

הכרתי והפל[תי]

אבנר רמו



A Roman Emperor's Praetorian guardsman from the 2nd century AD

In the Book of Ezekiel we read:

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

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

The association between the **פלשתים** (*plishthim*) - "Philistines" and the **כרתים** (*krethim*) - "Cherethites" is found also in verse Zep 2:5. The Greeks translated this name as "cretans."

Another association found in the Bible is between the **כרתי** (*krethi*) and **פלתי** (*plethi*), translated to English as the "**Cherethites**" and the "**Pelethites**", respectively (2 Sam 8:18; 15:18; 20:7, 23; 1 Ki 1:38, 44; 1 Ch 18:17). The Greeks translated these names as "Chereththi" and "Pheleththi" respectively.

We are not told who these people were and where they came from, yet we read about David's men:

וכל-עבדיו עברים על-ידו, וכל-הכרתי וכל-הפלתי; וכל-הגתים שש-מאות איש, אשר-באו ברגלו מגת, עברים על-פני המלך.

“And all his servants passed on beside him; and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men that came after him from Gath, passed on before the king” (2 Sam 15:18).

Already in the Book of Joshua we read:

חמשת סרני פלשתים, העזתי והאשדודי האשקלוני הגתי, והעקרוני,

“The five lords of the Philistines: the Gazite, and the Ashdodite, the Ashkelonite, the Gittite, and the Ekronite” (Jos 13:3).

Furthermore, in the Book of Amos we read about: **גת-פלשתים** - “Gath of the Philistines” (Am 6:2).

We may therefore assume that that if indeed “**the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites**” came from Gath, they must have been Philistines. If correct than it appears possible that the **פּלְתִי** (*pelethi*) is a letter-deletion error of **פּלִשְׁתִּי** (*plishthi*) - “Philistine.”

As for some pious Israelites the idea that Kings David and Solomon had a Philistine bodyguard unit may have seemed blasphemous, it would not be surprising if the **ש** (sh) letter-deletion here was not erroneous but intentional.

Yet in the Book of Samuel we read:

וּיִפְקֹד דָּוִד אֶת-הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ; וַיִּשֶׂם עֲלֵיהֶם שָׂרֵי אַלְפִים וְשָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד אֶת-הָעָם, הַשְּׁלִישִׁית בְּיַד-יֹאבֵב וְהַשְּׁלִישִׁית בְּיַד אֲבִישַׁי בֶּן-צְרוּיָה אַחֵי יֹאבֵב, וְהַשְּׁלִישִׁת בְּיַד אֶתִּי הַגִּתִּי;

“And David numbered the people that were with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them.

And David sent forth the people, a third part under the hand of Joab, and a third part under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and a third part under the hand of Ittai the Gittite” (2 Sam 18:1-2).

If David trusted the Philistine - Ittai of Gath to command one third of his force, it is not unlikely that he also employed Philistine bodyguards. Furthermore, there is biblical evidence that prior to the death of King Saul, the Israelite David himself served as a bodyguard of the Philistine King of Gath (1 Sam 28:2).

In the ancient Middle-East the service of foreigners as bodyguards was not uncommon, and there are documents about the Medes bodyguards of the Assyrian King Assurbanipal (668-627 BC).

Herodotus wrote about Gyges who was the bodyguard of Candaules, the king of Lydia in the 8th century BC. In Greece **Σωματοφύλακες** (Somatophylakes) -“Bodyguards” was a known institution. The most famous one consisted of seven Macedonian noble men who protected Alexander the Great, some of whom became generals and governors. One of them - Peucestas, saved Alexander’s life in 325 BC. After Alexander’s death he became the satrap of Persia.