



## COSSAEANS

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**COSSAEANS** (Lat. *Cossaei*, Gk. *Kossaîoi* or *Kossaeans*), a tribe of mountain people settled in western Iran; their land was called *Cossaea/Kossaîa* (attested in Diodorus, 17.111.5; Strabo, 16.1.17; Stephanus Byzantius, s.v.). Although this ethnonym is frequently mentioned in classical sources, the ancient ethnographers, geographers, and historians seem to have had only a very limited knowledge of these people and their land, customs, and culture, for the information they provided is vague and contradictory. Stephanus Byzantius (following Strabo, 16) reported that the land of the Cossaeans was part of Persia (Strabo, 16.1.17: “bordering on [Persia] as far as the Caspian gates”; cf. Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.23.1), but in reality it must have been situated somewhere in the Zagros mountains between Media on the north and Susiana in the south. Strabo (11.12.4) located it beyond the Zagros mountains, which separated Media from Babylonia, but “above” Media. He also mentioned (11.13.6) the “Cossaeian [mountains]” (Gk. *tà Kossaîa*) as part of the eastern boundary of greater Media south of Ecbatana; Polycleitus had reported them as scarcely 1,000 stadia (i.e., 200 km) from the Euphrates (Strabo, 16.1.13). When the Persian kings went down from Ecbatana, where they usually spent the summer, into Babylonia they made gifts to the Cossaeans (perhaps actually a kind of toll; Strabo, 11.13.6; cf. Weissbach, who suggested that Babylonia is an error for Susa); their land must thus have been situated along the route. That information was confirmed by Diodorus (19.19.2), who said that the shortest route from lower Mesopotamia (specifically from Badakē on the Eulaeus River) to Ecbatana passed through the country of the Cossaeans. Their small, barren land was rough and mountainous, though the mountains were neither



very high nor very snowy and only moderately timbered (Polyaenus, 4.3.31; Strabo, 16.1.13, 17,18).

The Cossaeans were variously described as the eastern neighbors of the Susians by Pliny (*Natural History* 6.134; cf. Ptolemy, 6.3.3, who put them in the region of Susiana closest to Assyria); as neighbors of both the Medes (Nearchus apud Strabo 11.13.6; cf. Arrian, *Indica* 40.6) and the Uxians (Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.15.1); and as inhabitants of the mountains of Media by Diodorus (17.111.4; cf. Polybius, 5.44.7, who included them among barbarian tribes). They were mountain tribesmen described as powerful, predatory, and audacious brigands, occupied with continual raiding and uninterested in agriculture (Strabo, 11.13.6, 16.1.17-18). They lived in village strongholds (Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.15.2) or in caves and ate acorns, mushrooms, and the smoked flesh of wild animals (Diodorus, 19.19.3).

Like their neighbors they were warlike, admired for their strength and daring; most of them were archers (Strabo, 11.13.6, 16.1.18; Diodorus, 17.59.3, 17.111.4; Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.15.1, 23.1). According to Strabo, at some uncertain date 13,000 Cossaeon bowmen joined the Elymaeans in war against the Susians and the Babylonians (11.13.6, 16.1.18). F. Weissbach (col. 1501) considered this report erroneous because Susa was part of Elam, but the occurrence of such a conflict is by no means unlikely. It thus seems that the Cossaeans occasionally entered into military service: Diodorus reported that they fought in the left wing of the army of Darius III (336-31 b.c.e.) at the battle at [Arbela](#) in 331 b.c.e. (17.59.3; cf. Curtius Rufus, 4.12.10).

The Cossaeans had been autonomous since ancient times (Diodorus, 19.19.3) and had never accepted a foreign ruler: They remained unconquered and had a measure of autonomy during the entire period of the Persian empire (Diodorus, 17.111.4). They were finally compelled, however, to submit to [Alexander the Great](#), when, after the death of Hephaestion, he attacked them in the winter of 324-23 b.c.e. (Strabo, 11.13.6; Diodorus, 17.111.4-6; Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.15.1-3; cf. Plutarch, *Alexander* 72.4) and laid waste to most of their land in only forty days, slaying and capturing a great number of the inhabitants. A significant number of Cossaeans were included in the Persian army that Peucestas assembled in 323 b.c.e., shortly before Alexander's death (Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.23.1). Although Alexander is said to have founded cities at crucial points throughout Cossaea (Diodorus, 17.111.6; Arrian, *Indica* 40.8), they apparently had no lasting significance, for Antigonos I, when passing through it only four years later, in 317 b.c.e., was exposed to great dangers and



lost a considerable number of men (Diodorus, 19.19.4-8).

It was probably the Cossaeans, rather than the **Cissians**, who were the descendants of the Kassites, the ancient tribal people (Babylonian Kaššî) attested in cuneiform sources from the 18th century b.c.e. onward; they ruled Babylonia until driven out by the Assyrians in the 7th century b.c.e. and continued to inhabit the Zagros area on either side of the modern road from Baghdad to Kermānšāh during the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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For classical sources any current edition may be consulted.

J. A. Brinkman, “Kassiten,” *RIA* V, 1976-80, pp. 464-73. [F.] Weissbach, “Kossaîoi,” in Pauly-Wissowa, XI/2, cols. 1499-1503.