



ASTYAGES

ASTYAGES, the last Median king. The name is attested in Greek as Astuágēs (so Herodotus, etc.) and Astuígas or Astuigās (in Photius' excerpts of Ctesias F9J.) and in Babylonian as Iš-tu-me-gu. These forms are now commonly assumed to reflect an Old Iranian form *Ršti-vaiga- "swinging the spear, lance-hurler" (see, recently, È. A. Grantovskiĭ, *Rannyaya istoriya iranskikh plemyon perednei Azii*, Moscow, 1970, pp. 330f.; M. Mayrhofer, *Onomastica Persepolitana*, Vienna, 1973, p. 171 no. 8.684; W. Hinz, *Altiranisches Sprachgut der Nebenüberlieferungen*, Wiesbaden, 1975, p. 208). The common Greek form is obviously transformed by popular etymology (cf. Greek *ástu* "town, city" and *ágnumi* "break" and the compounds in *-agēs*). Whether Elamite Iš-ti-/Ir-iš-ti-man-ka, attested several times in the Persepolis fortification tablets, belongs here is disputed (cf. Mayrhofer, loc. cit., and Hinz, op. cit., pp. 207 and 208).

Astyages, son of Cyaxares, brother-in-law of the Lydian king Croesus (Herodotus 1.73.2) by marriage with his sister, Alyattes' daughter Aryenis (ibid., 1.74.4), became king after his father's death (ibid., 1.107.1) and reigned according to Herodotus (1.130.1) 35 years, probably 584-550 B.C. He was the father of Mandane, the subsequent wife of Cambyses (ibid., 1.107.1-2), and so became the grandfather of the Persian ruler Cyrus II the Great (ibid., 1.75.1), who deposed him about 550 B.C.

In the story reported by Herodotus (especially 1.107-130; cf. Justin 1.4f.), who followed the accounts of the Harpagids in Lycia (the descendants of the Median general Harpagus), Cyrus (whose childhood and youth are described in a very fantastic way) was incited to rebellion against Astyages by this



Harpagus (in Nicolaus of Damascus F 66 J. we find the Persian Oebaras in this role). Cyrus then appointed himself chief of the Persians, some of whom yearned for freedom from the rule of the Medes. In the end Astyages was defeated and taken prisoner by Cyrus (Herodotus 1.128.3), who did him no harm up to his death (ibid. 1.130.3). According to Ctesias F 9 J., whose account of Astyages is on the whole very unreliable, he was murdered by Cyrus' servant Oebaras without the king's knowledge, when brought to the royal court from Barcania, where he presumably had been satrap in the meantime (cf. Justin 1.6.16).

The only classical sources on the struggle between Astyages and Cyrus itself are Nicolaus of Damascus F 66 J. (following Ctesias) and Justin 1.6.7-16. They report that there were three battles in all: Cyrus and his Persian army were twice defeated and put to flight and victorious only in the third battle, in the mountains near Pasargadae. No mention of this war is made in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. However, an authentic contemporary account of these events is given, unfortunately in a very short form, in two inscriptions of the Babylonian king Nabonidus (Na-bū-nā'id). In 553-52 B.C. (Nabonidus' third year), Cyrus, king of Anzan, vassal of Astyages, king of the Umman-manda (i.e., the Medes), advanced against his lord; in 550-49 B.C. (Nabonidus' sixth year) Astyages' army mutinied, and the king was captured and handed over to Cyrus, who took him as a prisoner to his homeland and carried off the gold, silver, and other treasures from Ecbatana (cf. the prophecy to Nabonidus by the god Marduk on the Abu Habba cylinder inscription, col. I, ll. 28f. and the Nabonidus chronicle, col. II, ll. 1f., both texts in S. Smith, *Babylonian Historical Texts*, London, 1924, pp. 44f. and 110f.). With the fall of Ecbatana Media ceased to be an independent and leading nation and was ruled by the Persians.

The ancient sources report almost nothing about Astyages' reign, and a final judgment on his character is not possible, since Herodotus' negative account (Astyages is represented as a cruel and despotic ruler) and Ctesias' favorable one, are both biased (cf. also the words of Aeschylus, *Persae* 766f. about the last king before Cyrus, who is not mentioned by name).



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