



Image from: [Early Babylon was often rebuilt. The excavated.... in Philip's Encyclopedia](#)

Summary Article: **Cyrus the Great**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(sī'rəθs), d. 529 B.C., king of Persia, founder of the greatness of the Achaemenids and of the Persian Empire. According to Herodotus, he was the son of an Iranian noble, the elder Cambyses, and a Median princess, daughter of Astyages. Many historians, following other ancient writers (such as Ctesias), deny this genealogy, and the whole of Cyrus' life is encrusted with legend. Cyrus overthrew Astyages, king of the Medes, sometime between 559 B.C. and 549 B.C. He entered Ecbatana and, taking over the Median kingdom, began to build a great empire after the Assyrian model. Cyrus' objectives were to gain power over the Mediterranean coast, secure Asia Minor, and civilize the east. Croesus of Lydia, Nabonidus of Babylonia, and Amasis II of Egypt, joined by Sparta, tried to build a strong alliance against him, but to no avail. He defeated and captured Croesus (546 B.C.), and Lydia became a satrapy under the Persian government. The Chaldaean empire of Babylonia fell to Cyrus in 538 B.C. He did not conquer Egypt, but he prepared the way for later Persian victories there. Cyrus demanded the surrender of the Greek cities that had been under Lydia, and they also became satrapies of Persia. Cyrus was much admired by the Jews, whom he favored, placing them in power in Palestine. His motive was probably to create a buffer state between Persia and Egypt, but the result was a rehabilitation of Israel. Cyrus was admired as a liberator rather than a conqueror, because he respected the customs and religions of each part of his vast empire. The exact limits of Cyrus' eastern conquests are not known, but it is possible that they reached as far as the Peshawar region. He used Susa, Ecbatana, and Babylon as his capitals but was buried at Pasargadae, where he had built a splendid palace. At his death his son Cambyses succeeded him, despite the ambitions of another son, Smerdis.

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