

**GREEK PERSPECTIVES ON CYRUS AND HIS CONQUESTS**

**GREEK PERSPECTIVES ON CYRUS AND HIS CONQUESTS**

By

**STEPHEN CLOTHIER, B.A.**

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

© Copyright by Stephen Clothier, September 1997

**MASTER OF ARTS (1997)  
(Classics)**

**McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario**

**TITLE: Greek Perspectives on Cyrus and his Conquests**

**AUTHOR: Stephen Clothier, B.A. (McMaster University)**

**SUPERVISOR: Dr. Peter Kingston**

**NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 100**

## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the figure of Cyrus II of Persia, as it appears in The Histories of Herodotus and Xenophon's Cyropaedia. The author's primary concern is the historical background of the narratives, rather than their literary aspects. An attempt will be made to relate the various episodes in the Greek works to the cuneiform evidence, which is quite substantial with respect to the capture of Babylon.

An examination of the cuneiform evidence (in translation) will form the main topic of the first chapter. Chapter Two will focus on the Herodotean account of Cyrus, which is the most important one to survive from the Classical world. Although the presence of various heroic motifs render substantial portions of the narrative questionable, these will nevertheless be examined in the light of the many parallels that have been found for them in the Near East and Greece itself. Also, an attempt will be made to uncover the historical truths that are quite possibly hidden beneath the mythic façade. Moreover, in the pursuit of reliable traditions, the differences and similarities between the Greek accounts and the cuneiform records will be noted. The same method will be used in the third chapter, which focuses on The Cyropaedia. Because of the largely fictitious character of this work, however, only those sections which can be related to historical events will be examined in any detail.

A reconstructed biography of Cyrus, based on all viable evidence, will form the bulk of the concluding chapter. At this point the testimony of other Greek historians, most notably Ctesias, will be examined. My own views on the proper reconstruction of events will be fully expounded, but dissenting opinions will also be noted. It is inevitable that opinion be sharply divided when the relevant texts are either ambiguous or fragmentary.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Peter Kingston, Dr. Evan Haley, and Dr. Howard Jones of the Department of Classics, McMaster University, for reading my thesis and for providing so many helpful insights. I would like to express my sincerest thanks to Dr. Kingston in particular, without whose helpful advice this thesis would never have reached completion.

Stephen S. Clothier

## Contents

Chapter One.....	1
Chapter Two.....	20
Chapter Three.....	50
Chapter Four.....	76
Bibliography.....	98

## Chapter One

As stated in the Introduction, there are three cuneiform sources that can be used to provide information on Cyrus the Great: the Chronicle of Nabonidus, the Cyrus Cylinder, and the so-called verse account. In the case of the Chronicle of Nabonidus, we have little more than seventy-five of the original three hundred to four hundred lines.<sup>1</sup> In spite of this, much important information has been preserved, and there has been no shortage of scholarly output on these invaluable documents. They are of equal importance to both Classicists and Biblical historians, who have either found their own texts vindicated by them, or been forced to re-evaluate age-old problems associated with their own disciplines. A. L. Oppenheim gives a useful description of the class of texts to which the Chronicle of Nabonidus belongs. "They provide mainly, in annalistic arrangement, bare facts about the accessions and the deaths of kings and military data, occasionally also reports of events pertaining to the cults of the main sanctuaries."<sup>2</sup>

Before presenting excerpts from the Chronicle of Nabonidus, it would be advisable to examine the career of the king himself, and the empire which he obtained. Nabû-nā'id (as he appears in actual Babylonian texts) was, in fact, a commoner; but his mother, Adad-guppi, was well-connected at the court of Nebuchadrezzar II and so he became acquainted with court life long before he actually became king.<sup>3</sup> The Neo-Babylonian Empire was founded by

---

<sup>1</sup> A. L. Oppenheim, "The Babylonian Evidence of Achaemenian Rule in Mesopotamia," Chapter 10 in Vol. 2 of The Cambridge History of Iran (1985), p. 534.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556-539 B.C., by Paul-Alain Beaulieu (New Haven, 1989), pp. 67-69.

Nabopolassar,<sup>4</sup> the father of Nebuchadrezzar; together with Cyaxares, the Median king, he put an end to the Assyrian Empire in 612 B.C. Their partnership was cemented by the marriage of one of Cyaxares' daughters to Nebuchadrezzar,<sup>5</sup> who was crown prince of Babylon at the time. Nebuchadrezzar went on to defeat the Egyptian pharaoh Neco in 605 B.C. and sacked Jerusalem in 586 B.C.<sup>6</sup> Josephus, quoting Philostratus, tells us that he also laid siege to Tyre.<sup>7</sup> His reign lasted forty-three years (605-562 B.C.), and he was succeeded by his son, Awēl-Marduk.

Now began a period of great instability. After reigning for only two years, Awēl-Marduk was murdered by his brother-in-law, Nergal-shar-uṣur. The assassin was himself killed four years later, and his son Lābāshi-Marduk took the throne. But he reigned for only a few months; another coup brought Nabonidus to the throne.<sup>8</sup> He was already quite old;<sup>9</sup> but his claim to the kingship may have been strengthened by an earlier marriage to one of Nebuchadrezzar's daughters. This union could well have produced Belshazzar,<sup>10</sup> the prince made famous by the Bible, where he is depicted as holding a feast on the eve of Babylon's fall.<sup>11</sup> Historically, he was

---

<sup>4</sup> I. M. Diakonoff, "Elam," Chapter 1 in Vol. 2 of The Cambridge History of Iran, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> I. M. Diakonoff, "Media," Chapter 3 in Vol. 2 of The Cambridge History of Iran, p. 123.

<sup>6</sup> The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, edited by Henry Snyder Gehman (Philadelphia, 1970), pp. 655-656.

<sup>7</sup> Antiquities of the Jews, X.xi.1.

<sup>8</sup> Gehman, pp. 656, 647; see also Beaulieu, pp. 86-87, 97.

<sup>9</sup> Beaulieu, p. 98.

<sup>10</sup> Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon, by D. J. Wiseman (Oxford, 1985), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Dan. 5. A full discussion of this feast and its possible links to celebrations mentioned by both Herodotus and Xenophon will be presented in Chapter Four.

regent at Babylon during his father's ten-year absence at the oasis of Tema, in the Arabian Desert.<sup>12</sup> The king's lengthy stay away from the capital was only one of several peculiar moves that he made. He was an antiquarian, and set up a museum containing artifacts that were even old in his day,<sup>13</sup> and his preoccupation with the cult of the moon god Sîn (which made Babylon's traditional Marduk cult suffer) is still the subject of much debate by scholars, who generally see him as a fanatic who alienated at least some of the people. One interesting theory is that the country people supported Nabonidus, while the urban populations were opposed to him. The army, which "was at all times drawn from the non-urban population... would therefore hardly be willing to defend the hated cities against an invader."<sup>14</sup> Thus, when the Persians overran the country, they encountered little resistance.

#### *The Chronicle of Nabonidus*<sup>15</sup>

The first entry of note in the Chronicle of Nabonidus is for the sixth year. It describes the battle between Cyrus and the Medes.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Beaulieu, pp. 149, 165-166.

<sup>13</sup> Gehman, p. 647.

<sup>14</sup> A. L. Oppenheim, "Babylonian Evidence," p. 542.

<sup>15</sup> The most complete translation of this document is to be found in **Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament**, edited by James B. Pritchard (Princeton, 1955). Although the translation, by A. L. Oppenheim, was undoubtedly accurate when first published, the continual advances made in Near Eastern Studies require that modifications sometimes be made. This is well illustrated by the new rendering of *zu* (see below, and footnote 25). Therefore, whenever possible, I have used Beaulieu's translation, given in **The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556-539 B.C.** Unfortunately, not all of the relevant excerpts appear in his work.

<sup>16</sup> Pritchard gives a useful guide to the peculiarities of cuneiform transcription: "Square brackets have been used for restorations; round brackets (parentheses) indicate interpolations made by the translator for a better understanding of the translation. Obvious scribal omissions

*He (Astyages,<sup>17</sup> king of the Medes) set (his) army in motion and marched out in order to defeat Cyrus, king of Anšan<sup>18</sup> [...]; Astyages' army turned against him and he was handed over to Cyrus in fetters. Cyrus {marched} to the royal city Ecbatana [and took as booty] gold, silver, precious objects. [Whatever] he had taken as booty from Ecbatana he (?) brought to Anšan. The spoils of the soldiers [...].<sup>19</sup>*

This terse description is very much in agreement with Herodotus, who tells us that some of the Medes abandoned their leader: ὤς δὲ οἱ Μῆδοι στρατευσάμενοι τοῖσι Πέρσησι συνέμισγον, οἱ μὲν τινες αὐτῶν ἐμάχοντο...οἱ δὲ αὐτομόλεον πρὸς τοὺς Πέρσας... (i.127). Even the mention of Astyages in fetters finds an echo in the Greek historian's account, where the defeated Median ruler is referred to as a prisoner of war (αἰχμάλωτος - i.129).

The following entry is for the ninth year of Nabonidus.<sup>20</sup>

*Nabonidus, the king, (stayed) in Tema; the crown prince, the officials and the army (were) in Akkad.<sup>21</sup> The king did not come to Babylon for the (ceremony of the) month of Nisanu; the god Nebo did not come to Babylon, the god Bēl did not go out (of Esagila in procession),*

---

have been placed between triangular brackets; braces indicate instances of scribal repetition of material." - Ancient Near Eastern Texts, p. xvi.

<sup>17</sup> Bab. Ištumēgu. However, the Old Iranian \* *Ršti-vēga* would be better represented as Ištuwēg. - I. M. Diakonoff, "Media," p. 142.

<sup>18</sup> The diacritical mark above the s is used by some scholars (particularly Semitists) to indicate the palatal sound heard at the beginning of "ship."

<sup>19</sup> Trans. by A. L. Oppenheim, in "The Babylonian Evidence of Achaemenian Rule in Mesopotamia," in The Cambridge History of Iran, pp. 538-539. This translation is smoother than the one given by the same scholar in Ancient Near Eastern Texts.

<sup>20</sup> The triple dash has been used to indicate omissions of material not relevant to the present study, while the standard ellipsis used by the translator indicates lacunae in the original text.

<sup>21</sup> i.e., Babylon. The country's scribes had a fondness for high-flown terms to designate countries and peoples. Thus Israel and Syria are referred to as Amurru, even though the Biblical Amorites had long since been absorbed by new populations. It would be like a modern English writer referring to Ireland as Hibernia.

*the festival of the New Year was omitted.*<sup>22</sup> --- *In the month Nisanu, Cyrus, king of Persia, mustered his army and crossed the Tigris below Arbela. In the month Ayyaru, he m[arched] to the country x[xx]. He slew its king, took his possessions, (and) stationed his own garrison [there]. Afterwards, his garrison and the king remained there.*<sup>23</sup>

The neglect of cultic matters mentioned above recurs throughout the Chronicle. The entries for Years 7, 10, and 11 also state that Bēl did not go out of the Esagil(a), or shrine of Marduk, in procession and that the New Year's Festival was omitted. The entries for Years 8 and 12-15 have been lost, but we may assume that similar disruptions occurred. These must have grieved the people, who were undoubtedly like other nations in antiquity and derived great pleasure from seeing their god carried in a festal procession.<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to speculate on the level that popular resentment might well have reached by 539 B.C., when the troops of Cyrus entered Babylon. This will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 as well.

The entry for Year 9 contains other important information. Although this translation omits the name of the country invaded by Cyrus, for a long time it was thought to be Lydia. In Babylonian Historical Texts relating to the capture and downfall of Babylon (London, 1924), Sydney Smith suggested that *lu-ud-du* should be read. These syllables would certainly suggest the Greek radical form of Λυδ-, seen in the words for "Lydia" and "Lydian." But if the king of country x[xx] (Lydia?) was killed, then the new rendering would effectively rule out the Herodotean tradition that Croesus' life was spared. But by 1975 it was shown that the broken

---

<sup>22</sup> Ancient Near Eastern Texts, p. 306.

<sup>23</sup> Beaulieu, p. 198.

<sup>24</sup> The same is true of modern-day Roman Catholics, who celebrate saints' days with great exuberance by carrying images of the Virgin Mary and other saints in processions.

sign was almost certainly zu,<sup>25</sup> and that therefore scholars were still without any non-Greek text describing the fall of Sardis.

The last entry in the Nabonidus Chronicle is for the seventeenth year. It is certainly the most interesting because the actual capture of Babylon is described.

*--- In the month [.....and the god]s of Marad, Zababa and the gods of Kish, Ninlil, [and the gods of H]ursagkalamma entered Babylon. Until the end of the month Utulu, the gods of Akkad [.....] who are above the...and below the...entered Babylon. The gods of Borsippa, Kutha [.....], and Sippar did not enter (Babylon). In the month Tašrītu, when Cyrus did battle at Opis on the [bank off] the Tigris against the army of Akkad, the people of Akkad retreated. He carried off the plunder (and) slaughtered the people. On the fourteenth day (of Tašrītu), Sippar was captured without a battle. Nabonidus fled. On the sixteenth day (of Tašrītu),<sup>26</sup> Ugbaru, governor of Gutium, and the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without a battle. Afterwards, after Nabonidus retreated, he was captured in Babylon.<sup>27</sup> Until the end of the month (of Tašrītu), the shield-(bearers) of Gutium surrounded the gates of the Esagil. There was no interruption of whatever (rites) in the Esagil and the (other) temples, and no (ritual) date was missed. On the third day of the month Araḥsamnu, Cyrus entered Babylon. The drinking tubes?<sup>28</sup> were filled in his presence. There was peace in the city when Cyrus spoke greetings to all of Babylon. He (Cyrus) appointed Gubaru governor of all the governors in Babylon. From the month Kislīmu to the month Addaru, the gods of Akkad that Nabonidus had brought to Babylon returned to their cult places. On the night of the eleventh day of the month Araḥsamnu, Ugbaru died.<sup>29</sup> In the month of [Araḥshamnu, the ...th day, the wife of the king died. From the 27th day of Araḥshamnu till the 3rd day of Nisanu a(n official) "weeping" was performed in Akkad, all the people (went around) with their hair disheveled ---<sup>30</sup>*

---

<sup>25</sup> Beaulieu, p. 198, footnote 34.

<sup>26</sup> October 12, 539 B.C.

<sup>27</sup> This sentence reads somewhat differently in Oppenheim's translation (given in Ancient Near Eastern Texts, p. 306). "Afterwards Nabonidus was arrested in Babylon when he returned (there)." This rendering, while much smoother than Beaulieu's, is not necessarily more accurate. It does, however, seem to imply that Nabonidus was outside the city when it was taken.

<sup>28</sup> According to Beaulieu, this word is a *hapax legomenon*. In earlier translations of the Chronicle, the sentence containing this word read: "they filled (the streets?) with (palm) branches in front of him." - A. L. Oppenheim, "Babylonian Evidence," p. 539.

<sup>29</sup> Beaulieu, pp. 220, 224-225.

<sup>30</sup> Ancient Near Eastern Texts, p. 306.

This text raises a number of questions. The movements of the Babylonian king, for example, are difficult to trace. To what place did Nabonidus flee and with how many supporters? His asylum could hardly have been a safe one or he would not have returned to Babylon so soon, unless, of course, spies had found him out. Depending on how the text is interpreted, he may have gone directly to Babylon from Sippar and witnessed Ugbaru's entry. Unfortunately, the brevity so typical of the Chronicle is here compounded by an utter lack of transitions where they would be most desirable. The only solution is to turn to the ancient Chaldean historian Berossus, whose Babyloniaka is partially preserved in Contra Apionem, a work written by Josephus.

He tells us that Nabonidus met the Persians in battle, but was defeated and forced to seek refuge in the city of Borsippa. Cyrus then went on to Babylon and later ordered the outer wall destroyed because it had been such an obstacle to him. Having taken possession of Babylon, Cyrus went to Borsippa and besieged Nabonidus, who gave himself up. Because he did so, Cyrus treated him kindly and settled him in Carmania, where he died (Contra Apionem, i.20).

Much of this can hardly be reconciled with the cuneiform sources, according to which Nabonidus was in Sippar, not Borsippa, and that he fled from that place *before* the capture of Babylon. Moreover, the fortifications of Babylon posed no problem at all to the troops of Cyrus (who, as is clear from the Nabonidus Chronicle, was not there himself). Most scholars, however, have accepted the statement about the king's exile to Carmania, if only because it contrasts so sharply with the fate of the "Assyrian" king in The Cyropaedia, a work that has long been discredited. Beaulieu points out that the testimony of Berossus on this matter is in agreement with a cuneiform text known as the Dynastic Prophecy. The relevant portion reads as follows:

*A king of Elam will arise, the sceptre x x [he will take?] He will remove him (the preceding king) from his throne and [...] He will take the throne and the king whom he will*

have removed? {from} the throne [...], the king of Elam will cha[nge] his place and settle him in another land.

Beaulieu states: "This passage of the Dynastic Prophecy undoubtedly refers to Cyrus...The king who was removed from his throne is Nabonidus, whose reign is described in the preceding six lines of the text."<sup>31</sup>

It will be noticed that two very similar names appear in this entry ("Ugbaru" and "Gubaru"), both Babylonian forms of the Persian name Gaubaruva.<sup>32</sup> Is the same person intended? If not, could Gubaru be identified with an individual of the same name mentioned as governor of Babylonia and Eber-nāri from the fourth year of Cyrus (535/4 B.C.) to the fifth of Cambyses (525/4)? It would seem that the Gubaru whom Cyrus appointed could not have been the one who was later governor, since a certain Nabû-ahḫē-bullit is attested as *šakin māti*, or chief administrator, up to 535 B.C.<sup>33</sup> Could the position of "governor of all the governors," mentioned in the Chronicle, be somehow superior to that of *šakin māti*? Both positions must have been lower than the one occupied by Cambyses, Cyrus' son, who is called "king of Babylon" in 538/7 B.C.,<sup>34</sup> unless that title was merely honourific. There is no ready solution, as Oppenheim notes in his concluding remarks on the problem.

"It is obvious that the Chronicle and the date formulae of the contemporary legal texts do not tell us everything about the administrative situation in Babylonia from the fall of Babylon to the creation of the new satrapy [comprising Babylonia and the regions beyond the Euphrates].

---

<sup>31</sup> The Reign of Nabonidus, p. 231.

<sup>32</sup> Oppenheim, "Babylonian Evidence," p. 544.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

One gains the impression that this was a period of administrative uncertainty and experiments, the reasons for which we may never learn."<sup>35</sup>

The fact that the shield-bearers of Gutium surrounded the Esagil(a) is a valid reason for assuming that other buildings within the city were not under any protection, and that the army was behaving in a typical way, which is to say, it was looting almost everything in sight.

Oppenheim states:

"The apparent contradiction that the same Gutians were plundering the city and protecting its sanctuary suggests that a master plan was here being executed. Both the rights of the conquering soldiers and the political interests of Cyrus were to be upheld. As stated explicitly, the cultic life of the sanctuary was not interrupted...the "king's peace" was placed upon the city...[This] can mean only that the king [Cyrus], upon entering Babylon, declared the end of the period of pillage and forbade weapons to continue to be drawn in the city."<sup>36</sup>

The person whose death is reported after that of Ugbaru has some connection with the king and, in Oppenheim's restoration of the line in the Chronicle, is made the very wife of Cyrus. Public mourning for this person is next described in lines that call to mind a similar passage in *The Histories* of Herodotus, where we learn that Cyrus was greatly attached to his wife, Cassandane: τῆς προαποθανούσης Κῦρος αὐτός τε μέγα πένθος ἐποιήσατο καὶ τοῖσι ἄλλοισι προεῖπε πᾶσι τῶν ἦρχε πένθος ποιέεσθαι (*Histories*, ii.1). Cambyses was the son of Cassandane. It is perhaps to her death that the Chronicle alludes.

### *The Cyrus Cylinder*

The Cyrus Cylinder is a clay barrel on which a rather lengthy inscription is recorded. It depicts Cyrus as a faithful servant of Marduk, the principal deity of Babylon, and contrasts his devotion to the traditional cults with the unorthodox attitude of Nabonidus. In their appraisal of

---

<sup>35</sup> "Babylonian Evidence," p. 545.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 543.

this inscription, How and Wells conclude that it "may treat acts of polite acquiescence as if they were prompted by genuine devotion; but such an official record could not have been published unless it represented the monarch's position with approximate accuracy."<sup>37</sup>

Most of the inscription is germane to the present study and therefore only small portions have been omitted. These include transliterations of various Sumerian and Akkadian forms of proper nouns. Although some of these resemble the ones familiar to us through the Graeco-Latin writers, others are quite obscure. The three names referring to Babylon, for example (DIN.TIR<sup>ki</sup>, Šu.an.na, and Ká.dingir.ra<sup>ki</sup>) are applied to the city without any apparent distinction, and none of them resembles "Babylon," which is derived from the Akkadian *Bāb-ilu*, meaning "gate of god."<sup>38</sup> These obscure designations are only of interest to the specialist in cuneiform, and in a work of this kind their presence is apt to complicate the process of understanding an imperfectly preserved document. The following is the greater portion of the Cyrus Cylinder.

*--- a weakling<sup>39</sup> has been installed as the enū<sup>40</sup> of his country; [the correct images of the gods he removed from their thrones, imitations he ordered to place upon them. --- He (furthermore) interrupted in a fiendish way the regular offerings --- The worship of Marduk, the king of the gods, he [chang]ed into abomination, daily he used to do evil against his (i.e. Marduk's) city....He [tormented] its [inhabitant]s with corvée-work (lit.: a yoke) without relief, he ruined them all.*

*Upon their complaints the lord of the gods became terribly angry and [he departed from] their region, (also) the (other) gods living among them left their mansions, wroth that he had brought (them) into Babylon --- (But) Marduk [who does care for] ...on account of (the fact that) the sanctuaries of all their settlements were in ruins and the inhabitants of Sumer and Akkad had*

---

<sup>37</sup> A Commentary on Herodotus with Introduction and Appendixes, (Oxford, 1912), Vol. 1, Appendix IV.6 (2), footnote 1 (p. 391).

<sup>38</sup> The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, p. 85.

<sup>39</sup> i.e., Nabonidus

<sup>40</sup> An old Sumerian title implying that the physical vitality of the king was linked to the country's prosperity.

become like (living) dead, turned back (his countenance) [his] an[ger] [abated] and he had mercy (upon them). He scanned and looked (through) all the countries, searching for a righteous ruler willing to lead him (i.e. Marduk) (in the annual procession).<sup>41</sup> (Then) he pronounced the name of Cyrus ---, king of Anshan, declared him (lit.: pronounced [his] name) to be(come) the ruler of all the world. He made the Guti country and all the Manda-hordes<sup>42</sup> bow in submission to his (i.e. Cyrus') feet. And he (Cyrus) did always endeavour to treat according to justice the black-headed whom he (Marduk) has made him conquer. Marduk, the great lord, a protector of his people/worshippers, beheld with pleasure his (i.e. Cyrus') good deeds and his upright mind (lit.: heart) (and therefore) ordered him to march against his city Babylon --- He made him set out on the road to Babylon --- going at his side like a real friend. His widespread troops - their number, like that of the water of a river, could not be established - strolled along, their weapons packed away. Without any battle, he made him enter his town Babylon---, sparing Babylon---any calamity. He delivered into his (i.e. Cyrus') hands Nabonidus, the king who did not worship him (i.e. Marduk). All the inhabitants of Babylon---as well as of the entire country of Sumer and Akkad, princes and governors (included), bowed to him (Cyrus) and kissed his feet, jubilant that he (had received) the kingship, and with shining faces. Happily they greeted him as a master through whose help they had come (again) to life from death (and) had all been spared damage and disaster, and they worshiped his (very) name.

I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, legitimate king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four rims (of the earth), son of Cambyses---, great king, king of Anshan, grandson of Cyrus, great king, king of Anshan, descendant of Teispes---, great king, king of Anshan, of a family (which) always (exercised) kingship; whose rule Bēl and Nebo love, whom they want as king to please their hearts.

When I entered Babylon---as a friend and (when) I established the seat of the government in the palace of the ruler under jubilation and rejoicing, Marduk, the great lord, [induced] the magnanimous inhabitants of Babylon---[to love me], and I was daily endeavouring to worship him. My numerous troops walked around in Babylon---in peace, I did not allow anybody to terrorize (any place) of the [country of Sumer] and Akkad. I strove for peace in Babylon---and in all his (other) sacred cities. As to the inhabitants of Babylon---, [who] against the will of the gods [had/were...], I abolished] the corvée (lit.: yoke) which was against their (social) standing. I brought relief to their dilapidated housing, putting (thus) an end to their (main) complaints. Marduk, the great lord, was well pleased with my deeds and sent friendly blessings to myself, Cyrus, the king who worships him, to Cambyses, my son, the offspring of [my] loins, as well as to all my troops, and we all [praised] his great [godhead] joyously, standing before him in peace.

All the kings of the entire world from the Upper to the Lower Sea, those who are seated in throne rooms, (those who) live in other [types of buildings as well as] all the kings of the West land living in tents, brought their heavy tributes and kissed my feet in Babylon---. (As to the region) from...as far as Ashur and Susa, Agade, Eshnunna, the towns Zamban, Me-turru, Der as well as the region of the Gutians, I returned to (these) sacred cities on the other side of the

---

<sup>41</sup> during the New Year's Festival

<sup>42</sup> i.e., the Medes

*Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which (used) to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I (also) gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus had brought into Babylon---to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed, in their (former) chapels, the places which make them happy.*

*May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bēl and Nebo for a long life for me and may they recommend me (to him)---<sup>43</sup>*

This document has a number of points in common with the Chronicle of Nabonidus; but, unlike the Chronicle, its flavour is hardly annalistic. Thus, while the disruptions in the religious life of the city are noted in the entries for Years 7, 9, 10 and 11 of the Chronicle, the tone of that source is detached, whereas here, there is no doubt that the writer has firm convictions about the superiority of Marduk and the sacrilegious nature of Nabonidus' activities. In addition to apostasy, the charge of being a slave-driver is levelled against Nabonidus. As will be seen, this finds a parallel in the Verse Account, where the forced labour is instead mentioned in connection with the king's building activities in Tema.

The king's devotion to Sin is considered so heretical that the gods themselves are brought into the picture: the disgust of Marduk and the other gods reaches such a pitch that they forsake Babylon. But Marduk is not ready to abandon his people. Instead, he searches for a saviour and finds him in the person of Cyrus, king of Anshan. The early conquests of Cyrus are ascribed to Marduk, who also enables Cyrus to capture Babylon without any effort. While it is true that the troops of Ugbaru entered the city without a battle, there were at least two preliminary battles: one at Uruk, in the winter, towards the close of Nabonidus' sixteenth year,<sup>44</sup> and the other at

---

<sup>43</sup> Ancient Near Eastern Texts, pp. 315-316. A few more lines are translated by Oppenheim, but these are fragmentary and the text breaks off shortly thereafter.

<sup>44</sup> Beaulieu, pp. 219-220.

Opis, in which Nabonidus himself may have participated. On this occasion Cyrus is said to have slaughtered the people and carried off plunder. So Babylon was hardly spared "any calamity," as the Cyrus Cylinder claims.

The people's jubilant attitude towards Cyrus may reflect historical fact, although the oppressiveness of Nabonidus' rule was probably felt more by the clergy than by the average citizen. The words "I strove for peace in Babylon" undoubtedly reflect the actual policies of Cyrus, since peace is also mentioned in the Chronicle of Nabonidus and the Verse Account. Along with this peace came an abolition of the slave labour and housing reforms. Finally, the submission of kings formerly dependent on Nabonidus is noted, as is the return of the various divine images to their sanctuaries.

#### *The Verse Account*

This composition is preserved on a damaged tablet in the British Museum. As mentioned in the Introduction, it contrasts the reigns of Nabonidus and Cyrus. Although some sections are quite well preserved, much of the text is fragmentary. Since the author was working with one basic theme (the overthrow of an apostate king by a pious one), he concentrated on certain outward signs of each king's attitude and found various ways to express the same idea. For this reason, only portions of the account have been reproduced here; but these clearly indicate to what degree Nabonidus was hated and corroborate details in the other two cuneiform sources.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> The translation in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 312-315, is given a poetic format, but I have not reproduced it for two reasons. Firstly, the poetic nature of the original is barely perceptible in the translation; the art of the original writer would have found expression in ways unique to Semitic cultures. For example, as in the poetry of the Old Testament, the same idea is often expressed twice. Thus we read: *(Nabonidus said): "I shall build a temple for him, I shall construct his (holy) seat..."* The seat is not mentioned to provide the reader with extra detail, but to echo the earlier phrase. An English reader unfamiliar with this peculiar aspect of Semitic

--- [As to Nabonidus] (his) protective deity became hostile to him, [and he, the former favorite of the g]ods (is now) seized by misfortunes: [...against the will of the g]ods he performed an unholy action, [...] he thought out something worthless: [He had made the image of a deity] which nobody had (ever) seen in (this) country, [he introduced it into the temple], he placed (it) upon a pedestal; [...] he called it by the name of Nanna,<sup>46</sup> [...it is adorned with a...of lapis] lazuli, crowned with a tiara, [...] its appearance is (that of) the eclipsed moon ---

\* \* \*

(Nabonidus said): "I shall build a temple for him, I shall construct his (holy) seat, I shall form its (first) brick (for) him, I shall establish firmly its foundation, I shall make a replica even to the temple Ekur, I shall call its name é.hul.hul for all days to come! When I will have fully executed what I have planned, I shall lead him by his hand and establish him on his seat. (Yet) till I have achieved this, till I have obtained what is my desire, I shall omit (all) festivals, I shall order (even) the New Year's Festival to cease!"

\* \* \*

After he had obtained what he desired, a work of utter deceit, had built (this) abomination, a work of unholiness - when the third year was about to begin - he entrusted the "Camp" to his oldest (son), the first-born,<sup>47</sup> the troops everywhere in the country he ordered under his (command). He let (everything) go, entrusted the kingship to him and, himself, he started out for a long journey, the (military) forces of Akkad marching with him; he turned towards Tema (deep) in the west. He started out the expedition on a path (leading) to a distant (region). When he arrived there, he killed in battle the prince of Tema, slaughtered the flocks of those who dwell in the city (as well as) in the countryside, and he, himself, took his residence in [Te]ma; the forces of Akkad [were also stationed] there. He made the town beautiful, built (there) [his palace] like the palace in Šu.an.na (Babylon), he (also) built [walls] (for) the fortifications of the town and [...]. He surrounded the town with sentinels [...]. [The inhabitants] became troubled [...]. The brick form [and the brick basket he imposed upon them] ---

\* \* \*

---

poetry is likely to read through a poem such as this without being aware of any artifice. My second reason for avoiding a poetic format is more practical: any poetic quality still appreciable in the translation would surely be lost by the frequent omission of material. My own arrangement of the quoted lines is topical; thus, while I have not deviated from the order, I have often merged two or more stanzas together to suit the prose format. Also, the translator seemed to dislike semi-colons and periods, especially the former. I have introduced these in places, in order to make the text more readable.

<sup>46</sup> This is the Sumerian form of Sin (Ancient Near Eastern Texts, p. 385, footnote 1).

<sup>47</sup> i.e., Belshazzar

*The pra[is]e of the Lord of Lords [and the names of the countries] which he has not conquered he wrote upon [this stela...]. (While) Cyrus (is) the king of the world whose tri[umph(s)] are true[ ] and [whose yoke] the kings of all the countries are pullifng.] he (Nabonidus) has written upon his stone tablets: "[I have made...bow] to my feet, I personally have conquered his countries, his possessions I took to my residence."<sup>48</sup>*

[At this point Nabonidus claims to have been granted occult knowledge, and tries to convince the priests that the Esagil(a) really belongs to Sin. There is a break in the text, where the entry of Cyrus must have been described.]

*[...for] the inhabitants of Babylon he (i.e. Cyrus) declared the state of "peace," [...].... (the troops) he kept away from Ekur. [Big cattle he slaughtered with the axe, he slaughtered many aslu-sheep; [incense he put] on the censer, the regular offerings for the Lord of Lords<sup>49</sup> he ordered increased, [he constantly prayed to] the gods, prostrated on his face, [to be/do...] is dear to his heart.*

*[To build up/repair the town of Babylon] he conceived the idea [and he himself took up hoe, spade and] earth basket and began to complete the wall of Babylon! [The original plan of] Nebuchadnezzar they (the inhabitants) executed with a willing heart ---*

*[The images of Babyl]on(ia), male and female, he returned to their cellas, [the...who] had abandoned their [cha]pels he returned to their mansions, [their wrath] he appeased, their mind he put at rest, [...those whose power was] at a low he brought back to life [because] their food is served (to them) [regular]ly.*

[The following section refers to the destruction of all traces of the reign of Nabonidus.]

*[...] (these) deeds he effaced, [...which] he has constructed, all the sanctuaries [...] of his [royal rule...he has eradicated, [...] of his [...] the wind carried away. [...] his picture/symbol he effaced, [...in all] the sanctuaries the inscriptions of his name are erased, [...whatever he (Nabonidus) had cre]ated, he (Cyrus) let fire burn up, [...what he (Nabonidus) had cre]ated, he (Cyrus) fed to the flames!*

*[To the inhabitants of] Babylon a (joyful) heart is given now. [They are like prisoners when] the prisons are opened. [Liberty is restored to] those who were surrounded by oppression; [all rejoice] to look upon him as king!*

---

<sup>48</sup> This passage would suggest that Nabonidus suffered from some delusion that he himself was a great conqueror, even while a truly potent force was preparing to invade his country. It is Cyrus, in fact, whose "yoke" is said to be on the necks of kings.

<sup>49</sup> i.e., Marduk

Thus ends the Verse Account, a rather florid and highly dramatic depiction of one king's fall and another's rise. It is significant that a foreign ruler is acknowledged as the rightful king of Babylon; this underscores the high degree of popular opposition to the policies of Nabonidus. It would seem that if the people could have their housing improved and their festivals reinstated, they would be willing to welcome any conqueror who was prepared to respect tradition. Some knowledge of Cyrus' liberal policies must have been in circulation and the inhabitants of Babylon were probably awaiting the arrival of the Persians with some feelings of hope for a better future.

The king's devotion to Sîn (or Nanna) is expressed in such a way that anyone would label him a fanatic. Except for the monotheistic Jews, ancient peoples were remarkably flexible in matters of religion. It was quite common for certain cults to find followings in other countries (the popularity of Isis in Rome is a good example of this). It is conceivable, then, that Nabonidus could have succeeded in establishing Sîn as an important god in Babylon, if he had moved more slowly and not tried to supplant the other gods (particularly not Marduk). The elimination of the festivals was another bad move, which must surely have dealt a death-blow to his dreams. But Nabonidus was old and perhaps he wanted to see the whole populace become devotees of his favourite god before he died.

In any case, the Verse Account does tell of an encounter between Nabonidus and some priestly scholars, in which the king tries to prove that Sîn is the actual owner of the Esagil(a). This would have been an ideal opportunity for the poet to express in dramatic terms the conflict between the apostate king and the orthodoxy. Fiercely loyal priests might have been tortured in some barbaric fashion worthy of an Assyrian king. Instead, we are not told what the priests said (if indeed they said anything at all). But two court officials are present, who agree with

Nabonidus' claim that the symbol of Šin is on the temple - no doubt in order to gain their master's favour. This could be a touch of realism. Until the actual arrival of the foreign troops, the king's word is law.

After the king's architectural achievements are mentioned, we are told that he entrusted affairs to his eldest son (Belshazzar) and set off for Tema, where he killed a native prince and settled down. He beautified the town and fortified it, and also built himself a palace - apparently by means of forced labour. It so happens that the entries for Years 3, 4, and 5 in the Chronicle of Nabonidus are so poorly preserved that it is virtually impossible to gather anything from them. This section of the Verse Account is thus very important for an understanding of "the Tema period."

The state of peace declared by Cyrus upon entering Babylon finds a parallel in the Nabonidus Chronicle, as does the later mention of the return of the statues to their proper shrines. Cyrus is next depicted as an active participant in the return to orthodoxy - so active, in fact, that he actually slaughters the sacrificial victims! A. L. Oppenheim notes:

"What is startling...is that the subject of the two verbs referring to the slaughtering of cattle...and of sheep...is clearly the king himself. Such activities are unheard of for a Mesopotamian king, let alone a foreign one, and square ill with the Persian aversion to animal sacrifice. It is clear that the poet's imagination got the better of his judgement, as a text meant to be read in religiously oriented circles would hardly include so unlikely a statement."<sup>50</sup>

The later statement that equips him with a hoe, spade, and earth basket could have some basis in fact. Ancient Mesopotamian kings did apparently become involved in actual building programmes<sup>51</sup> - if only on a limited scale to show their devotion to the public cause. So Cyrus

---

<sup>50</sup> "Babylonian Evidence," p. 551.

<sup>51</sup> Conversation with Dr. Evan Haley, Dept. of Classics, McMaster University.

could conceivably have contributed in some small way to the public works, just as some modern monarchs have been known to plant a tree. On the other hand, Cyrus (who was about fifty-nine years old at the time) might also have found this aspect of the traditional Babylonian kingship as distasteful as the Greeks found the custom of *proskynesis*.

Along with the return to orthodoxy and the building programme came an intense bitterness towards the memory of Nabonidus: we are told that Cyrus made every effort to destroy all traces of his reign. A similar (though probably more severe) form of vindictive behaviour occurred in the reign of Haremhab, the last pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt. The monotheistic dreams of Amenhotep IV (Akhenaton) made him a true visionary, but his devotion to the Aton (the solar disk) was characterized by the same level of fanaticism which Nabonidus displayed.<sup>52</sup> After his death and the passing of his immediate successors, Haremhab was tireless in destroying all evidence of the religion of Akhenaton.<sup>53</sup> At Thebes he destroyed the temple of Aton and used the blocks which had formed the sanctuary for building an addition to the temple of Amon. "Everywhere the name of the hated Akhenaton was treated as he had those of the gods. At Akhetaton his tomb was wrecked and its reliefs chiseled out; while the tombs of his nobles there were violated in the same way. Every effort was made to annihilate all trace of the reign of such a man..."<sup>54</sup>

Both the Cyrus Cylinder and the Verse Account depict a people on the verge of a crisis. A visionary is on the throne of Babylon and long-established traditions have been displaced. This

---

<sup>52</sup> James Henry Breasted, *A History of Egypt* (New York, 1937), p. 363; *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Toronto, 1986), Vol. 18, p. 159.

<sup>53</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Toronto, 1994), Vol. 6, p. 60.

<sup>54</sup> Breasted, p. 402.

climate of unrest was ideally suited to the plans of Cyrus. First King of Anshan, then King of the Medes and Persians, he had already conquered Lydia. Babylon, with all its riches, was a greater prize than Sardis and would prove easier to take.

## Chapter Two

The history of Herodotus was an innovative work; and, as with any such work, there are bound to be what some might cite as flaws ascribable to human nature. I have not set myself the task of asking whether or not he could have produced a better work, for twenty-five centuries separate us from the Father of History, and I would rather dwell on his contribution, not his shortcomings. First of all, his work is hardly one grand tapestry depicting the rise and fall of various powers in chronological order. To have created such a work, he would have had to bridge continents with his pen, charting the rise of one royal house in Lydia and then flitting to Media to describe similar events unfolding there. Such an attempt at achieving unity could only have resulted in confusion, for each subject (the rise of the Mermnad Dynasty, the treachery of Astyages, etc.) would have been robbed of any individual emphasis and the study wholly fragmented. Only in conflicts does the reader find more than one nation on the same section of the canvas. Thus Persia and Greece are linked closely in the later books; but this is only because they were at war and actual events enabled the historian to bring the two nations close together. For the most part, however, Herodotus limits his study to one nation at a time, tracing its history, describing its customs and achievements, and then moving on to another section of his tapestry, where he charts the fate of another power. As my own study, however, is confined to one man, I have tackled the various Herodotean stories about Cyrus in the order in which they would stand in a strictly chronological arrangement. Thus the material in i.107-130 (which describes the rise of Cyrus to power) is dealt with before the fall of Sardis (which, if traced back to the time when Croesus first became concerned about Persian power, extends from i.46 to i.91).

### *Sources*

Scholarly views on the worth of Herodotus and the reliability of his sources have gone in cycles. The scepticism of nineteenth and early twentieth century writers has given way to a more positive assessment of this Greek writer's inestimable contribution. There are still some, however, who assess The Histories from a purely literary viewpoint without anything, it would seem, but a superficial knowledge of the historical periods involved. Thus Detlev Fehling, in Herodotus and his 'Sources': Citation, Invention and Narrative Art (Leeds, 1989), is prepared to state (pp. 258-259):

"Such considerable portions of the whole work can be shown to be certainly, probably, or possibly invented that it may justly be concluded that Herodotus had only the very roughest framework of genuine historical information and filled that out...by his own creative powers...Statements about events in the remote past have to be interpreted without recourse to hypotheses of oral sources...The work may be assumed to have come into existence inside the author's head over a long period and to have been finally committed to writing all in one go..."

There are a number of problems here. Firstly, the "considerable portions" to which this writer alludes must obviously be those sections that have a strong legendary flavour (i.e, the birth story of Cyrus, the salvation of Croesus from death on the pyre, etc.). But the first of these, if not actually taken from a Persian source, is clearly built upon Greek models and therefore can only be called an adaptation, not an invention. And, though Herodotus does frequently refer to evidence for a particular belief or fantastic claim (which Fehling justifiably considers invention), all combined citations of such evidence could hardly constitute "considerable portions of the whole work."

Secondly, the specific details that do find support from external sources (some of them nearly contemporaneous with the event in question) are far too numerous to warrant the belief that "Herodotus had only the very roughest framework of genuine historical information." Also,

if Fehling dismisses the possibility that Herodotus had oral sources, he would seem to be implying that Herodotus had access to written sources or, on certain occasions, miraculously came up with an imaginary idea that just happened to be very close to the actual historical event. As it happens, he denies that Herodotus had written sources, stating (p. 3): "It is now also realised that there was not even any extensive literature in existence for him to draw on." So, quite apart from the fact that it is impossible to determine what was lost between the fifth century B.C. and the Middle Ages, Fehling is asking us to believe that the list of the seven conspirators who plotted against the false Smerdis (iii.70) was conjured out of thin air!

A less radical view of Herodotus' source material will now be given. It may be noted that, while the researcher can sometimes pick out a Homeric phrase in The Histories of Herodotus, the complete loss of early Persian literature foils all attempts to ascribe an eastern origin to any story in the Persian section of his work. Many of these, in fact, have parallels in Greek literature; it would seem, therefore, that Herodotus had no reservations about utilizing mythic texts. As for the non-mythic, seemingly reliable information, educated guesses have been made as to the historian's sources, some of which seem quite likely.

"It is assumed that the information of Herodotus on the history of Iran...came from the accounts of Zopyrus, a Persian emigrant belonging to one of the great houses of Persia, and also from someone or other of the descendants of the Median magnate Harpagus who played a fatal role in the years of the fall of the Median kingdom and subsequently became Persian satrap of Sardis. His descendants had apparently settled in Asia Minor, more precisely in Lycia, not far from Herodotus' native city Halicarnassus. The historian also utilized the writings of Hecataeus of Miletus, who seems to have had access to some official Persian documents of the satrapy of Sardis."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I. M. Diakonoff, "Media," in The Cambridge History of Iran, p. 89, footnote 1.

*Aims*

The aims of Herodotus are clearly set forth in the proemium to The Histories. His statement, however, fails to explain why he includes so much information that does not bear even indirectly on the conflict between the Persians and Greeks.<sup>2</sup> Scholars have laboured to account for the inclusion of many obscure geographic and ethnographic details, many of which pertain to remote peoples unconnected with the Graeco-Persian conflict. Seth Benardete, in Herodotean Inquiries (The Hague, 1969), provides an in-depth analysis of The Histories, which focuses on the philosophical stance of the writer but does not address the historical questions with which the present study is concerned. Still, some interesting points are made. After noting that Herodotus mentions that he could give three other accounts of Cyrus besides the one that he does present (i.95), Benardete states:

"Herodotus in his Lydian account did not speak of the Greeks' or Lydians' veracity; he recorded with increasing doubt what they say, but he never mentioned the possibility he might have written the story of Croesus otherwise, that there might have been a version which did not bring in the gods. There was no one among the Lydians or the Greeks who wished to tell an unadorned truth: in the Persian account there are dreams but no oracles, and the Magi incorrectly interpret a dream (120; cf. 208). Everything now appears in a different light, the light of the truth-telling Persians. Herodotus transposes two Greek stories into a Persian setting - those of Thyestes and Oedipus - in telling the story of Cyrus' childhood.<sup>3</sup> By letting us hear directly what Astyages, Harpagus, Cyrus, the shepherd and his wife have to say, with almost no comments by himself, we willingly accept that transposition. We understand the necessities under which

---

<sup>2</sup> Thus the long digression on Egyptian "history" (which includes the stories of Cheops and Rhampsinitus) seems only to have been included for the innate interest of the individual anecdotes. But the same cannot be said of the "biography of Cyrus." Herodotus undoubtedly felt that it was necessary to trace the life of the founder of the empire by which Greece was so greatly threatened.

<sup>3</sup> The author seems to be unaware of the fact that the East had infant exposure myths of its own, and that the story in Herodotus could have emanated from an eastern source. See below.

they acted as though they were our own, and we soon forget the Greek versions of Oedipus and Thyestes. We become slightly Persian."<sup>4</sup>

*The Story of Cyrus as told by Herodotus: A Summary*

Astyages, king of the Medes, had a daughter named Mandane. After having a foreboding dream about her, he decided not to marry her to a noble of his own race, but gave her to Cambyses, a Persian. In the first year of Mandane's marriage Astyages had another dream; although the image was different, the meaning (as interpreted by the Magi) was the same: Mandane's offspring would rule in the place of Astyages. So the king had his daughter brought home; and, as soon as the male child was born, Astyages gave him to Harpagus, a trusted relative and steward, with orders to kill the infant. Harpagus disliked the idea of carrying out the order himself, but was afraid to disobey completely. He therefore sent for a cowherd named Mitrdates, whom he ordered to expose the child on the mountains where the wild beasts roamed. Mitrdates took the baby, but found on his return home that his wife had given birth in his absence, and that the child was still born. The wife persuaded her husband to wrap their dead son in the royal apparel of Mandane's son and expose him on the mountains. They would raise the king's grandson as if he had been their own.

When Cyrus was ten years old, however, he revealed a kingly temperament in a game with other children. His cruel treatment of his playmate in the course of that game led to a complaint against him by the boy's father, who was of high rank and demanded satisfaction. Accordingly, Mitrdates and Cyrus were brought into the king's presence. Astyages was unsettled by the lad's appearance (which seemed to favour his own) and, as he compared his age with the time when his grandson was born, he decided that he must uncover the truth. At the prospect of torture, Mitrdates confessed and was apparently sent home unpunished. It was Harpagus who bore the full weight of the king's wrath. When he had confirmed the cowherd's story, Astyages expressed his gladness that his grandson was alive and invited Harpagus to a feast in the young prince's honour. Before this feast he sent for the only son of Harpagus, who was promptly slain and cut up in pieces. At the feast Harpagus was served his son's flesh; but, when this was later revealed to him, he maintained his composure and brought home whatever parts of his son's body he could salvage.

The Magi advised Astyages that the threat from Cyrus was over; and so he sent him home to his parents in Persia. When he was grown, he found himself the recipient of traitorous letters from Harpagus, who longed for vengeance on Astyages. Cyrus thought that the advice from Harpagus was good and roused his countrymen to rebel. Astyages mustered his army to oppose them and made the foolish mistake of appointing Harpagus general. Only those not privy to the conspiracy fought; the rest either passed directly over to the Persian ranks or fled. Astyages was taken prisoner and endured the taunts of Harpagus until Cyrus had him released and treated with respect.

The conquest of Lydia was relatively easy. Croesus, the king of Lydia, planned to follow an indecisive battle with a period of inactivity, when he could summon his allies and be ready

---

<sup>4</sup> Herodotean Inquiries, p. 24.

to meet the Persian army after winter. Cyrus marched straight to Sardis, paying no heed to the weather and thereby depriving Croesus of all hope of assistance from the auxiliary troops that were not expected until spring. His use of camels to frighten the Lydian horsemen made his opponents retreat to find shelter within their city walls. But watchful eyes found a weak spot in the fortifications and the Persians were soon in possession of Sardis. Croesus was to be burned alive on a pyre, but his prayer to Apollo sent a shower of rain, which extinguished the flames. From then on, Cyrus retained Croesus as an invaluable advisor.

Babylon was the next target of Persian ambition. It, too, proved to be an easy prize. By diverting the waters of the river that flowed through the midst of the city, the Persians were able to wade through the lowered waters and enter the city without the necessity of a siege. Their entry also happened to be made at a time when the inhabitants were celebrating at a festival and not particularly watchful.

Cyrus' campaign against the Massagetae did not go so well. The Scythian tribe was led by Tomyris, a warrior-queen, whose son fell into the Persians' hands and was later released, only to commit suicide. The Massagetae subsequently fought bravely to defend their land's independence and avenge their queen's loss. Cyrus fell on the battlefield, and Tomyris sought for his body among the Persian dead and decapitated it. Then she dipped the head into a skin of blood to satisfy the bloodlust which she felt was responsible for her son's death.

### *The Birth and Early Years of Cyrus*

Basic reference sources tend to discount the birth story of Cyrus as found in Herodotus because it is filled with motifs, or folkloristic elements, that cross all cultural boundaries and are almost exclusively drawn to the stories of famous (or infamous) persons. Typically, a sage announces to a ruler that his sovereignty may be threatened by the birth of a male child (often a relative). Sometimes (as in Herodotus) the king himself has a dream that is interpreted to mean the same thing.

In The Histories, Astyages has two dreams. In the first (i.107), he dreams that Mandane voids so much water that not only is his city filled but also the whole of Asia. In the second dream, he sees a vine growing from her genitals, which covers all of Asia (108). This last has a parallel in the Electra of Sophocles, where Clytaemnestra has a similar vision of Agamemnon, the husband whom she murdered:

εἶτα τόνδ' ἐφέστιον  
πῆξαι λαβόντα σκῆπτρον οὐφόρει ποτὲ

αὐτός, τανῦν δ' Αἴγισθος ἐκ δὲ τοῦδ' ἄνω  
 βλαστῆιν βρύοντα θαλλόν, ᾧ κατάσκιον  
 πᾶσαν γενέσθαι τῆν Μυκηναίων χθόνα. (*Electra*, 419-423)

In most hero tales, the king orders the child of promise killed, but someone takes pity on it and rears it in secret. In some stories, an animal finds a place here (as in the story of Romulus and Remus, who are suckled by a she-wolf). Some of these elements may not always be present, but the essential construction remains the same. The pattern is found in authors as distinct as Herodotus and St. Matthew. Accordingly, scholars have relegated the Cyrus nativity story to the same realm of fiction to which most have consigned the birth stories of Sargon of Akkad and Moses. Besides these, one may recall the exposure of Oedipus. How and Wells also mention the Indian hero Chandragupta, who was nourished by the sacred bull.<sup>5</sup>

It should be mentioned that in the story of Cyrus himself, as told by Herodotus, an animal is mentioned: the actual parents of the young prince are said to have circulated a rumour that Cyrus had been suckled by a bitch (*Histories*, i.122). It has been suggested that Herodotus (or one of his Persian sources) actually took such an account of Cyrus' nativity and rationalized it by turning the dog into a human foster mother. This view is authoritatively but not convincingly developed by Fehling, who states: "In fact even the basic story cannot be Persian, since it is founded on a Greek etymological play between Kyros and κύων, "dog" (122.3)."<sup>6</sup> But this is not the case. According to Herodotus, the parents of Cyrus come up with the idea of circulating the fabulous rumour when they hear the name of their son's foster mother, Kyno - the Greek form of Spako, which is itself a Hellenized form of the Median word for "dog" (*Histories*,

<sup>5</sup> *A Commentary on Herodotus*, Vol. 1, Appendix IV.4 (4) [p. 389].

<sup>6</sup> *Herodotus and his 'Sources'*, p. 110.

i.110). Besides, Herodotus says that Cyrus bore another name while he lived with the cowherd (i.113); this assumption finds support in Strabo.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, while it is not impossible that Herodotus himself rationalized a Persian legend, it is surely not necessary to agree with Fehling's sweeping conclusion that the Persians did not have a story of their own in which Cyrus was suckled by a female dog. In Heroes in Herodotus: The Interaction of Myth and History (New York, 1991), Elizabeth Vandiver makes some good points about i.122. She states (p. 251):

"This rational explanation [of the story involving the animal nurse] suggests two important points. First, it seems to indicate that when Herodotus was gathering his material, marvelous stories about Cyrus' childhood really were in circulation, and well enough known that Herodotus could assume his readers would understand his reference to them; in other words, Herodotus did not invent this story out of whole cloth. And secondly, Herodotus' specific rejection of the story that Cyrus was nursed by an animal shows that he himself did not simply accept a fabulous explanation whenever and wherever such an explanation was available, but rather exercised his critical judgment."

One should assume that the exposure of unwanted infants was a cruel fact of life in ancient times, unless, of course, evidence exists which indicates that it was not the norm in certain periods.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, it is the prevalence of infant exposure *as a motif* in the birth stories of either national heroes or religious leaders that points to a process of aetiology. Thus some figure rises from either obscure or princely roots and goes on to achieve great things for his people or country. The common folk, unable to see psychological factors as providing the impetus for his success and perhaps unwilling to accept the possibility of coincidence because

---

<sup>7</sup> ἔστι δὲ καὶ Κῦρος ποταμός, διὰ τῆς κοίτης καλουμένης Περσίδος ῥέων περὶ Πασαργάδας, οὗ μετέλαβε τὸ ὄνομα βασιλεύς, ἀντὶ Ἀγραδάτου μετονομασθεὶς Κῦρος. (Geography, XV.iii.6)

<sup>8</sup> I am told by Dr. Evan Haley that this is the case for both Archaic and Classical Greece.

of the importance of Fate in their culture, latch on to some timeless tale of exposure/salvation and link it to their hero, thus finding the germ of future greatness early on.

But in the end one must look at the later life of each individual hero before dismissing what tradition has preserved concerning that hero's childhood. Thus in the case of Moses, for example, by rejecting the tradition that he passed his formative years under the aegis of a powerful Egyptian, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to explain his later legislative and military abilities (to say nothing of his literary accomplishments, as some modern scholars believe that he may very well have written some skeletal, pre-Monarchic version of the Pentateuch). Of course, this one figure is bound (for religious reasons) to bring forward more champions than could ever be found for a figure from the Classical world.

At the core of the Cyrus nativity story is the assertion that he was half-Median. A rejection of this is unwarranted. Dynastic marriages were as common in the ancient East as in Mediaeval Europe. Their existence is confirmed by the countless tablets that have surfaced in the last century. Of these, the Amarna letters of the fourteenth century B.C. are perhaps the most famous. Cyrus' own silence on his maternal descent can easily be explained by the fact that Persian society was patriarchal;<sup>9</sup> matrilineal descent was important in Egypt and therefore the names of various monarchs' mothers are known to us. Accordingly, there seems to be no reason to doubt that Cyrus was the son of Mandane, the daughter of Astyages.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> R. N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (London, 1962), p. 52.

<sup>10</sup> This parentage was accepted by Diodorus Siculus (*Library of History*, ix.22).

The portrait of Astyages as painted by Herodotus could hardly be blacker.<sup>11</sup> It has been assumed that "his [Astyages'] memory was blackened in the tradition which H. had received, probably from the descendants of Harpagus...but traitors do not speak well of those they have betrayed."<sup>12</sup> But even if the tales told about him are fictitious, they should not be entirely discounted. It is irrelevant whether he actually tried to kill Cyrus or mutilated Harpagus' son: both stories suggest that the last Median king was extremely sadistic. Popular tradition could have invented these stories (which later acquired a Greek veneer), but my suggestion is that it merely built upon an existing foundation. Acknowledging that there were ill feelings between grandfather and grandson could also explain why Cyrus declined to trace his descent from Astyages. If Astyages had indeed been a wise and benevolent monarch, it is difficult to imagine how such horrid stories came to be associated with him. There is, however, another explanation. *The traditional motifs associated with a famous man's birth would have been drawn to the figure of Cyrus soon after his death by a younger generation that appreciated the extent of his accomplishments. Since someone had to be cast in the role of "the authority figure" who threatened the life of the future world conqueror, the only logical choice would have been Astyages. In fact, later Persian legend confounded him "with the tyrant Zohak or Azhi-dahâka, 'the biting snake' of night and darkness, celebrated in ancient Aryan mythology."*<sup>13</sup> But even

---

<sup>11</sup> Later writers inherited this portrait. Diodorus Siculus (ix.23) says of him: ὤμῶς γὰρ ἦν καὶ φύσει ἀπηνήγς. Xenophon, however, portrays him as a kindly grandfather.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 383.

<sup>13</sup> *The Ancient Empires of the East: Herodotos I.-III., with notes, introductions, and appendices* by A. H. Sayce (London, 1883), Appendix V, p. 438.

though "Astyages" is said to mean "biting snake,"<sup>14</sup> the later Persian legends need not have had pre-Herodotean antecedents. As stated above, the informants of Herodotus may have been biased.

The divergence of scholarly opinion on the overall worth of Herodotus, which is discussed under *Sources*, naturally extends to the birth story of Cyrus. At one end of the spectrum stands Robert William Rogers, who, in *A History of Ancient Persia* (New York, 1929), commented on the Median ancestry of Cyrus as follows: "...the stories that make his mother Mandane, daughter of the Median king Astyages, may safely be dismissed as legends intended to comfort the Medes after their defeat. It will be safe to regard Cyrus as wholly Persian..."<sup>15</sup> However, just over fifty years later, Max Mallowan was prepared to state (without apparent justification for his viewpoint), that the first decade of Cyrus' rule "was occupied in consolidating his position under the king of the Medes, whose daughter, Mandane, was his mother, that is to say, Astyages was his grandfather on the maternal side."<sup>16</sup> At about the same time, J. M. Cook concluded that "there does seem to be a firm substratum of genuine historical knowledge [in Herodotus], much of which has been obtained from Persian and Median

---

<sup>14</sup> How and Wells, Appendix III.5, footnote 1 (p. 383).

<sup>15</sup> *A History of Ancient Persia*, p. 36. As a possible defence of this view, it must be admitted that the name "Mandane" could be an ethnic symbol, since *manda* ("the Mede") is part of the usual designation of that people (Umman-manda) in Babylonian sources. This is noted in an Italian edition of Herodotus, *La Lidia e La Persia: libro I, le Storie*, with text and commentary by David Asheri (Rome & Milan, 1988), p. 334.

<sup>16</sup> "Cyrus the Great (558-529 B.C.)," Chapter 7 in Vol. 2 of *The Cambridge History of Iran*, p. 405. Other scholars who accept Cyrus' relationship to Astyages are A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago, 1948), p. 34, and William Culican, *The Medes and Persians* (London, 1965), p. 51.

sources."<sup>17</sup> The "firm substratum of genuine historical knowledge" to which Cook refers, however, must not be thought of as underlying the story of Cyrus' birth and youth. It is more likely that the historian has later portions of The Histories in mind - for example, that part in which the names of the seven conspirators who plotted against the false Smerdis are given (iii.70). Six of these are confirmed by the Bīsūtūn inscription of Darius. Other more colourful sources must lie behind the Cyrus nativity story, as David Asheri writes:

"Si è postulata anche l'esistenza di una novellistica persiana come fonte (intermedia) di alcune storie famose di palazzo, dal colorito tipicamente orientale, come la leggenda della nascita e della giovinezza di Ciro...Tuttavia in queste novelle molto doveva essere stato grecizzato già dagli informatori di Erodoto..."<sup>18</sup>

Asheri devotes a large paragraph to a discussion of the birth story, mentioning the other famous examples cited above.

"L'esposizione di un bambino...è tema prediletto delle saghe popolari...Attinge alle realtà socio-economiche dell'infanticidio...serve talvolta come legittimazione pseudo-storica di una usurpazione controversa, di un cambiamento di dinastia, della fondazione di un regno, di un culto, ecc..."<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, even though the birth story does fall into a familiar heroic mould, there is no sound reason to dismiss what seem to be the basic facts: Cyrus was related to the last Median

---

<sup>17</sup> "The Rise of the Achaemenids and Establishment of their Empire," Chapter 5 in Vol. 2 of The Cambridge History of Iran, p. 205.

<sup>18</sup> Le Storie, p. xxx. English translation: "The existence of a Persian storytelling tradition as an intermediate source of some famous palace stories has also been postulated, [stories with] typically Eastern colouring, like the legend of the birth and youth of Cyrus...Yet in these novellas much must already have been hellenized by the informants of Herodotus..."

<sup>19</sup> Le Storie, pp. 336-337. English translation: "The exposure of a baby...is a favourite theme of the popular sagas...It touches upon the socio-economic realities of infanticide...it sometimes serves as a pseudo-historical legitimization of a controversial usurpation, a change of dynasty, the foundation of a kingdom, of a cult, etc..."

king, there were bitter feelings between them, and the young king of Anshan did conquer his own grandfather.

### *The Defeat of Astyages*

According to Herodotus, the intrigues leading to the subjugation of Media are largely due to the scheming of Harpagus. This enigmatic character, who manages to maintain his composure at the sight of his own son's body parts (i.119), later becomes the guiding force behind the conspiracy. Although other factors undoubtedly contributed to the historic revolt against Astyages' rule, Herodotus naturally preferred the more dramatic motive of revenge. Social discontent gives way to the passion of the stage. Still, we may be sure that some contact was made between Cyrus and several of his grandfather's trusted officials (Harpagus included), and that they decided to revolt against Astyages. In the ensuing war Astyages is said to have made Harpagus general - the very man whose son Astyages had earlier butchered. This shows that the grisly feast was a late addition to the "romance" of Cyrus, in which Harpagus already played a prominent part. I. M. Diakonoff states:

"But if Astyages really acted in this fashion [appointing Harpagus general], it was certainly not because "god had clouded his mind"<sup>20</sup> (I.127) but because no cannibalistic feast had taken place and Harpagus, as the foremost representative of the Median aristocracy and kinsman of the king (I.109) could well be appointed commander-in-chief."<sup>21</sup>

Even without this narrative inconsistency (i.e., that Astyages would place a man whom he had greatly wronged in a position of power), the story would be suspect because of its obvious resemblance to the Greek myths of Tantalus and Thyestes. Tantalus was the son of Zeus

---

<sup>20</sup> θεοβλαβής is the word used by Herodotus.

<sup>21</sup> "Media," in The Cambridge History of Iran, p. 144.

and a frequent companion of the gods, but he wished to see how perceptive they were. Accordingly, he slaughtered his own son, Pelops, and served him up at a feast to the immortals. Because she was distracted by the loss of Persephone, Demeter ate a small portion. The other gods, however, perceived what had been perpetrated, restored Pelops to life, and sentenced Tantalus to eternal punishment.

Thyestes was the brother of Atreus, king of Mycenae. He conceived a strong desire for his brother's wife and dishonoured her. When Atreus discovered that his own brother had ravished his wife, he killed the children of Thyestes and served them up to their father. When Thyestes realized what he had eaten, he vomited up the sorry remains of his children and invoked a curse on his brother's house. This was fulfilled in a number of ways. Both Agamemnon and Menelaus, the sons of Atreus, suffered for their father's act. Menelaus lost his wife, Helen, who deserted him for the Trojan prince Paris; he therefore accompanied his brother to Troy, where the war dragged on for ten years. Thus both men were separated from their families for a long period. When Agamemnon returned, he was killed by his wife and her lover. This drove their children into a state of despair, which culminated in the execution of Agamemnon's murderers by Orestes, the son of Agamemnon. In killing his own mother, however, he called down upon himself the wrath of the gods and was subsequently hounded by the Furies.

Herodotus was obviously acquainted with both these stories, but it would seem that the potency of the Thyestes story arrested him more - perhaps because the gods play a less prominent role. The myth of Tantalus is filled with magical elements, whereas the story of Atreus and Thyestes is more or less grounded in reality. The Greek playwrights took the raw emotions found in the latter story and created timeless tragedies in which the cruel realities of human existence

are raised to a transcendental level. The story of Harpagus has more in common with the myth of Thyestes. Harpagus, unlike Demeter in the Tantalus story, is fed the flesh of his own son and thus the crime of cannibalism is made even more monstrous than it would have been for the goddess, who had no personal attachment to the victim. And, unlike Tantalus, Astyages loses nothing - neither his child nor his spiritual peace. Even after the victory of Cyrus, he is well treated by the grandson whom he once attempted to kill (*Histories*, i.130). His only punishment is a loss of power.

From the foregoing it is clear that the personal vendetta of Harpagus should be eliminated as a possible historical element in the Herodotean account of Cyrus. But in spite of the historian's fondness for reducing what must surely have been the outgrowth of social strife to the personal level and finding the roots of a revolt in a mythic feast, the basic outcome of the Medes' dissatisfaction with Astyages' rule is the same as that known from the *Babylonian Chronicle*: Astyages' own army turned on him and handed him over to Cyrus. Legend and fact converge at this point.

*Medo-Persian Customs and Religion as Presented by Herodotus*

Although much of what is told about Cyrus' birth and early years is improbable, actual historical customs and religious practices may, in fact, be preserved in the tales. This is especially likely when one considers that Herodotus' informants were quite possibly descendants of the Median noble Harpagus. Any non-Greek colouring may indeed be viewed as realistic (although not necessarily true, since Persian storytellers were undoubtedly as liable as Greek bards to draw from their own experience when recounting a story).

In i.114, for example, we are given a glimpse of young Cyrus (at this point the reputed son of a herdsman) playing μετ' ἄλλων ἡλίκων ἐν ὄδῳ. One of these playmates of Cyrus is called παῖς ἀνδρὸς δοκίμου ἐν Μήδοισι. This could suggest that Median society was not characterized by rigid class distinctions; but it is also true that in many societies children of different classes play together, segregation only occurring later on.

Religious matters are discussed in some detail after the defeat of Astyages is recounted (i.131-132), but even earlier we learn that the Magi occupied official positions at the royal court. Indeed, it is they who are consulted by Astyages when he has his first dream about Mandane's child (i.107). They were reckoned as one of the six tribes that made up the Median nation (i.101), and the testimony of Herodotus is corroborated by the Bīsutūn inscription of Darius I. I. M. Diakonoff, whose penetrating study of the Medes has proven invaluable for the present research topic, states that they were regarded "not as a caste or profession but as a tribe from which religious teachers, priests and soothsayers were recruited."<sup>22</sup> What sort of religion their teachers would have practised, however, is difficult to say. Diakonoff notes that the Magi had long been thought of as Zoroastrian priests - in fact, since well before the Christian Era. But he then states:

"It is only relatively recently that it has been suggested that originally the Magi represented pre-Zoroastrian beliefs. The author of this chapter seems to be one of the few scholars who still think they were Zoroastrians, and that Astyages and perhaps even Cyaxares had already embraced a religion derived from the teachings of Zarathushtra..."<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> "Media," in The Cambridge History of Iran, p. 141.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

After mentioning that very few ritualistic details are given by Herodotus, he then likens the religion of the Magi to that found in an archaic prose part of The Avesta, a sacred book of the Zoroastrian religion.<sup>24</sup> One problem has been pointed out: the ritual of animal sacrifice (as described in 132) could not be Zoroastrian, "if it is true that Zoroastrianism was opposed to the bloody sacrifices of animals."<sup>25</sup>

Whatever the exact beliefs of the Magi were, it is thought that their connection with Astyages makes sense. Herodotus characterizes Astyages as *πικρόζ* in his dealings with the Medes (i.123), and since the group with which Harpagus allied himself were members of the aristocracy it follows that the king was anti-aristocratic. Diakonoff says that "if the Magi were Zoroastrians, their orientation at such an early period would be sure to preserve still something of the original anti-aristocratic tendency of Zarathushtra's teachings."<sup>26</sup>

We cannot be sure about the religion of Cyrus himself, but his tolerance in most areas would be quite understandable if he was a Zoroastrian. Max Mallowan states:

"Perhaps Cyrus...may have come under the influence of Zoroaster's teaching...although there is no evidence yet for saying that Zoroastrianism became a state religion before the time of Darius and his successors. But it seems probable that the noble teachings of this prophet who...preached the doctrine of free will, would have found a kindred spirit in the liberal-minded Cyrus...One may sense that Cyrus' new concept of mercy and justice may have emanated from such beliefs."<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

<sup>25</sup> *Le Storie*, p. 343.

<sup>26</sup> "Media," p. 143.

<sup>27</sup> "Cyrus the Great," p. 416.

### *The Defeat of Croesus*

The story of the Fall of Sardis is preceded by a lengthy account of how Croesus, after mourning his son's death for two years, consulted a number of oracles, which he hoped would officially endorse his plans to move against Cyrus. The emissaries of Croesus had two basic destinations, as is clearly stated: ἀπεπειράτο τῶν μαντηίων τῶν τε ἐν Ἑλλάσι καὶ τοῦ ἐν Λιβύῃ... (*Histories*, i.46). The specific shrines were those of Delphi, Abae, Dodona, Amphiaraus, Trophonius, Branchidae, and Ammon. David Asheri states:

"I particolari sono sicuramente fittizi: gli oracoli sono sette (una cifra simbolica); la lista non corrisponde alle realtà del sesto secolo: mancano oracoli famosi d'Asia minore (Claro, Patara), che un re lidio avrebbe facilmente consultato prima di inviare messi in Grecia."<sup>28</sup>

Regardless of the supposedly unrealistic details, the story itself is vital to the thematic concerns of Herodotus. In *The Histories of Herodotus: An Analysis of the Formal Structure* (The Hague, 1972), Henry Wood states (pp. 24-25): "The main subject of the Croesus-logos proper...is not Lydian military or domestic history, but a paradigm of human εὐδαιμονία and divine φρόνος." Croesus was an over-confident monarch, accustomed to measuring everything in terms of material wealth. He was thus bewildered by the extreme cautiousness of the Greek philosopher Solon, who had earlier visited him and seen his treasures, yet not pronounced Croesus the happiest of men. He told him that no man could be called happy until he was dead, when he was finally past all possible threats to his happiness. His final words to Croesus were indeed ominous: πολλοῖσι γὰρ δὴ ὑποδέξας ὄλβον ὁ θεὸς προρρίζους ἀνέτρεψε

---

<sup>28</sup> Le Storie, p. 291. English translation: "The details are certainly fictitious: there are seven oracles (a symbolic figure); the list does not correspond to the realities of the sixth century: famous oracles of Asia Minor (Claro, Patara) are missing, which a Lydian king would have easily consulted before sending messengers to Greece."

(Histories, i.32). Yet Croesus later relies on the very god(s) whose attitude to mankind was considered "fickle" by at least one great mind of his day.

How and Wells call Herodotus' account of the defeat of Lydia "fairly adequate";<sup>29</sup> and, apart from a few legendary accretions, this would seem to be the case. In the end, it remains the only source that can be considered trustworthy. The first battle between the Lydians and Persians was indecisive; but Croesus, seeing that his own force was much smaller than the Persian one, marched away to Sardis, intending to call upon the Egyptians, Babylonians, and Spartans. Since it was now winter, however, he sent heralds to all his allies, bidding them assemble at Sardis in five months' time. He even dismissed the mercenaries who had just fought alongside him.<sup>30</sup> When Cyrus learned of these proceedings, he marched toward Sardis; and the two armies met on the plain. Fearing the Lydian cavalry (which was renowned for its skill), Cyrus gathered all the camels from the baggage train and set horsemen upon them. Then he had his infantry follow the camels, and set the horses behind them. When the Persian army was thus arranged, Cyrus commanded his men to kill all the Lydians who came in their way; but he gave specific

---

<sup>29</sup> A Commentary on Herodotus, Appendix IV.5 (2) [p. 390].

<sup>30</sup> Georges Radet, author of La Lydie et le monde grec au temps des Mermnades (687-546), has problems with this. He states (p. 248): "Mais on a de la peine à croire que le Mermnade, si aveuglé qu'on le suppose, ait, spontanément et sans y être contraint, affaibli une armée déjà si faible, au moment même où il venait d'en éprouver si cruellement l'insuffisance. Il est probable que la dispersion des mercenaires fut la conséquence forcée de la déroute à laquelle avait abouti la bataille de Ptéria."

English translation: "But one has some difficulty believing that the Mermnad, if blinded as one might suppose, would have spontaneously and without constraint, weakened an army already so weak at the very moment when its insufficiency was about to be so cruelly made trial of. It is probable that the dispersion of the mercenaries was the forced consequence of the rout to which the battle of Pteria had led." (Radet, on the authority of other ancient writers, believed that the preliminary battle which Herodotus considered indecisive did, in fact, turn out in the Persians' favour.)

instructions that Croesus should be spared. At the sight and smell of the camels the Lydian horses reared in fright and fled,<sup>31</sup> leaving their riders at a loss. But instead of abandoning hope, the Lydians dismounted and fought the Persians on foot. At length, however, they were routed and forced to seek protection within the city wall.<sup>32</sup>

The Persians now besieged Sardis; but it appeared that it would be no small task to take the city. At this point Croesus sent to his allies, informing them that they must come at once. The Spartans, however, were engaged in a feud with the Argives and therefore could not respond as quickly as they would have under normal circumstances. As it was, Croesus was left to wait upon their assistance. Meanwhile Cyrus sent horsemen to examine the wall in the hope that they might detect a weak spot. One man noticed that no guard was posted at a certain spot that was considered inaccessible; at this very place a Lydian was seen to drop his helmet, which he surprisingly retrieved by climbing down and then back up. This simple act spelled the fall of Sardis. The man who had seen the whole thing climbed up afterward with other Persians, and the city was soon in the hands of Cyrus.<sup>33</sup>

The actual fate of Croesus is a matter of dispute. As Paul Soedel noted in 1911: "*Historia exitii Croesi, ultimi Lydorum regis, memoriae prodita est tam varie, ut, quid re vera factum sit, vix constitui possit.*"<sup>34</sup> Herodotus claims that the Lydian ruler's life was spared and gives what

---

<sup>31</sup> Rogers (p. 47) accepts this story, as did Sayce before him, who wrote (p. 48, footnote 3): "The dislike of the horse to it [the camel] still continues, as travellers in the east are well able to testify." The tactic employed by Cyrus is also found in Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, VII.i.27.

<sup>32</sup> *Histories*, i.76-80.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, i.81-84.

<sup>34</sup> *De fabellis ad Croesum pertinentibus (quaestiones selectae)* (Göttingen, 1911), p. 1.

is clearly a folktale describing the circumstances. We are told that Cyrus ordered him to be burned alive upon a pyre, and that he afterward repented of his decision and attempted to quench the fire; at this point Croesus invoked Apollo, who sent a rainstorm which extinguished the flames (i.86-87). This story has provoked much scholarly debate.

A. H. Sayce, in his commentary to the first three books of Herodotus, likens it to the legends of Christian martyrs and the Old Testament story of the three youths in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3). He also gives alternate versions of the story, as they appear in the histories of Nicolaus of Damascus and Ctesias.<sup>35</sup> How and Wells seemed to have believed that there was some historical basis to the legend, for in their analysis of it they say: "A less probable view is that the whole pyre story is an invention..."<sup>36</sup> But if it was not an invention, how can it be rationalized?

Max Mallowan notes that "historians have rightly objected that the pollution of fire by human sacrifice would have been anathema and contrary to Persian religious practice."<sup>37</sup> He feels that another writer, Bacchylides, preserved the truth, even though he thought that Croesus was carried off to the land of the Hyperboreans.<sup>38</sup> Born only forty years after the fall of Sardis, he wrote that Croesus tried to commit suicide. "We may infer that Cyrus saved him from the flames

---

<sup>35</sup> The Ancient Empires of the East, p. 52, footnote 5.

<sup>36</sup> A Commentary on Herodotus, p. 99.

<sup>37</sup> "Cyrus the Great," p. 413.

<sup>38</sup> Soedel, p. 2.

- a more probable story, and one that accords with Greek tradition, namely that Cyrus used conquered princes to advise him in the administration of their former domains."<sup>39</sup>

It is interesting to note that, according to Herodotus (i.90), Croesus sent the fetters with which he had been bound to Delphi. This could indicate that the whole story was the invention of the Delphic oracle, which had received ample offerings from Croesus while he was still master of Sardis<sup>40</sup> and therefore felt inclined to make his name famous, or at least use it to increase the prestige of the Delphic oracle. What better way could there be to achieve this than by circulating a story that Apollo himself saved the Lydian king from a fiery death?

Despite the lack of scholarly support for the story, John Griffiths Pedley, an American archaeologist, has drawn attention to an anomaly discovered in the dig undertaken at Sardis in the seasons 1964-66.<sup>41</sup> On top of the burial chamber of Alyattes (the father of Croesus) was found a thick deposit of oak ashes, suggesting that "after the construction a fire of considerable size had burned on top of the roof of the chamber."<sup>42</sup> After noting that Hittite kings were cremated and postulating that the same custom was followed by the Lydians, Pedley then states:

"This fire must have been part of the funeral ceremonies, but was it simply to symbolize the brevity and extinction of life, or can we see here some real reflection of the Herodotean story of Croesus on the pyre?"<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> "Cyrus the Great," p. 413.

<sup>40</sup> Histories, i.50-51.

<sup>41</sup> Actually, it was more of a rediscovery, since H. Spiegelthal, the Prussian consul in Smyrna, had tunnelled into one of the mounds at the site in 1853. See Pedley, Sardis in the Age of Croesus (University of Oklahoma, 1968), p. 59.

<sup>42</sup> Pedley, pp. 60-61.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

It is difficult to explain why Pedley would even mention the story of Croesus on the pyre at this point. From his description of the find (which is stated as being on top of the chamber roof, but obviously *below* the mound) it is clear that this fire could only have had some connection with the burial of Alyattes, who would have been interred at least thirteen years before the fall of Sardis.

In any case, Pedley (writing in 1967) rejected the Herodotean tradition that Croesus survived the fall of Sardis.<sup>44</sup> His authority was the Nabonidus Chronicle, and he wrongly assumed that the entry for the ninth year described the invasion of Lydia and the death of its king. As mentioned in Chapter One, however, it is no longer believed that the cuneiform text refers to Lydia, although the passage in question could indicate that Cyrus was carrying on operations in the general vicinity of that country. Max Mallowan expressed the current views on the problem in his study of *Cyrus the Great*. With his statements we may lay to rest the question of whether or not Croesus survived:

"There is no need to invoke a mutilated passage in the Nabonidus Chronicle which some scholars have interpreted as meaning that Cyrus marched against the country Ly...possibly Lydia and killed its king, for it is now recognized that the Akkadian word *iduk* can mean fought, not necessarily killed. Moreover the sign read as Ly is almost illegible. Even if the sign may be read Ly...another interpretation is possible: that the country was Ly(cia) conquered by Cyrus before its neighbour Caria...It may be however that the Nabonidus Chronicle in this passage refers to some other country, neither Lydia nor Lycia,<sup>45</sup> and in any case this text as it stands cannot be taken as evidence that Cyrus killed Croesus: we may still accept the testimony of the Greek historians who reckoned that his life was saved."<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Sardis in the Age of Croesus, p. 98.

<sup>45</sup> If the cuneiform sign is read *zu*, as Beaulieu mentions (p. 198), then this is the only possibility.

<sup>46</sup> "Cyrus the Great," pp. 413-414.

### *The Capture of Babylon*

There are three main elements to be examined in this section of Herodotus: the identity of the Babylonian king, the siege story, and the festival. Of these, the first is a trifling matter (since we are told very little about Labynetus), and the last is really only mentioned to account for the lack of Babylonian resistance. There is no doubt that Herodotus structured his narrative in such a way as to make the siege the main focus. To the modern investigator, however, all three elements raise important questions, particularly the festival.

As discussed in Chapter One, the last king of Babylon was Nabû-nā'id. This would, at first sight, seem to be far removed from Λαβύνητος, the name given by Herodotus (i.188). But it was suggested as long ago as 1883 that the first letter could be the result of a scribal error,<sup>47</sup> and that it might originally have been N instead of Λ, thus yielding Nabunētos - a fairly accurate Greek rendering of the Babylonian name. A recent writer has some interesting thoughts on the matter. In his commentary to Herodotus, R. A. McNeal states: "Did H. himself change Nabonidus to Labynetos? Cf. the Athenian practice of writing πλεύμων for πνεύμων and λίτρον for νίτρον."<sup>48</sup> Herodotus refers to "Labynetus" in the earlier part of his narrative, in the passage describing the war between the Lydians and Medes (i.74). Here, "Labynetus" and Syennesis the Cilician suggest that the two warring powers make a formal agreement through a diplomatic marriage. At this point in time Nabonidus could only have been acting as a high-

---

<sup>47</sup> Sayce, *The Ancient Empires of the East: Herodotos I.-III.*, p. 44, footnote 9.

<sup>48</sup> Herodotus, *Book I*, edited with commentary by R. A. McNeal (Lanham, Maryland, 1986), p. 141.

ranking official under Nebuchadrezzar, unless that very king is intended and the two Babylonian names had become confused in the traditions upon which Herodotus drew.

Unfortunately, Herodotus tells us nothing about what happened to "Labynetus" once the Persian army entered the city, choosing instead to focus on the general populace. He tells us that the inhabitants of the inner city failed to notice the Persian army until it was too late because they were in the midst of a revel: ἀλλὰ τυχεῖν γάρ σφι εἰσοῦσαν ὄρτην, χορεύειν τε τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον καὶ ἐν εὐπαθείησι εἶναι (i.191). This festival is also found in Xenophon's account, where Cyrus is wrongly assumed to be present when Babylon is taken. Although Xenophon's account is the fuller one, a detailed examination of the "festival" will be postponed until Chapter 4, where the Babylonian background will be discussed.

Before recounting the actual capture of Babylon, Herodotus devotes some time to describing the city. He tells us that the total length on all sides of the enclosure-wall(s) was 480 stades (*Histories*, i.178). Ctesias gives 360 stades, and Strabo 365. Since the figures given by Herodotus delineate an area far larger than that covered by the ruins on the actual site of Babylon, a vast literature has developed to explain the discrepancies. A detailed discussion of the problems involved is well beyond the scope of this paper. It will be sufficient to briefly summarize the main theories. The older of these are discussed by How and Wells in their commentary, where they state that one excavator, Weissbach, asserts that the Herodotean figure of 480 stades is fifty times too big. But a colleague of his, Nickel, "points out that the extent of the ruins (roughly fifteen miles by twelve) corresponds to H.'s figures...If this is right, the outer wall included the neighbouring town of Borsippa...which had also a wall of its own. Many, however, maintain Borsippa was quite separate from Babylon, following Berosus...The recent excavations render somewhat doubtful the enormous size of Babylon...[but] even if their results

were more certain than they are, the literary tradition is very strong, and walls of brick might disappear, leaving little or no trace..."<sup>49</sup>

Scholars have not known what to make of the story told in i.191. According to this, the Persians diverted the waters of the Euphrates (which flowed through the midst of the city) and entered Babylon by way of the river, through which they were able to wade. Prior to the discovery of cuneiform sources, many doubtless accepted this story. Later, the trend was to reject it in its entirety. But How and Wells (following Maspero) were prepared to accept that it might have a factual basis, postulating that Cyrus did perhaps use this means to intimidate the capital. They state that "it is more likely that H. is partly right...than that the whole narrative is an invention borrowed from the irrigation works on the Gyndes..."<sup>50</sup>

The method that Cyrus used to enter Babylon, while not an act of *hybris* itself, certainly emphasizes that human failing. Referring to the diversion of the river, David Asheri writes:

"Questo aneddoto, narrato con accuratezza topografica, vuole illustrare la vanità dei disegni umani: il lago, scavato con tanta arte da Nitokris per la difesa di Babilonia (185,4-7), serve al nemico per la conquista della città."<sup>51</sup>

### *The Final Battle of Cyrus*

According to The Histories, Cyrus loses his life fighting against the Massagetae. These were a nomadic people who lived east of the Aral Sea in what is now Turkestan. The Araxes

---

<sup>49</sup> How and Wells, A Commentary on Herodotus, p. 137.

<sup>50</sup> A Commentary on Herodotus, pp. 146-147.

<sup>51</sup> Le Storie, p. 378. English translation: "This anecdote, told with topographic accuracy, is intended to illustrate the vanity of human designs: the lake, excavated with such skill by Nitokris for the defence of Babylon (185.4-7), serves the enemy as a means of conquering the city."

River, which Cyrus is said to have crossed, is the Jaxartes.<sup>52</sup> As to their race, Herodotus states: εἰσὶ δὲ οἴτινες καὶ Σκυθικὸν λέγουσι τοῦτο τὸ ἔθνος εἶναι (i.201). Although some of the Scythian tribes were of Iranian stock,<sup>53</sup> it would appear that the term "Scythian" was applied to a number of peoples, some of non-Caucasian affinity. Apparently "the graphic representations of Saka [Scythian] cavalrymen who were stationed at Memphis in Egypt show Mongol features..."<sup>54</sup> This pictorial evidence is supported by certain skulls from Saka burials of Achaemenid date.<sup>55</sup> In any case, the Massagetae of Herodotus are a formidable nation governed by a warrior-queen, who rejects Cyrus' offer of marriage (i.205).

According to our author, Cyrus loses his life in the fierce battle described in i.214. In his commentary to this section, David Asheri writes:

"La descrizione delle due fasi della battaglia concorda con quanto si sa della tattica delle cavallerie dei popoli seminomadi iranici (anche in età tarda): logoramento del nemico con una pioggia di frecce e scontro frontale, a piedi o a cavallo, con armi da urto e da taglio."<sup>56</sup>

The whole story of the expedition has a highly moralistic tone and seeks to teach that "pride goeth before a fall."<sup>57</sup> David Asheri illustrates this rather well.

---

<sup>52</sup> "The Rise of the Achaemenids," by J. M. Cook, p. 213. See also the map on pp. 282-283. Herodotus unwittingly combined four rivers. See How and Wells, p. 152.

<sup>53</sup> "The Scyths," by T. Sulimirski, Chapter 4 in Vol. 2 of The Cambridge History of Iran, p. 153.

<sup>54</sup> "The Rise of the Achaemenids," p. 255.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, footnote 2.

<sup>56</sup> Le Storie, p. 385. English translation: "The description of the two phases of the battle agrees with as much as is known of the cavalry tactics of seminomadic Iranian peoples (even at a late date): a wearing out of the enemy with a rain of arrows and a frontal attack, on foot or on horseback, with weapons of assault and swords [lit. "cutting"]."

<sup>57</sup> See How and Wells, p. 43.

"Non è difficile comprendere perché per Erodoto l'espansionismo territoriale di uno stato ponesse un problema etico e di riflessione storica e filosofica. Espansionismo significa in primo luogo trasgressione dei limiti naturali e riconosciuti tra popoli e stati. Creso attraversa lo Halys e invade la Cappadocia, Ciro attraversa l'Arasse e invade il paese dei Massageti...[altri esempi]...Sono tutti atti di *hybris*, nel senso di prevaricazione e di affronto alla natura ed alle leggi delle genti, la cui funzione è di preparare il lettore alla catastrofe che incombe. In secondo luogo, l'eccessivo ingrandimento territoriale di uno stato e l'accumulazione di enormi ricchezze producono lusso ed effeminatezza; di qui i rischi delle guerre tra popoli raffinati e popoli rozzi o primitivi, come sarebbero stati i Persiani di Ciro rispetto ai Lidi di Creso ed ai Babilonesi di Nabonido e, rispetto ai Persiani stessi, i Massageti, gli Etiopi, gli Sciti, i Greci..."<sup>58</sup>

The topic of expansion referred to above is considered so important by Kenneth Waters that he bases his whole understanding of the Herodotean portrait of Cyrus on it. Denying that there is a complete literary portrait, he goes on to say: "There is an *impression*, but it is largely that of a successful expansionist, who like many another such eventually meets his Waterloo."<sup>59</sup>

Other ancient writers viewed the death of Cyrus as punishment for lesser human failings than *hybris*. Arrian, for example, took the Persian custom of proskynesis (which was particularly distasteful to the Greeks) and ascribed its invention to Cyrus. Thus, according to Arrian, the

---

<sup>58</sup> Le Storie, p. cix. English translation: "It is not difficult to understand why for Herodotus the territorial expansion of a state posed an ethical problem and one of historical and philosophical reflection. Expansion signifies in the first place transgression of the natural boundaries and those recognized among peoples and states. Croesus crosses the Halys and invades Cappadocia, Cyrus crosses the Araxes and invades the country of the Massagetae...[other examples]...They are all acts of *hybris*, in the sense that they are a transgression and affront to nature and the laws of man, whose function is to prepare the reader for the coming catastrophe. In the second place, the excessive territorial expansion of a state and the accumulation of enormous riches produce luxury and effeminacy; hence the risks of wars between civilized peoples and coarse or primitive peoples, as the Persians of Cyrus would have been with respect to the Lydians of Croesus and to the Babylonians of Nabonidus and, with respect to the Persians themselves, as the Massagetae, the Ethiopians, the Scyths, [and] the Greeks would have been..."

<sup>59</sup> Kenneth H. Waters, Herodotos on Tyrants and Despots: A Study in Objectivity (Wiesbaden, 1971), p. 52.

perpetuation of a humiliating custom tainted the whole of Persian history, so that each king, from Cyrus down to Darius III, was punished for its enforcement. He argues:

εἰ δὲ ὑπὲρ Κύρου τοῦ Καμβύσου λέγεται πρῶτον προσκυνηθῆναι ἀνθρώπων Κῦρον καὶ ἐπὶ τῷδε ἐμμεῖναι Πέρσαις τε καὶ Μήδοις τήνδε τὴν ταπεινότητα, χρῆ ἐνθυμεῖσθαι ὅτι τὸν Κῦρον ἐκείνον Σκύθαι ἐσωφρόνισαν, πένητες ἄνδρες καὶ αὐτόνομοι, καὶ Δαρεῖον ἄλλοι αὖ Σκύθαι...[other examples].

(*Anabasis of Alexander*, iv.11,9)

Regardless of what moral lesson is contained in the story of the campaign, historians accept its basic outline. "That Cyrus was active on this frontier is confirmed by the survival of a city of Cyrus (Kyroupolis or Kyreschata) near the Jaxartes until the time of Alexander the Great."<sup>60</sup> According to Arrian, the superiority of its fortifications marked it as the work of Cyrus.<sup>61</sup> Thus the founder of the Persian Empire "established for the first time an Achaemenian frontier post on the very boundaries of Central Asia - a bulwark against the hordes of migrant tribes who were perpetually threatening Iran from as far afield as Outer Mongolia."<sup>62</sup>

In little more than four pages Elizabeth Vandiver makes a number of perceptive points about the Herodotean portrait of Cyrus, which betray the author's narrative concerns.

"In the last sentences of the *Histories* Cyrus advises the Persians not to leave their own country for a softer one; he asserts 'the argument, Asia for the Asians,' which was first stated in the beginning chapters of the book. Had the Persians heeded all the implications of Cyrus' advice, they would never have dared to violate the natural order of things so greatly as they did by invading Greece and trying to take lands that were not theirs and that, Cyrus told them, could do them no good. Cyrus thus stands as an example of how later Persians should have behaved and, through contrast, as an explanation for their actual defeat..."<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Cook, "The Rise of the Achaemenids," p. 213.

<sup>61</sup> *Anabasis of Alexander*, iv.3,1.

<sup>62</sup> Mallowan, "Cyrus the Great," p. 399.

<sup>63</sup> *Heroes in Herodotus: The Interaction of Myth and History*, pp. 252-253.

The desire of Cyrus to conquer the Massagetae may indicate *hybris*, but here one should perhaps recall how the Greeks of the early fifth century B.C. viewed the actions of Xerxes, when he attempted to invade Greece. Although Athenian envoys had formerly given a symbolic offering of earth and water to Darius at the behest of the viceroy of Sardis (*Histories*, v.73), this action was condemned at the time and subsequently not recognized by the Greeks of 480 B.C. as sufficient to authorize any Persian control over their land. Indeed, Herodotus ascribes to Xerxes a level of *hybris* vastly greater than that displayed by Cyrus. In vii.34-35, for instance, the Persian king reacts to the collapse of bridges built across the Hellespont in a particularly memorable way. In addition to executing the builders (which is expected behaviour for a despot), he commands that the body of water be scourged and even has his servants castigate it! Cyrus' act may seem arrogant, but it is hardly laughable.

### Chapter Three

The Cyropaedia is a work that has attracted much scholarly attention, the greater part of which has been directed at literary analysis. This body of work is indeed vast. It is noteworthy that Deborah Levine Gera, in her Preface to Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique (Oxford, 1993), states (p. vii) that her own work is not a study of "the long, multifarious composition in its entirety..." This should serve as a reminder to Xenophon's apologists as well as detractors that no one study - unless it be a massive work in its own right - can tackle every issue raised by The Cyropaedia, but must rather concentrate on certain elements of peculiar interest to the author. This present chapter will summarize the accepted views on the literary aspects of The Cyropaedia as well as on Xenophon's possible sources and his aims as a writer; then, as in Chapter Two, the writer will attempt to uncover the historical details underlying Xenophon's largely fictional work. These will be discussed under headings relating to either individuals or topics. Individuals important to The Cyropaedia but not historically significant will not be examined.

The Cyropaedia ("Education of Cyrus") is a strange title for a work which, on its surface at least, purports to be a complete biography of Cyrus from boyhood to death. Perhaps one could perceive the whole of life as a learning experience and thus explain the title. But a better explanation has been suggested. In the introduction to his translation of The Cyropaedia, Walter Miller notes that "the first book, in dealing with the education of Cyrus, really answers the supreme questions of government - how to rule and how to be ruled - and therefore gives its

name to the whole; for that problem is the real theme of the work."<sup>1</sup> There could, however, be even more simple explanations. The title could mean "Education through Cyrus" and the work could thus have been intended to serve as a model life for others to emulate. It is also possible that some late scribe made up the title for the work after only a cursory glance at Book One.<sup>2</sup>

In the absence of other ancient sources, Xenophon's work might stand as a long and detailed biography of Cyrus; but the vast literature which has survived from the ancient world shows that there is little of historical value in The Cyropaedia. "The constitution of Persia, as set forth in the *Cyropaedia*, is no oriental reality; it is the constitution of Sparta, which, in his admiration for Agesilaus and Clearchus and the Spartan discipline, he has transfigured and set up as the model of his idealized constitutional monarchy."<sup>3</sup> The Persians in Xenophon's work worship heroes, enter battle crowned with garlands and singing hymns, and eat and dress simply. These actions and characteristics are all Spartan, as are the military tactics employed by Xenophon's Persians, which are most inappropriate for Persians.<sup>4</sup>

### *Genre*

The features mentioned above set The Cyropaedia in a class of its own. Quintino Cataudella provides a useful characterization of this type of writing.

"I Greci non ebbero un termine specifico per indicare la nostra 'novella'...può essere αἶνος, μῦθος, λόγος, ἀπόλογος, διήγημα, πλάσμα. Contiene del fiabesco, ma non è favola; c'è della storia, ma non è la storia: presenta episodi reali o inventati ma verosimili,

---

<sup>1</sup> Xenophon, Cyropaedia, trans. by Walter Miller (Cambridge, Mass., first printing: 1914), 2 volumes), p. xi.

<sup>2</sup> Conversation with Dr. Peter Kingston, Dept. of Classics, McMaster University.

<sup>3</sup> Miller, *Introduction to Cyropaedia*, pp. viii-ix.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

imperniati sulle passioni umane e col gusto particolare di soddisfare la curiosità naturale dell'uomo di sapere episodi relativi ai suoi sentimenti, specialmente a quello dell'amore, dei quali ogni individuo desidererebbe o non desidererebbe essere il protagonista."<sup>5</sup>

The "novelistic" flavour is partially achieved by the minuteness of Xenophon's descriptions. Particular emphasis has been placed on the exhaustive detail found in the account of the fictitious<sup>6</sup> battle of Thymbrara.<sup>7</sup> The stories of Panthea (IV.vi.11-VII.iii.16) and Gobryas and Gadatas (discussed below) are also important in this regard.

V. J. Gray says of Xenophon: "His *Cyropaedia* set one of the patterns for the Greek novella with its love story and was one of the earliest self-contained biographical works."<sup>8</sup> This last statement, however, must be qualified. Apparently there were earlier biographies, but none of them have survived intact. Deborah Levine Gera mentions some of these. Heraclides of Mylasa was the subject of a work by Scylax of Caryanda, the explorer employed by Darius (Herodotus, *Histories*, [4.44]), but the title of this work alone survives. Xanthus of Lydia (a contemporary of Herodotus) seems to have written an account of the Sicilian philosopher Empedocles, but this is only known from a reference in another author. Extant fragments remain,

---

<sup>5</sup> *La novella greca*, in *Athenaeum* 35, pp. 371-372.

English translation: "The Greeks did not have a specific term to indicate our 'novel'...it can be αἶνος, μῦθος, λόγος, ἀπόλογος, διήγημα, πλάσμα. It contains fabulous elements, but is not fable; there is some history, but it is not history: it presents real or invented yet believable episodes based on human passions and with a particular taste to satisfy the natural curiosity of man to know episodes relative to his feelings, especially to that of love, [episodes] in which every individual would wish or not wish to be the protagonist."

<sup>6</sup> See "From Victory to Peace: Some Aspects of Cyrus' State in Xenophon's CYRUPAEDIA," by A. B. Breebaart, in *Mnemosyne* 36 (1983), p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> "Xenophon's CYROPAEDIA, 'The Compleat General,'" by Samuel James Pease, in *Classical Journal* 29 (1933-1934), p. 437.

<sup>8</sup> "Xenophon's *Hiero* and the Meeting of the Wise Man and Tyrant in Greek Literature," in *Classical Quarterly* 36 (1986), p. 122.

however, of a biography of Heracles, by a certain Herodorus of Heraclea Pontica, who wrote his account in no less than seventeen books. This was produced at the very end of the fifth century, and the remaining fragments show that he used a rationalizing approach. Gera states that "in Herodorus Heracles became, apparently, an ethical figure, a model of some kind..."<sup>9</sup>

If Herodorus could take the most popular figure in Greek mythology, who had already been lampooned for his drunkenness and licentiousness, and transform him into an ethical figure, then it is easy to see how Xenophon could have undertaken less radical character changes in the case of Cyrus, about whose personality there seems to have been general agreement. Moreover, Herodorus managed to bring geographical, zoological, and cosmological matters into his work, thus making the life of Heracles "a convenient backdrop or framework for presenting discussions of topics that were close to his heart."<sup>10</sup> Gera notes the obvious similarity between such a method and that which is evident in The Cyropaedia.

Gera also describes another biographical writer who lived in the fifth century B.C. Stesimbrotus of Thasos wrote about Themistocles, Thucydides, and Pericles, discussing both their public and private lives. The surviving fragments show that, in addition to the expected emphasis on political policies and public pronouncements, some stress was also laid on the character, childhood, and education of each of these men. Direct quotations and reproduced conversations (the stock-in-trade of Greek and later Roman historiographers) were accompanied by tidbits, which Gera describes as "spicy." Plutarch (on whom we are dependent for almost all the fragments) does, in fact, make it clear that Stesimbrotus was not a meticulous historian, but was

---

<sup>9</sup> Xenophon's Cyropaedia, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

careless in his chronology and inconsistent in his treatment. In any case, the fact that Stesimbrotus chose to examine the characters and education of the Athenian statesmen as well as the more public aspects of their lives is evidence of a common bond with Xenophon's Cyropaedia. Gera notes, however, that the "inclusion of rather scandalous stories about these statesmen...would seem to indicate...that his subjects, unlike Xenophon's Cyrus, were not meant to be model figures."<sup>11</sup>

### *Sources*

Gera presents an impressive array of evidence from which one may choose any number of possible sources for The Cyropaedia. Antisthenes wrote more than one work with the title Κῦρος, but some of the preserved titles are bizarre (Κῦρος ἢ ἐρώμενος, Κῦρος ἢ κατάσκοποι) and the evidence for the contents too insubstantial to establish a definite framework. Moreover, the exact dates are uncertain. Nonetheless, Gera makes a good attempt at proving that one of the above-mentioned works provided Xenophon with a model for his Cyropaedia, however much his own treatment may have differed.<sup>12</sup>

Gera next considers the influence on Xenophon of an actual person - Cyrus the Younger, whom the writer personally knew. Acknowledging the fact that this influence had long been recognized, Gera states: "The two [Cyrus in The Cyropaedia and Cyrus the Younger in The Anabasis] are similar in character and personality, both go through the same educational curriculum, and they even have friends and followers of the same name."<sup>13</sup> Gera states that the

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

positive portrayal of Cyrus the Younger in The Anabasis is a clear indication that Xenophon admired him and even considered him to be the person most worthy of possessing an empire (Anab. I.ix.1).

"It seems that at first Xenophon compared Cyrus the Younger to his illustrious namesake and then later, when writing the *Cyropaedia*, reversed the situation and projected qualities of the younger man backwards in time, assigning them to his ancestor of long ago. When painting the portrait of his model hero in the *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon had the figure of an authentic Persian leader (actually named Cyrus), whose qualities of leadership he particularly admired, ready at hand."<sup>14</sup>

It is thought that Xenophon may also have been influenced by Persian sources. Gera points out that the Iranologist Christensen suggested that the royal Persian chronicles mentioned in the Old Testament (Esther 6:1; Ezra 4:15) were "not a dry, annalistic record of events, but rather a royal epic...containing more than a simple chronicle of Achaemenid royal activities." She goes on to say how Christensen deduced this from the very text of Esther 6:1, where the sleepless king has the Book of Memorable Deeds read to him. It is unlikely that the subject matter of this book was very dull or the king would not have been entertained. As cogent as this argument may be, Gera remarks that it is unlikely that Xenophon made use of any royal Persian chronicles.<sup>15</sup>

She then suggests that oral Persian tales about Cyrus, possibly in epic form, would constitute a more likely source. After noting that some doubt has been cast on the very existence of early Persian epic, Gera states:

"It would seem, however, that the burden of proof lies upon those who would deny the Persians (or any other people) any kind of folk narrative dealing with men of the past. Cyrus the Great,

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.

in particular, left his mark upon Babylonian and Jewish literature; it is difficult to believe that his own people did not commemorate him in some fashion."<sup>16</sup>

There are four kinds of evidence for early Persian oral or written traditions: (1) references in Greek sources to fabulous tales among the Persians and Medes ; (2) stories found in Persian epic of a much later date; (3) obscure allusions in the tales of The Avesta<sup>17</sup> which assume widespread knowledge of legendary material; (4) stories found in Greek authors which seem to be derived from Persian sources.<sup>18</sup>

The classical references are many and varied; as an example, one may cite the passage (Histories, i.95) in which Herodotus speaks of the existence of three other Persian accounts of Cyrus besides the one that he uses. Sometimes a link can be established between a Greek author and a Persian work that are separated by a whole millennium. Thus Gera mentions Athenaeus, who gives a love story (first told by Chares of Mytilene), which was popular among the Asians in the second half of the fourth century B.C. "A strikingly similar, but not identical, story is told by Firdausi in the *Shahnamah* [a Persian work of the eleventh century A.D.] over 1,300 years later...Thus, in theory at least, a Persian story of the classical era could have been transmitted orally, generation after generation, and have first been written down...many centuries later."<sup>19</sup> The fact, however, that the Persians are known to have told a particular love story in the fourth century B.C., which for some reason survived the centuries substantially unchanged, only proves

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> For a description of this, see below.

<sup>18</sup> Gera, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17.

that the Persians were particularly tenacious in clinging to certain traditions, not that an epic about Cyrus the Great was current in the years preceding the writing of The Cyropaedia.

At this point one might ask if, in fact, there are any stories in later Persian epic that bring to mind the narratives of Herodotus or Xenophon. If there were, one could make a particularly strong argument for the existence of a Persian epic about Cyrus in the fifth or fourth century B.C. The Shahnamah (mentioned above in connection with the love story given by Athenaeus) is apparently derived from an earlier chronicle known as the Xwaday Namag and tells the story of Iran from the creation of the world to the Arab conquest. Gera states that it uses "the successions of kings and dynasties as a framework."<sup>20</sup> In such a vast composition one would expect to find the figure of Cyrus.

"Unfortunately Cyrus - along with the Medes and most of the other Achaemenian kings - does not appear in the *Shahnamah* at all. In all likelihood Cyrus is missing...not only because ancient lists of kings were incomplete or lost when the *Xwaday Namag* was compiled but also because Cyrus is completely absent from eastern, Zoroastrian traditions and it is these that underlie the *Xwaday Namag* and thus, indirectly, the *Shahnamah*."<sup>21</sup>

The third kind of evidence for early Persian epic consists of allusions in The Avesta, a work comprising texts from the time of Zoroaster and much later.<sup>22</sup> If the argument above, involving the long tradition of the same basic love story, is very much an *argumentum ex silentio*, then the obscure allusions in The Avesta rest on even more uncertain ground. The most that can be said is that the often incomprehensible stories in this source only prove that their characters or background were sufficiently well known to allow the writer or compiler of The

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

Avesta to be brief. As for the stories in Greek authors that may be derived from Persian sources, this is also a highly speculative matter. In short, then, no firm conclusions can be made about Xenophon's sources.

### *Aims*

On the whole, the modern reader would do well to regard The Cyropaedia in the same light as Cicero did; the famous Roman orator thus described the Cyrus depicted in its pages: "Cyrus ille a Xenophonte non ad historiae fidem scriptus sed ad effigiem iusti imperi."<sup>23</sup> In his appraisal of The Cyropaedia J. M. Cook summarizes the most blatantly fictional elements:

"Thus Cyrus is depicted not as a rebel but as loyal throughout to Astyages and his fictitious son and successor Cyaxares; his wars against Lydia and Babylon are telescoped into one single operation against an aggressive coalition; he is spoken of as the conqueror of Egypt, and he is allowed to die at peace in the fullness of years."<sup>24</sup>

Gera states: "The *Cyropaedia* is above all a didactic work, its author's vehicle for developing and discussing his own cherished ideas and interests...The narration of the life and deeds of Cyrus the Great is, in essence, a convenient framework, a peg upon which Xenophon hangs reflections and ideas of his own. Cyrus is not the real impetus for the *Cyropaedia* but is more akin to a tailor's dummy, a useful figure to be clothed as his author likes. Thus Xenophon improvises freely with the facts of Cyrus' life, altering historical circumstances to suit his literary and didactic purposes, even while making use of the narrative framework which the historical Persian's well-known deeds provide."<sup>25</sup>

The comparison to a tailor's dummy made above is a striking one; and, taking it up, one might suggest that "the clothing" which Xenophon used to cover his model was, by and large, Socratic. Gera deals in depth with the question of Socratic influence in The Cyropaedia, but is

---

<sup>23</sup> Epistulae ad Quintum fratrem, 1.i.23.

<sup>24</sup> "The Rise of the Achaemenids," p. 207.

<sup>25</sup> Xenophon's Cyropaedia, p. 2.

careful to point out that her main goal is the study of Xenophon's Socrates<sup>26</sup> and that figure's connection to The Cyropaedia, not the links between the historical figure and the work. She sees a number of points in common between the two, first mentioning temperance and moderation, physical endurance, and a fondness for didacticism.<sup>27</sup> After noting that a number of other characters in the work possess these virtues, Gera seeks to discover why this is so.

"One explanation is that the figure of Socrates - the Athenian philosopher as Xenophon perceived him - has left his mark upon all of his follower's writings. In other words, Xenophon portrays his positive characters as variations on his ideal model, Socrates. Another possibility is that Xenophon's own view of life, his moralistic, didactic way of thought, dominates his writing (and thinking) so thoroughly that he fashions all his heroes, including a figure as unique as Socrates, along the same lines."<sup>28</sup>

Although the various character traits admired in Socrates and ascribed to Cyrus are of some importance in tracing a relationship between the two figures, Gera states that the Socratic dialogues found in The Cyropaedia constitute an even more persuasive reminder of Xenophon's preoccupation with the great philosopher.<sup>29</sup> As an example she adduces the episode in Cyr. I.iv.13-14, in which the young Cyrus conceives a desire to go out hunting with his comrades beyond the royal game preserve but cringes at the prospect of approaching Astyages. At last he decides to use hypothetical questions to test his grandfather's disposition. He first asks him how he would treat a servant who had run away and then been caught; then he asks him how a fugitive slave who returned voluntarily would be treated. As can be expected, the treatment accorded both slaves is hardly of a kind to inspire Cyrus with courage; nonetheless the youth tells

---

<sup>26</sup> as he appears in The Memorabilia

<sup>27</sup> Gera, p. 26.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Astyages what he desires, namely that he should make ready to serve him as he would the slaves (i.e., flog him at the very least). The king merely forbids the hunting excursion and only later, through sulking, does Cyrus get his way: his grandfather takes him out on a great hunt.

"The technique used here by Cyrus, of having a conversational partner discuss a hypothetical question - one seemingly unrelated to his own situation - and then suddenly applying the (analogous) outcome to himself, is one used time and again by Socrates in the *Memorabilia*."<sup>30</sup>

A second Socratic dialogue is found in I.vi, where Cambyses instructs his son in a number of matters while escorting him to the border of Media. After mentioning that a didactic tradition existed in which instruction was made without the use of dialogue, Gera states that Xenophon "may well have chosen to have the Persian king converse with his son - rather than address him in one long, continuous speech - because of the Socratic influence...It would also be very much out of character for...Cyrus simply to listen passively to another, no matter how wise."<sup>31</sup>

### *The Cyropaedia: A Summary*<sup>32</sup>

Cyrus is given the same descent as in Herodotus; that is, he is the son of Cambyses, called "king of Persia,"<sup>33</sup> and Mandane, daughter of the Median king Astyages. He is raised in accordance with Persian laws and customs. Before he is grown up, his mother takes him to her father's court, where he becomes the darling of Astyages and everybody else. He excels in hunting and every other endeavour. When the Assyrians (i.e. Babylonians) invade Media, he shows himself to be a brave young warrior. At this point Cambyses recalls Cyrus to Persia,

---

<sup>30</sup> Gera, pp. 28-29.

<sup>31</sup> Gera, pp. 51-52.

<sup>32</sup> This is a paraphrase of the useful summary given in Xenophon's Imperial Fiction: On The Education of Cyrus, by James Tatum (Princeton, 1989).

<sup>33</sup> This is a title which Herodotus does not grant him, referring to him instead "as inferior to a Mede of middle rank" (Histories, i.107). In fact, he was a king, but of Anshan, not Persia.

where his training is completed. Meanwhile, Astyages has died and Mandane's brother, Cyaxares, ascends the throne of Media.

On the way to the campaign against the Assyrians, Cyrus has a long conversation with his father in which they review Cyrus' education up that point. This constitutes "the true Cyropaedia," or "Education of Cyrus." Cyrus takes part in the war against the Assyrians with his maternal uncle. Following his father's advice, he reorganizes the army and surrounds himself with a number of loyal officers, including Chrysantas, a nobleman, and Pheraulas, who is a commoner. He manages to win back the rebellious Armenian king, after first getting him to admit his own wrongdoing in attempting to revolt. The Armenian prince Tigranes proves a loyal supporter. Cyrus even persuades the distant king of India to become an ally,<sup>34</sup> and through his winning nature even causes some of the subjects and allies of the Assyrian king to desert their master. Thus he secures the friendship of Gobryas, whose son was murdered by the Assyrian king; the prince Gadatas, who was castrated by the same monarch; and the beautiful Panthea, who is so charmed by Cyrus that she induces her husband, Abradatas of Susa, to desert the Assyrians.

Cyrus meets with resounding success in his war against the Assyrians. He captures Croesus of Lydia, an important ally of the Assyrian king, and retains him at his court. When Cyrus takes Babylon, Gobryas and Gadatas have the pleasure of killing the evil Assyrian king. But there are casualties: Abradatas of Susa is killed in the battle before Babylon and Panthea is so distraught that she commits suicide. Cyrus erects a monument to honour them.

With the war over, Cyrus organizes his empire according to the model afforded by his army. Establishing a court, he creates an atmosphere which is so elaborate that all his subjects are awed and voluntarily obey his commands. At length he returns to Persia to visit his parents and bring them gifts. He also marries the daughter of Cyaxares, his uncle. The Persian Empire is greatly enlarged in the wake of many more campaigns.

Many years are skipped at this point, and the reader finds himself at the deathbed of Cyrus. Having been warned in a dream that his end was near, Cyrus is able to gather his sons and friends about him. He appoints Cambyses, his eldest son, to be his successor; and, after warning him and his younger brother to maintain friendly relations, he dies. We are told that the successors of Cyrus did not live up to his example, but that the empire declined soon after the accession of Cambyses.

### *The Figure of Astyages*

Even though the character of this Median king is a far more positive one than that displayed by the same figure in The Histories of Herodotus, there are still some traces of "the old tyrant." Gera, for instance, points out that Xenophon's choice of words in one sentence

---

<sup>34</sup> The notion that Cyrus could have communicated with any personage so far east is further proof of the fictional nature of Xenophon's work.

betrays a familiarity with the Herodotean narrative. As discussed under *Aims*, Socratic dialogue is used in the section describing how Cyrus wished to go hunting outside his grandfather's park. After posing his hypothetical question about how a fugitive slave should be treated, Cyrus admits to his grandfather that it is he himself who wishes to go out hunting. Astyages then forbids him, saying: χαρίεν γάρ...εἰ ἔνεκα κρεαδίων τῇ θυγατρὶ τὸν παῖδα ἀποβουκολήσασαιμι (Cyr., I.iv.13). As Gera says, "Astyages does not want to lose his daughter her son, as one loses a stray sheep, for the sake of a bit of meat."<sup>35</sup> She then establishes the connection with Herodotus, noting how a βουκόλος plays an important part in that author's account of the birth of Cyrus, and also remarking on the grisly significance of bits of meat in the story of Harpagus' loss (*Histories*, i.119).<sup>36</sup>

### *The Figure of Cyaxares*

Although the possibility that Astyages might indeed have had a son named Cyaxares was not ruled out until this century, no one would admit the possibility that he succeeded to the Median throne when Astyages died (*Cyropaedia*, I.v.2). But a better understanding of *The Cyropaedia*'s genre as well as the discovery of contemporary documents in the Near East have eliminated the possibility of his very existence. Miller suggested in an entry in his index to *The Cyropaedia* that Xenophon invented Cyaxares "to bring out Cyrus's perfect discipline in obedience as well as in ruling."<sup>37</sup> This seems quite likely, and Classicists are not alone in coming to the conclusion that the character of Cyaxares is fictitious. Old Testament scholars have also

---

<sup>35</sup> *Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique*, p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>37</sup> *Index to Cyropaedia*, p. 468.

had to deal with him and the issue of whether or not he existed in their efforts to find a secular counterpart to a character known only from Biblical sources: Darius the Mede.

According to Daniel 5:31, when Belshazzar (the son of Nabonidus died), Darius the Mede received the kingdom. No mention is made of any event later than his first year; but even this short period presents a major problem. We know beyond reasonable doubt that Cyrus the Persian was the conqueror of Babylon and that no Median king sat upon the throne of that city between the kingship of Nabonidus/Belshazzar and Cyrus. These facts have led enterprising scholars who believe in the historicity of the Book of Daniel to propose all sorts of solutions. These involve four individuals: Cambyses, son of Cyrus II (the Great), Gobryas, Astyages, and Cyaxares II, the reputed son of Astyages.

The definitive study of the problems associated with the Biblical Darius is Darius the Mede and The Four World Empires in the Book of Daniel, by Harold Henry Rowley (Cardiff, 1935). The author tackles the problems associated with Darius in pages 9-60 of his work, methodically eliminating each of the solutions advanced by scholars over the last two millennia. As the present concern is the historicity of Cyaxares and not the identity of the despot who had Daniel thrown into the den of lions, it will suffice to say that none of the four individuals mentioned above fulfils the requirements demanded by the Biblical narrative. As for Cyaxares, no one today would disagree with Rowley's assertion that he "is a mere figment of Xenophon's imagination."<sup>38</sup>

But the fictional Cyaxares is nonetheless important to The Cyropaedia. "Normally he serves simply as a pallid and ineffectual contrast, a kind of counter-figure, to the hero of the

---

<sup>38</sup> p. 42

work, Cyrus. From the very start of the *Cyropaedia* uncle and nephew are compared with one another, and Cyrus is consistently shown to be the better of the two."<sup>39</sup> At one point, for instance, Cyaxares sees victory as being largely dependent upon numbers rather than on military organization; but Cyrus changes Cyaxares' mind (II.i.8-10).

*The Fall of Babylon: Historical Elements in The Cyropaedia*

In The Cyropaedia we find two Assyrian (i.e. Babylonian) rulers: a kindly father and a cruel son. What pair of kings did Xenophon have in mind? Gera states that the father could be Nabonidus and the crown prince his son, Belshazzar. But then, after noting that Nabonidus spent ten years in the oasis of Tema, she writes:

"Thus Xenophon (or his source) may have assumed that Belshazzar was the actual ruler of Assyria (i.e. Babylonia) at the time of Nabonidus' stay in Teima and that Nabonidus was dead rather than in exile. In the *Cyropaedia*, however, the elderly Assyrian king is a fairly positive figure: his former subjects all speak highly of him and his only crime is his desire to add Media to his empire. His son, on the other hand, is unabashedly evil...This picture of a wicked, impious king fits in well with the very black portrait of Nabonidus found in the (Persian-inspired) Babylonian sources...[in which] Nabonidus is a wicked man and a heretic...Thus word of Nabonidus' bad reputation may have reached Xenophon through Persian sources, and Nabonidus, although close to 70 at the time of Babylon's capture, seems a much more likely candidate for the role of the villainous young Assyrian king of the *Cyropaedia*."<sup>40</sup>

She then points out the problem with this hypothesis: Nabonidus was a usurper and we are thus still left with the problem of identifying his "father," the elderly king. After mentioning various explanations (none of which seem convincing), she admits that "there is no simple way

---

<sup>39</sup> Gera, p. 103.

<sup>40</sup> Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique, pp. 262-263.

to identify the two Assyrian rulers of the Cyropaedia with any pair of historical Babylonian kings."<sup>41</sup>

As noted in the Summary of The Cyropaedia, Xenophon, like Herodotus, was aware of a "festival" tradition in connection with the capture of Babylon: ὁ δὲ Κῦρος ἐπειδὴ ἑορτὴν τοιαύτην ἐν τῇ Βαβυλῶνι ἤκουσεν εἶναι, ἐν ᾗ πάντες Βαβυλώνιοι ὅλην τὴν νύκτα πίνουσι καὶ κωμάζουσιν...(Cyr., VII.v.15). The possible relationship between these Greek traditions and an actual Babylonian festival, which could have been celebrated at the time of Babylon's capture, is a topic more germane to the fourth chapter, where it will be fully discussed.

Gobryas and Gadatas are two men who play a prominent part in Xenophon's account of the fall of Babylon (Cyr., VII.v.24-30). It is they who first enter the city and kill the king. According to Xenophon, Gobryas joined Cyrus so that he could avenge himself on the reigning king of Babylon, who, while still a prince, had killed his son on a hunting trip (Cyr., IV.vi.2-7). Apparently amicable relations had existed between Gobryas and the old king (who is dead at this point in Xenophon's account). This state of affairs can hardly be reconciled with the cuneiform evidence. Nabonidus, the reigning king, was **not** the son of a king and was quite old in 539 B.C. But, in view of his long absence in Tema, it may have been supposed (as Gera states) that the actual king was the regent, Belshazzar, who could then be equated with the murderous young prince in Xenophon's account. But Nabonidus was very much alive, and so the story still presents many difficulties. Unfortunately, no evidence has turned up to confirm the accuracy of this tale of revenge; but, in view of the fact that Xenophon correctly gives Gobryas a prominent

---

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

role in the capture of Babylon, there could be a basis to the story, however much the Greek author has embellished it.

Like the account of Gobryas, the story of Gadatas is one of vengeance. Xenophon tells us that he was castrated by the "Assyrian" king years before and so, like Gobryas, had personal reasons for wanting him dead (*Cyr.*, V.ii.28). But even if this fanciful tale is untrue, his participation in the capture of Babylon could be as factual as the role assigned to Gobryas, which accords well enough with the cuneiform evidence.

Gobryas appears in the Chronicle of Nabonidus as Ugbaru, who there too enters Babylon before Cyrus. Ugbaru was the governor of Gutium, a territory east of the Tigris, and therefore an influential personage, not unlike the character in *The Cyropaedia*. He either had a personal grudge against the Babylonian monarchy, as Xenophon states; or, as is more likely, had prudently switched sides when he saw that Cyrus would undoubtedly emerge as victor in any power struggle.<sup>42</sup>

There is as much dispute about the fate of Nabonidus, the Babylonian king, as there is about the end of Croesus. As discussed in Chapter Two, Herodotus has much to say about Croesus both during and after the siege of Sardis. After his life is miraculously saved by Apollo, Cyrus decides to retain him as an advisor. The older author is silent, however, on the fate of the Babylonian king. We must turn to Xenophon for information on this individual, whom he erroneously refers to as "the Assyrian king." Xenophon gives us a vivid picture of the monarch's last moments, as he vainly attempts to save himself from Gobryas and Gadatas, the leaders of

---

<sup>42</sup> "The Rise of the Achaemenids," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, p. 212.

the Persian army (Cyr., VII.v.29-30). But what do other sources have to say about such a dramatic demise?

The cuneiform sources do not tell us what happened to Nabonidus, but it is quite clear that he was not slain on the night of Ugbaru's entry. Scholars have thus been forced to depend on works written in Greek. As mentioned in Chapter 1, portions of Berossus' Chaldean history have survived in the works of Josephus. According to this historian, Cyrus treated Nabonidus kindly and settled him in Carmania (Contra Apionem, i.20). Modern scholars have usually accepted this story, because of the questionable nature of much of the material in The Cyropaedia.

But should one completely overlook the story in Xenophon? Biblical information (in the Book of Daniel) would seem to support it, and Josephus himself only mentions the statement of Berossus in the Contra Apionem. This short work was aimed at refuting the opinions of those Gentiles who argued that the Jews were not an ancient people; as such, it was not intended to provide educated Greeks and Romans with a complete history of the Jewish people. This was, however, the purpose of The Antiquities of the Jews, a vast work consisting of twenty books. In it, Josephus felt obliged to identify "Naboandelus" with Belshazzar, because he found no mention of the Biblical name in Berossus. He could hardly have allowed a book to go into circulation which plainly contradicted a statement in one of his own people's religious texts. His identification of Belshazzar with Nabonidus did, however, enable him to assign the correct number of years (17) to his last Babylonian king.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Antiquities, X.xi.2.

Of course, it is now known that Belshazzar was the eldest son of Nabonidus and that he acted as regent during his father's long absence in the oasis of Tema. This could explain why, in Dan. 5 (the famous chapter describing the handwriting on the wall), Belshazzar only offered to make the interpreter of the writing *third* ruler in the kingdom. He himself was second-in-command. Josephus, not having access to actual Babylonian records, thus felt the need to harmonize and presented the incorrect identification already mentioned. But in light of our present knowledge is it not reasonable to suppose that Belshazzar and Nabonidus could have met different fates? The answer is "yes." In fact, Paul-Alain Beaulieu suggests that Xenophon may actually be describing the death of Belshazzar and that the confusion between father and son (no doubt caused by Belshazzar's long regency) could have led Xenophon's informants to make the same mistake as the author of Daniel - that is, to assume that it was the king who was killed, rather than the crown prince.<sup>44</sup>

The only problem with this hypothesis is that Nabonidus had once again assumed full royal duties by the time the Persian army entered Babylon.<sup>45</sup> Belshazzar would still, of course, have remained an important figure, but could he have eclipsed his father in the popular mind, thus leading the author of Dan. 5 and possibly Xenophon's informants to overlook the actual ruler? The answer to this question depends on how the kingship of Nabonidus is viewed. At one time it was taken for granted that his preoccupation with the cult of Sîn had caused a great deal of popular resentment, since the principal god of Babylon had long been Marduk. Accordingly,

---

<sup>44</sup> The Reign of Nabonidus, p. 231. See also p. 81.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

the entry of the Persian army could have been made easy by the disgruntled priests of Marduk, who would have seen in Cyrus the very liberator described on his own cylinder.<sup>46</sup>

Time has modified this picture, since we now know that Nabonidus had an interest in the cities of the sun god, Sippar and Larsa,<sup>47</sup> and was likely supported by the non-urban populations (as discussed in Chapter One). Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that Babylon itself must have been seething with resentment, since the people found their favourite cults neglected; for a time, the New Year's Festival was not even celebrated in Babylon. These disruptions are attributable to the whims of a dreamer-king. As Oppenheim notes:

"He [Nabonidus] presented himself in his own inscriptions as a man having visions and dreams, as one guided by miraculous events, which is quite exceptional in such texts. Thus the picture painted of him in the Cyrus Cylinder and the Poem...is not at all incongruous with that yielded by his heavily autobiographical inscriptions."<sup>48</sup>

#### *The Character of Cyrus & Xenophon's Philosophy of Leadership*

The actual "Education of Cyrus," as noted by Walter Miller in the introduction to his translation, is contained in the long dialogue between Cyrus and Cambyses, which runs from I.vi.1 to the end of the book. Cyaxares has summoned his nephew to head a Persian force in a combined venture against the Assyrians. It is the Persian prince's first major campaign and his father accompanies him as far as the Persian-Median border. This provides the setting for a dialogue with a strong Socratic colouring.

---

<sup>46</sup> How and Wells, A Commentary on Herodotus, Appendix IV.6 (1) [p. 390].

<sup>47</sup> "Babylonian Evidence," p. 541.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

"Xenophon's admiration for Cyrus is based on the three qualities of reverence, justice, and self-control (θεοσέβεια, δικαιοσύνη, σωφροσύνη)..."<sup>49</sup> All of these are brought out at various points in The Cyropaedia.

Cyrus appears reverent throughout the work. Indeed, the gods are mentioned early on and the importance of divine omens is discussed at the beginning of I.vi, which was described above as the actual "Education of Cyrus." At one point Cyrus even says: Πάνυ μὲν οὖν, ἔφη, ὦ πάτερ, ὡς πρὸς φίλους μοι ὄντας τοὺς θεοὺς οὕτω διάκειμαι (4). At the end of his life he thanks his "friends" for granting him so much success (VIII.vii.3). Much of this success was due to his receiving favourable omens, and Gera compares this to the δαιμόνιον of Socrates, which is mentioned in both the Memorabilia and Apology.<sup>50</sup> A closer link may be found in The Anabasis, in which Xenophon is consistently dependent upon the gods for favourable omens.<sup>51</sup>

We see justice at work during the course of the Armenian king's trial (Cyr. III.i), in which Cyrus asks him a number of questions designed to have him convict himself. When asked why he failed to pay the required tribute, the king makes a simple statement: Ἐλευθερίας ἐπεθύμουν (III.i.10). Cyrus agrees that it is a fine thing to fight for freedom, but qualifies his admission with a question:

ἦν δὲ δὴ ἢ πολέμῳ κρατηθεὶς ἢ καὶ ἄλλον τινὰ τρόπον δουλωθεὶς ἐπιχειρῶν τις φαίνεται τοὺς δεσπότας ἀποστερεῖν ἑαυτοῦ, τοῦτον σὺ πρῶτος πότερον ὡς ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα καὶ καλὰ πράττοντα τιμᾶς ἢ ὡς ἀδικοῦντα, ἦν λάβης, κολάζεις;  
(Cyr., III.i.11)

<sup>49</sup> "The Compleat General," p. 440.

<sup>50</sup> Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique, p. 57.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, VI.i.

The Armenian king admits that he would punish such a man; and, when Cyrus asks him how he would treat a deserter, he admits that he would execute him. This leads to an outburst on the part of Tigranes, his son, and the women of the royal household (13), who think that Cyrus will surely kill their lord for having behaved rebelliously himself. But Cyrus spares his life, influenced to some extent by the arguments of Tigranes but more by his own intention to make the Armenian king an even greater ally than before.<sup>52</sup> Regardless of how positive the outcome was for the Armenians, we are left in no doubt concerning Cyrus' own attitude toward the actions of the Armenian king. The questions posed by Cyrus at the trial reveal a character strictly opposed to rebellion. Gera observes: "Cyrus does not care to discuss the joys of freedom with the king, but points out the duties of a vassal instead. (We can assume that the historical Cyrus, who rebelled against his Mede grandfather and gave the Persians their freedom, had rather different views on this subject.)"<sup>53</sup>

His sense of fairness extends to even the simplest of matters. When he was leaving his grandfather's court, for example, he gave many presents to his friends; but these were all taken to Astyages and sent back to Cyrus, who returned them and informed his grandfather that if he ever wished for Cyrus to return without being ashamed, he should return all the gifts that he had taken away (Cyr., I.iv.26).

Cyrus shows a distinctively Greek form of self-control in the banquet scene (Cyr., I.iii.4 & ff.). His bewilderment at the number of different dishes would suggest that the Persians originally ate simple fare, like the poorer Greeks, who eventually became role models for the

---

<sup>52</sup> He had earlier expressed this intention to Cyaxares (Cyr., III.i.31).

<sup>53</sup> Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique, p. 82.

philosophers. While it is not impossible that the Persians were indeed a simple, rustic people until their conquest of the more cultured Medes brought them into contact with a more elaborate way of life, it is also possible that Xenophon wished to transform the Persians of the mid-sixth century B.C. into an abstemious people (such as the Greeks would have admired) in order to contrast them with the Medes, who would then have conformed to the more usual Greek conceptions of "barbarians."

One may add astuteness to the qualities already discussed; this is evident in the manner in which Cyrus secures his own position. A. B. Breebaart notes that "the long account of Cyrus' methods to gain the sympathies of his former enemies by means of an ambitiously planned system of premia and donations according to merit, goes far beyond specific groups which had to be watched. The policy of ostentatious 'gratitude' to all meritorious subjects is shown to be a special aspect of Cyrus' *general* munificence; including his servants and friends. Evidently, Xenophon wishes to demonstrate that here we are at the roots of Cyrus' achievement to bring about voluntary obedience."<sup>54</sup>

Cyrus was held in such high regard by foreign nations and later generations of his own countrymen that it is doubtless safe to assume that he actually did use such methods to win over various groups.

But it would not be right to see his success as entirely based on a system of virtual bribery. In VIII.i.12, for example, Cyrus is said to believe that only an upright ruler can inspire others to perform good and noble works. The incentive for subjects to behave in such a way is provided by a ruler who sees to their needs. As Cambyses says to his son: ...οὕτως ἐπίστασθαι ἀνθρώπων ἄλλων προστατεύειν ὅπως ἔξουσι πάντα ταπιτήδεια ἔκπλεω καὶ ὅπως ἔσονται πάντες οἴους δεῖ, τοῦτο θαυμαστὸν δήπου ἡμῖν ἐφαίνετο εἶναι

---

<sup>54</sup> "From Victory to Peace," pp. 124-125.

(I.vi.7). Gera notes how, in The Memorabilia, Socrates "discusses these two tasks of a leader - attending to the welfare of his 'flock' and seeing that they fulfil their function..."<sup>55</sup>

One might think that the character of Cyrus, as portrayed by Xenophon, is an admirable one. We even find that, in addition to possessing the expected qualities of leadership, Cyrus is endowed with a refreshingly human appreciation for humour. It has been noted that "in the *Cyropaedia* (ii.2.12) Xenophon makes Cyrus defend men who joke, calling them witty and pleasing (ἀστεῖοι καὶ εὐχάριτες)..."<sup>56</sup> But others see Cyrus in a darker light, viewing his character as more Machiavellian than anything else. James Tatum, for example, states:

"Although the broad divisions of family, friends, and enemies are real enough, we shall find it hard to see any difference in Cyrus's treatment of his family, friends, or enemies. At every stage of his career, and at every level of involvement with others, he has a curious detachment about other people, even as he makes himself famous throughout the world for his kindness and his generosity, through calculated shows of philanthropy."<sup>57</sup>

Any author's view of Xenophon's Cyrus is bound to depend on his personal views of government and the ideal relations between the various members of a state. A writer living in a democracy is thus bound to produce a radically different commentary than a writer living in a dictatorship. If the writer feels that a just society can indeed exist when absolute power is in the hands of one man, he will applaud the empire-building of Cyrus in Xenophon's work. In The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods (Aarhus University Press, 1989), Bodil Due states (p. 218) that "although there can be no denying that Cyrus' regime is absolutist in its nature, it

---

<sup>55</sup> Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique, p. 59.

<sup>56</sup> "Wit and Humour in Xenophon," by Samuel E. Bassett, in Classical Journal 12 (1916-1917), p. 566.

<sup>57</sup> Xenophon's Imperial Fiction: On The Education of Cyrus, p. 71.

is by no means certain that such a system was equally detestable to a Greek of the 4th century as it is to most people of modern western democracies."

Her point is sound; we must remember when the work was written. Besides, from a theoretical viewpoint, it is pointless to dwell on the virtual impossibility of finding someone who would not abuse his power if placed in such a position. In The Cyropaedia almost all nations become the willing vassals or allies of Cyrus. In reality such an invariable pattern of submission is unthinkable. Thus one must view The Cyropaedia as fiction and much of its politics as impossible. In any case, even if the near-perfection of Cyrus' character is difficult to accept, Xenophon's "picture of a great hero could not have been painted had there not been a credible memory of such a Cyrus..."<sup>58</sup>

### *Conclusion*

It is clear that Xenophon created something quite unique in The Cyropaedia: as Walter Miller called it, "an historical romance - the western pioneer in that field of literature."<sup>59</sup> The author took a basic account of the Persian king's life, retaining what served his purpose and remodelling at will, whenever any incident did not fit into his scheme. Thus the fall of the Median empire is not described as the result of a conspiracy between the Median aristocracy and Cyrus, but as the dowry given by the fictitious Cyaxares to Cyrus when the latter marries his daughter. Perhaps most daring of all changes is that involving Cyrus' manner of death. Xenophon alone tells us that he died in peace, not on the battlefield. In spite of these distortions, however, there are some unquestionably historical elements in The Cyropaedia, most notably the

---

<sup>58</sup> "Cyrus the Great," p. 417.

<sup>59</sup> *Introduction* to trans. of Cyropaedia, p. viii.

prominence of Gobryas, whose historical counterpart has been mentioned above and will be further discussed in Chapter Four. But stretched over this armature of half-truths and utter fiction lies a Graeco-Persian tapestry depicting a "barbarian" king as seen through the eyes of a Socratic devotee, his eastern attitudes and modes of behaviour filtered through the lense of a man who had admired Cyrus the Younger and wished to pattern his great namesake after him.

## Chapter Four

*The Beginnings of the Achaemenid Dynasty*

As discussed in Chapter Two, there seems to be no real reason for dismissing the Herodotean tradition that Cyrus was of Median ancestry on his mother's side. The historical Medes, at least, were Iranian-speaking and therefore closely related to the Persians. The father of Cyrus, Cambyses (Old Persian Kambujiya), was a Persian of the Achaemenian royal house. The House of Achaemenes (Old Persian Hakhāmanish<sup>1</sup>) first enters the historical record in the mid-seventh century B.C. (c. 646), when Kurash (Cyrus) of Parsuwash submitted to the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal and sent his son to Nineveh as an assurance of his continued fealty. This Cyrus was given the title "Great King of Anshan" by his grandson, Cyrus II.

"It would appear that the first Cyrus was political chief in Parsuwash and ruler of the former Elamite province of Anshan...The two lands would seem to be identical. Parsuwash apparently is an Assyrian rendering of the name from which Old Persian Parsa derives, the ancestral form of present-day Fars and referring to the same district, the Persis of the Greeks. Anshan remained the traditional name in south Mesopotamia for the northern area of Fars down to the New-Babylonian period."<sup>2</sup>

Almost fifty years before the submission of Cyrus I, Anshan/Parsuwash had allied itself with Elam against the Assyrian king Sennacherib.<sup>3</sup> But, as already mentioned, the elder Cyrus thought it best to yield to the mightier power. There is little doubt that Cyrus II was a wise ruler, especially in his dealings with conquered territories. He quite possibly realized that by accepting the religions and customs of vanquished nations he would make it easier for them to accept

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Hansman, "Anshan in the Median and Achaemenian Periods," Chapter 2 in Vol. 2 of *The Cambridge History of Iran*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Persian domination; also, the likelihood of uprisings would be reduced. Perhaps it is not too bold a statement to ascribe to Cyrus I some of the sagacity which his grandson displayed. His decision to submit to the Assyrian Empire was a wise one, because his little kingdom would have been ravaged and his own power broken if he had attempted to resist; instead, Anshan survived and, in little more than a century, fanned out westward to become the greatest empire of its day.

### *Cyrus' Early Life*

Cyrus was probably born in 598 B.C.<sup>4</sup> He was the son of Cambyses II, king of Anshan. As discussed in Chapter Two, there is no reason to disbelieve the claim of Herodotus that Cyrus' mother was Mandane, the daughter of the Median king Astyages. This genealogy can only be possible, however, if we assume that Mandane was the daughter of a woman other than Aryenis, whose marriage to Astyages is mentioned in connection with a battle between the Lydians and the Medes (*Histories*, i.74). During this encounter there was an eclipse (συνήνεικε ὥστε τῆς μάχης συνεστεώσης τὴν ἡμέρην ἐξαπίνης νύκτα γενέσθαι). In his translation of Herodotus, A. D. Godley states:

"All evidence, historical and astronomical, fixes the date of this eclipse as May 28, 585 B.C. There was another eclipse of the sun in Alyattes' [Croesus' father] reign, on Sept. 30, 610; but it appears that this latter was not total in Asia Minor and Pliny's mention of the phenomenon places it in the 170th year from the foundation of Rome."<sup>5</sup>

This date is only forty-six years before 539, the well established year of Cyrus' entry into Babylon. Needless to say, any union consummated in 585 could hardly have produced a grandson old enough to have achieved what Cyrus had by the time the Persian troops entered Babylon.

---

<sup>4</sup> "Cyrus the Great," p. 404.

<sup>5</sup> Herodotus, trans. by A. D. Godley (Cambridge, Mass., 1920), pp. 90-91 (note).

Indeed, any grandchild of Astyages and Aryenis would hardly have passed adolescence by that date, depending, of course, on how young each generation in this scenario was when its first child was born. Assuming that Astyages fathered Mandane at age twenty (by an unknown woman), and that Mandane bore Cyrus at age fourteen (which is quite possible), Astyages would have been in his late forties when he married Aryenis, the daughter of Alyattes. He could already have had a number of grown children and adolescent grandchildren. Thus, if the date given above for Cyrus' birth is correct, the future conqueror would have been about thirteen years old when his maternal grandfather took another wife to seal an alliance between his father, Cyaxares, and the Lydian king. Indeed, Cyaxares must have been fairly old at this time and would have died very soon after the battle, for the Chronicle of Nabonidus places the defeat of Astyages in the sixth year of the Babylonian king's reign (550 B.C.), and Herodotus tells us that Astyages reigned for thirty-five years (Histories, i.130).

If Cyrus was the son of Mandane, it is likely that he would have spent some time at his maternal grandfather's court; but even if there was no blood relationship between them, "it is...possible that, as was quite common for sons of petty vassal kings,<sup>6</sup> he was during his father's lifetime indeed at the imperial court."<sup>7</sup>

Cyrus married Cassandane, daughter of Pharnaspes, "probably not later than 578 B.C."<sup>8</sup> He was greatly attached to her,<sup>9</sup> and Cambyses (who succeeded his father) was the son of

---

<sup>6</sup> such as Cambyses, father of Cyrus II

<sup>7</sup> "Media," p. 145.

<sup>8</sup> "Cyrus the Great," p. 404.

<sup>9</sup> Histories, ii.1.

Cassandane. Cyrus had another son, Bardiya (whom Herodotus calls Smerdis), and two daughters, Atossa and Aristone.<sup>10</sup>

Cyrus ascended the throne of Anshan in 558 B.C.<sup>11</sup> Diodorus Siculus gives approximately the same date in the fragmentary ninth book of his Library of History:

Κῦρος Περσῶν ἐβασίλευσεν ᾧ ἔτει Ὀλυμπιάς ἦχθη νε΄, ὡς ἐκ τῶν Βιβλιοθηκῶν Διοδώρου καὶ τῶν Θαλλοῦ καὶ Κάστορος ἱστοριῶν, ἔτι δὲ Πολυβίου καὶ Φλέγοντος ἔστιν εὐρεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐτέρων, οἷς ἐμέλησεν Ὀλυμπιάδων, ἅπανσι γὰρ συνεφώνησεν ὁ χρόνος.

(Diodorus, ix.21, as quoted by Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 10. 10. 488 c.)

### *The Revolt against Astyages*

Apart from one fragmentary entry in the Chronicle of Nabonidus,<sup>12</sup> scholars have little in the nature of truly reliable sources for the battles that consolidated Cyrus' position and spelled an end to Median power. Herodotus must remain our principal authority, but some mention should be made of Ctesias, of whose writings only excerpts and digests have survived.<sup>13</sup>

"Ctesias was an Asclepiad of Cnidus who was taken prisoner and became the Persian King's doctor, a post that he occupied for a number of years (17 on his own admission, and ending in 397 or at the latest 393 B.C.)...On his own showing he is a priceless firsthand authority. For he claimed that at the Persian court he had studied royal historical *diphtherai*...and it is almost certainly from his writings that the later universal historian Diodorus was able to cite episodes of oriental history that were supposedly recorded in the Persian royal archives (*anagraphai*)."<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> *Histories*, iii.88.

<sup>11</sup> "Cyrus the Great," p. 404.

<sup>12</sup> given in Chapter One, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> "Media," p. 110.

<sup>14</sup> "The Rise of the Achaemenids," p. 205.

Despite these impressive credentials, however, Ctesias did not take advantage of the information to which he had unusual access. "In general it is often a hopeless task to try to extract something rational from his narrative. His chronology...is nothing but the inverted and doubled chronological system of Herodotus. Ctesias himself admits that his aim was to refute Herodotus."<sup>15</sup> Thus he makes Cyrus a Mardian and the son of Atradates, a robber, and Argoste, a goatherd.<sup>16</sup> Yet we know from contemporary inscriptions that Cyrus was of royal blood on his father's side at least. Still, it would seem that "modern scholars...tend to give him the benefit of the doubt when he is not in conflict with other authorities."<sup>17</sup> For example, Ctesias does have one interesting thing to say about Astyages' heir designate. Amytis, another daughter of Astyages, was married to a certain Spitamas.<sup>18</sup>

"This is a name by no means uncommon in Iranian languages, but one that was also the family name of Zarathushtra who must have lived in the 7th to early 6th century at the latest...The history of the fall of the Median kingdom...was much discussed in Persia...so that together with his fabrications and fantasies Ctesias may have brought to his reader the echoes of more or less genuine traditions. Therefore...it is not impossible that the son-in-law and presumed heir of Astyages was named after Zarathushtra and perhaps even believed to have been his kinsman and descendant."<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> "Media," p. 110.

<sup>16</sup> Fragment 66.3 (=Exc. *De insid.* p. 23, 23) from Nicolaus of Damascus, given in Die Persika des Ktesias von Knidos, von Friedrich Wilhelm König (Graz, 1972), p. 176.

<sup>17</sup> "The Rise of the Achaemenids," p. 206.

<sup>18</sup> Fragment 66.8, (p. 177 of Die Persika des Ktesias von Knidos; see also Excerpt 2 from Photius in same German source, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> "Media," p. 143, note 1.

An impartial reading of the different texts presents the following situation: an aged king (Astyages) backed by a son-in-law with powerful religious connections (Spitamias) is threatened by a foreign prince (Cyrus), who is himself the grandson of the aged king.

I. M. Diakonoff states that "there is nothing astonishing in the fact that Harpagus, standing as he did at the head of the plot of the Median aristocracy against Astyages' unwelcome heir designate, the husband of his daughter, should have put forward as a more acceptable candidate to the throne the son of the king's other daughter, a Persian prince."<sup>20</sup>

The methods by which Cyrus overcame Astyages (according to Herodotus) have been discussed in Chapter Two, but it is also necessary to study the account of Ctesias, and from the two attempt a reconstruction of what probably occurred. The story given by Ctesias is highly entertaining but clearly fabulous; nonetheless, it may contain some kernels of truth, however obscured they may be by the author's vivid imagination. The basic story is as follows.

Cyrus, while still a youth, makes the acquaintance of Artembares, the cupbearer of Astyages, and wins the admiration of this servant, with the result that he is eventually adopted by him. When the man dies, Cyrus inherits his estate and, with his money and influence, summons his parents to court and makes his father satrap of the Persians. Inspired by a dream that his mother tells him she had while carrying him,<sup>21</sup> he decides to overthrow Astyages and requests the king to grant him leave to visit his father. His actual motive, however, is to head a rebellion that is stirring there. His instigator is a certain Oebares,<sup>22</sup> a groom and the slave of a Median magnate. As Cyrus marshals his considerable forces, Astyages hears of the plot and

---

<sup>20</sup> "Media," p. 144.

<sup>21</sup> It is very much like the dream of Astyages in Herodotus, and even involves the voiding of a considerable quantity of urine.

<sup>22</sup> It is thought that this name is derived from Ugbaru, who (as described in Chapter 1) was at the head of Cyrus' forces when they entered Babylon in 539. See Diakonoff, "Media," p. 144.

quickly moves against the rebels.<sup>23</sup> (It will be recalled that, according to Herodotus, the decisive move on the part of the Median king came at a time when Harpagus and the other members of the Median aristocracy had already made secret overtures to Cyrus).

Ctesias tells us that the first encounter between the Medes and Persians ended in the defeat of the latter (in 553 B.C.<sup>24</sup>). Astyages pursued the Persians and inflicted another defeat on them in the vicinity of Pasargadae. The battle at the actual walls of the city seems to have been the turning point, and various peoples subject to the Medes (including the Hyrcanii) joined the Persian ranks.<sup>25</sup> Diakonoff notes:

"What happened thereafter is not clear from the excerpts that have come down to us. The war...was a prolonged one and success varied.<sup>26</sup> What gave the victory to Cyrus must have been the treason of the Median aristocracy which may also have been the cause of the defection from Media of borderland peoples."<sup>27</sup>

The conspiracy against Astyages is also mentioned by Diodorus Siculus. In his account, however, it is formed after the Median army is routed and is a reaction to Astyages' execution of those responsible for the flight. Diodorus states:

οὐ μὲν τὰ πλήθη κατεπλάγη αὐτοῦ τὴν βαρύτητα, ἀλλ' ἕκαστος μισήσας τὸ βίαιον καὶ παράνομον τῆς πράξεως μεταβολῆς ὤρεγετο. διὸ καὶ κατὰ λόχους ἐγίνοντο συνδρομαὶ καὶ λόγοι ταραχώδεις, παρακαλοῦντων ἀλλήλους τῶν πλείστων πρὸς τὴν κατὰ τούτου τιμωρίαν. (Library of History, ix.23)

---

<sup>23</sup> Fragment 66.3-33, in Die Persika des Ktesias von Knidos, pp. 176-183.

<sup>24</sup> "Media," p. 146.

<sup>25</sup> Fragment 66.34-46, in Die Persika des Ktesias von Knidos, pp. 183-185.

<sup>26</sup> Herodotus only describes the last two battles, one in which Harpagus was in command of the Medes, and the other in which Astyages himself led the troops.

<sup>27</sup> "Media," p. 146.

The execution of the soldiers finds a parallel in the Herodotean account, where Astyages murders the Magi for having advised him to spare Cyrus' life (*Histories*, i.128).

As mentioned in the Babylonian Chronicle translated in Chapter One, Astyages' own army turned against him in the final battle and handed him over to Cyrus in fetters. It is possible that the Babylonian source compresses events, since Ctesias tells us that Astyages did succeed in finding safety in the citadel of Ecbatana, which he was only compelled to quit when Cyrus threatened to torture his daughter Amytis, her husband Spitamas, and their sons. The subsequent actions of Cyrus (as given by Ctesias) would seem to argue against his having been a grandson of Astyages, for he proceeded to marry Amytis after executing Spitamas.<sup>28</sup> Diakonoff states that this was "in order to strengthen the legality of his right to the throne"<sup>29</sup> - a right, one would think, which he would automatically have had as the son of Mandane.

"Since the victory of Cyrus was achieved with the aid of the Median aristocracy it had to be given the appearance of a compromise. Therefore, though Ecbatana was sacked and some of the Medians were turned into slaves, Cyrus possibly did not abolish the kingdom of Media...However, as in other similar cases (e.g. in Babylonia) Cyrus, though he left to Media the name of a kingdom, nevertheless appointed a satrap (Oebares) there, and apparently laid a tribute on the country."<sup>30</sup>

### *The Conquest of Sardis*

With the defeat of Astyages in 550 B.C.,<sup>31</sup> Cyrus was master of the largest empire in western Asia. He had but two rivals: Nabonidus and Croesus, the ruler of Lydia. The latter's kingdom was a rich one, and stretched west of the River Halys to the Aegean Sea. But it was

---

<sup>28</sup> Excerpt 2 from Photius, p. 2 of German source.

<sup>29</sup> "Media," p. 147.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> "Cyrus the Great," p. 404.

small in comparison to the dominions of Cyrus. Besides his father's kingdom of Anshan, Cyrus held sway over the rest of Elam and almost all of what was once the Assyrian Empire. "From the mountains east of Elam to the Halys on the west, and from Ararat on the north to the Persian Gulf on the south stretched his territories in great and almost unbroken sweeps."<sup>32</sup> Such a giant would have roused anyone but Nabonidus from a state of complacency. Indeed, Croesus was wise enough to form alliances with both Amasis, king of Egypt, and Nabonidus. He even went so far as to seek the aid of the Greek state of Sparta, whose fleet might prove invaluable.<sup>33</sup>

Cyrus knew that Lydia would be a rich prize. "The firtrees on the higher hilltops crowned slopes on which the vine flourished, and in the broad plains grain grew well, while in the soft and mild airs of the great river bottoms of the Hermus cattle flourished on the lush grass."<sup>34</sup> Still more alluring was the gold for which Lydia was famous; one of its rivers - the Pactolus - was even said to be full of golden sand. Proof of the existence of Lydian gold is still to be found. According to Eleanor Guralnick, "...there are remains of a gold-refining installation which operated from the late 7th century into the mid-6th."<sup>35</sup>

Croesus, the fourth king of the Mermnad Dynasty, would pose no small obstacle to Persian ambition. His father, Alyattes, had taken the port of Smyrna, and Croesus had already added Ephesus and Miletus to his empire. His coffers were filled to overflowing with the wealth in taxes from these Greek settlements on the Aegean Sea, and such riches could buy him much

---

<sup>32</sup> Rogers, p. 38.

<sup>33</sup> Histories, i.77.

<sup>34</sup> Rogers, p. 40.

<sup>35</sup> Eleanor Guralnick, Sardis: twenty-seven years of discovery (Chicago, 1987), p. 10.

support.<sup>36</sup> The inhabitants of his empire would have had little reason to grumble. According to La Lydie et le monde grec au temps des Mermnades (687-546), by Georges Radet, subject peoples were treated with respect. "Avant tout, le grand principe du gouvernement lydien, comme du gouvernement perse, fut d'intervenir le moins possible dans la vie locale des États annexés. Les villes se régissaient d'après leurs constitutions particulières, reconnues et garanties par des chartes royales."<sup>37</sup>

But Croesus took no chances. If we may accept the testimony of Diodorus Siculus, he sent Eurybatus of Ephesus to the Peloponnese with a considerable amount of money, which he was to use to recruit Greek mercenaries. Instead, Eurybatus went over to the side of Cyrus and revealed all the plans of the Lydian king.<sup>38</sup>

Rogers draws attention to the difficulty that Cyrus must have had in selecting the best route to Lydia. If he had tried to move within the boundaries of his own empire in order to guard against a flank attack on the part of Nabonidus, he and his army would have been forced to cross the mountains of Armenia. The naturally rough terrain was covered with deep snow that did not melt until the late spring. With this in mind, then, Cyrus decided to risk a march over

---

<sup>36</sup> Rogers, pp. 40-43.

<sup>37</sup> La Lydie et le monde grec (Paris, 1893), p. 212.

English translation: "First of all, the great principle of the Lydian government, like that of the Persian government, was to interfere as little as possible in the local life of the annexed states. The cities conducted themselves according to their particular constitutions, [which were] recognized and guaranteed by royal charters."

<sup>38</sup> Library of History, ix.32.

the northern part of the great Mesopotamian plain, even though his left flank would then be vulnerable to an attack by the Babylonians from the south.<sup>39</sup>

In his informative article on Cyrus, Max Mallowan estimates the length of time involved in the preliminary march to Sardis.

"According to Herodotus [v.53] the distance from Susa to Sardis over the approved route worked out at about 1,700 miles and was accomplished in 90 days; at the rate of about 19 miles a day - an exhausting rate of travel - it is likely that the preliminary subjugation of Western Asia Minor and the intervening territory must have taken Cyrus at least a year."<sup>40</sup>

Diodorus relates how Cyrus sent messengers to Croesus, offering to make him satrap of Lydia if he acknowledged Cyrus as his master. Croesus is said to have sent back an insolent reply, declaring that the Persians should instead submit to the Lydians.<sup>41</sup> Apart from the story of Croesus on the pyre (which is discussed in Chapter Two), the Herodotean account of the capture of Sardis is free of "suspicious" elements (i.e., *topoi* or folkloristic motifs) and may therefore be accepted. The possibility that an observant soldier detected a weak spot in the wall is certainly preferable to the account of Polyaeus, who reports that Cyrus made images of wood and dressed them like Persian soldiers and that these, complete with weapons, frightened the Lydians into submission.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Rogers, pp. 43-44. The author apparently accepts the mistaken view that the country referred to in the Babylonian Chronicle, Year 9, is Lydia. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, this identification is no longer accepted.

<sup>40</sup> "Cyrus the Great," p. 403.

<sup>41</sup> Library of History, ix.31.

<sup>42</sup> Strategemata, 7, 6, 10 (as given in Die Persika des Ktesias von Knidos, p. 197).

According to Sidney Smith and H. T. Wade-Gery<sup>43</sup> (whose general chronology is accepted by Mallowan), the capture of Sardis occurred c. 545 B.C.<sup>44</sup> This event does not seem to have been catastrophic. The city did not become a backwater; the opposite occurred. "With Cyrus' conquest, Sardis changed from capital of a kingdom to a major city in a worldwide empire."<sup>45</sup>

### *Between Conquests*

It is impossible to say how Cyrus spent the years between the campaign against Croesus and the capture of Babylon. Max Mallowan does, however, suggest a reasonable scenario.

"It is difficult to believe that he would have been away from home during all that time, for continued absence from the seat of government for so long would have constituted a danger to his dynasty. We know that his great imperial predecessors the Assyrians had conducted annual campaigns, but such marches to and fro rarely exceeded some five or six hundred miles, whereas Cyrus had to undertake the moving of armies up to five times that distance. It is reasonable to think that in the course of this second decade, approximately, he must have returned to his bases in Elam and Media at least three times, however confident he may have been in his satraps and allowing for the fact that his kingdom was sustained by the continuous acquisition of wealth that surged to the homeland on the tides of victory."<sup>46</sup>

Arrian tells us that Cyrus attempted to reach India, but lost the greater part of his army due to the harshness of the terrain.<sup>47</sup> Apparently he approached India through South Baluchistan.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> JHS LXXI (1951), p. 229, note 38.

<sup>44</sup> "Cyrus the Great," p. 404.

<sup>45</sup> G. M. A. Hanfmann, Sardis from Prehistoric to Roman Times (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), p. 107.

<sup>46</sup> "Cyrus the Great," p. 407.

<sup>47</sup> Anabasis, vi.24,3; Indica, 9.

<sup>48</sup> "Cyrus the Great," p. 407.

*The Fall Of Babylon*

The threat from Cyrus must have long been a source of concern to the people of Mesopotamia, although as late as c. 550 B.C. Cyrus had allowed Nabonidus to invest Harran (which had been occupied by the Medes) and rebuild the temple of Sîn.<sup>49</sup> It was in the winter, toward the close of Nabonidus' sixteenth year, when the Babylonian and Persian armies met in a skirmish near the city of Uruk.<sup>50</sup> But the increasing closeness of the enemy did not deter Nabonidus from observing the customary religious events; thus, in the following year, the New Year's Festival was celebrated and, in due course, offerings were bestowed on all the temples of the kingdom.<sup>51</sup>

At the approach of Cyrus, Nabonidus sent to all the sanctuaries in Mesopotamia, commanding that the statue of each tutelary deity be brought to the capital.<sup>52</sup> This move was not without precedence: "Carrying off divine images was a common punishment imposed on vanquished peoples in the ancient Near East..."<sup>53</sup> Such acts by conquerors were obviously intended to force worshippers into submission, since the ancients did not regard the images as mere statues but as sources of actual power. If one gives to Nabonidus the benefit of the doubt,

---

<sup>49</sup> "Cyrus the Great," p. 408.

<sup>50</sup> Beaulieu, pp. 219-220. His source is the Chronicle of Nabonidus, but the text is very poorly preserved at this point; the six words comprising Beaulieu's translation are all doubtful renderings. I have therefore not included this entry in Chapter 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>52</sup> See the Chronicle of Nabonidus, entry for year 17, given in Chapter 1, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Beaulieu, p. 223.

it might be said that he "was trying to ensure the loyalty of all Babylonian cities by sheltering their main gods in the capital, which could endure a long siege."<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps, however, he was not so altruistic. By concentrating the power of all the gods in Babylon, he may have thought that he could improve the capital's chances of success against the Persians. At the arrival of objects which they assumed could afford divine protection, it is quite possible that the citizens of Babylon would have experienced renewed hope for the future of their city. But even if Nabonidus' intentions were good, one can only imagine how the inhabitants of the other cities must have viewed the departure of their gods. Deprived of their imagined protection, they would quite likely have been demoralized and also annoyed at the inconvenience associated with the removal of the cultic figures. The priests of Ishtar's shrine at Uruk, for example, would have been forced to send their assistants to Babylon in order to lay offerings of food and drink before the goddess. There could be no interruption in the cult.<sup>55</sup>

Soon after the last gods of Mesopotamia entered Babylon, the assault of Cyrus began in earnest. After penetrating the northern part of the country, he found himself confronted by the forces of Nabonidus. It was at Opis, on the banks of the Tigris, that the first and only full-scale battle between Babylonian and Persian was waged. As it happened, Cyrus and his army prevailed and forced the Babylonians to retreat, making a great slaughter of the men and carrying off much plunder in the process.<sup>56</sup> Nabonidus, however, fled with a small retinue and took refuge within

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>56</sup> See the Nabonidus Chronicle in Chapter 1.

the city of Sippar.<sup>57</sup> A few days later, on the fourteenth day of Tishri, Sippar was captured without a siege; but, while his army was surrendering, Nabonidus managed to escape into the desert.<sup>58</sup> Whether he reached Babylon or not is open to question; subsequent events would seem to suggest that he did not - at least not before the entry of the Persians.<sup>59</sup>

It is likely that the flight of the Babylonian king did not trouble Cyrus, as he must have known that the old king was somewhat unpopular and would find few supporters beyond his immediate circle of friends. It is entirely possible that his concerns would have revolved around Belshazzar, the king's son. It is a fact that the historical Belshazzar was opposed to his father's religious policies;<sup>60</sup> after the latter's return to the capital, the son would most likely have paid lip service to Sîn, but only in order to stay in his father's good graces. Indeed, if he had learned of the defeat of Nabonidus by Cyrus, he would most probably have found followers among the priests, who would have favoured him because he was very likely of royal blood - something which his father was lacking.<sup>61</sup> So his blood-ties to the founder of the Neo-Babylonian Dynasty and his youth could well have made him a threat in the eyes of Cyrus. Biblical tradition states

---

<sup>57</sup> The Chronicle does not explicitly state that Nabonidus was involved in the battle at Opis, although this could be inferred from the later statement that he fled when Sippar was captured. This information comes from Berossus (see Beaulieu's commentary, p. 230). Incidentally, the city in which Nabonidus takes refuge is not Sippar in the account of Berossus, but Borsippa, the so-called twin city of Babylon.

<sup>58</sup> See the Nabonidus Chronicle. Berossus, however, says that Nabonidus did not flee, but surrendered. He places this event *after* the capture of Babylon.

<sup>59</sup> According to the Chronicle of Nabonidus, he was captured in Babylon. But the phrasing would suggest that a little time elapsed between the taking of the city and his arrest.

<sup>60</sup> Beaulieu, p. 65.

<sup>61</sup> As mentioned in Chapter One, he was quite possibly a grandson of Nebuchadrezzar.

that Belshazzar was killed on the very night that Babylon was taken, while it would seem that Nabonidus was spared. It is likely, therefore, that Cyrus gave orders concerning the execution of Belshazzar to the general Ugbaru (Gobryas), who was with the main body of the army when the city was taken. Gobryas was the governor of Gutium and obviously much trusted by Cyrus. He may have defected to Cyrus "at some point in the middle of the reign of Nabonidus..."<sup>62</sup> It was Gobryas, then, who set out for Babylon, enabling his master to attend to other matters. Gobryas may or may not have been accompanied by Gadatas.

*After his return from Tema, Nabonidus may well have imposed certain features of the cult of Sîn (as it was practised at Harran) in the capital. One of these was the Akītu or New Year's festival, which was celebrated at Harran in the autumn rather than in the spring,<sup>63</sup> as it was at Babylon.<sup>64</sup> Belshazzar, who was staying in the capital, would have felt obliged to observe the festival in his father's absence. After years of opposition, he may finally have concluded that he had more to gain if he supported his father's religious policies - at least as long as he was alive - than if he opposed them. And so he proceeded with the celebration of the festival, despite the proximity of the Persian army. Its closeness must surely have engendered feelings of apprehension in the capital, but Belshazzar was either ignorant of the fact that the city had its share of malcontents or pinned his false sense of security on the massive fortifications, never*

---

<sup>62</sup> Beaulieu, pp. 229-230.

<sup>63</sup> i.e., in the month of Nisan (March-April)

<sup>64</sup> Beaulieu, pp. 226; 152.

dreaming that the gates could be opened by the priests of Bel-Marduk, who had seen their own cult neglected during the regime of Nabonidus.<sup>65</sup>

The fact that three separate sources<sup>66</sup> mention that the city was taken while festivities were going on would convince most impartial scholars that some sort of celebration was in progress at the time of Babylon's capture. But even if one accepts the tradition of festivities, how does one justify Belshazzar's decision to make merry while the troops of Cyrus were so close?<sup>67</sup> Could messengers have failed to inform him of his father's defeat only a few days before? Perhaps the only ones not slaughtered by Cyrus' troops escaped with Nabonidus and did not venture to communicate with the capital. The fact that we cannot be sure where Nabonidus was at the time of Ugbaru's entry makes the situation even more confusing. In the absence of information to the contrary, it seems best to assume that Belshazzar was ignorant of recent events; if he did not know that his father had been defeated, we can at least be one step closer to understanding why he would have proceeded with the celebration of the festival. Even then, he must have been blind to the people's dissatisfaction with his father's rule to trust in the city's defences. Interestingly enough, while the Book of Daniel implies that the capture of the city was a complete surprise, Josephus states (*Antiquities*, X.xi.2) that the vision of the handwriting on the wall occurred while Belshazzar was being besieged in Babylon, indicating that, in Josephus' view at least, the inhabitants were apprised of the approach of the Persian army.

---

<sup>65</sup> According to Cook ("The Rise of the Achaemenids"), Cyrus "had made overtures to the priesthood of the capital [Babylon], which had been alienated by the insouciance and provincial attachments of Nabuna'id." - Vol. 2 of *The Cambridge History of Iran*, p. 212.

<sup>66</sup> i.e., Herodotus, Xenophon, the Book of Daniel

<sup>67</sup> Perhaps the simplest explanation is that he feared the god's dissatisfaction if he neglected the festival.

The seventeenth day of Tishri marked the beginning of the Akītu festival.<sup>68</sup> It is quite feasible that Belshazzar would have initiated celebrations the night before. This, then, would account for the tradition of the feast or festival alluded to in both the Greek and Hebrew sources. Whatever its extent, the Persian army would already have been at the city gate. Possibly relying on the support of a disgruntled priesthood, the troops of Cyrus had approached Babylon in a way no conquering army ever had, their swords sheathed and their minds unperturbed by thoughts of a life-threatening siege. Perhaps, as Xenophon states, Gobryas and Gadatas made their way to the palace and killed the small guard posted in front (*Cyropaedia*, VII.v.27). They would then have had access to the only person young and able enough to pose a threat to the new order - Belshazzar.

Although most scholars feel that little bloodshed took place during the capture of the city, it is assumed that the usual pillaging occurred. This seems all the more likely when one considers that it was the army of Gutium which entered the city.

"[It] consisted of the semi-barbarian hill people from beyond the Tigris...He [Cyrus] seems to have known what to expect when the Guti tribesmen entered the rich and famous city as victors, and therefore kept the Persian army, and above all himself, away from Babylon until he could enter the city as liberator and saviour."<sup>69</sup>

In this light, the shield-bearers of Gutium who surrounded the Esagil(a) were protecting the city's most important sanctuary, while the rest of Babylon was being looted.

It was presumably before the official entry of Cyrus that Nabonidus and his followers appeared in Babylon. They may have found their flight from Sippar blocked by Arabs and so

---

<sup>68</sup> Beaulieu, pp. 226; 152.

<sup>69</sup> A. L. Oppenheim, "The Babylonian Evidence of Achaemenian Rule in Mesopotamia," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, p. 542.

returned to the capital, only to find it in Persian hands.<sup>70</sup> These very Arabs may have been identical to the ones who, only six years earlier, had submitted to Nabonidus.<sup>71</sup> Now, however, they were forced to switch their loyalties. When Cyrus entered Babylon, the kings from sea to sea, even the Bedouin sheikhs of the West, came with heavy tribute to Babylon and made obeisance to the conqueror.<sup>72</sup>

The domains of Cyrus II were vast indeed. With Babylon captured, the great plain of the Euphrates and Tigris, which stretched from the Persian Gulf to the Armenian foothills, was in Persian hands. Moreover, all the peoples west of the Euphrates who had formerly been subjects of the Babylonian Empire were now subjects of Cyrus.<sup>73</sup> Although it seems incredible, Herodotus states:

"During all the reign of Cyrus, there were no fixed tributes, but the nations severally brought gifts to the king. On account of this and other such like doings, the Persians say that Darius was a huckster, Cambyses a master, and Cyrus a father; for Darius looked to making a gain in everything; Cambyses was harsh and reckless; while Cyrus was gentle and provided them with all manner of goods." (*Histories*, iii.89)

The portrait of Cyrus in the Old Testament provides a striking confirmation of the favour with which he was regarded by foreigners. In the words of the prophet:

"Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and ungird the loins of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: 'I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut asunder the bars of iron...' (Isaiah 45:1-2).

---

<sup>70</sup> This is Sydney Smith's reconstruction.

<sup>71</sup> "The Rise of the Achaemenids," p. 262.

<sup>72</sup> Cyrus Cylinder.

<sup>73</sup> "The Rise of the Achaemenids," p. 212.

It is well known that Cyrus permitted the Jews to return from their Babylonian Exile and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>74</sup> According to the views of Maurice Dunand (as summarized by Max Mallowan) this move seems to have been "the corner stone of a policy which was designed to take over the remnants of the old Babylonian empire in Phoenicia and Palestine. There is much archaeological evidence that the rebuilding of the temple of Jerusalem was followed by the repair and foundation of a chain of fortified sites which ran down from the Gulf of Issus at about the latitude of modern Alexandretta to the marches of Palestine where the Jews were doubtless expected to co-operate in sustaining a defensive bulwark against Egypt."<sup>75</sup>

### *The Final Years of Cyrus*

According to Ctesias, before his death Cyrus made Cambyses' younger brother ruler over the eastern provinces of his empire.

Cyrus died in 529 B.C.<sup>76</sup> All ancient sources but Xenophon indicate that his death was more or less violent. Most scholars accept the Herodotean story that he died in a battle with the Massagetae, a tribe living in what is now Turkestan. As discussed in Chapter Two, Tomyris, the queen of the Massagetae, searched for his body among the Persian dead and decapitated it, so that she could immerse the head of her foe in a skin filled with human blood. Ctesias makes the Indians - of all peoples - allies of the Derbikes (who take the place of the Massagetae in his version) and tells us that, after being wounded in battle, Cyrus was transferred by his friends to the Persian camp, where he died three days later. Cambyses then transported his father's corpse

---

<sup>74</sup> Ezra 1:1-4.

<sup>75</sup> "Cyrus the Great," p. 409.

<sup>76</sup> "Cyrus the Great," p. 404.

to Persia for burial.<sup>77</sup> According to Diodorus, Cyrus did not die in battle, but was taken prisoner by the Scythians and crucified by their queen.<sup>78</sup>

Although Herodotus does not tell us that his body was recovered after its mutilation by Tomyris, we may assume that it must have been: the tomb at Pasargadae was - and to some extent still is - clear evidence of his interment. The stone structure with the gabled roof has long been accepted as the final resting place of Cyrus.<sup>79</sup> In fact, Arrian gives us a detailed description of the tomb's opulent contents, which were tampered with as early as the time of Alexander the Great. The body lay in a massive golden sarcophagus and a couch and table stood nearby, richly appointed with exotic woven stuffs and golden jewellery. When Alexander visited the tomb, he found only the sarcophagus and the couch. The body had been removed from its resting place and the sarcophagus damaged by the robber's efforts to carry some of the gold away. Alexander not only had the remains of Cyrus put back into the sarcophagus and the lid replaced, but also endeavoured to make the tomb look as it had before the looting occurred. Then the entrance was walled up and the royal seal set on the clay.<sup>80</sup> In spite of these measures, the tomb was subsequently plundered and even the body was removed. It is now completely empty. Had the tomb been concealed from view, archaeologists might have been able to hope for the eventual discovery of a Persian Tutankhamon.

---

<sup>77</sup> Excerpts 6-9 from Photius, in Die Persika des Ktesias von Knidos, pp. 4-5.

<sup>78</sup> Library of History, ii.44.

<sup>79</sup> For a detailed discussion of the site and tomb, see David Stronach's article, "Pasargadae," Chapter 20 in Vol. 2 of The Cambridge History of Iran (1985), pp. 838-855.

<sup>80</sup> Anabasis of Alexander, vi.29.

The tomb may be empty, but the legends remain. These are resonant with age-old motifs, and regardless of what truth may lie behind them, they clearly testify to the enormous awe that the figure of Cyrus commanded in later generations. He was always revered by the Jews as the man who allowed the exiles to return and rebuild the temple. To the Greeks Cyrus was a figure whose name was linked to incidents from their own mythology, and his string of victories and virtual invincibility would have heightened the greatness of Greece's accomplishment in ultimately repelling the Persians, whose empire, even at its inception, seemed virtually omnipotent. But Cyrus was not only regarded as the founder of the Persian empire and thus the creator of Greece's great opponent; Xenophon made him into a paradigm of just rule. As J. M. Cook noted in his appraisal of Cyrus, "few conquerors have won such unqualified admiration."<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> "The Rise of the Achaemenids," p. 213.

## Bibliography

### *Primary (Near Eastern)*

Pritchard, James B., Ancient Near Eastern Texts (Princeton, New Jersey, 1955).

Smith, Sydney, Babylonian Historical Texts relating to the capture and downfall of Babylon (London, 1924).

### *Classical*

Herodotus, Historiae, edited by Carolus (Charles) Hude (Oxford, 1963).

" , [The Ancient Empires of the East] (books I-III), with notes, introductions, and appendices by A. H. Sayce (London, 1883).

" , [The History]. Book I, edited with commentary by R. A. McNeal (Lanham, Maryland, 1986).

Erodoto, La Lidia e la Persia: libro I, le Storie, testo e commento a cura di David Asheri; traduzione di Virginio Antelami (Rome & Milan, 1988).

\* \* \*

Xenophon, Cyropaedia, trans. by Walter Miller (Cambridge, Mass., first printing: 1914), 2 volumes).

\* \* \*

Arrian, Anabasis Alexandri, Indica, trans. by P. A. Brunt (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 2 vols.

Ctesias. Die Persika des Ktesias von Knidos, von Friedrich Wilhelm König (Graz, 1972).

Diodorus Siculus, The Library of History (Bibliothèque Historique), trans. by C. H. Oldfather (Cambridge, Mass., first printing of complete work in translation: 1961-?), 12 volumes.

Josephus, Flavius, Complete Works, trans. by William Whiston (Grand Rapids, 1981).

" , trans. by H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, Mass., 1967).

Sophocles, Electra, trans. by Francis Storr (London and New York, 1919).

Strabo, with an English translation by Horace Leonard Jones, in eight volumes (Cambridge, Mass., 1966 --- first published 1930).

*Secondary (on Herodotus)*

- Benardete, Seth, Herodotean Inquiries (The Hague, 1969).
- Fehling, Detlev, Herodotus and his 'Sources': Citation, Invention and Narrative Art, trans. from the German by J. G. Howie (Liverpool, 1989).
- How, W. W. and Wells, J., A Commentary on Herodotus, with introduction and appendixes (Oxford, 1912).
- Vandiver, Elizabeth, Heroes in Herodotus: the Interaction of Myth and History (New York, 1991).
- Waters, Kenneth H., Herodotos on Tyrants and Despots: A Study in Objectivity (Wiesbaden, 1971).
- Wood, Henry, The Histories of Herodotus: An Analysis of the Formal Structure (The Hague, 1972).

*(on Xenophon)*

- Bassett, Samuel E., "Wit and Humour in Xenophon," in Classical Journal 12 (1916-1917), pp. 565-574.
- Breebaart, A. B., "From Victory to Peace: Some Aspects of Cyrus' State in Xenophon's CYRUPAEDIA," in Mnemosyne 36 (1983), pp. 117-134.
- Cataudella, Quintino, "La novella greca," in Athenaeum 35, pp. 371-374.
- Due, Bodil, The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods (Aarhus University Press, 1989).
- Gera, Deborah Levine, Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique (Oxford, 1993).
- Gray, V. J., "Xenophon's *Hiero* and the Meeting of the Wise Man and Tyrant in Greek Literature," in Classical Quarterly 36 (1986), pp. 115-123.
- Pease, Samuel James, "Xenophon's CYRUPAEDIA, 'The Compleat General,'" in Classical Journal 29 (1933-1934), pp. 436-440.
- Rowley, Harold Henry, Darius the Mede and The Four World Empires in the Book of Daniel (Cardiff, 1935).
- Tatum, James, Xenophon's Imperial Fiction: on the Education of Cyrus (Princeton, 1989).

*on the Greek Historians*

Drews, Robert, The Greek Accounts of Eastern History (Washington, 1973).

*on Babylon*

Beaulieu, Paul-Alain, The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556-539 B.C.  
(New Haven, 1989).

Tadmor, H., "Inscription of Nabunaid: Historical Arrangement," Assyriological Studies XVI (Chicago, 1965), pp. 351-363.

*on Lydia*

Butler, Howard Crosby, The Excavations (Amsterdam, 1969).

Guralnick, Eleanor, Sardis: twenty-seven years of discovery (Chicago, 1987).

Hanfmann, George Maxim Anossov, Sardis from Prehistoric to Roman Times  
(Cambridge, Mass., 1983).

Pedley, John Griffiths, Sardis in the Age of Croesus (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1968).

Radet, Georges Albert, La Lydie et le monde grec au temps des Mermnades (687-546)  
(Rome, 1967 - reprint of French edition of 1893).

Soedel, Paul, De fabellis ad Croesum pertinentibus (quaestiones selectae) (Göttingen, 1911).

*on Persia*

Frye, R. N., The Heritage of Persia (London, 1962).

Gershevitch, Ilya, The Cambridge History of Iran (Vol. 2: "The Median and Achaemenian Periods"), Cambridge, 1985.

Olmstead, A. T., History of the Persian Empire (Chicago, 1948).

Rogers, Robert William, A History of Ancient Persia (New York, 1929).

