

Khirbet Qeiyafa identified as biblical 'Neta'im'

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Has another mystery in the history of Israel been solved? Prof. Gershon Galil of the Department of Bible Studies at the University of Haifa has identified Khirbet Qeiyafa as "Neta'im", which is mentioned in the book of Chronicles. "The inhabitants of Neta'im were potters who worked in the king's service and inhabited an important administrative center near the border with the Philistines," explains Prof. Galil.

Khirbet Qeiyafa is a provincial town in the Elah Valley region. [Archaeological excavations](#) carried out at Khirbet Qeiyafa by a team headed by Prof. Yosef Garfinkel and Mr. Saar Ganor have dated the site to the beginning of the 10th century BCE, namely the time of King David's rule. A Hebrew inscription on a pottery shard found at the site, also dating back to the 10th century, has recently been deciphered by Prof. Galil and indicates the presence of scribes and a high level of culture in the town.

The genealogy of the Tribe of Judah dated to the same period is recorded in 1 Chronicles. The last verse of this genealogy, 1 Chronicles 4:23, mentions two important cites: Gederah and Neta'im, both of which were administrative centers, since they were inhabited by people who work "in the king's service": "These were the potters, the inhabitants of Neta'im and Gederah, they dwelt there in the King's service." Gederah has been identified by A. Alt with Khirbet Ğudraya, near the Elah Valley, but Neta'im, which is mentioned only once in the Bible, remained unidentified.

American scholar Prof. William Albright, a leading archaeologist, proposed associating Neta'im with Khirbet En-Nuweiti', which is also located near the Elah Valley, based on the phonological similarity between the two names. Archaeological surveys at Khirbet En-Nuweiti', however, revealed that it was only inhabited during Hellenistic and Roman-Byzantine times, and not during the Iron Age.

Prof. Galil's identification of Khirbet Qeiyafa with Neta'im is based on the proximity of Khirbet Qeiyafa to biblical Gederah/Khirbet Ġudraya; on the archaeological findings - including impressive fortifications - dating from the time of King David's rule and indicating that this was an administrative center; and on the preserved name of nearby Khirbet En-Nuweiti'.

"The archeological findings at this site, the discovery of the earliest and most important Hebrew inscription to be found to date, and the understanding, based on the biblical text, that members of the Tribe of Judah inhabited the town and worked in the king's service, testify to Khirbet Qeiyafa - Neta'im - being an important administrative center in the border region of the Kingdom of Israel during the time of King David's reign. The existence of this fortified administrative center relatively far from the center of the kingdom testifies to a conflict that broke out between the Israelites the Philistines after David was victorious over the House of Saul and all of the Tribes of Israel were unified under his leadership. It is further proof of a large and powerful kingdom during the days of King David," Prof. Galil concludes.

Provided by University of Haifa

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