



CYAXARES

CYAXARES (Gk. *Kyaxárēs*, Herodotus' transcription of OIr. *^h*Uvaxštra*, a name rendered in Akkadian as ^m*Ú-ak-sa-tar*, ^m*Uk-sa-tar*, ^m*Ú-ma-ku-iš-tar*, in Elamite as *Ma-ki-iš-tur-ri*, *Ma-ak-iš-tar-ra* [-*m-* to be read (-*w-*)], Old Phrygian *ksuwaksaros*; the etymology is obscure; see *Iranisches Personennamenbuch* I/2, p. 27, V/4, p. 34, cf. p. 27: evidence in Lycian?), king of Media in the 6th century b.c.e.

The name is attested twice (Uksatar and Uaksatar, possibly the same person) among Median princes as early as the 8th century b.c.e. It was by no means a title, as argued, for example, by Walther Hinz, for Uksatar was mentioned as only one among a group of princes and chieftains who paid tribute to Sargon II of Assyria in 714; he was one of several from the “land of the river” (*ša nārti*; Grayson), which can hardly be identified with Ecbatana (OIr. **Hangmatāna*, Gk. *Agbátana*, *Ekbátana*, Hebrew *‘Aḥmētā*, modern *Hamadān*), the later capital of the Median empire. This city was not mentioned at all in the very detailed Assyrian sources on northwestern Iran. Uksatar could thus not have belonged to the Median dynasty, nor can a relation be demonstrated between him and Dāyukku, whom Sargon II claimed to have deported to Syria in 715 (Grayson); Dāyukku was a provincial chieftain from the Mannean kingdom near Lake Urmia and thus cannot be identified with Herodotus' *Deioces* (Gk. *Dēiókēs*), founder of the Median dynasty and the city of Ecbatana (1.96-101). The supposed Cyaxares “I,” proposed as a king of Media in the late 8th and early 7th centuries, is thus a phantom (Grantovskii, pp. 249ff., 316).

The only historically attested Median king named Cyaxares is the one whom



Herodotus (1.73, 1.103-07) mentioned as a son of Phraortes and father of the last Median king, [Astyages](#). If the eclipse of the sun mentioned by Herodotus (1.74) was that of 585, then Cyaxares reigned until 585/4 b.c.e. He may have been the Makišturri referred to in an Elamite letter, found at Nineveh and probably dating from the 620s, as the recipient of a delivery or gift of considerable value.

Herodotus' statement (1.73) that Cyaxares was a son of Phraortes (OPers. Fravartiš) was probably based on a confusion of Cyaxares' father with the 6th-century Median pretender Fravartis, who claimed to be Xšaθrita, a descendant of Cyaxares. No Fravartiš or Phraortes is attested in 7th-century Media, though there is ample evidence of a Kaštariti (Assyrian for OIr. *Xšaθrita), one of three chieftains (of Madāi, Saparda, and Bēt-Kari) who led a successful insurrection against Assyria in about 673; this Xšaθrita/Kaştariti from Kār-Kaššī (the main city of Bēt-Kari?) may well have been the father of Cyaxares, as suggested by George G. Cameron and others (pp. 182, 213).

According to Herodotus (1.103), Cyaxares was attacked by Madyes, chief of the Scythians, during a siege of Nineveh, after which the Scythians reigned in Asia for twenty-eight years. This report contradicts the evidence of the oriental sources and was probably founded on another error: The Scythians may have achieved a victory over the Medes during a war between Cyaxares' father and the Assyrians (Cameron, p. 182). There is some reason to believe that Protothyes (Assyrian Partatūa), father of Madyes, was involved in an Assyro-Median war in the 670s and that the Scythians were later allied with Assyria, for example, during the war with Babylonia in the 650s. In the Assyrian source on this war Media was called Qutium, an ancient name for the inhabitants of the lands east of Mesopotamia (Grayson); the use of such ancient names for kingdoms contemporary with Assyria, like Magan for Egypt and Meluḥḥa for Ethiopia, is well attested. An Assyrian victory over Qutium is not mentioned, however, perhaps because it was achieved by the Scythian allies.

Cyaxares is certainly mentioned in the Babylonian Gadd chronicle on the fall of Assyria (Grayson, no. 3, ll. 29ff.) as [^mU-ma-]ki[š-t]ar šār Ummān-man-da (collation, l. 38). It was probably he who was meant by the term “king of Ummānmanda” (another archaistic Akkadian designation for northern barbarians) or “king of Madāi” (Media) wherever it occurred in the chronicle. That these two titles were synonymous has been shown by François Thureau-Dangin in relation to a letter about the participation of the Medes in the Babylonian siege of Karran (modern Ḥarrān) soon after the fall of Nineveh in



612.

A combined Assyrian and Mannean force was defeated by the Babylonians at Qablīn on the Euphrates in 616, and Cyaxares could have used the opportunity to conquer the Mannaeans in 615, which would have brought him to the frontiers of Assyria, already invaded from the other side by the Babylonians. In October-November 614 the Medes occupied the Assyrian province of Arrapkhe (modern Kerkūk), then captured Tarbīš above Nineveh on the Tigris, and finally stormed Aššur, the ancient capital of Assyria, in the late summer of 614. Many Assyrians were slain, and a huge amount of booty carried away to Media, which was thus transformed from a poor and semidemocratic country into a rich oriental empire. Nabopolasser, king of Babylonia, arrived too late to take part in the capture of Aššur, but the two kings made a “treaty of friendship and alliance,” Cyaxares married Nabopolasser’s daughter (or, perhaps, granddaughter; cf. Berossus apud Josephus, *Antiquitates* 10.11). In 612 the Medes and Babylonians joined forces to storm Nineveh; the fall of the city is vividly described in the biblical Book of Nahum. The remnants of the Assyrian army, headed by one Aššuruballiṭ, broke through the encirclement and retired to Karran, but in 610, under the united onslaught of the Babylonians and the Medes, they left. Although they soon reconquered the city, they were finally driven out by the Babylonians and retreated to Carchemish near the great bend of the Euphrates, where they were joined by some Egyptian forces. Meanwhile, the Medes may have raided or even conquered Urartu in the north (although an earlier date for this conquest has also been suggested). Whether or not the Medes took part in the final defeat of the Assyrians and Egyptians at Carchemish and the following Babylonian offensive in Palestine is not clear. The frontier between Media and Babylonia was established south of Aššur and Karran.

According to Herodotus (1.73), the Scythians founded a kind of kingdom (in the proximity of Lake Urmia or maybe farther north) after their invasion of Anatolia and perhaps northern Iran, but Cyaxares invited their leaders to a feast and slew them. The survivors fled to Asia Minor, thus involving Cyaxares in a war with Alyattes, king of Lydia. Some of the vicissitudes of this war (at first favoring Lydia) seem to have been hinted at by Jeremiah (50:9-10, 50:41-43, 51:27-28), and Ezekiel (32:22-30, 38:2-6, 39:1-16). Finally, however, Cyaxares drove the Lydians into the interior of Asia Minor. Through the mediation of Syennesis, king of Cilicia (Babylonian Pirind), both sides agreed to a peace. The river Halys was established as the frontier between the Lydian



and the Median spheres of influence, though some regions remained semi-independent within both empires. Cyaxares died in the same year (585/4?).

Other classical references to the history of Media at this period, based ultimately on reports by [Berossus](#) and [Ctesias](#), have little value.

It should be noted that the circumstances of Cyaxares' reign have received a totally different interpretation in the works of René Labat and Hinz.

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