The Kingdom of Geshur in History and Memory

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“Whoever declares others invalid … with his own flaw he invalidates”
(Talmud Bavli, Qidushin, 70,1)

ABSTRACT: The article re-examines the biblical, extra-biblical and archaeological sources for the history of Geshur and the way it was memorialized in biblical texts. It demonstrates that archaeological research is the key to establishing the location of the kingdom’s capital, its territory, population, economy and commercial relations. The written sources complement and corroborate the archaeological data. Evidently—contrary to the conclusions reached in a recently published article—we know quite a lot about this marginal Aramean kingdom.

Geshur was located on the northern border of the Kingdom of Israel, far away from Jerusalem; and yet late Judahite scribes, who operated hundreds of years after it disappeared from the political arena, still remembered that it was a separate entity, on par with Maacah, and different from all other neighbouring districts enumerated side by side with it. What was unclear to the scribes is the geographical reality in the far north. Hence, their geographical depiction of Geshur’s (and Maacah’s) location was inaccurate.

Key words: Geshur, Maacah, Israel,

In a recently published article, Juha Pakkala (2010) surveyed the written sources that refer—or are assumed to refer—to the Aramean kingdom of Geshur. He first discussed the biblical texts, then the extra-biblical sources, and briefly surveyed the scholarly discussion of Geshur. His article aimed to demonstrate how little we know of this kingdom, as is clearly expressed by his conclusions (2010:172):

“We know basically nothing substantial about the area, the political unit, the people or their culture. We do not even know whether there was a people who called themselves Geshurites and, if so, whether they spoke a Semitic or some other language …. We do not have more evidence about Geshur than that it seems to be connected to an early monarchic period and to the approximate
area of the Golan …. Geshur may or may not have been politically united at some point, but we do not know when and how, and we do not know what the extent of this possible kingdom was.”

Pakkala went so far as to compare the Geshurites to “groups of people, like the Hivvites, Girgashites and Perizzites, whose identity and existence is similarly debatable.” Significantly, the archaeological evidence is left out of his discussion, probably because he assumed that it contributes little to our understanding of the kingdom’s history.

In what follows, I will revisit the documentary sources—both biblical and extra-biblical—and the archaeological evidence in an effort to show what we really know about Geshur in the early First Millennium BCE. I will suggest that Pakkala’s discussion of the sources is inadequate, his acquaintance with the scientific literature is insufficient, and he neglected the most important source available for the study of the Aramean kingdom.

**Geshur in the Bible**

Albright (1956: 12) suggested that Gether (LXX Γαθερ) listed in Gen 10,23 “reflects the original Aramaic pronunciation of the name that appears as Gššūr in MT.” Other scholars supported the assumption that the two names are variants of a single Old Aramaic place name (Lipiński 1993:202; 2000: 336; Halpern 1997:312 and n. 3; Hendel 2005:111). Lipiński (1993:202) pointed out that the two toponyms were derived from the root *gtr (“être très fort”), and hence the place name means “stronghold, fortress.” Hendel (2005: 111) concluded that “the etymology from *gtr indicates that Gššūr represents the orthography and phonology of the Old Aramaic period.” The analysis of the name corroborates the commonly held opinion that Geshur was an early first millennium Aramean kingdom (contra Pakkala 2010:156-159, 172-173).

When examining the references to the land of Geshur in the Deuteronomistic (Dtr) literature, two different viewpoints of its place vis à vis the Israelite territory may be observed. According to one, Geshur was located outside the inherited Israelite territory of Og, the king of Bashan (Deut 3,13-14; Josh 12,4-5), and according to the other it was included in Og’s kingdom, and thus “the Geshurite and Maacathite still live among Israel to this day” (Jos,13,11-13). The latter viewpoint is similar to that of other “remaining” cities that were included within the boundaries of the Promised Land but not conquered and thus “remained” within the inheritance of the named tribes (Josh 15,63; 16,10; 17,11-13; Judg 1,21.27-35). The kingdom of Og was located within the Israelite tribal territories, and the non-conquered lands of the Geshurites and Maacathites “remained” within its confines. According to the other viewpoint (Deut 3,13-14; Josh 12,4-5), Geshur and

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1. Haf pórsson (2006:235-236) reached similar conclusions: “We cannot be certain when Geshur existed, in what form, and what contacts it had with Aram-Damascus. In the case of Israel, there seem to have been contacts in the time of David, a time presented in the Bible so entwined with narratives of literary character that it is difficult to separate history from legend.”
Maacah were located outside the boundaries of the conquered territories and their border adjoins the boundary of the tribal inheritances.

Wüst (1975:39-44) analyzed in detail the three Dtr texts delineating the scope of Og’s kingdom in similar ways. The district of Mount Hermon is the northernmost among the enumerated territories and encompassed the areas of the Golan and the Upper Jordan Valley. Evidently, the scribes who composed the descriptions had only a vague notion of the reality in the north and treated the area between Mount Hermon and Bashan as an extension of the mount. Moreover, in the account of Josh 13,11-13, the district of Mount Hermon and the territories of Geshur and Maacah were included within the confines of Og’s kingdom, whereas Josh 12,4-5 excluded Geshur and Maacah from the kingdom’s territory (see above). The inconsistency indicates once again how unclear the configuration of these remote northern regions was for the Dtr scribes who lived in far-away Jerusalem. Surprisingly, Pakkala (2010:156-159) kept repeating the term “the Golan tradition” for the assumed sources of the Dtr scribes. It goes without saying that no “Golan tradition” was available for the scribes. Rather, they held a stock of territorial designations and combined them in different manners in the texts they produced. Among these designations of northern regions were Geshur and Maacah, which, according to the Dtr scribes, were located outside the borders of the northern Gilead and Bashan (Deut 3,13-14) and close to the district of Hermon (Josh 12,5; 13,11).

The land of Geshur probably appears once again in 2 Sam 2,9. According to the massoretic text, five districts are listed in the territory over which Ishbaal son of Saul reigned: Gilead, ṣwry, Jezreel, Ephraim and Benjamin. The overall territory is defined as “Israel in its entirety.” The inclusion of Gilead, Ephraim and Benjamin in the district list is self-evident, whereas the appearance of the ṣwry and Jezreel evokes serious problems. Since I already discussed the text in detail elsewhere (Na’aman 1990) I will analyze it here only briefly.

Instead of ṣwry, the Syriac and Vulgate versions read ges(s)uri, “the Geshurite.” On the basis of several Dtr geographical lists (Deut 3,14; Josh 12,5; 12,5), I suggest rendering the text of 2 Sam 2,9 as follows: wymlkhw ‘l hgl’d <‘d gb> wl ṣwry w’l yzr ‘l w’l ‘prym w’l bnynn w’l ysr’l klh; “and he made him king over Gilead <up to the boun> dary of the Geshurite and (the border of) Jezreel, and over Ephraim and over Benjamin, that is, over Israel in its entirety.” The reconstruction, admittedly uncertain, indicates that the land of Geshur bordered the district of northern Gilead, in accord with Josh 13,11. The presentation of Geshur on the border of Ishbaal’s kingdom fits nicely the kingdom’s place in the story of David’s rise to power. While reigning in Hebron and fighting Ishbaal, David has married Maacah, daughter

2. Wüst’s detailed discussion of the sources’ history of tradition is beyond the scope of this article.
3. For a detailed discussion of the meagre acquaintance of the Jerusalemite scribes with the reality of remote regions, see Lissovsky-Na’aman 2004:302-316, 320-321.
of Talmai king of Geshur (2 Sam 3,3), thereby obtaining an ally on his rival’s northern front.

The district list of Ishbaal’s kingdom is no less Dtr than the three other texts discussed above. The four texts illustrate the way that scribes operating in the late seventh-fifth centuries grasped the pre-monarchical and early monarchical reality in the far north and the way they integrated the northern districts in the compositions they produced.

Very little can be said of the historicity of the story of Absalom in Geshur (2 Sam 13,37-38; 14,23.32; 15,8). The historical evaluation depends on the date we assign to the so-called “succession History” in which the story is included and the overall estimate of its potential for historical research (for detailed discussion, see Ma’oz 1992:996; Hess 2004:56-58; Dietrich 2007:210, 224; Pakkala 2010:156-157). Since my discussion is not dependent on the historical authenticity of the story, I will avoid analyzing its authenticity in detail.4 However, the reference to a king of Geshur in the context of the United Monarchy, namely, the tenth century, is significant and will be evaluated below.

The Amarna Letters

In an article published in 1961, Benjamin Mazar discussed the scope of the land of Gari mentioned in an Amarna letter and the identification of its villages (EA 256,22-28). After a detailed analysis of the location of the listed toponyms, he concluded that “the land of Garu … was a large tract of territory in the Golan … stretching southward as far as the Yarmuk and identical with the biblical Geshur” (Mazar 1961:18-21). This is the basis for his suggested rendering of the land’s name Ga-ri as Ga-<ša>-ri, “Geshur.”

Mazar did not present evidence for his claim of an overlap in territory between Gari and Geshur. I already analyzed the biblical references of Geshur and demonstrated that its place might generally be determined, but its territorial scope cannot be established on the basis of the biblical data. Hence, the territories of the lands of Gari and Geshur should be studied separately.

Unfortunately, Mazar’s hasty conclusion was uncritically accepted by some scholars, who on the basis of the reconstructed territory of the land of Gari established the borders of biblical Geshur (Ma’oz 1992: 996; Epstein 1993: 83-90; Arav 2004: 3-5). Pakkala (2010: 167) was aware that “the identification of Garu and Geshur is largely based on the hypothetical and disputed assumption that the author accidentally omitted one syllable”, and yet dedicated almost half of his paper to an investigation of the location of the land of Gari’s villages (pp. 159-167). Not only did he not advance the research beyond what was already suggested by other scholars, but he ignored the works of Edel (1966:13, 90-91), Weippert (1971, 12 n. 28), Galil (1998: 375-376) and Liverani (1998: 125 n. 55). Liverani’s reading ya-bi-ši-ma in EA

4. It seems odd that Absalom’s mother, who was a Geshurite princess, is called by the name of Maacah, Geshur’s northern neighbouring kingdom. Thus, the authenticity of the princess' name might well be questioned.
256:28 and his suggestion to identify it with biblical Jabesh-gilead (Tell el-Maqlûb) is notable.

In sum, the territory of the fourteenth century BCE land of Gari should be sought in the area between the cities of Ashtaroth and Pihilu. Its extent, however, is irrelevant for the study of the Aramean Kingdom of Geshur in the early first millennium BCE.

Shalmaneser III’s Campaign in 838 BCE

An inscribed fragmented royal statue of Shalmaneser III’s was unearthed at Calah and published in part by Laessoe (1959). It includes the most detailed account known so far of the king’s campaign in his 21st year of reign (838 BCE). The statue fragments remained in Iraq, and an unpublished copy was prepared by Peter Hulin. Grayson consulted Hulin’s copy while preparing his edition of Shalmaneser’s inscriptions (1996:72-84), and his edition formed the basis for Yamada’s discussion of the campaign (2000:27, 205-209, 285-286). Later, Yamada (2000b) published and discussed Hulin’s copy, leading to what is today considered the edition priceps of the text.5

What path did Shalmaneser III take en route to arrival in his 21st year at the Phoenician Coast? After he crossed the Euphrates, Shalmaneser advanced southwards along Mount Lebanon and crossed Mt. Anti-Lebanon eastwards, apparently along the route of Baalbek-Zabedani-Damascus (Yamada 2000a: 207). In his 841 BCE campaign, after besieging Damascus for a short time Shalmaneser advanced southward along the eastern side of Mt. Anti-Lebanon, arrived at Mount Hauran, probably proceeded along the Darb el-Ḥawarneh road (Oded 1971:193; Lissovsky-Na’aman 2004:306-307)6 and reached Mount Carmel (Ba’li-rāsi), on the border between Israel and Tyre. In 838, he again proceeded southward along the east route of Mt. Anti-Lebanon and conquered four of Hazael’s fortified cities, the names of two of them (Danabi and Maḥa) and the initial syllable of a third (Ia[...]) survived in the fragmented text.

Where should we search for the four cities? Pakkala presented a catalogue of suggested identifications (168-169 notes 69-70; also Hafpórsson 2006: 132-135), aimed at demonstrating that the location cannot be established. However, the “catalogue approach,” which mixed together all site identifications suggested so far, cannot help solve the problem. Rather, we should look for a solution that combines the mentioned cities with the possible route of the Assyrian campaign. Indeed, Lemaire (1991: 100-101) has pointed out that Danabi and Maḥa are mentioned in an Egyptian topographical list of cities located in the area of Bashan (Maḥa = m-ri-hw; Danabi = tw-n-bw) (see

5. Surprisingly, Pakkala did not consult Yamada's new edition (2000b), and his analysis rests only on Grayson's (1996) and Yamada's (2000a) works.
6. The Darb el-Ḥawarneh road passed from the Hauran/Bashan to the Jordan valley, crossed the river south of the Sea of Galilee, continued along Nahal Jabneel (Wādi Fejjas) to Mount Tabor, passed along the foot of the Hills of Nazareth to Tell el-‘Amr and reached the southern side of the Acco plain.
Edel and Görg 2005:51-52, 66). In light of his observation, we may suggest that up to the area of the Hauran/Bashan, the marching line of the 841 and 838 campaigns was roughly identical (Dion 1997:198-199). Establishing the exact location of the cities is of secondary importance for reconstructing the route of Shalmaneser’s campaign toward the Phoenician Coast.

Following the conquest of the four cities, Shalmaneser related that Ba’îl of [KU]R Z/G[i-x-(x)-r]a-a-a submitted to him and paid the tribute. He then placed his royal statue in the temple of Laruba (or Lašubba), Ba’îl’s fortified city, and received the tribute of the men of Tyre, Sidon and Byblos (Grayson 1996, 79 lines 159b-162a; Yamada 2000a:206-209; 2000b:80). As such, Ba’îl’s kingdom must be sought between the area of Bashan and the Phoenician Coast.

The stronghold of LaRUBa is mentioned nowhere else. Yamada (2000a: 207, 209, 285) suggested transcribing the LA-sign as MA and rendering the city’s name as Ma-rû-ba, which he identified with the Sidonian city of Ma-å’ru-ub-bu (Ma’rubbu). However, the “improved” rendering of the sign is arbitrary and Ma’rubbu belonged to Sidon, which is certainly not Ba’îl’s kingdom (see Bagg 2007: 171). Moreover, the kingdoms and cities of the Phoenician Coast are well known from ancient Near Eastern texts, and neither the kingdom of Z/G[i-x-(x)-r]a nor the city of LaRUBa was ever mentioned. This may indicate that the toponyms should be sought outside the Phoenician Coast.

How should we read the name of the fragmented land in line 160? In light of Hulin’s copy, Grayson’s rendering of the broken name as Tyre is definitely incorrect (Yamada 2000b: 80). Lipiński (1999: 242b) suggested restoring it Šî-mir-r]a-a-a (Šimirra). However, Šimirra always appears as a city and not as a land, and its name is consistently written with the ŠI-sign, never with the ZI-sign (Bagg 2007: 231-232; also Marín 2001: 251-252). With all due caution, I suggested restoring the land’s name G[i-šu-(u)]-r]a-a-a, Geshur (Na’a’mân 2002: 205-207). As we shall see, Geshur’s capital is identified at et-Tell, northeast of the Sea of Galilee. In this light, I suggest that at a certain point southeast of the Sea of Galilee, the Assyrian campaign of 838 BCE deviated from the Darb el-Hawarneh road and proceeded northward along the shore of the lake, and near the city of Hazor or Dan crossed westward and reached the Phoenician Coast.7

7. After he received the tribute of Tyre, Sidon and Byblos, Shalmaneser III proceeded to KUR Mušurûna. I suggested that this land/mountain should be identified with the ridge of Nahr el-Kalb, where a relief of a royal image was discovered – possibly representing Shalmaneser III (Na’a’mân 2002:207). The references to the gods Athar of Mušurûna and Dagan of Mušurûna (Bagg 2007: 180) may refer to deities represented on the reliefs curved at Nahr el-Kalb by ancient Near Eastern kings. Furthermore, the small ninth century kingdom of Mušur/Mešri, which is mentioned beside Byblos in the monolith from Kurkh and beside Tyre and Sidon in the Calah throne base of Shalmaneser III, also occupied the territory between the borders of Byblos.
It goes without saying that the suggested restoration of Geshur’s name is uncertain. Provided that it is acceptable, it indicates that as late as year 838, Geshur was still an independent kingdom and was annexed to the Kingdom of Aram Damascus at a later time, as explained below.

The Archaeological Evidence

A large mound of about eight hectares was discovered northeast of the Sea of Galilee. Its Arabic name is et-Tell, and it was identified with the Second Temple village of Beitsaida. The site is located two and a half kilometers off the lake and rises 25-30 meters above its surroundings. It is divided into a higher mound in the north and a lower mound in the south. To date, only the former was excavated.

The site was fortified by a heavy wall of between six and eight meters width, with four chambered gate on its southeastern side. Impressive architecture was unearthed within the walls, including a large palace, a cult place and a storehouse (Arav 1995; 1999a; 2004; 2008:1612b-1615a; 2009; Arav—Bernett 2000). The most remarkable find discovered in the site is a basalt stеле with a curved representation of the Moon God (Bernett—Keel 1998). This was found near the gate and has close parallels to steles discovered in other Aramean centres. Other small finds are four short alphabetical inscriptions, a clay bulla, figurines and clay vessels.

The monumental buildings uncovered at et-Tell were attributed to Strata VI-V, the latter stratum being destroyed by Tiglath-pileser III in 733-732 BCE. Radiometric dates measured on grain from a granary under the Stratum V gate and hence attributed to Stratum VI were dated to the tenth century BCE (1000-930 results in 68%) (Boaretto et al. 2005:49; Sharon et al. 2007: 7, 34, 44). These dates corroborate Arav’s suggestion that Stratum VI was founded in approximately the mid-tenth century BCE. Unfortunately, very few floors with complete vessels have been unearthed at the site, whereas only broken sherds have been found on the floors of all the other buildings. The date of construction of the city wall and the main structures (gate, palace and cult place) remains uncertain.

The Iron II eight hectare, massively fortified mound of et-Tell is by far the largest and strongest site in the east of the Jordan Valley area between the Jarmuk River in the south and Tel Dan in the north. Similar large and fortified sites are known only from the territory of the Kingdom of Israel west of the Jordan, from north Transjordan and from the Bashan. No wonder that the site’s excavators identified it as the capital of the Kingdom of Geshur, and


8. For architectural synchronisms between et-Tell and North Israelite sites, see Finkelstein 2000:125; 2011:237-238.
their suggestion was accepted by other scholars (Ma’oz 1992:996; Na’aman 2002:205-207; Hess 2004:49-59; Finkelstein and Silberman 2006:110).

Before proceeding to analyze the site and its environment, I shall examine in brief the site of Abel-Beth-Maacah, the capital of the Kingdom of Beth Maacah (see 2 Sam 10,6) mentioned side by side with Geshur in Dtr texts (Deut 3,14; Josh 12,5; 13,11.13).

The city of Abel is commonly identified at Tell Abil al-Qamḥ, a large mound located about seven kilometers northwest of Tel Dan. The 14 hectare site lies on a high plateau overlooking the northern Huleh Valley near the Bareight River (Nahal ‘Ayoun), a tributary of the Jordan River (Dever 1986).

Eran Arie’s recently published analysis of the pottery and history of Tel Dan (2008) provides the key for clarifying the history of the Kingdom of Beth Maacah. In light of the archaeological material published so far from the Tel Dan excavations, he demonstrated that the site was poorly settled in the early Iron IIa (mid-10th-mid 9th centuries BCE, according to the “modified conventional chronology”) and was rebuilt by Hazael, King of Aram, after he conquered the area. Hazael erected his stele at Tel Dan in order to commemorate his victories and inaugurate the centre he built in the place (Arie 2008:34-36). According to his analysis (Arie 2008:34-38), it was Hazael who conquered and annexed the two Aramean neighbouring kingdoms of Geshur and Beth Maacah. In his words: “Hazael may have constructed Dan as a new centre for the former area of the southern Aramaean kingdoms of Geshur and Maacah, which he united and annexed to his new kingdom of Aram Damascus.”

In light of this study, the coupling of the kingdoms of Geshur and (Beth) Maacah in biblical historiography becomes clear. Tell Abil al-Qamḥ and et-Tell are the most prominent Iron IIa mounds located in the ninth century BCE east of the Kingdom of Israel’s border. The strength and prosperity of the latter was demonstrated by the site’s excavations, whereas the state of affairs in the former site cannot be established. The two sites were the seats of local Aramean dynasties that ruled their respective kingdoms and were conquered and annexed by Hazael in the third quarter of the ninth century. The memory of the two westernmost Aramean kingdoms situated along the eastern border of the Kingdom of Israel was memorized for a long time. When the history of Israel was composed in writing, the two former Aramean


10. Line 2 of Hazael’s stele may be restored as follows (Biran and Naveh 1995: 12-15; Lemaire 1998:3-4; Na’aman 2000: 96): “[…] my father went up [against him when] he was fighting at Abel? (ḥbh lhmḥ b’b[f]).” The text possibly refers to an attack of Hazael’s father on the king of Israel when the latter besieged Abel. Provided that the restoration (admittedly uncertain) is correct, it indicates that until this date, Abel-Beth-Maacah was an independent city.
kingdoms were integrated into the description as separate, non-conquered entities, located near the border of the Israelite tribal inheritances.

Establishing the location of Geshur’s capital at et-Tell enables us to posit general outlines for its territory, population, economy and commerce. Geshur was a city-state whose territory spread along the Sea of Galilee up to the Jarmuk River in the south and up to an unknown location south of Tel Dan in the north. Its territory included a narrow strip of plain on its western side and vast highland areas, including the Golan plateau on its east. Tel Dover (Kh ad-Duweir), located southeast of the Sea of Galilee near the Jarmuk River, where an Iron I-IIa small settlement was unearthed, might have marked the southern border of the kingdom (Wolff 1998:775a; Rapuano 2001:19*-20*). The surveys conducted in the Golan Heights (see Epstein—Gutman 1972) show that, side by side with et-Tell, there were only a few other settlements in Geshur’s territory—among them Tel ’En Gev (Mazar et al. 1964; Kochavi 1996:192-193; Kochavi and Tsukimoto 2008; Hasegawa 2010:97-101) and Tel Soreq (Kochavi 1989:6-9; 1996:188-189). Geshur’s economy was mainly based on a combination of agriculture, pasture and fishing. Two east-west routes passed near the kingdom’s borders, Darb el-Hawarneh in the south and the road leading to the Acco plain in the north. Commerce must have played an important role in the economy of the kingdom. Internal and external transportation was carried out by land and sea.11

What was the name of the city located at et-Tell? To answer this question, we must first clearly distinguish between Aramean kingdoms that are called by the name of a real or legendary ancestor (e.g., Beth Rehob, Beth Maacah, Bīt Agusi, Bīt Adini, Bīt Gabbari) and kingdoms called by other names. Aram Damascus and Aram Zobah are called by the names of their respective capitals, Damascus and ʻubab/ʻubiti (Na’aman 1999; Fales 2002; Bagg 2007:233-234). In this light, I suggest that Geshur was the name of the city located at et-Tell and that given the city’s prominence, the kingdom was called by its name.12 The derivation of the kingdom’s name from the root *gtr (“to be strong”) and its meaning “stronghold, fortress” fits nicely the exceptional strength of the city walls (between six and eight meters width). LaRuba, Ba’il’s stronghold, was possibly the ancient name of Kh. el-ʻAshiq/Tel ’En Gev, the fortified settlement located about 13 kilometers south of et-Tell (Na’aman 2002:206).

11. An illuminating example of et-Tell’s commerce is the name zkryw written on a jar handle discovered in the excavations (see Hess 2004:55). According to Arav (1999b:88), the stamp is identical to an eighth century stamp on a jar discovered at Tel Dan (Biran 1994:255). Petrographic analysis may demonstrate whether the jar was made and stamped in one of these cities, or rather was made in a third place and exported to both of them.

12. Contrary to the commonly held opinion, Lipiński (2006:238-243, 252-253) suggested that Leshem was the ancient name of et-Tell (Behsaida) and that Geshur and Maacah were interchanging names of the kingdom located east of the Sea of Galilee.
Conclusions

The article demonstrates that—in marked contrast to the conclusions of Pakkala—we do in fact know quite a lot about the Aramean Kingdom of Geshur. The main source for this analysis is the archaeological excavations and surveys conducted in the Golan Heights and the coastal strip of land east of the Lake of Galilee. Pakkala ignored this source, apparently because he adheres to the obsolete idea that history is what can be learned from the written sources alone. In reality, archaeological research is the key for establishing the location of the kingdom’s capital, its territory, population, economy and commercial relations. The written sources complement and corroborate the archaeological data.

The Kingdom of Geshur was probably established in about the mid-tenth century BCE and existed through the third quarter of the ninth century, when it was annexed by Hazael, king of Aram. It was a city-state of the kind known from Late Bronze Age documents. The small entity was ruled by a king who lived in his capital city, Geshur, where all civil and sacred institutions were concentrated (as indicated by the excavations). The territory under his domain included a few villages and hamlets, as well as agricultural and pastural lands and a strip of coast suitable for fishing and naval transportation.

The way Geshur (and Maacah as well) was memorialized in biblical historiography and how it was integrated into the early history of Israel is an exemplary case of the ways late Judahite scribes have memorialized the ancient reality hundreds of years after it disappeared from the political arena. Geshur was located on the northern border of the Kingdom of Israel, far away from Jerusalem, and yet the late scribes still remembered that it was a separate entity, on par with Maacah, and hence differed from other neighbouring districts enumerated side by side with it. A Judahite scribe integrated Geshur into the history of David—a description that might have had a germ of authentic historical memory, although there is no way to verify it. What was unclear to the Jerusalemite scribes is the geographical reality in the far north. Hence, they integrated Geshur (and Maacah) in an inaccurate geographical manner.

Pakkala (2010: 173) concluded his article by emphasizing that many historical works deal inadequately with the biblical texts. His article on Geshur is a case in point.
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