



Summary :

The Cimmerians were people of nomadic origin. Both literary sources and archaeological evidence confirm their presence in Anatolia. However, it is not always clear whether “Cimmerian” traces should be attributed to Cimmerians or Scythians.

Date

8th cent. BC-7th cent. BC

Geographical Location

Crimea, Thrace, North-eastern Asia Minor

1. The origins of the Cimmerian culture

The Cimmerian culture had several roots: one of them was local, a certain degree of tradition from the previous Belozërka phase, a second was in the Caucasian (Koban culture) tradition,¹ and a third marked by the eastern links with Ananino culture and the Minussinsk area,² further east also with the Ordos region (cf. below). This all suggest that the bulk of the cultural phenomena of the Cimmerian culture was of a similar nomadic descent as the later culture of the Scythians. Similarly as e.g. for the Etruscan origins, the time seems to be ripe to overcome the hypotheses based on partial analyses of the material, and stressing one of the aspects only. The stelae (so-called stag-stones) and the daggers show eastern links, most other bronze objects, including mace-heads with figural motifs, link the Cimmerians with the Koban culture, while pottery seems to show some degree of local Pontic tradition, of the Belozërka phase.

Graves of both stages of the Cimmerian culture are distributed over vast territories from the Kuban and Volga-Kama area over the Crimea, Ukraine and Moldavia to north-eastern Bulgaria (Belogradec, Endža). The most characteristic objects are daggers of the Kabardino-Pjatigorsk types, horse bits of the North Caucasian types, differently classified by others, particular arrowheads and less specific spearheads. Several decorative parts of horse harness and personal ornaments are rare. Rattles in openwork were probably ritual objects, and Maltese crosses seem to have possessed a particular symbolic significance, perhaps solar.³ They may have also represented the centre of the universe, of the four-sided world like in Scythian mythology.⁴ Some scholars found models of this ornament on [Assyrian](#) reliefs, which may be correct (cf. below for the contacts between the Cimmerians and the Assyrians), but does not explain the particular meaning of the motif in the Cimmerian culture.⁵

2. Literary sources for Cimmerians in Anatolia

There are two main groups of literary sources for the Cimmerians: Near Eastern and Greek. The former are mainly contemporary documents on wars within the Assyrian border zone, the latter mostly stories taken over from old traditions or memories. Both are mainly concerned with those aspects of Cimmerian history which directly affected the civilized world, i.e. there are viewed from an angle different from our position. For Homer,⁶ the Cimmerians were a people living in a mythical land of fog and darkness, on the fringes of the inhabitable world .

The first Assyrian references on the Cimmerians date from 722-713 B.C.. During the reign of Sancherib (705-681 B.C.) the Cimmerians attacked Asia Minor and destroyed the [Phrygian empire](#): the Phrygian king [Midas](#) committed suicide.⁷ This presumably happened in 696/695 B.C. (Eusebius` date), although a date twenty years later cannot be excluded. American excavations at Gordion uncovered considerable destructions, but no characteristic "Cimmerian" objects. A group of Cimmerians probably settled for some time near Sinope, and Asarhaddon mentions an Assyrian victory over them in 679 B.C. The military leader of the Cimmerians in their 679/678 campaign is called Tušpa in Assyrian records. Another group of Cimmerians probably entered Anatolia from Thrace. This is suggested by Strabo, when he speaks about an alliance between the Cimmerians and the Thracian Terres and Edoni,⁸ tribes



later living in Central Bulgaria (Treres) and in Chalcidice (Edoni). The Lydian king [Gyges](#) even sought aid against them from Assurbanipal. A second attack on [Lydia](#) in 652 B.C. was successful. [Sardis](#) (with the exception of the citadel) was sacked and Gyges killed.

The leader of the Cimmerian troops in 652 B.C. is named [Lygdamis](#) in Greek sources, and there is a parallel name Tugdamme in the [Assyrian](#) records. According to [Strabo](#), Lygdamis was later killed in [Cilicia](#), and Assyrian archives probably confirm this report. This happened between 637 and 625 B.C. and the second foundation of Sinope in c. 630 B.C. may probably be a result of the defeat of the Cimmerians. Herodotus, however, mentions,⁹ that the last Cimmerians were only driven out of Asia Minor by [Alyattes](#), in about 600 B.C. The Scythians, who followed them, were lords of Urartu between 625 and 585 B.C., and their Near Eastern campaign lasted, according to Herodotus, 28 years.¹⁰

The reason why most of the Cimmerians left their country in the Pontic steppe was the movement of the Scythians from the east under pressure from the Massagetes. This happened before 713 B.C., when both Cimmerians and following them Scythians reached the region of Urartu.¹¹ Herodotus explicitly mentions Tyras (Dniestre) as the place where the Cimmerian kings fought a fratricidal battle and were buried, and from where the common people left their homes. After this, [Herodotus](#) describes the Cimmerian escape along the Black Sea west of the Caucasus to the area of [Sinope](#),¹² and this may be the story of one of their main military forces. Some Cimmerians, however, remained on the shores of Maeotis (the Azov Sea), as reported by Plutarchus,¹³ apparently following an earlier tradition. The Cimmerian Bosphorus, Cimmerian Walls and the Cimmerian peninsula are all in the same area (the Crimea and its surroundings), much more further east than Tyras/Dniestre, and equally distant from Araxes, the original eastern boundary of the Cimmerians.¹⁴ Araxes usually designated Syr-Darja. The fratricidal battle of the Cimmerian leaders on the Dniestre seem to have marked the last stage of the retreat of the Cimmerians, which was not a single event, but lasted for a considerable time, just as happened later in Sarmato-Scythian relations. The fact that most of the Cimmerians must have disappeared early is underlined by Aristeas` Arimaspeia (7th century at the latest, perhaps earlier), which only knows them as earlier inhabitants of the Pontic steppes.

3. Cimmerian and/or Early Scythian finds from Anatolia

Especially interesting are several nomadic finds from NE Anatolia, especially those from Irmilar near Amasia and Nurşintepe. Finds like those from Nurşintepe, showing closer relations to Siberia, may be probably connected with the Scythians rather than with the late Cimmerians. The objects from a disturbed grave at Imirler show an equipment combining objects of a Scythian/ Sauromatian character with those having parallels as far east as in the Minussinsk and Ananino areas, while the finds from the "offerings shaft" in Nurşintepe, where three horses and two dogs were buried, has parallels among the finds from the Kelermes tumuli.¹⁵ Similar objects came from Kaplangu, Hasanlu, Čavus-tepe and from the Ziwiyé region . Their dating to the second half of the 7th century B.C. appears plausible, and thus even archaeological finds seem to contribute to the picture of the Scythian Near Eastern campaigns, known from historical sources. The group of horse-bits from these complexes (including Arsintepe, no. 141 in the Vienna exhibition of Anatolian art in 1990) has parallels among the finds from Amlash in Iran, and may be more closely connected with the Iranian than with the Eurasian world, but the bird's or griffin's heads and other ornaments collected by Hauptmann seem to point more closely to the tradition of the Eurasian steppes.¹⁶ The gold rosettes from Altintepe (no. 144 in the same exhibition) can be compared with the late stage of what are commonly supposed to be Cimmerian objects, like the Belogradec grave in Bulgaria. In fact, the objects find the best parallels among the finds from the earliest Kelermes barrows,¹⁷ It should be remembered that also the cross-like objects characteristic for the Cimmerians are represented at Kelermes,¹⁸ harness of the horses 15 and 16 of Veselovskij Kurgan 2). The Cimmerian or Early Scythian arrowheads are known from a number of Anatolian sites.¹⁹ V. Ünal mentions 250 socketed arrowheads from the area between Tasova and Ladik, north of Amasya, dating from the 7th-6th century, which may have been either Cimmerian or Scythian.

4. Identification of archaeological finds

There is a long discussion among Russian and Ukrainian archaeologists as to whether the late Cimmerian stage named after the Novočerkasskij hoard is still Cimmerian (what was the view of the late V. Tenerenožkin and of the majority of specialists) or already



Scythian. There was also a long discussion on the chronology among Russia archaeologists, started by Medvedskaja in 1992 and followed in the next two years.²⁰ If the Novočerkasskij horizon would be allowed partly still after 700, and the beginning of the earliest "Archaic" Scythian art in the second- third quarter of the 7th century, as suggested already by Galanina, the chronological gap would disappear.

Some attempts have been made to alter the usual picture and to confine the Cimmerians only to the very late stage of c. 700 B.C. or to make them only an unimportant tribe on the northern frontiers of the Assyrian empire, but the earlier common opinion should be preferred.²¹ We should remember that the two tribal groups spoke a related Iranian language (though we know only a few words of the former), their nomadic way of life was similar, and, according to Near Eastern sources, so was their way of warfare. From the point of view of art history, Scythian art is a similar continuation of the Pontic and North Caucasian artistic tradition under new "Orientalistic" impulses, as was the transition between Geometric and Archaic art in Greece and Etruria. The Scythians did not come with an established sophisticated artistic tradition, their first products are simple, and it was only after contact with more sophisticated artistic traditions during their invasions in the Near East that Scythian art attained a high level.²²

It is no wonder that the formative period of the Scythian art was not homogenous in its style. Attempts to equate between change of artistic style and with ethnicity are dubious, especially at the time when one stylistic phase replaces another, and the new one is not yet fully developed.

The Cimmerians and Scythians are not always distinguishable archaeologically at that "transitional" period. Neither in Greece nor in Etruria, there was a strong frontier between the Geometric and Orientalizing styles, and the transition from one style to another there had nothing to do with any ethnic change. The Scythians replaced the Cimmerian in the Pontic area, but the Novočerkassk stage belonged to both of them, and the ethnic similarity and identical way of life enabled the swallowing of the remains of the latter by the Scythians.

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1. See Bočkarev, V.S. 1972, "Kimmerijski kazani", *Archeologija (Kiev)* 5, p. 63-68.
 2. Chalikov, A.Ch. , *Volgo-Kamje v načale epochi rannego železa* (Juškar-Ola 1977). Členova, N.L., "O svjazach severo-zapadnogo Pričrenomorja i nižnego Dunaja s vostokom v kiimmerijskuju epochu", in *Studia Thracica* I (Sofia 1975) p. 69-70.
 3. Those are related to a northern people neighbours to the mythical Hyperboeans, cf. Diod. Sic. 2,47.
 4. Hdt. IV, 101G
 5. Bouzek, J., *Greece, Anatolia and Europe: Cultural Interrelations during the Early Iron Age* (Jonsered 1997) p. 194-201.
 6. Hom. *Od.* I, 14. Cf. Strabo I,2,9.
 7. Hdt. I, 6,15.
 8. Str. I,1,10, I,3,21 and 36, cf. XII,3,34, XII,8,7 and XIII,4,8.
 9. Hdt. I, 16.
 10. Hdt. IV, 1.
 11. Cf. Hdt. IV, 11-13, and VII, 20.
 12. Hdt. IV, 12.



13. Plu, *Mar.* XI.

14. Hdt. IV, 11-12.

15. Hauptmann, R., "Neue Funde eurasischer Steppennomaden in Kleinasien", in Hauptmann, R., Boehner, R. (eds.), *Beiträge zur Altertumskunde Kleinasien, Festschr. K. Bittel*, (Mainz 1983) p. 251-270. Únal, V., "Zwei Gräber eurasischer Reiternomaden im nördliche Zentralanatolien", *AVA-Beiträge* 4 (1982) p. 65-81.

16. Bouzek, J., « Les Cimmériens en Anatolie », in *Mode de contacts et processus de transformation dans les sociétés anciennes, Actes du colloque de Cortone 1981* (Pisa-Rome 1983) p. 145-165. i.d., "Caucasus and Europe and the Cimmerian problem", *Sborník NM Prague A* 37, fasc. 4 (1983).

17. Galanina, L.K., Kelermeskije kurgany - Die Kurgane von Kelermes (Moskva 1997) pl. 16, ct. nos. 169, 173, 179, 195, 189 etc.

18. Galanina, L.K., Kelermeskije kurgany - Die Kurgane von Kelermes (Moskva 1997) pl. 23, cat. nos. 294-297.

19. Nicholls, V.D., "Old Smyrna I", *BSA* 53-54 (1958-59) p. 129-30 n. 120 and 135-37 for Ancient Smyrna. Sulimirski, T., "The Cimmerian problem", *Bull. Inst. Arch.* Th2 (1959), 45-62. Waldbaum, J.C. 1984, *Metalwork from Sardis. The finds through 1974*, Sardis 8 (Cambridge 1984), p. 35 no. 41 for Sardis.

20. Galanina, L.K., "K probleme chronologii kelermeskich kurganov", *RossArch.* 1994/1, p. 92-107. Kuročkin, G.N., "Chronologija predneaziatskich pochodov Skifov po pismennym i archeologičeskim dannym", *RossArch.* 1994/1, p. 117-122. D'jatonov, I.M., "Kimmerijci i Skifi na Drevnem Vostoke", *RossArch.* 1994/1, p. 108-116.

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22. Urušadze, N., "Semantika prikladnogo izkusstva drevnego Zakavkaz'ja", in *Sov.Arch.* 1973/1, p.54-70.

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