the Philistines (at unknown location or date) we read:

ותהי-עוד מלחמה לפלשתים את-ישראל; וירד דוד ועבדיו עמו, וילחמו את-פלשתים-ויעף דוד.

“And the Philistines had war again with Israel; and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines; and David waxed faint” (2 Sam 21:15).

אז נשבעו אנשי-דוד לו לאמר, לא-תצא עוד אתנו למלחמה, ולא תכבה את-נר ישראל.

“Then the men of David swore to him, saying: You shall go no more out with us to battle, that you quench not the lamp of Israel” (2 Sam 21:17).

This campaign ended the rather lackluster personal military career of King David.

In the Book of Kings we read:

ושלמה היה מושל בכל-הממלכות-מן-הנהר ארץ פלשתים, ועד גבול מצרים: מגשים מנחה ועבדים את-שלמה כל-ימי חייו.

“And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt; they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life” (1 Ki 5:1).

It seems that this verse, which does not appear in the Greek translation of the Book of Kings, indicates that King Solomon had no control over the Philistine territory.

There are only five other verses in the Books of Kings that mention the Philistines (1 Ki 15:27; 16:15; 2 Ki 8:2, 3; 18:8). When hunger struck Samaria, we hear about a woman that followed Elisha’s advice and moved to the Land of the Philistines where she resided for seven years (2 Ki 8:2, 3).

This event suggests that most of the time the relations between the Israelites and the Philistines were cordial. In fact already in the Book of Samuel we read:

וירדו כל-ישראל הפלשתים-ללטוש איש את-מחרשתו ואת-אתו, ואת-קרדמו, ואת מחרשתו. וירדו כל-ישראל הפלשתים-ללטוש איש את-מחרשתו ואת-אתו, ואת-קרדמו, ואת מחרשתו.
“And all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his plowshare, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock” (1 Sam 13:20).

Furthermore, according to the Book of Samuel, it was only after the successful raids of Saul and Jonathan against the Philistines that:

והעברים היו לפלשתים כאתמול שלשום, אשר עלו עמם במחנה סביב; וגם-המה להיות עם-ישראל אשר עם-שאול ויונתן.

“Now the Hebrews that were with the Philistines as beforetime, and that went up with them into the camp round about; even they also turned to be with the Israelites that were with Saul and Jonathan” (1 Sam 14:21).



The Nimrud Slab in Rawlinson's Edition. The Original has been lost

The top half of a "Summary inscription" of the Assyrian king Adad-nirari III (811-783 BC) was discovered in 1854. This "Nimrud Slab" inscribed in Akkadian cuneiform, included the text: "The Land of Palastu, as far as the great sea of the setting of the sun, I imposed tax and tribute on them."

It seems that the looming prospect of conquest by one of the empires of that period persuaded the Israelites and the Philistines that it was time to stop quarreling about every: **חלקת השדה** - "plot of ground" whether it was **מלאה עדשים** - "full of lentils" (2 Sam 23:11), or **מלאה שעורים** - "full of barley" (1 Ch 11:13).



Sargon II's Prism A. 710 BC

The annals of the Assyrian King Sargon II (722-705 BC), mention the rulers of the Samaritans, Palastu, Judah, Edom, and Moab, and contain information about Sargon's military campaigns toward the Egyptian border. According to the annals, in 722 BC Sargon fortified Ashdod and Gath that since 734 BC were under Assyrian control. He also built on the seashore near Ashdod a port city which was named Ashedodimmu. In addition, Sargon deposed Aziru the King of Ashdod that did not deliver the tribute, and appointed his brother Ahimiti as the new king of Ashdod. In 720 BC near Raphiakh, Sargon captured Ganon the King of Gaza, in spite of the help that Ganon received from the Egyptian king. In 712 BC Iamani, a Greek who rebelled against Ahimiti, and made himself the King of Ashdod had to flee to Ethiopia because of the approaching Assyrian army.

The echo of this intensive Assyrian activity is represented in the Bible by a single verse:
בשנת בא תרתן אשדודה, בשלח אתו סרגון מלך אשור; וילחם באשדוד וילכדה.

“In the year that Tartan came into Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it” (Is 20:1).

Sharing the same external threat may explain why we do not hear in the Book of King about military conflicts between Judea and the Philistines until the reign of King Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah (727-698 BC). However it seems that the close ties between these nations had also resulted in the reprimand of the Judeans by the contemporary Prophet - Isaiah:

**בית יעקב-לכו ונלכה באור יהוה
כי נטשתה עמך בית יעקב-כי מלאו מקדם, ועננים כפלשתים; ובילדי נכרים ישפיקו.
ותמלא ארצו כסף וזהב, ואין קצה לאצרתיו; ותמלא ארצו סוסים ואין קצה למרכבתיו.
ותמלא ארצו אלילים: למעשה ידיו ישתחוו, לאשר עשו אצבעתיו.**

“O house of Jacob, come you, and let us walk in the light of YHWH.

For You had forsaken Your people the house of Jacob; for they are replenished from the east, and with soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the brood of aliens.

Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land also is full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots.

Their land also is full of idols; every one worships the work of his own hands, that which his own fingers have made” (Is 2:5-8).

King Hezekiah was a remarkably pious man, or as the writer of the Book of Kings states:

**ביהוה אלהי-ישראל בטח; ואחריו לא-היה כמהו בכל מלכי יהודה, ואשר היו לפניו
וידבק ביהוה לא-סר מאחריו; וישמר מצותיו אשר-צוה יהוה את-משה.**

“He trusted in YHWH, the God of Israel; and after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among them that were before him.

For he cleaved to YHWH, he departed not from following Him, but kept His commandments, which YHWH commanded Moses” (2 Ki 18:5-6).

Two verses later we read:

הוא-הכה את-פלשתים עד-עזה ואת-גבוליה, ממגדל נוצרים עד-עיר מבצר.

“He smote the Philistines unto Gaza and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fortified city” (2 Ki 18:8).

Although the reason for this particular military campaign is not stated, it is possible that the twenty-five old king, who was under the influence of the Prophet Isaiah, struck Gaza in an effort to eliminate its economic, cultural and religious influence on Judah and Jerusalem.

Hezekiah's great-grandfather: **עזיהו** - “Uzziah” (785-733 BC) is also described as one who **“did that, which was right in the eyes of YHWH”** (2 Ki 15:3; 2 Ch 26:4). The Chronicler tells us that this sixteen-year old king was under the influence of one **זכריהו, המבין בראת האלהים** - **“Zechariah, who had understanding in the vision of God”** (2 Ch 26:5). Yet in the next verse we are told that Uzziah:

ויצא וילחם בפלשתים, ויפרץ את-חומת גת ואת חומת יבנה, ואת חומת אשדוד;

“he went forth and warred against the Philistines, and broke down the wall of Gath, and the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod” (2 Ch 26:6).



The Tylor Prism (in the British Museum)

Several of the annals of Sennacherib King of Assyria (705 - 681 BC) were discovered. One of them is named today: the “Taylor Prism” which was discovered in Nineveh in 1830. It is made of red baked clay, hexagonal in shape, 38 cm high and 14 cm wide. Written in cuneiform in 691 BC, it tells among other things, about Sennacherib’s campaign against Judah and its king Hezekiah in 701 BC.

“As for Hezekiah the Judahite, who did not submit to my yoke; forty-six of his strong, walled cities, as well as the small towns in their area, which were without number.”

“His cities, which I had despoiled, I cut from his land, and to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron (who previously had been dethroned by rebels who gave him over to Hezekiah and which Sennacherib managed to release from Jerusalem and return to his royal throne in Ekron), and Silli-bel, king of Gaza, I gave them.”

It should be noted that Sennacherib did not give any of the captured Judean territory to Sidka king of Ashkelon who like Hezekiah did not submit to the Assyrian yoke. On the other hand it seems that Sennacherib distributed the Judean territory among Hezekiah’s enemies.

While it is clear from this record why Padi, king of Ekron would be hostile to Hezekiah, this record does not explain why Silli-bel, king of Gaza, and Mitinti, king of Ashdod had a grudge against Hezekiah. Yet the Gazean animosity to Hezekiah may have been rooted in Hezekiah military campaign against Gaza described in verse 2 Ki 18:8, and the Ashdodians could have remember the raid of their town by Hezekiah’s great-grandfather - Uzziah, that occurred just some years earlier (2 Ch 26:5).

Some other events that are described in the 2nd Book of Chronicles, further suggest that the approach of the Judean kings to God was closely related to the affairs between Judah and the Philistines.

We read about King Jehoshaphat:

ויהי יהוה עם-יהושפט : כי הלך בדרכי דויד אביו הראשנים, ולא דרש לבעלים.

כי לאלהי אביו דרש ובמצותיו הלך; ולא כמעשה ישראל.
ויכן יהוה את-הממלכה בידו,

“And *YHWH* was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto the Baalim;
But sought to the God of his father, and walked in His commandments, and not after the doings of Israel.
Therefore *YHWH* established the kingdom in his hand” (2 Ch 17:3-5; see also: 1 Ki 22:43).

ויהי פחד יהוה על כל-ממלכות הארצות אשר סביבות יהודה; ולא נלחמו עם-יהושפט.
ומן-פלשתים מביאים ליהושפט מנחה-וכסף משא;

“And a terror from *YHWH* fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat.
And some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and silver for tribute” (2 Ch 17:10-11).

Now we read about Jehoshaphat's son - Jehoram:

וילך בדרך מלכי ישראל, כאשר עשו בית אחאב-כי בת-אחאב היתה-לו לאשה; ויעש הרע בעיני יהוה.

“And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab; for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife; and he did that which was evil in the sight of *YHWH*” (2 Ki 8:18; see also: 2 Ch 21:6).

ויער יהוה על-יהורם את רוח הפלשתים והערבים, אשר על-יד כושים.
ויעלו ביהודה ויבקעוה, וישבו את כל-הרכוש הנמצא לבית-המלך,

“And *YHWH* stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians that are beside the Ethiopians;
And they came up against Judah, and broke into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house” (2 Ch 21:16-17).

We also read about Ahaz the son of Jotham king of Judah:

ולא-עשה הישר בעיני יהוה אלהיו-כדוד אביו.
וילך בדרך מלכי ישראל;

“And he did not that which was right in the eyes of *YHWH* his God, like David his father.
But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel” (2 Ki 16:2-3).

ופלשתים פשטו בערי השפלה והנגב ליהודה, וילכדו את-בית-שמש ואת-אילון ואת-הגדרות ואת-שוכו ובנותיה ואת-תמנה ובנותיה, ואת-גמזו ואת-בנתיה; וישבו שם.
כי-הכניע יהוה את-יהודה, בעבור אחז מלך-ישראל: כי הפריע ביהודה, ומעול מעל ביהוה.

“The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the Lowland, and of the South of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, and Aijalon, and Gederoth, and Soco with the towns thereof, and Timnah with the towns thereof, Gimzo also and the towns thereof; and they dwelt there.
For *YHWH* brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he had cast away restraint in Judah, and acted treacherously against *YHWH*” (2 Ch 28:18-19).

These events are not mentioned in the Books of Kings (except for the raid of King Hezekiah son of Ahaz on Gaza), and may well be fictitious. On the other hand they could have been included

in the book of Chronicles due to a peculiar observation made by its writer about the relationship between the historical events of that period, and the religiosity of the contemporary Judean kings.

In the Book of Isaiah we read:

**בשנת-מות המלך אחז היה המשא הזה.
אל-תשמחי פלשת כלך, כי נשבר שבט מכך:**

“In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden.

Rejoice not, O Philistia, all of you, because the rod that smote you is broken” (Is 14:28-29).

However, **כי נשבר שבט מכך** could also be translated as “because your hitting rod is (or will be) broken.” If this interpretation is correct then it may be referring to the campaign of the Philistines against Judah in the days of King Ahaz described by the Chronicler (2 Ch 28:18-19).

The Prophet continues:

**והמתי ברעב שרשך, ושאריתך יהרג.
הילילי שער זעקי-עיר, נמוג פלשת כלך: כי מצפון עשן בא, ואין בודד במועדין.**

“And I will kill your root with famine, and your remnant shall be slain.

Howl, O gate; cry, O city; melt away, O Philistia, all of you; for there comes a smoke out of the north, and there is no straggler in his ranks” (Is 14:30-31).

It seems that Isaiah was forecasting the campaign of the Assyrian Sennacherib against Egypt and the small independent states of Canaan, which Egypt encouraged to revolt against Assyria, and to stop paying tributes to the Assyrian king. Isaiah’s forecasting might have been based on his knowledge that for Assyria these foreign payments were crucial for financing its standing professional army, an essential element for sustaining its empire.

As the Assyrian army might was largely dependent on the use of chariots it seemed obvious that the Philistine territory along the seashore would suffer heavily from an Assyrian attack, while hilly Judea was less venerable.

The association in verse Is 14:30 between the word “**remnant**” and the Philistines, became a routine term in the Books of later Prophets:

We read in the Book of Jeremiah:

**כה אמר יהוה, הנה-מים עלים מצפון והיו לנחל שוטף, וישטפו ארץ ומלואה, עיר וישבי בה;
וזעקו האדם, והילל כל יושב הארץ.**

**מקול שעטת פרסות אביריו, מרעש לרכבו, המון גלגליו-לא-הפנו אבות אל-בנים, מרפיון
ידיים.**

**על-היום, הבא לשדוד את-כל-פלשתים, להכרית לצר ולצידון, כל שריד עזר: כי-שדד יהוה
את-פלשתים, שארית אי כפתור.**

באה קרחה אל-עזה, נדמתה אשקלון שארית עמקם;

“Thus said YHWH: behold, waters rise up out of the north, and shall become an overflowing stream, and they shall overflow the land and all that is therein, the city and them that dwell therein; and the men shall cry, and all the inhabitants of the land shall wail.

At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his strong ones, at the rushing of his chariots, at the rumbling of his wheels, the fathers look not back to their children for feebleness of hands;

Because of the day that comes to spoil all the Philistines, to cut off from Tyre and Zidon every helper that remains; for *YHWH* will spoil the Philistines, the remnant of the isle of Caphtor.

Baldness is come upon Gaza, Ashkelon is brought to naught, the remnant of their valley” (Jer 47:2-5; see also: Jer 25:20).

Similarly we find in the Book of Ezekiel:

לכן, כה אמר אדני יהוה, הנני נוטה ידי על-פלשתים, והכרתי את-כרתים; והאבדתי את-
שארית חוף הים.

“Therefore thus said my Lord *YHWH*: Behold, I will stretch out My hand upon the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites, and destroy the remnant of the sea-coast” (Eze 25:16).

In the Book of Amos we read:

והכרתי יושב מאשדוד, ותומך שבט מאשקלון; והשיבותי ידי על-עקרון, ואבדו שארית
פלשתים-אמר אדני יהוה.

“And I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and him that holds the sceptre from Ashkelon; and I will turn My hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, said my Lord *YHWH*” (Am 1:8).

The reading of the Book of Zephaniah (640-630 BC) suggests that the steep decline of the Philistines began already in that period:

כי עזה עזובה תהיה ואשקלון לשממה; אשדוד בצהרים יגרשוה, ועקרון תעקר.
הוי יושבי חבל הים-גוי כרתים; דבר-יהוה עליכם, כנען ארץ פלשתים, והאבדתיך מאין יושב.
והיתה חבל הים, נות כרת רעים-וגדרות צאן.

“For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation; they shall drive out Ashdod at the noonday, and Ekron shall be rooted up.

Woe to the inhabitants of the sea-coast, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of *YHWH* is against you, O Canaan, the land of the Philistines; I will even destroy you, that there shall be no inhabitant.

And the sea-coast shall be pastures, even meadows for shepherds, and folds for flocks” (Zep 2:4-6).

A century later the Prophets Zechariah summarized the status of the Philistines in his day:

תרא אשקלון ותירא, ועזה ותחיל מאד, ועקרון כי-הביש מבטה; ואבד מלך מעזה, ואשקלון לא
תשב.

וישב ממזר באשדוד; והכרתי גאון פלשתים.

“Ashkelon shall see it, and fear, Gaza also, and shall be sore pained, and Ekron, for her expectation shall be ashamed; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited.

And a bastard shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines” (Zec 9:5-6).



The inscription on this brick translates: “Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who cares for Esagila and Ezida, eldest son of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon” (The British Museum).

In 604 BC the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II ordered his army to completely destroy Ashkelon of King Aga, and Ekron of King Adon, and to exile their surviving inhabitants. (A. Fantalkin. Why did Nebuchadnezzar II destroyed Ashkelon in Kislev 604 BC? In: I. Finkelstein and N. Na’aman (Eds.): The Fire Signal of Lachish: In honor of David Ussishkin. Eisenbrauns, Vinona Lake, Indiana. 2011. pp. 87-111).

It appears that King Nebuchadnezzar II brought an end to the independent region of Philista, as he soon will do to the Kingdom of Judah. However, unlike the Judean people, it seems that this was the end of the Philistines as a nation.

The Babylonians, as their Assyrian predecessors, had a policy of transferring people from one conquered region to other conquered areas, and it is likely that they settled in what was previously a Philistine territory some foreigners.

In fact, Zachariah’s words in verse Zec 9:6: **וַיֵּשֶׁב מַמְזֵר בְּאַשְׁדּוֹד** (*veyashav mamzer beashdod*) were translated to Greek as: “and alien shall settle in Azotus” which suggests that the translator believed that **מַמְזֵר** (*mamzer*) is a misspelled **עַם זָר** (*a’m zar*) - “a foreign people.”

Even without the involvement of the state, a sudden geographical vacuum, in particular, in a region that could sustain life, tends to draw people from other locations. Therefore, it is not surprising that archeologists found artifacts that indicate that Ashdod was inhabited again in the Persian period.

In the Books of Haggai, Malachi, Lamentations, Ezra and Nehemiah, that describe events that occurred after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar II in 586 BC, and in the Persian era, there is no mention of the Philistines.

In the Book of Nehemiah we read:

ויהי כאשר שמע סנבלט וטוביה והערבים והעמנים והאשדודים, כי-עלתה ארוכה לחמות ירושלים-כי-החלו הפרצים להסתם; ויחר להם מאד.

“And, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem went forward, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth” (Neh 4:1).

However, the marked words do not appear in the Greek translation of the Book of Nehemiah, which suggests that these words were inserted by a late scribe, and did not appear in the Hebrew vorlage of the translator.

Yet we also read in this book:

גם בימים ההם ראיתי את-היהודים השיבו נשים אשדודיות (אשדדיות), עמוניות (עמוניות), מואביות.

ובניהם חצי מדבר אשדודית, ואינם מכירים לדבר יהודית-וכלשון עם ועם.

“In those days also saw I the Jews that had returned Ashdodian women, of Ammonite, and of Moabite;

And their children spoke half in the speech of the Ashdodians, and could not speak in the Jews' language, and according to the language of each people” (Neh 13:23-24).

These verses do not necessarily indicate that at that time Ashdod was inhabited. It is possible that the exiled Jews that returned to Jerusalem brought with them their Ashdodian, Ammonite, and Moabite wives and their children. The shared exilic experience of the Philistines and the Israelites may have brought these communities closer and it probably also resulted in intermarriage.



A silver drachm minted by the **Persian** administration in Jerusalem (4th century BC). The coin shows a deity seated on a winged wheel.

Between 539 and 332 BC “**Yehud Medinata**” was a province of the Achaemenid Empire. The name is in Aramaic which was the official language of the empire and its meaning is: “the province of Judah.” This name also appears in the Aramaic part of the Book of Ezra: **יהוד מדינתא** - “**the province of Judah**” (Ezr 5:8). The capital of this Persian province was Jerusalem. Hundreds of Persian-period coins of several types bearing the name “YHD” had been found in this area, and in other regions.

Yet the contemporary Greek Historian Herodotus (c. 450 BC) never mentioned a name similar to “Yehud.” On the other hand he wrote: “the region I am describing skirts our sea, stretching from Phoenicia along the coast of Palestine-Syria till it comes to Egypt” (The Histories. Book 4; see

also: Books 3 and 7). Yet a name similar to Παλαιστίνη (Palaistínē) had not been found in any Achaemenid document, nor had Persian-period coins, bearing such a name, ever been found. These arguments cast severe doubt about the authenticity of Herodotus' remarks about "Palestine-Syria."

The name "Judaea" remained in official use until the suppression of Bar Kokhba's revolt (136 AD). The Roman emperor at that time was Publius Aelius Hadrian (117-138 AD).



Coin commemorating Hadrian's visit to Judea in 130/131 AD

Hadrian initiated many colossal building projects. He built in Rome the temple of Venus and Roma, and rebuilt the Pantheon. In England he constructed the northerner Limes known as "Hadrian's wall." And in Athens, which he planned to turn into the cultural capital of the empire, he built many magnificent temples.

On his visit to Judea in 130 AD, the 54-year old Hadrian ordered that Jerusalem, which was almost completely destroyed by Titus sixty years earlier, would be rebuilt as a Roman city with a temple dedicated to Jupiter.

In the same year Antinous, Hadrian's Greek male lover, drowned in the Nile. It was on the day that the Egyptians were commemorating the death by drowning of their god Osiris. There were rumors in Rome that Antinous actually died, like the Greek god Attis, of self-mutilation.

The heartbroken Hadrian deified him and founded a city in his name in Egypt. Hadrian also supported the creation of the Antinous cult that became popular among the common people, where it seems to have competed with Christianity. In addition, during Hadrian's reign a temple was built in Rome for the goddess Isis the wife of Osiris, the god with the missing phallus.



Roman Isis (from the time of Emperor Hadrian)

It is not known whether these details relate to the fact that in 132 AD Hadrian forbade castration and circumcision. The imperial decree banning circumcision sparked a fanatical religious and messianic revolt in Judea that was led by Simon ben Kosiba.



A coin representing the boar emblem of the X Fretensis Roman legion

The Romans experienced great difficulties in their effort to crush the rebellion. At the end of 133 AD, three Roman legions were employed there, VI Ferrata, X Fretensis, and XXII Deiotariana, with seventeen auxiliary units. Apparently after the decimation of the XXII legion, the III

Cyrenaica, the III Gallica, and the III Scythia legions were sent as reinforcement, and Rome was experiencing manpower shortage. As the rebels did not operate in large formations, and relied on guerilla surprise tactics, the Romans paid dearly until they learned that the most effective weapons in this war were fire and destruction that caused widespread famine and disease. It is believed that the rebellion faded away only after about a thousand towns and villages were destroyed and more than half a million Jews perished.



Statue of Hadrian unearthed at Tel Shalem commemorating Roman military victory over Bar Kochba, displayed at the [Israel Museum](#)

No wonder that this rebellion made (the already ailing) Hadrian furious about the Jews, and he could have been seeking for means to destroy even the symbols of their religious and national identity. One measure was name changes. Jerusalem was renamed as Aelia Capitolina (after his first name: Aelius), and the Province of Judaea would from now on be referred to as Syria Palaestina. If this name which appears in the Histories of Herodotus is not a late forgery, Hadrian could have borrowed it from there. Yet there is also an alternative explanation.

Already as a boy Hadrian learned Greek and being a cultural Hellenophile he later became familiar with the philosophical works of Epicetus, Heliodorus and Favorinus. The British historian Gibbon wrote that he was a remarkable intellectual. It is also known that he collected books and built libraries.

These details raise the possibility that Hadrian was familiar with the book: “The Antiquities of the Jews”, written by his contemporary, Titus Flavius Josephus (37-100 AD). As Hadrian also spent some time in Egypt, it is possible that he also knew about of the writings of the famous philosopher: Philo of Alexandria. Hadrian might have even been aware of the Greek translation of the Bible.

From such sources he could have learned that of the many enemies of the ancient independent Judea,(judging by number of biblical references to the Philistines which is by far greater than to any other local adversary), must have been their greatest local foe . Furthermore, they were the only enemy of Judea that is repeatedly described as “uncircumcised.”

What a better and sweeter revenge than to rename the province of Judea, that initiated a bitter and costly revolt over the issue of circumcision, as Syria Palaestina, a name that had not been in use in the previous 740 years. This new name will be employed through the next eighteen centuries.