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SOLOMON'S NAVY IN THE CONTEXT OF MARITIME TRADE RELATIONS IN IRON AGE SOUTH LEVANT

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Levant can be seen as an important link between the two great centers of social and historical events of the Near East, Mesopotamia and Egypt. In Early Iron Age, this area was marked by many social changes, such as the weakening of Egypt's supremacy in the Levant area and the emergence of new ethnic groups like the Philistines and Israelites. The problem of Israel's monarchy and Solomon, David's successor is an important topic in the scientific world for a long time now. What does the Old Testament tell and what is the archaeological evidence? How strong was the monarchy of Solomon and what was its relation to neighboring nations? With the help of archaeological and literary sources this paper attempts to present as faithfully as possible the social relations between Israel and some of the people in the southern Levant. Solomon's navy is the key to understanding these relationships, in both political and economic aspects. The importance of maritime trade, maritime routes and harbors suggest a great social activity, and according to the Old Testament the foundation of Solomon's wealth. Among other things, this paper wants to present a possible conflict between the material evidence and written sources, and problematizes the relationship of archaeological evidence and the Old Testament.

Key Words: Solomon, Navy, Ezion Geber, Israel's monarchy, Phoenicians, Iron Age

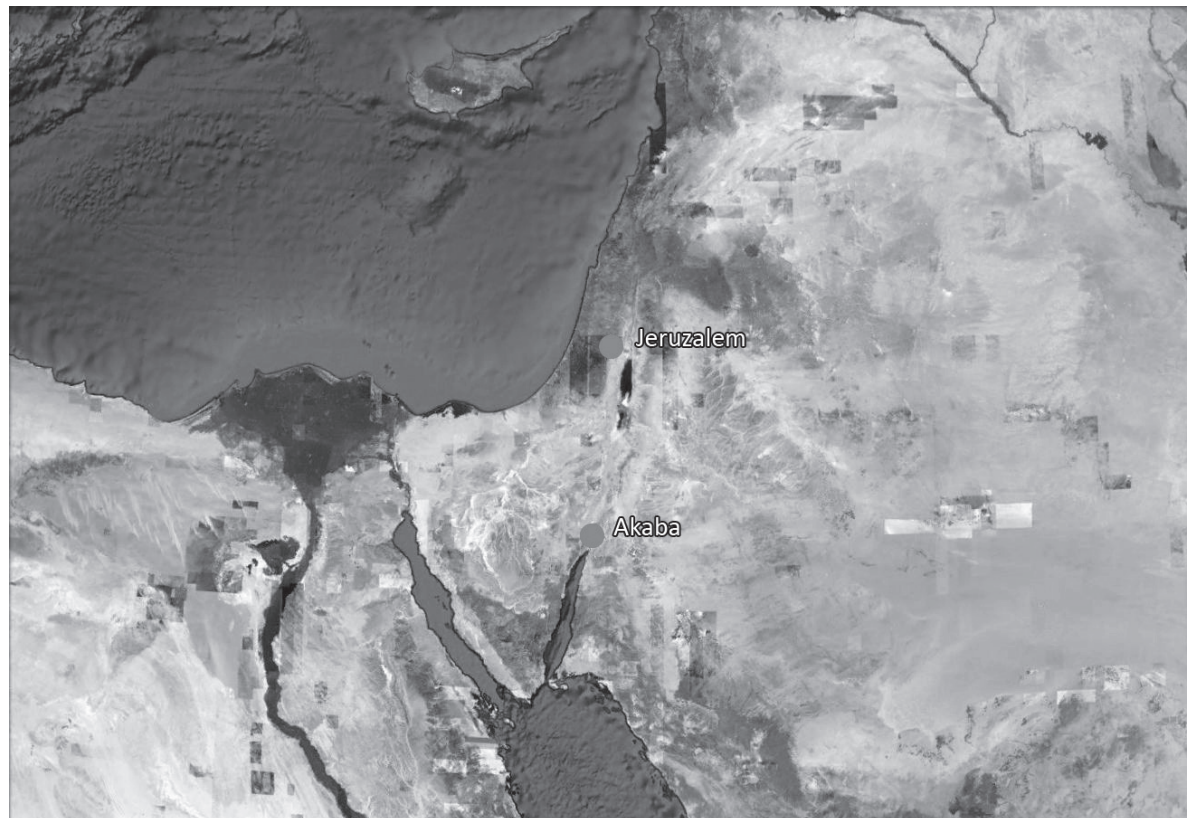
Introduction

The beginning of the Iron Age, cca 1200 B. C. E. marked important social and political changes in the Levant. Unification of Israel tribes and the establishment of the Monarchy is a controversial subject that even today hasn't reached consensus among the scholars. Due to the lack of material sources, the main source for studying the history of Israel during the Iron Age period is the Old Testament. Nevertheless, we need a lot more than biblical texts to understand the complexity of the formation of the Israel monarchy, even though the title of this article implicates the existence

of king Solomon as a historical figure, the fact of his existence is still unclear.

The main and almost only source of information on the great naval and merchant navy in Solomons period is the Old Testament. It is important to investigate Solomon's navy because it would increase our knowledge of different aspects of Israel's relations with other states in the Levant region. Technology of manufacturing and possession of a naval force was probably the most important technological achievement that enabled the military and cultural expansion of civilisations during this period.

Fig.1 Map of the region



The problem of material sources that appears in this case leads to difficulties in interpreting the written sources and although the main research of this paper is focused on written sources, the main arguments for the verification or denial of the generally accepted views are the results of analysis of archaeological resources.

The main goal of this article is to try to describe the circumstances of the period more accurately which should help clarify the possibility of the existence of Solomon's navy.

Historical and social context of the period prior to king Solomon

Iron Age brought many changes in the area that stretches from Anatolia, Syria and Palestine all the way to Egypt. The transition from Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age witnessed the collapse of the great Hittite state in the north and the decline of Egypt which lost its predominance over southern Levant.¹ Great Canaanite city states of Ugarit and Emar also suffered collapse.² (Fig. 1.) The disruption of diplomatic ties from 1150. to 900. B.C.E. enabled the wider Syria and Palestine region to slowly develop without any foreign intervention. Areas that were more favourable for habitation were lo-

cated in the northern and coastal regions and that new settlement pattern favored a sedentary rural lifestyle and formation of new political structures.³ Archaeological evidence that might relate to proto-Israel tribes and the process of establishment of the Monarchy are inconclusive, however the conditions for the formation of new political and social structures were extremely favourable.

Reconstruction of the formative period of the Israel monarchy at the beginning of the Iron Age is problematic and there are many theories concerning these events.⁴ If we try to compare Palestine region during Late Bronze Age (1400.-1200. B. C. E.) with the Early Iron Age period (1200.-1000. B. C. E.)⁵ we are confronted with several problems, the largest one being the lack of written sources, but also a lack of proper interpretation of archaeological materials. Unfortunately, despite the long term nature of the excavations much data is still unavailable to researchers because of the slow rate of analysis and publication. Also, we should emphasize that many results of the analysis of archaeological materials display a continuity in material culture during this transitional period which undermines the theory of newcomers to the region (the coming of the Israeli tribes from Egypt), but it doesn't diminish the possibility of the formation of a monarchy.⁶

¹ We can place these Egyptian rulers in the context of king Solomon's reign: Siamun (978.-959. B.C.E.), Psusennes II. (959.-945. B.C.E.), Sheshonk I. (945.-924. B. C. E.). More on the subject in: GRIMAL 1992, 311-334; KUHRT 1995, 385-386; LLOYD 2010, 120-140.

² KUHRT 1995, 386.

³ Cf. DIETRICH 2007, 118.

⁴ The most well known theory is „sociological“, which describes the beginning of Israel history and the formation of the monarchy as a result of the events that occurred after the exodus from Egyptian slavery. Although this theory is for the most part undisputed there are still some problematic aspects.

⁵ GREGOR 2004, 6.

⁶ LIVERANI 2007, 32.

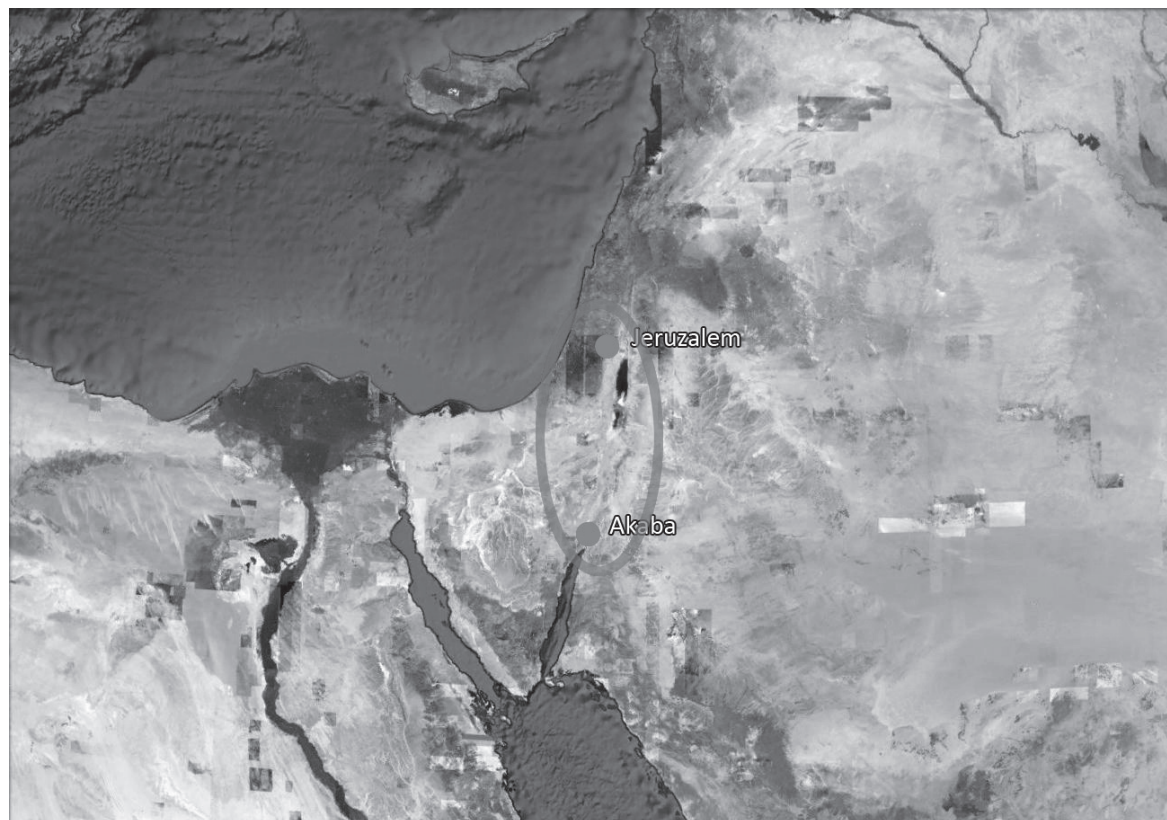


Fig.2 Map of Solomon's kingdom

Traditional historical views consider the increasing threats of other organized communities such as Philistines that forced fragmented tribes to unite, and that was probably a contributing factor for choosing a leader, their first king Saul.⁷ However, Saul couldn't organize a proper statelike structure and couldn't repel the Philistine threat. The process of unification of all the tribes into a common state is ascribed to the next king, David.⁸ He managed to conquer the city of Jerusalem and turn it into his capital.⁹ The borders of his kingdom stretched from Damascus kingdom in the north all the way to Aqaba bay in the south.¹⁰ There is no data at our disposal that could help us in reconstructing a precise picture of David's reign and the extent of his kingdom. Even though there are some disagreements concerning David's successor, it is mostly considered that he turned over the kingdom to his eldest son and successor Solomon thus creating his own dynasty. This is confirmed by an aramaean royal stela from Tel Dan dated around 840. B. C. E.¹¹ The inscription mentions „תיב דוד“ (House of David) which is the first (and the only) archaeological recognition of David.¹² Both archaeologists and epigraphists agree that the inscription is authentic, but it should be noted that this artefact is still under investigation so it cannot represent irrefutable proof of David and the existence of a monarchy.

Solomon's reign

King Solomon is believed to have ruled over a vast kingdom with significant political and religious importance. Biblical tradition speaks of a kingdom that extended from Euphrates to Egypt (1 Kin 5). An imperial project such as the one mentioned in the Old Testament has probably never been achieved. In fact, with Solomon's name we find no mention of a military victory, on the contrary we find that he had lost parts of the kingdom such as Edom (1 Kin 11: 21-22). In that case, it wasn't likely that Solomon ruled over such a vast territory. (Fig. 2.)

According to traditional chronology¹³ Solomon is credited with building the city gate of Megiddo (Megiddo V-A and IV-B) and Hazor (Hazor X).¹⁴ This chronology accepts Solomon's twelve districts and considers the construction of the stables and palaces to be correct. Low chronology places the construction at a later period which means that we cannot ascribe these monumental works to Solomon.¹⁵ From all this we can conclude that at best, the borders of Solomon's kingdom stretched from Aqaba bay (assuming that Edom was later lost) to Galilea in the north. Due to the lack of important archaeological artefacts we shouldn't exaggerate the size and power of Solomon's kingdom. It is unlikely that a kingdom such as the one described in the

⁷ REBIĆ 1992, 64.

⁸ REBIĆ 1992, 64.

⁹ Now the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, and they said to David: „You shall not come in here, but the blind and lame will turn you away“; Thinking: „David cannot enter here“ Nevertheless David captured the stronghold of Zion, that is the city of David; 2 Sam 5: 6-8.

¹⁰ REBIĆ 1992, 65.

¹¹ HALPERN 1994, 63-80.; LIVERANI 2007, 96.

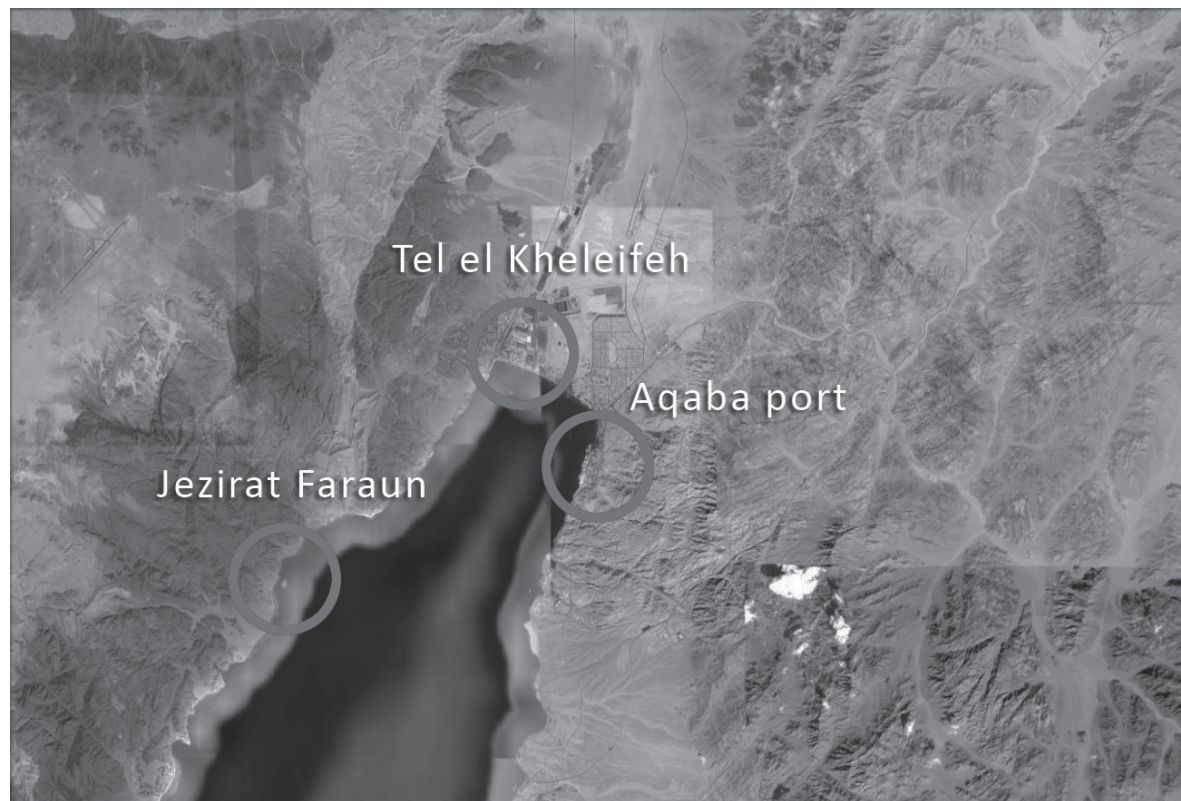
¹² HALPERN 1994, 63-80.

¹³ LIVERANI 2007, 98.

¹⁴ MAZAR 1990, 387.; ASH 1999, 82.; LIVERANI 2007, 98.

¹⁵ FINKELSTEIN-SILBERMAN 2002, 149-169.

Fig. 3 Ezion-geber possible locations



Old Testament could have existed without having left any evidence that could be connected to king Solomon.

It is interesting to note that we associate Solomon's reign with justice and wisdom, which can be traced to descriptions of other rulers from the period (for example king Jehimilk of Byblos is also described as a wise king).¹⁶ In that sense, there is a possibility that later authors of the scriptures wanted to equate Solomon's reign with the general situation in Syria and Palestine in the period. This is also corroborated by interesting details in the Old Testament about diplomatic relations between Solomon and other nations.¹⁷ It is obvious that texts about Solomon were the result of familiarity with the social and political situation during the 10th century B. C. E in the Levant.

The end of Solomon's reign is connected to the invasion of pharaoh Sheshonk I. which is depicted in a relief at Karnak temple. The list of conquered cities mentions Jerusalem and the attack is dated to 925. B. C. E. at the very end of king Solomons reign, or at the very beginning of the divided kingdom of Israel and Judaea.¹⁸

Solomon's navy

Biblical tradition places an important emphasis on Solomon's navy indicating that Israel's monarchy

played an important role in the wider region. It is associated with good foreign relations, and provides a basis for Israel's prosperity. The Old Testament refers to the subject of Solomon's navy in First book of Kings where we can find information about many maritime trade routes, as well as the main port, where most of the navy was stationed.

Ezion-geber port

King Solomon also built a fleet of ships in Ezion-geber, which is near Eloth on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom. (1 Kin 9:26). Although there are several locations that are considered as possible locations of this port and although most of the maps mark the location of Ezion-geber on the shore of the Red Sea, results of archaeological investigations, haven't confirmed the location or even the existence of such a port. In general, the port of Ezion-geber was located on the eastern shore of the Red Sea at the very end of the Edomite territory. One of the possible locations that was considered for a long time to be Ezion-geber is Tel el-Kheleifeh (or Elat).¹⁹ Thorough archaeological investigations discarded this location as Solomon's port because of the unfavourable geographical conditions and also because all of the archaeological materials that were found are dated later than Solomon's reign.²⁰

¹⁶ Cf. PRITCHARD 1969, 653.; GIBSON 1982, 6.; LIVERANI 2007, 99.

¹⁷ The Bible speaks of Solomon's wedding with daughter of an Egyptian pharaoh (Siamun or Psusennes II.) (1 Kin 3) when he received the city of Gezer as dowry (1 Kin 9). The Old Testament paints an idyllic picture of the relations between Solomon and Hiram who supplies the cedar and cypress timber for the temple (1 Kin 5: 22- 23). There is further mention of the economic ties with Kue (1 Kin 10: 28) and also the visit of queen of Sheba who brought great riches to king Solomon (1 Kin 10: 2).

¹⁸ Cf. BREASTED 1906 IV, 348-357.; AUBET 2001, 86.; MALAMAT 2001, 205-206.;

¹⁹ More on the subject in the early works of Nelson Glueck, e.g. GLUECK 1938, 13-16.

²⁰ GLUECK 1965, 70-87.

There is an argument that Solomon's port is to be found at the island of Jezirat Faraun,²¹ but since this port is located on the western shores of the Red Sea, which was traditionally the Egyptian side of the Sea, and also because of the shortage of the appropriate archaeological material, this location cannot be accepted as Solomon's port.

It is generally held today that Ezion-geber is located under the modern port of Aqaba in Jordan.²² Because of the excessive financial costs to close down the port, or to move the modern port for the purpose of systematic investigations there is a possibility that we might never find out the true location of Ezion-geber.

It is unlikely that a kingdom whose capital is centered in the central highlands and which didn't have any significant access to the coastal area should be considered a great naval force. When we add the fact that most of the urban centres of Edomite territory were located in the north, the question of sustainability of such a port at the southern end of the kingdom arises. The lack of archaeological material represents a huge problem in locating Solomon's port, and without any firm evidence that would support the biblical tradition we have to conclude that the existence of this port is doubtful. (Fig.3.)

Trade routes

Solomon's maritime trade as described in the Old Testament essentially illustrates the desire for the expansion of political and economical dominance beyond the existing borders of the monarchy. According to tradition Solomon's influence extended over several continents, but it is obvious that this construction wanted to present Solomon as the greatest Israelite ruler.

And Hiram sent his servants with the fleet, sailors who knew the sea, along with the servants of Solomon. They went to Ophir and took four hundred and twenty talents of gold from there, and brought it to King Solomon (1 Kin 9: 27-28). Ophir is an unknown harbour or a region from which Solomon received large amounts of gold, which led to the assumption that Ophir might be connected to locations that possess large findings of this precious metal. This led to a large number of possible locations of Ophir and the reason why we still can't say with certainty where it was located (if indeed it existed). Some of the most popular theories place Ophir in three loca-

tions: southwestern Arabia²³, India²⁴, and eastern Africa.²⁵ Ophir is not mentioned in the context of relations between king Solomon and the queen of Sheba, which would suggest that we can exclude the regions associated with southwestern Arabia. Although that region has many fragmented monarchies there is little possibility that they possessed large amounts of gold.

There is also little possibility that Ophir was located in India, because India has never been a large exporter of gold, which was also true in Solomon's time. Likewise, the distance and lack of ports along the way, would make such a long journey problematic.

The region of southeastern Africa is both famous for its gold and precious stones and still insufficiently explored which makes it an interesting location for Ophir theories. Some theories identify Ophir with Punt.²⁶ There was extensive trade between Egyptians and Phoenicians so we can assume most of the precious stones and metals came from the same source. If this theory correctly assumes the location of biblical Ophir it would explain the Phoenician influence on king Solomon and also cast doubts on his naval force.

For the king had at sea the ships of Tarshish with the ships of Hiram; once every three years the ships of Tarshish came bringing gold and silver, ivory and apes and peacocks. (1 Kin 10: 22). The first problem that appears in this text is the problem of translation of the hebrew word *וְתִקְיִים* (wetukkiyyim). Namely, it is not certain if this term refers to baboons or peacocks. Many theories dealing with the trade routes have relied precisely on the time indication in this line (*once every three years*) as a confirmation that the ships have sailed to India. But it is the peacocks that represent an important detail related to distance and travelling time since peacocks are sensitive birds which do not tolerate long voyages. If they were supposed to arrive at Solomon's court alive this would exclude a long journey, such as the one to India.

Another detail of this text which explains the possible origin of goods is *ships of Tarshish*. We believe that in this context the aforementioned navy doesn't represent the ships located in the Phoenician mediterranean colony of Tarshish²⁷, but it is more probable that it represents a type of vessel.

As we still can't confirm the exact duration of voyages it is hard to determine the exact destinations. Therefore, based on the biblical descriptions of their cargo,

²¹ FLINDER 1989.

²² MEYERS (ed.) vol. I. 1997, 153.

²³ SKOLNIK (ed.) vol. XV. 2007, 439.

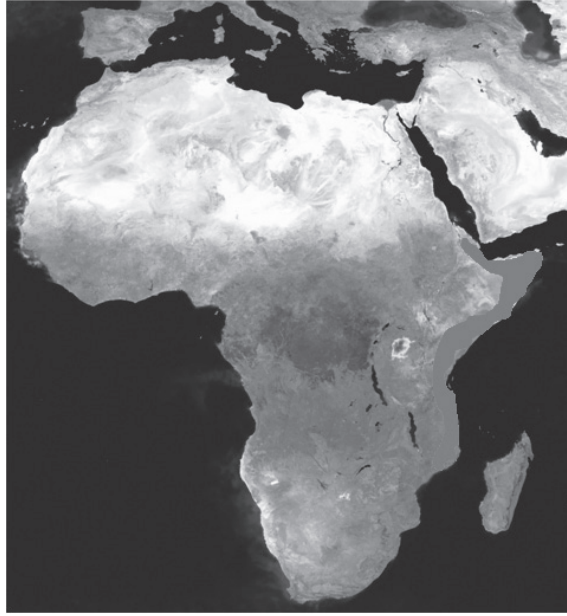
²⁴ J. AJ, I, 6; AUBET 2001, 44-45.

²⁵ Cf. AUBET 2001, 44-45.; MALAMAT 2001, 205.; SKOLNIK (ed.) vol. XV. 2007, 439.

²⁶ SKOLNIK (ed.) vol. XV. 2007, 439.

²⁷ SKOLNIK (ed.) vol. XIX. 2007, 522.

Fig.4 Location of Ophir in Africa



we conclude that the eastern or southeastern area of Africa is the main candidate for the location of possible trading posts. (Fig. 4.)

Phoenicians

The first sources that demonstrate the importance of trade in the Near East as early as Early Bronze Age are the archaeological findings from Ebla (3100.-2300. B.C.E.).²⁸ Records mention cities like Arvad, Beirut, Tyre, Sidon and Gubla (Byblos), as separate units that weren't connected in any kind of larger political structure. They began to expand after the decline of the Egyptian New Kingdom. Predominance of one city over the other, neighbouring city-states occurs for the first time just after their release from external (egyptian) influence. Domination over a wider area was first achieved by the city of Sidon.²⁹ Wealth and predominance of Sidon contributed to the successful colonization of the most part of central and western Mediterranean.³⁰ After the sudden collapse of Sidon, the city of Tyre attained dominance over the Phoenician area, which can be related to the arrival of Israelites in Palestine.³¹ Tyre is often mentioned in the diplomatic documents from Ebla, and archaeological material also indicates that the area of Tyre was already inhabited by the mid-third millennium BC.³² In the Late Bronze Age (1550.-1200.) Byblos and Tyre were important stations in the trade routes between Egypt, Aegea and Mesopotamia. Even after the crisis of Late Bronze Age, Tyre remained an important subject in Palestine and it obviously had all the conditions for great expansion in

the 10th century BC. Special importance is attributed to their ability for long lasting sea voyages which is evident in the existence of their colonies in Spain and their trade with Britain.³³

One of the most capable rulers that Tyre had was king Hiram who was, according to the Old Testament, Solomon's contemporary. Even though the Bible mentions an alliance between the two rulers, in which Hiram supplied cedar and cypress timber for Solomon's construction work and in return received food (1 Kin 5: 22-23), the presence of Tyre's secondary settlements of Qana and Siddiqin shows the great agricultural potential of Tyre which would exclude their dependance on food imports.³⁴ Trade between Hiram and Solomon cannot be excluded, although Solomon's dependance on materials from Tyre is questionable. Hiram's strong trading connections with Solomon could be based on the desire for good relations with Solomon, but they can also simply be an exaggeration of later authors.

Hiram's major works within the city of Tyre are well known: he enlarged the size of the city by filling canals, he built new temples from which the most magnificent one was the temple of God Melqart, a temple which was probably the background of the biblical story about sending workers for the construction of Solomon's temple (1 Kin 6: 1-3). We are familiar with Hiram's temples to Melqart, Baal and Astara from Assyrian reliefs from 7th century BC in Khorsabad.³⁵ The relief displays Tyre and, beside the ships, the great temple with two large pillars which correspond to the description of the temple dedicated to Melqart from Hiram's period. (Fig. 5.)

Hiram owned a large number of ships with which he controlled trading across the Mediterranean. His wealth must have attracted the attention of his neighbours. It is not impossible to imagine that Hiram wanted to expand his maritime trading dominance to the coastlines of the Red Sea and east Africa which would circumvent the Egyptian monopoly in gold trade. The port of Ezion-geber, if it ever existed, was most probably an important element of that strategy.

Concluding remarks

The Iron Age period in the Levant area was a most favourable time for the formation of city states which had control over a limited territory. King Solomon could have ruled such a city state during 10th century B.C. E. It is likely that the authors of biblical books that describe this period (Kin and Chr) wished to exagger-

²⁸ AUBET 2001, 18.

²⁹ Cf. RAWLINSON 1898, 110-114.; AUBET 2001, 18-26.

³⁰ RAWLINSON 1898, 112.

³¹ Cf. RAWLINSON 1898, 114-120.; AUBET 2001, 29-39.

³² Egyptian texts mention an autonomous monarchy in Tyre in the Middle Bronze Age, Cf. AUBET 2001, 39-43.

³³ Cf. RAWLINSON 1898, 115.; AUBET 2001, 212-215., 305-310.

³⁴ AUBET 2001, 43.

³⁵ AUBET 2001, 35.

ate the nature of Solomon's reign and present it as very succesful and prosperous time while describing Solomon with attributes that were commonly associated with rulers of that time, such as wisdom, great wealth, military success and good trade relations. Solomon's navy was one of these attributes that most probably wasn't based in reality. King Solomon probably had good relations with Phoenician king Hiram whose reputation as a naval force enabled the biblical writers to present Solomon as the owner of a large navy. We can assume that Hiram needed a port in the Red Sea as part of his expansion plans which could be confirmed by the definitive location of Ezion-geber. It is unclear whether Solomon's role included equal partnership in building the navy or if he was subordinate to Hiram in this undertaking, but it is clear that the nations of Iron Age Levant possessed knowledge and the resources to build such a fleet and an administration that could control the flow and exchange of cargo over large distances. Maritime routes served as an extension of land routes which is a characteristic of the Mediterranean even today.

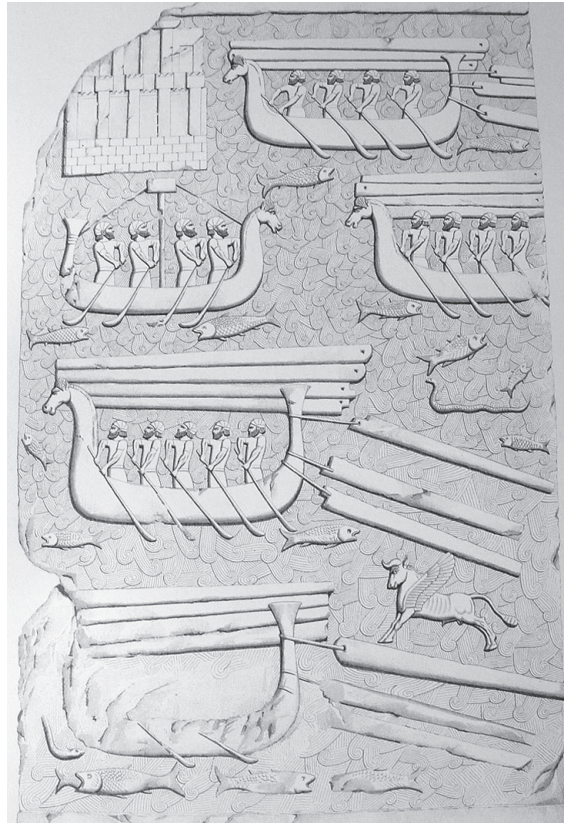


Fig.5 Phoenician ships and temple at Tyr

ABBREVIATIONS

B.C. E.	Before Common Era
Chr	Book of Chronicles
Fig.	Figure
J. AJ	Flavius Josephus
Kin	Book of Kings

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SAŽETAK

SALOMONOVA MORNARICA U KONTEKSTU POMORSKO-TRGOVAČKIH VEZA NA PROSTORU JUŽNOG LEVANTA U ŽELJEZNO DOBA

Eva Katarina GLAZER, Danijel ŠTRUKLEC

Početak željeznog doba, oko 1200. g. pr. Kr. prostor Levanta obilježile su mnoge društveno-političke promjene, kao što su gubitak prevlasti Egipta nad levantskim prostorom i pojava novih etničkih skupina poput Filistejaca i Izraelaca. Problem izraelske monarhije i Salomona, Davidova nasljednika provlači se kroz znanstvene krugove već dugo vremena. Uz pomoć arheoloških i literarnih izvora ovaj rad tumači društvene odnose između Izraela i pojedinih naroda u kontekstu pomorsko-trgovačkih veza na prostoru južnog Levanta u željezno doba. Salomonova mornarica ključna je za razumijevanje tih odnosa, kako u gospodarskom tako i u političkom aspektu. Važnost pomorske trgovine, pomorsko-trgovačkih putova i luka dokaz je velike društvene aktivnosti, a prema Starom zavjetu i temelj bogatstva Salomonovog kraljevstva, no uspoređujući pisane izvore s rezultatima dostupnih materijalnih izvora možemo uočiti da izvori govore u prilog snažnoj feničkoj pomorskoj sili, a ne Salomonovoj mornarici. Kralj Salomon je vjerojatno bio u dobrim odnosima s feničkim kraljem Hiramom i vjerojatno su upravo zahvaljujući slavi koju su Feničani kao pomorska sila imali, biblijski pisci iskoristili te odnose da prikažu Salomona kao onoga koji je sagradio mornaricu. Najvjerojatnije je Hiram u širenju pomorskih putova bila potrebna luka na Crvenom moru i vjerojatno bi budući pronalazak Esjon Gebera mogao potvrditi da je to bila fenička luka. U kojoj mjeri je Salomon sudjelovao kao Hiramov ravnopravni graditelj te mornarice, odnosno u kojoj mjeri mu je bio podložan možemo samo nagađati, no ono što je zasigurno točno je to da je u željezno doba na prostoru Levanta postojalo znanje i mogućnost izrade brodova, snažna i čvrsta uprava koja je mogla kontrolirati protok i razmjenu dobara i to na vrlo velikim udaljenostima. Pomorski putovi svakako su poslužili kao produžetak i nadopuna kopnenih putova, što je karakteristika istočnog Mediterana sve do današnjih dana.