# Ashurbanipal Biography

## Ashurbanipal

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# Biography

Ashurbanipal (died ca. 630 BC) was the last great king of the Assyrian Empire. He was an able soldier and administrator, a scholar, and a patron of art and learning.

The events of the reign of Ashurbanipal succeeded to the throne 3 years later; his elder brother Shamash-shum-ukin was proclaimed king of Babylonia in the same year. Ashurbanipal's first task was the settlement of Egypt, recently conquered by Esarhaddon. Native princes were appointed as vassal rulers, but after repeated revolts by Egyptians the country was put under military occupation in 663 and Memphis and Thebes destroyed. Ashurbanipal then defeated Tyre, which had aided Egypt, and made an alliance with Lydia against the threat of Cimmerian hordes to the northeast. In 654 the Egyptians expelled the last Assyrian garrison and regained their independence.

Ashurbanipal spent the middle years of his reign in a bitter struggle with his brother. In 652 Shamash-shumukin rebelled with Elamite aid against Assyrian hegemony, and the revolt was joined by the Chaldeans of South Babylonia, the Arameans and Arabs, and the princes of Palestine. Ashurbanipal attacked Elam, starved the Babylonian cities into submission, and in 648 captured Babylon; Shamash-shum-ukin perished in the flames of his burning city. Ashurbanipal installed a puppet king, Kandalanu, in Babylon and subdued the Arabs. The Elamites after several years of warfare were forced to capitulate, and their capital, Susa, was destroyed. Among those who subsequently paid homage to Ashurbanipal was Cyrus, the first king of Persia.

Little is known of Ashurbanipal's last years, though private documents hint at shrinking frontiers and the dislocation of trade. Assyria's end was not far off, but few at the time of his death, about 630, would have dared to predict it.

The splendid reliefs from Ashurbanipal's palace at Nineveh (near Mosul, Iraq) depict him as a warrior and an intrepid hunter of lions. Thousands of cuneiform tablets found in the ruins of this palace show Ashurbanipal's wide range of interests. The dockets on some tablets show they had been copied, or borrowed, from the ancient temple libraries of Babylonia, and they comprise religious literature, scientific treatises, and historical records. The king's interest sprang from a degree of education unusual among monarchs of the ancient world, for he could read the ancient Sumerian texts and was an expert mathematician. His love of learning and his desire to uncover and preserve the past have earned him the title of the "archeologist king."