



# ASSYRIA II. ACHAEMENID AΘURĀ

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## ASSYRIA

### ii. Achaemenid Aθurā

Old Persian Aθurā “Assyria” goes back to Akkadian Aššur, the name of the city of Aššur and of the original Assyrian territory on the middle course of the Tigris (cf. Aramaic ʾtwr, Greek Assyria). It is mentioned in the Achaemenid inscriptions among the countries forming part of the Persian empire, usually in the following sequence: Bābirruš, Aθurā, Arabāya, Mudrāya (Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt). Old Persian Aθurā corresponds to Akkadian <sup>māt</sup>E-bir nāri “the Land across the River [Euphrates],” i.e., Syria, in the Babylonian version on Dsf 23, which proves that in the official usage of Persian chancelleries the name Aθurā referred to Syria. This is not contradicted by the fact that in other Achaemenian inscriptions (DB, DNa, DPe, DSe, XPh, etc.), as well as in the Elamite versions, the Old Persian Aθurā is rendered as <sup>māt</sup>Áš-šur<sup>KI/h</sup> Áš-šu-ra “Assyria.” In the Egyptian versions of the Achaemenid inscriptions Aθurā corresponds to Eshur “Assyria,” but in Demotic texts this name designates Syria. After the collapse of the Assyrian empire at the end of the 7th century B.C., its original territory became part of Media, and the name of Assyria was gradually transferred to Syria. This could be explained by the fact that the remnants of the Assyrian army retreated onto Syrian territory, there to suffer final defeat. Greek authors, following the Persians, usually give



the name of Assyria to Syria, regarding the latter as a contraction of “Assyria.” Herodotus, however, makes no distinction between Assyria and Babylonia and calls Babylon the capital of the Assyrians and at times gives the name of Assyrians to the Babylonians themselves (e.g. Herodotus 3.155). In Herodotus Assyria is not the designation of a Persian administrative province but a geographical term, apparently for the whole of Mesopotamia. The Persians spread the name of the city of Babylon, which also designated the country of Babylonia, to the whole of Mesopotamia. Following Persian usage, the Greeks gave to the Babylonian satrapy the name of Babylonia, and sometimes (erroneously) that of Assyria. (See also *Āsōristān*.)

In 535 B.C. Cyrus II created a single province out of Babylonia and “the land across the River,” i.e., countries situated to the west of the Euphrates (Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine). Thus the Assyrian geographical term *Ebēr-nāri* (Aramaic *Abar-naharā*, cf. Greek *péran Euphrátou* “beyond the Euphrates” in Gadatas’ inscription from Asia Minor, ed. Cousin and G. Deschamps, *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 13, 1889, p. 530), which had served to designate Syria, became a political concept in Achaemenid times. The first satrap of Babylonia and of “the Land across the River” was a Persian named Gubaru, and towards March 520 B.C. this office was occupied by the Persian Uštani. However, towards the year 516 B.C. Darius I divided this enormous satrapy into two. Uštani was appointed satrap of Babylonia, and Tattenai satrap of “the Land across the River.” In the list given by Herodotus these countries appear as different satrapies, namely, Babylonia and “the rest of Assyria” (3.92) forming the ninth satrapy, and the lands beyond the river (3.91) being the fifth satrapy, which paid a yearly tribute of 350 talents of silver. This latter satrapy also included Cyprus.

The Persepolis fortification tablets (ed. R. T. Hallock, Chicago, 1969) belonging to the years 509-494 B.C. mention *Aššuriyap* (from *Aššuriya-ip*, Elamite plural) “Assyrians.” These worked as part of the palace economy in various districts of southwestern Iran. They were evidently Syrians, for workers from Mesopotamia are called in the same documents *Bapilip* “Babylonians.” The Achaemenid reliefs in Persepolis, Naqš-e Rostam, etc., have preserved the figures of representatives of the country of Aθurā.



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