



AŠŠURBANIPAL

AŠŠURBANIPAL (Aššur-bāni-apal, lit. “Aššur has given a son-heir”), son of [Assarhaddon](#), king of Assyria 666-25 B.C., known as Sardanapal by the classical authors. He was the last great monarch of Assyria and during his reign the empire reached the summit of its power, though at the same time exhibiting clear symptoms of impending dislocation and fall. Here only Aššurbanipal’s relations with the Cimmerians and Lydians, and the Medians and the Persians are discussed. (See [Assyria, i.](#))

The Cimmerians (Gimirru) had entered Assyria about 700 B.C. but were stopped by Assarhaddon and so turned towards Lydia (Luddu). The king of Lydia, Gyges (Gūgu, Guggu), who had founded the Mermandes dynasty (Herodotus 1.7ff.), following the advice of the god Aššur in a dream, sent a delegation to Aššurbanipal (*Annals* II, 95ff.) to ask for assistance. The Assyrians, who had never heard of the Lydians and their incomprehensible language necessitating interpreters, granted their request (ca. 665 B.C.) and the Cimmerians were beaten and two of their chiefs were sent to Nineveh together with a large booty (*Annals*, *ibid.*). It is, however, not quite certain that the Assyrians did indeed lend substantial help, and subsequent events point to Gyges’ being disillusioned with them. As a matter of fact, twelve years later, Gyges took sides with Psammetic (Pišamelki/Tušamelki) of Egypt and the other anti-Assyrian conspirators and broke the alliance. Aššurbanipal cursed him and when Lydia was conquered by the Barbarians, Assyria rejoiced (ca. 652-50; *Annals* II, 116ff.). We do not know if it was Assyrians or Barbarians who finally defeated the troops of king Tugdamme (Dugdamis; thus rather



than Lugdamis, Strabo 1.3.21), chief of the Umman-Manda (here Cimmerians rather than Medians). The son of Gyges, Ardys (not mentioned in the Assyrian sources) succeeded his father (625?-15?). He took Priene and made war upon Milet, but the Cimmerians, driven from their homes by Scythian nomads, returned and captured all Sardis except the citadel (Herodotus 1.15). Frightened out of his wits, Ardys told Aššurbanipal, “You cursed my father and bad luck befell him; but bless me, your humble servant, and I will carry your yoke” (*Annals* II, 123). Lydia was saved once more—by own resources or Assyrian aid is not known—and the Cimmerians were finally thrown out of Asia by Ardys’ grandson Alyattes (Herodotus 1,16). Lydia was to survive Assyria, but eventually clashed with the Medians and was conquered by Cyrus the Great in about 546 B.C.

The Assyrian sources keep rather silent about Iranians during the reign of Aššurbanipal, which may or may not indicate that Assyria was less preoccupied with them than during the reign of Assarhaddon. Following a campaign against Manna (660 B.C.), Aššurbanipal’s troops entered the territory of a certain Birizḫatri (possibly OIr. *Brz(a)-xwāθra “of exalted happiness”), “chief of Media” (*Ḥazānu ša Mat-a-a*; *Cylinder B, Annals* III, 102), whom they vanquished as well as Pariḫia and sarati (cf. Scythian Saratos?), the sons of Gāgi (cf. the biblical Gōg = Scythians?), who were chiefs (*ḥazānu*) of seventy-five fortified villages (*alānī*). These events probably took place in 660-58.

After the conquest of Susa and the decisive and complete defeat of Elam (646/640) the Assyrians entered the land of Cyrus (Kuraš), king of Parsumaš and Anzan. Cyrus, who sided with the Elamite rebels, was forced to submit and give his son Arukku (never again mentioned) as hostage to Assyria. After Cyrus had offered his allegiance, a certain Pizlume or Pizlame, “king of Ḥudimiri, a distant land, extending beyond Elam,” seemingly for the first time sent emissaries to Aššur with gifts. Yet, the territory of Ḥudimiri was not entirely unknown to the Assyrians as Bēl-ibni (governor of the Low-land and opponent of Nabû-bēl-šumāte) knew that Nabû-bēl-šumāte had at one point fled to Ḥukimeri, read Ḥudimeri (Weidner, *Archivfür Orientkunde* 7, pp. 1ff.; R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters*, Chicago, 1892-1914, nos. 83, 521). Since it was not until Cyrus’ submission that Pizlume began to worry one may surmise that his kingdom extended beyond Parsumaš, and if Ḥudimeri is Elamite and means **uddu meri* “after the exit,” it may designate the exit immediately beyond the straits of Ḥūrān (Clarence Strait) and so the isle of



Hormoz or part of the littoral towards Bandar ‘Abbās. It is hardly likely that the ill-fated attack of Phraortes (Fravarti) on Nineveh (Herodotus 1,102) belongs to the reign of Aššurbanipal. More probably Phraortes was confused with Kaštariti (see [Assarhaddon](#)). Only after the death of Aššurbanipal, about 623-20, under Aššur-etil-ilani or Sîn-šar-iškun, is such an attack thinkable. After Aššurbanipal’s death (maybe in 625), Assyria only existed for ten years. In 619 the Median army of Cyaxares (Huvaxštra) took Aššur, and in 612, abetted by the Babylonians, also Nineveh. The city was completely destroyed and transformed into a desert where “all animals in flocks, even the pelican, even the bittern will pass the night in its cornices,” as the god had prophesied (Sophonias 2,13,15).

A tablet from the library of Aššurbanipal contains one of the earliest mentions of the god Miθra (Mi-it-ra). He is there equated with Šamaš, the Akkadian Sun god (Rawlinson, *CIWA* III, 69 no. 5 = *CT* XXV, 25; 25; Jensen, *KAT*², p. 486).

[Figure 54](#). Assyria and its neighbors under Assarhaddon and Aššurbanipal.

See also [ASSARHADDON](#).

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See also G. G. Cameron, *History of Early Iran*, New York, 1968, s.v. Ashurbanipal; and *Camb. Hist. Iran* II, s.v. Aššurbānapli.

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