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NADAV NA'AMAN, SHAARAIM – THE GATEWAY TO THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH

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1. DOES SHAARAIM MEAN "TWO GATES"?

The city of Shaaraim is mentioned twice in the Bible: first, after Socoh and Azekah and before Adithaim and Gederah in the list of Judahite Shephelah cities (Josh 15:35–36); second, "the Shaaraim road" is mentioned in connection with the Philistines' flight after their defeat in the battle of the Valley of Elah (1 Sam 17:51–52).

In a recently published article, Garfinkel and Ganor (2008) suggested identifying Shaaraim at Khirbet Qeiyafa, a site north of the Valley of Elah (Israel map grid 14601226). They offered three arguments in support of this identification: (a) The listing of Shaaraim after Socoh and Azekah in Josh 15:35–36; (b) the city's proximity to the Elah Valley, as related in 1 Sam 17:52; and (c) the 'discovery' of a second gate at Khirbet Qeiyafa.

Concerning (c), it is worth noting that only one gate, located on the western side of the site, was unearthed in the excavations conducted there. Garfinkel and Ganor discovered two enormous blocks of stone on the eastern side of the site. They have interpreted them as the remains of a second major entrance to the place and were not discouraged by the fact that the assumed second gate has not yet been excavated. Until the assumed second gate is excavated there can be no firm conclusion about its existence or lack thereof.

On the basis of the existence of this assumed second gate, Garfinkel and Ganor (2008: 3) concluded that "this unique feature [of two gates] provides a clear indication of the site's identity as biblical Sha'arayim, a place name that means 'two gates' in Hebrew." But does Shaaraim mean "two gates"?

In their article, Garfinkel and Ganor simply assumed duality. They failed to interact, however, with the substantial body of academic literature on the ending –*ayim* in place names. As is well-known many scholars have

rejected the position that the ending *–ayim/n* in place names is a dual form, and claimed instead that it is either a locative ending or a phonetic expansion of the nominal form. This position was first advanced by Barth (1894: 319–320 n. 5) in the late 19th century and was further supported by Brockelmann (1908: 393–394; see Gesenius-Kautzsch 1970: 245–246). The problem of the local ending *–ayim/n* was recently discussed in detail by Demsky (2002) and Elitzur (2004: 282–290). These scholars demonstrated that *-ayim/n* is a separate ending that is sometimes attached to place names and which *cannot* be interpreted as a dual morpheme. Elitzur (2004: 290) concluded that "*–ay(i)m/n > –ay* is indeed a free ending for place names that was common in all periods of Hebrew up to the time of the Mishnah and the Talmud, and it should not be considered a fossilized archaism". In sum, although the dual suffix and the local ending look identical, they are separate endings, each carrying its own meaning and therefore, the efforts of scholars to interpret place names with *–ayim/n* endings as dual forms cannot be sustained (contra Fontinoy 1971: 36–40).

This being the case, the interpretation of the place name Shaaraim as "two gates" cannot be sustained, whether the two blocks of stone discovered on the site's eastern side were indeed part of a gate or some other monumental structure.

Thus I propose that the place-name Shaaraim means "gate." It is my contention also that it was given this name because it was located on the western border of Judah with Philistia, a place that was seen as the gateway to the kingdom of Judah. The rest of this essay is meant to support this position.

2. THE PLACE OF SHAARAIM

The flight of the Philistines after their defeat in battle (1 Sam 17:51b–52) is described thus:

> …When the Philistines saw that their warrior was dead, they ran. The men of Israel and Judah rose up with a war cry and they pursued the Philistines all the way to Gai [LXX Gath] and up to the gates of Ekron; the Philistines fell mortally wounded along the Shaaraim road and up to Gath and Ekron (NJPSV)

The description makes it clear that Shaaraim was situated near the road that led from the Philistines' encampment, south of the Valley of Elah, to Gath and Ekron. The place where the main road divided in two, one road leading to Gath and the other to Ekron, was probably near the city. In this light, its identification at Khirbet Qeiyafa, which is located near the battlefield, north of the Elah Valley and close to the Israelites' encampment, is extremely unlikely. Moreover, Khirbet Qeiyafa was probably deserted in the 7th century, when the list of Judahite Shephelah cities was composed (Na'aman 1991: 23–33, with earlier literature).

Rainey's suggested location of Shaaraim at Khirbet es-Sa'îreh (Israel map grid 15271271), about five kms southeast of Beth-shemesh, a place

that is detached from the arena of the battle, is equally unlikely (Rainey 1975: 69*–70 and n. 64, with earlier literature; 1982: 244). Dagan (1996: 139) suggested identifying Shaaraim at Khirbet esh-Shari'ah (Israel map grid 14581246), about 2.5 km. northeast of Azekah, where Iron II pottery was discovered in the survey. However, the northeast location of the site does not accord with the description of the Philistines' flight. I concur with Driver (1913: 147), who suggested that Shaaraim "was presumably some place down the valley between Sochoh and Tell eṣ-Ṣāfiyeh. Its actual site can, however, only be conjectured." Shaaraim, which is listed among the Judahite cities of the Shephelah, side by side with Socoh, Azekah, Adithaim, Gederah and Gederothaim (Josh 15:35–36), must be sought near Naḥal Elah (Wādi es-Sant), on the important road that led from Socoh and Azekah to Gath. It was probably the first Judahite location along this road from Gath eastward, hence its name Shaaraim ("the gate")—namely, the gateway from Philistia into the kingdom of Judah. Or, looking it the other way round, it was the last Judahite site on the way to Gath, and thus "the gate" to Philistia. According to the description in 1 Sam 17:52, the Israelites pursued the fleeing Philistines along the Shaaraim road—that is to say, the road leading to Shaaraim, the westernmost Judahite city in the time when the David and Goliath story was composed, then penetrated the Philistine territory up to the cities of Gath and Ekron (for the late date of the story of David and Goliath, see Yadin 2004, with earlier literature)

It must be emphasized that there is a marked difference between the territorial situation in the tenth century—Gath was a strong kingdom and Khirbet Qeiyafa a major stronghold on its eastern border—and the eighth-seventh centuries—the kingdom of Gath has fallen and the city of Gath was annexed to the territory of Ashdod. In the eighth-seventh centuries the kingdom of Judah's western border shifted westward, toward the city of Gath, and Khirbet Qeiyafa was located deep within the territory of Judah.

As for the possible identification of Khirbet Qeiyafa, Garfinkel and Ganor ignored my suggestion to identify it with biblical Gob, a tenth century Philistine city on the border with Judah (Na'aman 2008). They also ignored Dagan's suggestion to identify it with the 7th city Judahite city of Adithaim (Dagan 1996: 139), although it is not clear whether the site was inhabited at that time. The discussion about the identity of this important site and its contribution to the study of the Philistine-Judahite border zone in the tenth century BCE must continue. Its unlikely identification with Shaaraim, however, is not a good starting point.

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