



The Chiti

Rediscovering A Lost Race

For 2,500 years there was no archaeological evidence for the existence of the Chiti, the biblical Hittites mentioned in Tanach. Then, in the late 1800s, scientists suddenly discovered extensive evidence of Chiti existence. Not only had the Chiti existed, but they were once a world power—capable even of challenging the mighty pharaohs of ancient Egypt. Read about how the Chiti civilization was discovered and what we know about them today.

The Torah lists the Chiti (*Hittites*, to secular scholars) as one of the seven nations that inhabited *Eretz Yisrael* and who *Hashem* promised to drive out (*Devarim* 7:1). Their patriarch, Cheis (Heth), is named (*Bereishis* 10:15) as one of the sons of Canaan, the youngest son of Cham (Ham). Rashi (*ibid* 12:6) says that *Eretz Yisrael* was actually given to the descendants of Shem after the Flood. However, the Canaanite nations took *Eretz Yisrael* from them by force.

When Avraham Avinu needed to purchase *Meoras Hamachpelah* to bury his wife Sarah, it was to the Chiti, the current masters of the land, that he turned. They in turn pointed to

one of their members, Ephron, as the owner of the lot in which Avraham was interested (*Bereishis* 23:3-20).

We find (*Melachim I* 10:29) that Shlomo purchased horses from the Chitim, just as he did from *Mitzrayim*. And when the army of Sancheriv thought they heard hordes coming to attack them, they assumed that the king of Yehudah had hired the kings of *Mitzrayim* and told the Chitim to come to his aid (*Melachim II* 7:6).

Other than these brief references in *Tanach*, for over 2,500 years there was no record to

Note: Traditional chronologies provided by secular historians are by no means undisputed and infallible. All dates given throughout this article should be understood in that context.

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verify the Chiti's existence. Then dramatic discoveries were made beginning in the late 1800s.

Rediscovering an Empire

Various Egyptian texts had already been deciphered that referred to a rival kingdom named Kheta. These included the Amarna Letters, a set of 382 clay tablets found in the ancient Egyptian city of Akhetaten (today called Amarna) around 1887. These texts, dating from the mid-14th century BCE, were written in Akkadian cuneiform (an ancient Semitic writing system) and represent approximately 30 years of mostly official correspondence between the pharaohs Amenhotep II and Akhenaton and various other heads-of-state. Among them are four letters from a King Suppiluliuma of the land of Kheta.

Kheta was also mentioned in texts of a major battle that Ramses II had fought, as well as in the subsequent peace treaty. But scholars have always had difficulty determining which lands were referred to in ancient texts. The names they were known by then often did not correspond to the names they are known by to us. In fact, the land known to the Egyptians as Kheta is known to scholars today as Hatti. The people of Hatti, however, actually referred to themselves as



Bronze art from Chiti metalworkers.

the Nesili. So, for many years the identity of Kheta remained a mystery.

In 1812, Johann Ludwig Burchhardt, a Swiss-born student of Islam and Arabic studies, was traveling through the Middle East when he found himself in Hama, Syria. He noticed an ancient inscription, called a petroglyph, on a stone built into a local home. It was odd in that it appeared to be written in hieroglyphics, but it did not match any known Egyptian hieroglyphs.

The find was ignored until it was rediscovered in 1876 by an Irishman, William Wright. Wright found several similar inscriptions and was very curious about them. He obtained official permission to carry off the inscriptions to Istanbul for further research. The locals were very adamant about keeping the originals, however, believing that they cured diseases and that their displacement would bring bad luck.

Instead, copies were made by Wright as well as by a distinguished Welsh-born Assyriologist and linguist from Oxford University, Archibald Henry Sayce. Noting similarities between the carving from Hama and others found across Anatolia, Sayce surmised that they represented a powerful empire that had once ruled across modern-day Syria and Turkey. Both Wright and Sayce suggested that the writings were remains of the Biblical "sons of Heth," but they could not offer proof of their hypothesis. Sayce even suggested the ruins near Bogazkale, Turkey, as the Chiti capital. This site, 125 miles east of Ankara, had first been found by Europeans in 1820. Its significance, however, was not yet understood.



Building on the site of Meoras Hamachpelah, the site Avraham Avinu purchased from Ephron the Chiti.

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