



Aram (Place name)

Aram denotes the territories, where Arameans lived. They comprise the area from the Habur-triangle in the East, to the middle-Euphrates region, through most of Syria, and to the South, the Beqaa valley, Damascus and to the Golan heights. In some occurrences Aram refers to this area in general or at least to large parts of it; most clearly in 1 Kgs 10:29 = 2 Chr 1:17, Solomon trading with the kings of Aram. In Judg 10:6, „the Gods of Aram“, Aram rather refers to the closer Aramean neighborhood of Israel, and in Amos 9:7, Aram in a general way refers to the people of Aram.

The usage of the term *Aram* corresponds to the fact, that Aram did not grow into a large united state, but consisted of different entities. Only in the late 9th cent., under the leadership of king Hazael, Aram-Damascus dominated most of Aram and even rivaled Assyria. The regional division of Aram is reflected in the different compound names designating the area, the main city or the local dynasty:

Paddan-Aram: Region along the road (Akk. *paddanu*) through the Habur-triangle and to Haran on the Balikh river, and on to the Euphrates.

Aram-Naharaim: Western part of Paddan-Aram (cf. Gen 24:10) and areas along the great bend of the Euphrates (cf. Deut 23:5; Judg 3:8). In Num 23:7; Judg 3:10; Hos 12:13 the general term Aram designates this area.

Most states of these two regions were named by the name of its dynasty or by the capital, e.g. Bit Bachiani = Gozan (= Akk. *guzanu*; 2 Kgs 17:6; 19:12), Haran (cf. Gen 11:31; 29:4), Pethor (= Pitru; cf. Num 22:5; Deut 23:5); Bit-Adini (cf. 2 Kgs 19:12; Amos 1:5).

Aram-Zoba, also called ***Aram-Bet-Rekhob*** (according to the dynasty that had founded it): Comprising the Beqaa valley of modern Lebanon, partly expanding along the Orontes, down to Hamat, which stayed independent, and into the Antilebanon mountains, possibly also to(wards) the Euphrates, cf. 2 Sam 8:3,9. In the 10th cent. Aram-Zoba became part of Aram-Damascus, but the name Zoba is still found in Assyrian lists from ca. 700 B.C.E. as the name of an Assyrian province in the Beqaa.

Aram-Damascus: According to 1 Kgs 11:23f. some time after the defeat of Aram-Zoba by David, Rezon, a former military leader from Aram-Zoba, seized power at Damascus. By this act, Damascus became Aramaic in a way, similar to that as Jerusalem had become Israelite through David. Aram-Damascus became the most powerful state in southern Syria. In the 9th and the 8th cent. Aram-Damascus initiated and led coalitions against Assyria. In the last third of the 9th cent. and still in the beginning of the 8th cent., Aram-Damascus fought against Israel and captured parts of it, especially the Golan heights (cf. 2 Kgs 10:32f. and now also the „Tell-Dan-inscription). Under the reign of Hazael (ca. 842 - 800 B.C.E.) Aram-Damascus became an empire that dominated large parts of Syria and Palestine. According to two (designation-)inscriptions (see Na’aman) he even crossed the Euphrates to attack Assyria. After some more quiet decades Assyria expanded again, and Damascus was captured in 732 B.C.E.. For the Old Testament Aram-Damascus is the Aramean power and many times it is simply called Aram.

Aram-Maacah and **Geshur:** Small territories resp. states in Transjordan, between Mt. Hermon and the Yarmouk river. They are mentioned in the Old Testament only. According to 2 Sam 10:6,8, Aram-Maacah took side with Aram-Zoba against David. Geshur evidently was south of Aram-Maacah. Its king Thalmai’s daughter Maacah became a wife of David and the mother of Abshalom, who later fled to Thalmai (2 Sam 3:3; 13:37f.). The aramean character of Aram-Maacah and Geshur is disputed, but in 2 Sam 15:8 Geshur is explicitly called a part of Aram.

The aramean state of **Sam’al / Ja’udi**, modern Zendjirli in SE-Turkey, ca. 100 km west of the bend of the Euphrates, provided important aramaic inscriptions, but is not mentioned in the Old Testament.

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