

# A Note on Elhanan and Goliath

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The Masoretic text of 2 Sam. 21:19 states in part: "And Elhanan the son of Jaare-Oregim, the Bethlehemite, struck down Goliath the Gittite." 1 Chronicles 20:5 states in part: "And Elhanan the son of Jair struck down Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite." Below is the unpointed Hebrew text of both verses. 2 Samuel 2:19 is on top, with the English translation above the Hebrew, and 1 Chron. 20:5 is on bottom, with the English translation below the Hebrew. This highlights the parallel of the texts.

the Gittite	Goliath	acc.	lehemite	the Beth	Oregim	Jaare	son of	Elhanan	struck down
הגתי	גלית	את	הלחמי	בית	ארגים	יערי	בן	אלחנן	ויך
הגתי	גלית	אחי	לחמי	את		יעור	בן	אלחנן	ויך
the Gittite	Goliath	brother of	Lahmi	acc.		Jair	son of	Elhanan	struck down

The differences are probably the result of scribal errors in the transmission of both verses. The word "Oregim" probably was added by mistake to Jair's name in 2 Sam. 21:19 from its presence in the phrase "weaver's beam" at the end of the verse. The NET note for 2 Sam. 21:19 states, "*Heb* 'Jaare-Oregim,' but the second word, which means 'weavers,' is probably accidentally included. It appears at the end of the verse. The term is omitted in the parallel account in 1 Chr 20:5, which has simply 'Jair.'" Kaspars Ozolins likewise states, "it is likely that Elhanan's father (or ancestor) did not bear such a compound name and that this extra *ōrēgīm* has crept into the text of 2 Samuel 21:19 from the end of the verse through a series of scribal mistakes."<sup>1</sup> He explains how a scribe may have made such an error in his more detailed academic article on the subject.<sup>2</sup> There is evidence in some ancient Greek manuscripts of a Hebrew text that lacked "Oregim."<sup>3</sup> According to David Fouts, the change from Jair (or Jaur) to Jaare "was to accommodate the construct relationship demanded by the presence of *ōrēgīm*."<sup>4</sup>

2 Samuel 21:19 states that Elhanan struck down Goliath, instead of the "brother of" Goliath as reported in 1 Chron. 20:5, probably because a scribe misread the word for "brother of" (אָחִי, *’āhī*) as the accusative sign (אֶת, *’et*), the result of which was to identify Goliath as the direct object of the striking. The NET note for 2 Sam. 21:19 states, "The Samuel text misread the word for 'brother' (אָחִי, *’akh*) as the accusative sign (אֶת, *’et*), thereby giving the impression that Elhanan, not David, killed Goliath." Ozolins states: "It is entirely reasonable to imagine a scribe mechanically reading אֶת (instead of אָחִי) in anticipation of a definite object like גִּלְיָת הַגִּיטִית 'Goliath the Gittite.' Thus, the most plausible way to account for the testimony of the Chronicles parallel

<sup>1</sup> Kaspars Ozolins, "[Who Really Killed Goliath?](#)" (March 8, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Kaspars Ozolins, "Killing Goliath? Elhanan the Bethlehemite and the Text of 2 Samuel 21:19," *Vetus Testamentum* 72 (2022), 722-723.

<sup>3</sup> Ozolins, "Killing Goliath?," 720-721.

<sup>4</sup> David M. Fouts, "Who Really Killed Goliath? 2 Samuel 21:19 Versus 1 Chronicles 20:5," *Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics* 13 (2000), 19-20."

(with אחי גלית הגתי 'the brother of Goliath the Gittite') is to posit a direct change from אחי → את at 2 Sam 21:19."<sup>5</sup>

1 Chronicles 20:5 does not describe Elhanan as "the Bethlehemite" and identifies the brother of Goliath whom Elhanan struck down as Lahmi. This probably resulted from a scribe misreading or mishearing "the Bethlehemite" (בֵּית הַלְחָמִי, *bêt hallahmî*) as אֶת־לְחָמִי (*'et-lahmî*), the accusative sign followed by the proper name Lahmi, thus identifying Lahmi as the direct object of the striking. That seems more likely than *'et-lahmî* being the original reading and being mistaken for *bêt hallahmî* because Elhanan is associated with Bethlehem in the three other occurrences of his name (2 Sam. 21:19, 23:24; 1 Chron. 11:26). The NET note for 1 Chron. 20:5 states, "it is likely that the accusative marker in front of לְחָמִי (*lakhmiy*, 'Lachmi') is a corruption of בֵּית (*bet*), and that אֶת־לְחָמִי (*'et-lakhmiy*) should be emended to בֵּית הַלְחָמִי (*bet hallakhmiy*, 'the Bethlehemite')." Ozolins states:

Given the arguments adduced above, it is possible that an ancestral witness of MT Chronicles lost the article of בֵּית הַלְחָמִי prior to the introduction of "Lahmi" as a name. This factor would add to the likelihood that a scribe could have anticipated the name of a Philistine giant in his text (and not a gentilic of Elhanan) after the sequence ... ויך אלחנן בן יעור "Then Elhanan, son of Ya'ur, struck x ..." Perhaps hindered by a poorly visible *bêt + yôd* letter combination in the first word (בֵּית), he could have interpreted the second half of the gentilic as the personal name of the giant and miscopied the first half as the sign of the direct object את (viz., את לחמי).<sup>6</sup>

The NET note for 2 Sam. 21:19 concludes, "Thus in all probability the original text read, 'Elhanan son of Jair the Bethlehemite killed the brother of Goliath.'" This is consistent with the reconstruction of the original text by Ozolins. He summarizes his proposed history of the texts with the following chart.<sup>7</sup>

	2 Samuel 21:19	1 Chronicles 20:5
<b>ORIGINAL</b>	...and Elhanan the son of Jaur, the Bethlehemite, struck down the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam	
<b>STEP 1</b> An extra <i>oregim</i> appears after "Yaur" in 2 Sam.	...and Elhanan the son of Jaare- <b>oregim</b> , the Bethlehemite, struck down the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's ( <i>oregim</i> ) beam	
<b>STEP 2</b> "brother of" is misread in 2 Sam. and "Bethlehemite" is misread in 1 Chron.	...and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, struck down <b>Goliath the Gittite</b> , the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam	...and Elhanan the son of Jaur, struck down <b>Lahmi</b> the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam

<sup>5</sup> Ozolins, "Killing Goliath?," 730.

<sup>6</sup> Ozolins, "Killing Goliath?," 729.

<sup>7</sup> Ozolins, "[Who Really Killed Goliath?](#)" (March 8, 2022).

This all seems reasonable, but since there are no known manuscripts in which "brother of" is present in 2 Sam. 21:19 or "Lahmi" is absent in 1 Chron. 20:5, it raises the question of when it is acceptable to reconstruct or emend a text. I would say that, at a minimum, it is acceptable to reconstruct a text when clearly parallel passages differ in spots that make them inconsistent with each other and our understanding of normal textual transmission errors provides a reasonable explanation for how the discordant parallel passages may have arisen from a proposed original text that fits the context and comports with the basic rules of grammar and syntax.<sup>8</sup> I think the text proposed by Ozolins and the NET notes qualifies.

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<sup>8</sup> See, Fouts (2000), 15.