



## CIMMERIANS

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**CIMMERIANS**, a nomadic people, most likely of Iranian origin, who flourished in the 8th-7th centuries b.c.e.

*The name.* The English form is ultimately derived from Gk. *Kimmérioi* via Lat. *Cimmerii*. In Assyrian and Babylonian sources various forms are found: *Gamir*, *Gamir-(r)a*, *Gi-mir-a-a*, *Gi-mir-ra-a-a*, and so on (see, e.g. Parpola, 1970a, pp. 122-33; cf. Pinches, p. 611). The Hebrew Bible (Genesis 10:2, Ezekiel 38:6) has *gmr*, masoretic *Gómär* (erroneously assimilated to *Gómär*, name of the wife of Hosea (Hosea 1:3; D'yakonov, 1981, p. 109 no. 12); in the Septuagint the forms *Gámer* (Genesis) and *Gómer* (Ezekiel) are used (cf. Josephus, *Antiquitates Iudaicae* 1.123: *Gómaros*, and 1.126: *Gomareís*), and the Vulgate has *Gomer* (cf. also Ezekiel 27.17: *gmdym* [read *gmrym*?; cf. Lagarde, p. 367], Jeremiah 25.25: *zmry* [read *gmry*?; cf. D'yakonov, 1981, p. 112]). I. M. D'yakonov attributes the variation *a/i* in the first syllable of the word to vowel gradation (see below). It is possible that the name was preserved in Arm. *Garmik'*, referring to [Cappadocia](#) south of the river Halys (Adontz, pp. 316ff.; D'yakonov, 1981, p. 111; cf., however, Nöldeke, p. 324).

*Origin.* The first mention of Cimmerians in western sources is in *The Odyssey* of Homer (11.14), where they are described as inhabitants of the opposite side of the Oceanus river surrounding the earth, a country forever deprived of sunshine, thus at the entrance to the kingdom of Hades, toward which Odysseus sails to obtain an oracle from the soul of the seer Teiresias. The western Greeks very early localized Odysseus's wanderings to the seas around Italy and Sicily and placed the Cimmerians around Lake Avernus near Cumae



in Campania; near Avernus there was an ancient oracle of the dead, and, because of its physical peculiarities, the lake was considered to be one of the entrances to Hades (Ephorus [ca. 405-330 b.c.e.], in Jacoby, *Fragmente*, no. 70, fr. 134; Strabo, 5.4.5). Nearly all authors of the Hellenistic and Roman periods looked at the Cimmerians through the prism of the Homeric evidence; specifically it is often used to date Homer. The fictive identification of the Cimmerians with the Celtic (or Germanic) tribe of the Cimbri, made by Poseidonius (128-45 b.c.e.), ultimately depended on this evidence (Jacoby, *Fragmente*, no. 87, fr. 31).

Nevertheless, prevailing opinion among the ancients was that the Cimmerians had once inhabited the steppes on the northern shore of the Black Sea. The first surviving evidence of this view is found in the poem *Arimaspaea* by Aristaeas of Proconnesus (ca. 550 b.c.e.), in which the Scythians are said to have driven the Cimmerians from their country in southern Russia (Bernabé, p. 151, fr. 2; cf. Herodotus, 4.11-13; cf. 1.15, 1.103-04, 4.1, 7.20). According to Herodotus (4.11-12), the Cimmerian aristocrats, reluctant to abandon their homeland, killed one another and were buried in a tumulus beside the river Tyres (modern Dniester), after which the common people migrated to “Asia” to escape the Scythians, proceeding along the Black Sea coast of Caucasia (see [caucasus i. geography, population, and economy](#)) to the peninsula of Sinope and leaving traces in the form of toponyms on the shores of the Cimmerian Bosphorus. The idea that the Black Sea steppes had been the former homeland of the Cimmerians was probably already current at the beginning of the period of the Ionian colonization of Scythia, in the second part of the 7th century b.c.e. Initially two different versions about the starting point of the Cimmerian flight were current among the colonists, that of the Tyrirts and that of the Bosphorans. Later these were combined by the historians, as in the work of Herodotus. Later authors, influenced by the large number of “Cimmerian toponyms” in the region of the Bosphorus, connected the Cimmerians mainly with that region (see, e.g., Strabo, 1.1.10, 1.2.9, 3.2.12, 7.4.3, 11.2.5). Probably it was before the time of Herodotus that reports about the Cimmerians on the northern shores of the Black Sea were connected with the evidence in *The Odyssey*; it seemed natural to consider that Homer had depicted this cold northern country in poetic imagery as deprived of sunshine and near Hades (Strabo, 1.1.10; 1.2.9).

This opinion has been accepted by the majority of scholars in modern times. Archeologists have logically concluded that finds dating from before the



appearance of the Scythians (i.e., the culture of Scythian type) in southern Russia must be Cimmerian. Especially since A. I. Terenozhkin published his work on these pre-Scythian finds, Soviet archeologists, as well as many from abroad, have identified a nomadic culture that flourished mainly in the Ukraine during the period of transition from the Bronze to the Iron Age as that of the Cimmerians. Two chronological phases have been recognized: Chernaya Gora (ca. 900-750 b.c.e.) and Novocherkassk (ca. 750-700 b.c.e.; for this dating see Il'inskaya and Terenozhkin, p. 19; for a more convincing dating of the second phase to the 9th-8th centuries, see Kossak, pp. 35ff., 84).

Some scholars, however, have considered the classical tradition to be imaginary, pointing, for example, to glaring errors in Herodotus's narrative, for example, his report (4.11) that the Cimmerians had fled eastward from the Scythians, who were in fact coming from the east, and his report of the troops' march along the Caucasian shore of the Black Sea, which would have been impassable if they were coming directly from the strait of Kerch (D'yakonov, 1981, pp. 135-36). Karl Müllenhoff (pp. 19-31) argued that the location of the Cimmerians on the north shore of the Black Sea was based solely on an attempt at rationalization of the Homeric evidence by the Greeks, citing the Avernian location as an analogy (see also, Rohde, pp. 99-100; Aly, pp. 122-23; Cozzoli, p. 67 et passim). Nevertheless, it seems that this interpretation could have had only secondary importance in the evolution of the classical tradition; it is significant that there are no legends about Odysseus's wanderings on the Black Sea, in contrast to the western Mediterranean. More important is archeological evidence that both shores of the strait, as well as the lower Dniester, were largely uninhabited from the 10th century b.c.e. until the arrival of the Scythians, the period of the Novocherkassk culture previously associated with the Cimmerians (Vinogradov, pp. 370ff.; Tokhtas'ev, 1984a, pp. 142-43). It is clear that the Greeks ascribed to the Cimmerians a tumulus beside the river Tyres, just as, for example, they ascribed various ancient buildings to the half-mythical Pelasgians (cf. Uslar, p. 277; D'yakonov, 1956, p. 239). A similar interpretation was given to some ruins that were reminiscent of defensive structures, *Kimméria teíkhea* ("Cimmerian fortifications"; Herodotus, 4.12; Tokhtas'ev, 1984b, pp. 144-45). Excavators of the Bosporan settlement Kimmerikon (late 6th century b.c.e.-3rd century c.e.) discovered a stratum dated to the second half of the 2nd millennium b.c.e., which had been disturbed by Greek colonists (Kruglikova; for dating, see Sharafutdinova, pp. 115-16); the name of the later settlement is evidence that the Greeks considered these antiquities to be Cimmerian. The assertion that Cimmerians



had lived there was founded partly on findings of this sort and was reflected in the name of another locality on the Bosphorus, *Kimmeriē khórē* (“Cimmerian land”; Herodotus, 4.12; cf. Tokhtas'ev, 1984b, pp. 142ff.). Just as the Thracian Bosphorus received its name from adjoining Thrace, the Cimmerian Bosphorus took its name from Cimmeria.

Confidence in the classical tradition was finally shaken by the fact that no artifacts of the Novocherkassk type have been found in the Transcaucasian, Near Eastern, or Anatolian regions connected with later Cimmerian activity (see below). Only artifacts of early Scythian type have been found in those areas (Kossak, pp. 47-48, 63, 66, 67; D'yakonov, 1981, pp. 133ff.; Kleiner et al., pp. 94, 135ff.). The most ancient such finds (probably from the end of the 9th century b.c.e.) were discovered in Tuva (southern Siberia). In the second half of the 8th century the bearers of this culture were moving westward. One group reached the land that is now Bulgaria; another halted in northern Caucasia and at the same time partly penetrated into Transcaucasia and, in the 7th century, as far as Anatolia. This last group is to be identified with the Cimmerians of the written sources (for material, see Il'inskaya and Terenozhkin, pp. 18-86; Murzin; for chronology, see Kossak, pp. 25ff. and passim).

As the Cimmerians cannot be differentiated archeologically from the Scythians, it is possible to speculate about their Iranian origins. In the Neo-Babylonian texts (according to D'yakonov, including at least some of the Assyrian texts in Babylonian dialect) *Gimirri* and similar forms designate the Scythians and Central Asian Saka, reflecting the perception among inhabitants of Mesopotamia that Cimmerians and Scythians represented a single cultural and economic group (D'yakonov, 1981, pp. 118ff.; Dandamayev, pp. 95-105). Unfortunately, the proposed etymologies of the names of Cimmerian kings—*Teušpa*, *Tug/k/Dúg/k-dam-mi-i*, and *Sa-an-dak-KUR-ru* (read *Sandakšatru?*)—are not completely reliable, though they could be Iranian (D'yakonov, 1981, pp. 112 n. 20, 116-17 n. 30; cf. Mayrhofer, pp. 187ff.). The ingenious etymology proposed for the ethnonym itself, from Iranian *\*gāmīra-/\*gmīra-* “mobile unit” (D'yakonov, 1981, pp. 131-32), cannot be verified, but no other satisfactory suggestion has been put forward. The widely held opinion that the Cimmerians were of Thracian origin depends in fact only on the confused information of Strabo: “The Cimmerians, who are also called Treres, or some people of them” (1.3.21); “. . . Treres, a Cimmerian people” (14.1.40). In all other references, however, Strabo and other authors treated Treres and Cimmerians



as separate peoples (cf. Strabo, 1.3.21, 12.3.24, 12.8.7, and 13.4.8; cf. [Callisthenes](#), in Jacoby, *Fragmente*, no. 124, fr. 29; for more detail, see Cozzoli, pp. 75ff). Some scholars have considered the word *árgillai* “underground dwellings,” which Ephorus applied to the habitations of the Avernian Cimmerians, as of Thracian origin, but those Cimmerians were not directly related to the historical people (see above); the same word, attested this time as a Greek word, has a convincing Greek etymology (cf. Chantraine, p. 103).

*Cimmerians in Transcaucasia and the Near East.* According to intelligence reports sent to the Assyrian king Sargon II between 720 and 714 b.c.e., King Rusā I of Urarṭu marched his troops to *KUR Gamir(ra)* “land of the Cimmerians” but was defeated (Parpola, 1987, nos. 30-32; Lanfranchi and Parpola, nos. 92, 144, 174; Deller, pp. 98ff.); a modern attempt at more precise dating of these events to August-September 714 (Lanfranchi) is hardly convincing. *KUR Gamir(ra)* was reliably localized by D’yakonov on the territory of modern Georgia, most probably in its central part (D’yakonov, 1984, pp. 90, 175 n. 253; idem, 1981, p. 108; idem and Kashkai, p. 71); the opposing view of Mirjo Salvini (pp. 45-46) and his arguments for a location south or southeast of lake Urmia do not seem well founded. It is in central Georgia that archeologists have found the greatest concentration of materials of the Scythian type (D’yakonov, 1981, p. 135; Esayan and Pogrebova, p. 20 map), the earliest dating from about 700 b.c.e. (Kossak, pp. 43-48). The Homeric evidence for the Cimmerians (see above) was apparently drawn from a more ancient Greek epic, *Argonautica* (see Von der Mühl, pp. 148ff.), which may have recorded the actual presence of Cimmerians in the general region immediately to the east of [Colchis](#) in the 8th century b.c.e.

According to another Assyrian intelligence report (Lanfranchi and Parpola, no. 145; Deller, no. 2.1), Cimmerians did invade Urarṭu from the territory of Mannea (the country south of Lake Urmia); the document is datable to the same years (720-14 b.c.e.), but, as the context differs from that of Rusā’s campaign against the “country of Cimmerians,” it is probable that it deals with a different phase of the conflict.

Transcaucasia was in fact the base from which Cimmerian troops marched, probably until the beginning of the reign of [Aššurbanipal](#) (668-ca. 625 b.c.e.). In 679 the Cimmerian king Teušpa was defeated by the Assyrians near the city Ғhubušnu (perhaps in Cappadocia; see, e.g., Borger, pp. 33 l. 18, 51 l. 43, 100 l. 23; Heidel, p. 14, col. 2 ll. 1-3; Grayson, p. 125, chron. 14.9); in the same year Cimmerian detachments of individual soldiers (probably captives) were



serving in the Assyrian army (D'yakonov, 1984, p. 175 no. 259; idem, 1981, p. 113). In 675 they were present on the border of Mannea (Fales and Lanfranchi; cf. Starr, no. 269) and in about 667 on Mannean territory (Parpola, 1983, p. 420). Šubria (the country west of Lake Van) was perhaps subject to invasion by the Cimmerians in about 672-69 (Starr, no. 18, referring to an alliance with Urartu. In the period of the Median revolt against Assyria (ca. 674-72) even Parsuā (west of Media; Starr, no. 39, 40) and probably Ellipi (between Media and Elam, Starr, nos. 79, 80; cf. nos. 65, 97) were open to attack by the Cimmerians, who were allies of the Medes (cf. Starr, nos. 36, 43, 45, 48, 50, 51, pp. lxi-lxii; Parpola, 1983, pp. 192-93 and n. 196). Cimmerians were serving as contingents in the Assyrian army in 671-70 (Starr, nos. 139, 142, 144, p. lxiii).

*Cimmerians in Anatolia.* Strabo (1.3.21) synchronized the suicide of King Midas of Phrygia with the invasion of his country by the Cimmerians. Owing to contradictory and dubious reports about the date of Midas's death, however, it is impossible to date this event more precisely than 700-675 b.c.e. The apparent synchronism most likely results from chronographic speculations, in which ancient and popular conceptions about Midas and Homer as contemporaries were connected with the no less widely accepted synchronism between Homer and the Cimmerian invasion. Other evidence about the arrival of the Cimmerians in Phrygia (Stephanus Byzantius, s.v. *Syassós*) offers no grounds for dating. An Assyrian oracular text of 676-60 b.c.e. has been interpreted as referring to a conjectural alliance between the Cimmerians and Phrygians against Melitene, *URU Melīdi* (modern Eski Malatya in eastern Turkey; Starr, no. 1, cf. pp. lvii-lviii; see also Starr, no. 17, a document probably related to the same events, mentioning Cimmerians in the same connection with Cilicians). It is equally difficult to determine when the Cimmerians appeared in the region of Sinope (Ehrhardt, pp. 55, 326ff.). As noted above, Cimmerians were defeated by Assyrians in eastern Anatolia as early as 679 b.c.e., but in the reign of Esarhaddon (680-69 b.c.e.) they remained active, mainly on the northern and eastern borders of Assyria. The first reliable information about their permanent establishment in Anatolia is from the early reign of Aššurbanipal: in about 665 they attacked Lydia but were defeated by King Gyges, with Aššurbanipal's support (Cogan and Tadmor, p. 84; Spalinger, p. 402). In the spring of 657 the Assyrians expected the Cimmerians to march against Lydia, probably from eastern Anatolia (apparently from Cappadocia, which was their base; cf. Arm. *Gamirk'*), whence they also exercised "hegemony" over at least a part of Syria (Parpola, 1970b, nos. 110, 300; idem, 1983, pp. 307ff.). In 644 they defeated the Lydians and took Sardis, the Lydian



capital; Gyges died during this battle. It is possible that, when the Treres and the Lycians seized Sardis once again in 637, the Cimmerians were their allies (Spalinger, pp. 406-09; Cogan and Tadmor, pp. 78-79 nos. 25, 84).

In the 640s, under the leadership of King Lygdamis (Akkad. Dugdammē) and sometimes in alliance with the Treres under King Kobos, the Cimmerians attacked the Greek city-states of Ionia and Aeolis (Herodotus, 1.6; Callimachus, *Hymn to Diana* 255ff.; Welles, no. 7; Strabo, 1.3.21, 3.2.12, 11.2.5; Kleiner et al., pp. 135ff.). They were also active in Paphlagonia (Strabo, 1.3.21), especially in the region of Sinope (cf. above); in Bithynia (Arrian, in Jacoby, *Fragmente*, no. 156, frs. 60, 76; scholia in Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 1.1126; Heracleides Ponticus, in Wehrli, pp. 103-04, fr. 129); and in the Troad (Aristotle, in Stephenus Byzantius, s.v. *Antandros*; in Pliny, *Natural History* 5.123). In about 640 they tried to enter into an alliance with the state of Tabal, a faithless vassal of Assyria, and twice attacked the imperial forces; during the second campaign, in 640, Lygdamis was taken seriously ill and killed himself (according to Strabo, 1.3.21, he died in Cilicia), being succeeded by his son Sa-an-dak-KUR-ru (Thompson, 1933, pp. 88-89; idem, 1940, pp. 106-07 no. 33 l. 10-11, 109 no. 35 ll. 6-12; Millard, pp. 109-10; Cogan and Tadmor, pp. 80-81, 84; Spalinger, p. 407).

In the 630s or 620s b.c.e. the Scythian king Madyes defeated the Treres (Strabo, 1.3.21), probably in eastern Anatolia, and at the end of the 7th or beginning of the 6th century the Lydian king Alyattes defeated the Cimmerians (Herodotus, 1.16; Polyaeus, 7.2.1), after which nothing more was heard of them.

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