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The kingdom of the Medes

The creator of the Median kingdom, according to Herodotus, was **Deioces [728-675 BC]** who founded the Median capital Ecbatana [mod. Hamadan]. He was succeeded by his son **Phraortes [675-653 BC]** who subjugated the Persians and lost his life in a premature attack against the Assyrians.

Groups of nomadic warriors were constantly marauding these areas from the 9th to the early 7th centuries. Dominant among these groups were the Scythians. Herodotus tells of their interference in the Persian affairs and they had an interregnum which fell between 653-625 BC in the area.

Herodotus [Hist, I, 103-108] speaks of this interregnum as a period of pillage and disorder throughout the countryside.

Under **Cyaxares of Media [625-585 BC]** the Scythians were overthrown. Cyaxares re-organised the military into special units, majoring upon particular armaments; spearmen, bowmen and cavalry. This re-organisation made them rather a match for the Assyrian armies. They attacked a border city Arrapkha in 615 BC and then went on to surround Ninevah, but were unable to capture it. So they went on and successfully stormed the religious capital Asshur and captured it.

An alliance was sealed between the Medes and the Babylonians by the betrothal of Cyaxares' granddaughter to Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar II [604-562 BC]. In 612 BC Ninevah fell - the Babylonians arriving too late to participate in the battle - and the Medes and the Babylonians pursued the fleeing Assyrians into the Syria. Although the Assyrians appealed to Egypt for help it came to nothing. So the Assyrian leader Ashurbanipal II disappeared from the stage in 609 BC.

After this, the spoils were divided in this way: the fertile crescent became the settled place of the Babylonians. The Medes gained control over the highlands in E. Anatolia, where the Urartu had ruled. This meant that eventually the Medes came into conflict with the Lydians, the dominant political power in Eastern Asia. In 585 BC, probably with the aid of Babylonian mediation, a peace was established between the Lydians and the Medes, and their agreed boundary was the Halys River on the southern bank of the Black Sea.

So a new balance of power was established in the Near East among the Medes, the Babylonians, the Lydians and far to the south, the Egyptians. Cyaxares, at the time of his death, controlled vast territories: all of Anatolia to the Halys R.; the whole of western Iran, perhaps as far as Tehran, and all of SW Iran.

Cyaxares was succeeded by his son **Astyages [585-550 BC]**. There is evidence that the Babylonians feared the Median power. But they were not to worry, for soon it was clear that Astyages was under attack from the rising power of Cyrus II the Great, of Persia.

The Persian Empire [Archaemenian]

In the middle of the 6th Century BC [550] after the downfall of the Assyrian Empire, two great powers Babylonia and Media faced each other.

In Anshan, a district of Elam in SW Iran, the kings who had reigned there were Archaemenes, **Teispes, Cyrus I and Cambyses I.**

Teispes, freed from Median domination during the Scythian interregnum of 653-625, expanded his kingdom, dividing it upon his death between his two sons, **Cyrus I** and Ariaramnes. When the Median control was re-asserted under Cyaxares [see above] Cambyses I was given a reunited Persian to rule and administer as a Median vassal. His son, - whose remarkable story of his birth and upbringing is recorded in Herodotus 1, 108-120 - Cyrus II, married the daughter of Astyages and in 559 BC and so inherited his father's position in the Median confederation.

A remarkable man, **Cyrus II** united under his authority several Persian and Iranian groups who had not been under his father's control. Unilaterally, he initiated diplomatic relations with Nabonidus of Babylon [556-538 BC], which worried Astyages.

Eventually, a revolt against the Median king Astyages was started by Cyrus II in 550 BC. The Medes

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were beaten in battle when a large contingent of the Median army deserted to the Persian standard on the battle field [Herodotus 1.130]. Astyages was taken alive and kept at court by Cyrus II.

So it was that in 550BC, the Archaemenid kings broke on to the international stage with a suddenness that must have alarmed many. So alarmed were the Babylonians that Babylonia entered into an alliance with Amasis [570-526 BC], Pharaoh of Egypt and Croesus, king of Lydia [560-546].

Cyrus II the Great [550-529BC]

2C36.22-23; Ezra 1.1-2,8; 3.7;4.3-5; Dan 10.1.

[a] Cyrus defeats Croesus and the Lydian states [547-546 BC]

Cyrus immediately set out on expanding his empire. Making it clear to the Babylonians that they had nothing to fear from Persia, he turned his attention to the Lydian states under the rule of the fabulously wealthy Croesus. They appealed to Babylonia for help but to no avail.

Cyrus took Cilicia, which had the effect of cutting off any help for Croesus from anyone from the east. Cyrus attacked and an indecisive battle was fought on the Halys River in 547 BC. It being late in the campaigning time of the year, the Lydians returned to their capital of Sardis and dispersed their nationally called up soldiers.

But Cyrus kept coming - crossing the Halys in the dead of winter, he besieged the Lydians in Sardis and captured Croesus in 546 BC. The Greek city-states along the coast put up a fight but were overcome, only Miletus surrendered without a fight. These mopping-up wars were the responsibility of Cyrus' subordinate generals.

With most of the Asia Minor to the Aegean Sea in Cyrus' hands, the defensive alliance with Egypt fell apart and the Babylonians stood alone.

We know little of what Cyrus did for the next 6 years. But he seemed to be stabilising things in the East, campaigning in Hyrcania and Parthia [mod. Afghanistan] and across the steppes beyond the Oxus as far as Jaxartes.

[b] The Babylonian campaign [540-539 BC]

We next hear of him in 540 BC as he initiates the Babylonian campaign. It could be said to have begun when he had lulled the Babylonians into a false sense of security at the time of his campaign against the Lydians. Certainly, as Babylonia's turn came she was deprived of a possible ally.

Gobryas, a Babylonian general deserted to Cyrus and established himself in Upper Mesopotamia in the province of Elam [Gutium], which he governed under Cyrus' rule. By summer the forces of Cyrus had gathered at the borders.

Cyrus took advantage of the internal disruption in Babylon, for Nabonidus was not a popular king. He had paid little attention to local domestic affairs and had alienated the priesthood. Many people, beside the Jews, would have looked at Cyrus as a possible deliverer. Nabonidus, in a desperate measure, brought the gods of the outlying districts into Babylon - alienating the locals even more.

The decisive engagement took place on the Tigris at Opis; it was a crushing defeat for Babylon. Resistance collapsed and Gobryas took the city of Babylon without a fight.

In the late summer [October] of 539 BC, Cyrus entered Babylon, took hold of the hands of the god Marduk, so stating that he would rule as a Babylonian and not as a foreigner. With this step came into his hands all that Babylon had conquered from the Assyrians, including Egypt.

[c] Cyrus' Policy: commissions the re-building of the Temple in Jerusalem [538 BC]

Cyrus in the first year of his reign in Babylon issued a decree restoring the Jewish community and worship possibility to Palestine. The Bible records this in two places: Ezra 1.2-4 and also 6.3-5. This latter reference is in the form of a dikrona [Ezra 6.2] which is a memorandum of an oral decision of the king filed in the royal archives.

The Aramaic documents behind Ezra 6.3-5 provided for:

- [a] the temple to be rebuilt at the expense of the royal treasury.
- [b] lays down certain general specifications for the building
- [c] the vessels captured by Nebuchadnezzar to be returned to their rightful place.

The Hebrew record of Ezra 1.2-4 takes the form of a royal proclamation announced to the subjects by heralds. It states that:

- [a] Cyrus ordered the rebuilding of the Temple building
- [b] permitted Jews, who wished to, could return to their homeland
- [c] Jews remaining in the Babylonian area, were invited to contribute

The Chronicler reports about the return of the sacred vessels and also tells us that the project was

placed in the charge of Sheshbazzar - "prince of Judah" ie a member of the royal household in all probability. There was a Shech-bazzar who was the same as Shenazzar who is listed in the 1C 3.18 as a son of Jehoiachin.

Cyrus' mentality, and it was followed by most of his successors, was that the control of people was best enlisted by allowing them to maintain their gods and their cultural autonomy within the Empire.

In this way they could use local governors, who were at peace with the own subjects and maintain the control over the empire by a framework of a complex bureaucracy, their army and a fast courier system for communications.

Also, Jerusalem was at the very frontier of the empire; it was very much to the king's advantage to have a group of loyal subjects out there who had a cause to be grateful to the king.

Our reading in the Bible *****

1 - The Building of the Temple

The work of Joshua and Zerubbabel [aka. Sheshbazzar]	[Ezra 2.2;3.2]
538 BC	Cyrus commissions the building of the house of God [2C 36.22-23; Ezra 1.2-4]
7months later	Men come to Jerusalem and Judah with Zerubbabel The altar is built [Ezra 2.2; 3.2]
536	In the second year of coming the foundation of the Temple is laid [Ezra 3.6-13] The people of the land are re-buffed by Zerubbabel and Joshua [Ezra 4.1-5] Work stops [Ezra 4.24], while a search is made for Cyrus' initial decree [Ezra 5.1-6.12]

As long as Cyrus lived, there were no competitors who could match him for power and military strength. Cyrus met his death in the course of a campaign against the nomadic peoples beyond the Jaxartes River. His successor was his eldest son Cambyses, who had been deputy in Babylon for some years.

Cambyses [529-522BC]

Known to us in the Bible as 'king of Persia' Ezra 4.5,24; 'the Persian' Neh 12.22; 'the Mede' Dan5.31cf 6.125;9.1;11.1.

After Cyrus II died, his son Cambyses II [after putting aside his brother, Bardiya,[aka. Smerdis] who he considered a threat to his position] continued his father's style.

After careful preparation he succeeded in a conquest of Egypt [525] and of the Greek islands of Cyprus and Samos [Herodotus iii,1.60]. Amasis [Ahmose], the Pharaoh, had entered into an alliance with the tyrant of Samos and made use of Greek mercenaries in his army. The battle was engaged at Pelusium; the Egyptians lost and retired to Memphis. The Persians took the city. The war was lost as a Greek mercenary deserted and laid the Egyptian defence plan before Cambyses. Amasis died and his son, Psammetichus III [Psamtik III], could not halt the invaders.

After organising Egypt as a satrapy of the empire, Cambyses campaigned unsuccessfully in Ethiopia, up as far as the oasis of Ammon. The Greeks of Libya, Cyrene and Barca submitted to him.

He was careful to spare the Jewish temple at Elephantine and we have no information from the Jews of Palestine that he interfered in any way with their affairs.

As he was en-route through Palestine, news was brought to him of a man Guamata, who had usurped the throne. Guamata was now accepted as the governor of some of the eastern provinces, on account of the bribes he had offered them as a 3 year remittance of their taxes. This man gave himself out as Cambyses's own brother Bardiya, whom Cambyses had had secretly assassinated some years earlier.

Cambyses died, either by his own hand, or of an infected sword wound. A general in his army Darius, hurried back to quell the rebellion with the army.

Darius I Hystapes 522-486 BC]

[a] Putting down the rebellion 522-521 BC]

It took over a year of hard fighting to quell the rebellion associated with Bardiya's claim to the throne. All of the empire was involved and especially Media. Darius combined an even-handed policy of mercy to some, and the swift and thorough punishment of rebels on the other.

[b] Organisation and consolidation of the Empire.

Darius campaigned into the East and consolidated the gains that Cyrus had made earlier; adding larger areas of northern India.

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Our reading in the Bible*****

521	Work resumes in the second year of the reign of Darius I Hystapes [Ezra 4.24]	
1.6.521	Haggai prophesies	[Haggai 1.1]
24.6.521	Zerubbabel and Joshu begin their work	[Haggai 1.12-15]
21.7.521	Haggai prophesies	[Haggai 2.1-9]
8.521	Zechariah prophesies	[Zech 1.1-6]
24.9.521	Haggai prophesies twice on this day	[Haggai 2.10-23]
24.11.521	Zechariah prophesies	[Zech 1.7 - 6.15]
4.9.519	Zechariah prophesies	[Zech 7.1-8.23]
3 Adar 516	The Temple is completed	[Ezra 6.13-15]

In 516 BC Darius expanded to the West, moving against the Hellespont as a first stage of an attack on the western and northern shores of the Black Sea. In this way he disrupted the trade that the Greeks had with the Black Sea area. This was not a small imposition on the Greeks, for it was from here that most of the Greek grain supplies came through from the Ukraine area.

He crossed into Europe and campaigned, with little success, around the R. Danube. On withdrawal from here there was set up a bridgehead at the Hellespont.

[c] 500 BC saw a revolt of the Greek cities of Ionia against Persian rule. The Persians were initially surprised, and the rebellion grew with help from the Athenians who, by 498 BC, had thought themselves strong enough to take the offensive.

Darius took a counter offensive against this, but with limited success; then in 494 BC he renewed the offensive and was successful. The Greek fleet was trounced at Miletus and the Persian land army systematically worked their way through the rebel cities.

In 492 BC Mardonius, a son-in-law of Darius, who made him special commissioner to the Ionian cities, suppressed the local tyrants and returned democracy to these cities. So by 492 BC the Persians had recovered Thrace and Macedonia, which had been lost in the Ionian revolt.

However, despite clever technical preparation, the Median War against the Greeks ends in defeat at the utter failure of the Persian armies and fleet at the Battle of Marathon 490 BC. The King was forced to retreat, and also learned to consider that the Greek problem was one that required more preparation and manpower.

So, from this time, there began a consistent preparation, on a large co-ordinated scale, to deal with the Greeks. But before that could happen, first there was a revolt in Egypt to deal with. In the midst of this, Darius died.

Xerxes I [486-465 BC]

[Perhaps Ahasuerus of Esther].

Xerxes was the eldest son of Darius by Queen Atossa; he was born after his father had come to the throne. He had been designated crown prince in 498 and had ruled as the King's governor in Babylon.

[a] In 485 BC he quickly suppressed the revolt in Egypt and then, departing from his predecessor's policy, he ruthlessly ignored the local forms of rule and supplanted them with Persian style.

Our reading in the Bible*****

483	During the reign of Xerxes I [486-465] , Queen Vashti disobeys	Esther 1-2
	Esther becomes queen in her place, Mordecai informs of a plot	
474	Haman causes the king to make a decree against the Jews	Esther 3
	They are to be slain 13th day of the 12th month [Adar].	
	Esther intercedes, Mordecai is honoured, the Jews are saved	Esther 4-10

[b] 482 BC a revolt in Babylon was also put down strongly.

[c] Xerxes now looked to the West and to Greece.

After wintering in Sardis 481-480 BC he launched a land and sea invasion of Greece. Northern Greece fell to the invaders in the summer of 480 BC.

In the August of 480, the Greeks made a stand at Thermopylae, which was lost to them. Under Xerxes personal command the Persians inflicted a defeat at Thermopylae [480BC] where Leonidas and his 300 Spar-

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tans died a heroic death at Kolonos. The Persian forces landed at Athens and destroyed the Acropolis by fire. But a big dent was put in this success when the Battle of Salamis [480 BC] was lost by the Persian fleet.

Xerxes, who had by this time been away from Babylon a long time, returned, leaving Mardonius in charge. The real end of the invasion came with the;

[a] Battle of Plataea [479 BC], in which, once Mardonius was killed, the leaderless Persian forces were unable to resist the disciplined Greek hoplites.

[b] the fall of Thebes which was a base for the pro-Persian forces

[c] Persian naval loss at Mycale 479 BC

The Greeks formed the Delian League, Athens began to launch its own imperialism and, with the troubles on the West coast of Asia Minor, the Persian military designs on Greece, within 10 years, were over.

[d] Xerxes, opting for a quieter life in the captial Susa, fell victim to harem intrugues and **was assassinated in 465 BC.**

Artaxerxes I Longimanus [465-425BC]

Ezra 4.7 'king of Persia' Ezra 7.1

Our reading in the Bible*****

The work of Ezra - during the reign of Artaxerxes I Longimanus

459	Priests, Levites, singers and gatekeepers precede Ezra on his journey to Jerusalem	Ezra 7.7
1.1.457	Ezra sets out from Babylon	Ezra 7.9
1-12.1.457	The journey: How they assembled at the River Ahava From the River Ahava to Jerusalem	Ezra 8.1-30 Ezra 8.31-36
1.5.457	Ezra arrives in Jerusalem after 4 months journey What Artaxerxes decreed is recorded for us Prayer of Confession The people repent concerning intermarriage Proclamation made	Ezra 7.9 Ezra 7.11-28 Ezra 9 Ezra 10.1-4 Ezra 10.5-8
457	Malachi speaks of seven statements of God to which the people delay by asking, "How?"	Malachi 1-4
20.9.457	Men of Judah and Benjamin assemble at Jerusalem and they agree to an investigation taking place	Ezra 10.9-15
1.1.456	The investigation is finished List of people who separate from their foreign wives	Ezra 10.16-17 Ezra 10.18-44
450	The Prophet Obadiah speaks a vision concerning Edom	Obadiah

The work of Nehemiah - The building of the Walls of Jerusalem

Chislev 444	Nehemiah hears of the state of the walls of Jerusalem. He prays	Neh 1.1-2,4-11
Nisan 445	Nehemiah is commissioned by Artaxerxes and is appointed the governor from 445-431.	Neh 2.1-8 Neh 2.6; 5.14;13.6
440	Arrives in Jerusalem and observes the walls The entrances to Jerusalem are finished	Neh 2.9-20 Neh 3
August 439	Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, opposes the work. The workers are armed Nehemiah rebukes Jews who are enslaving one another	Neh 4 Neh 5.1-19
Dec 437	Wall is finished, ie raised, in 52 days Gates are hung, guards are appointed. There are few people	Neh 6.15 Neh 7.1-4
7.445	Census is taken of the people, most are in cities	Neh 7.5-73
1.7.445	The people gather to Ezra to hear the Law	Neh 8.2-12
2.7.445	The feast of Tabernacles is celebrated from the 2.7-2.8 445	Neh 8.13-18
24.7.445	Sackcloth and fasting The people decide to return to the Law A 10th of the people volunteer to live inside Jerusalem The Wall is dedicated	Neh 9.1-38 Neh 10 Neh 11 Neh 12.27
432	Nehemiah returns to Babylon	Neh 13.6

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Comes back to Jerusalem and rebukes many.

Artaxerxes faced a series of rebellions throughout his reign. The most important of these was **[a] the rebellion in Egypt [459 BC]** and this was not fully put down until 454 BC.

During this time from 460-404 The Peloponnesian Wars between Athens and Sparta were the major event. They dominated the minds of the Persian kings and made for opportunities from time to time.

[b] In 439 BC, Athens broke the peace and launched an attack on Samos. In the aftermath of putting this down the Persians made some military gains in the west.

Xerxes II 423

He ruled only 45 days and was killed while in a drunken stupor by the son of one of his father's concubines. The assassin was then killed by Darius II who rose to the throne by palace intrigue.

Darius II Nothus [423-404 BC]

Several revolts had to be dealt with in this reign, one of which was in Media, close to home.

Artaxerxes II Mnemon [404-359 BC]

Came to the throne in 404 BC, the same year that Persian gold and Spartan soldiers brought about the fall of Athens.

[a] During his reign the war with Sparta ended with a favourable result for the Persians.

Sparta, having been triumphant over Athens, built for herself a small empire and soon became involved in a war with the Persians over the western cities of Asia Minor. The Spartans played one Persian governor against the other, particularly in Anatolia.

The Persians, who were spending gold in Greece to raise rebellion in Sparta's home territory, also rebuilt their Persian fleet and placed it under a competent admiral from Athens, Conon.

This state of affairs went on from 400 to 387 BC with Sparta being confined to operating on an ever shrinking front. Eventually, with a balance of power created in Greece, Artaxerxes was able to dictate the *King's Peace 387-6 BC*. Once more, the Greeks gave up any interest in the territory and cities of Asia Minor.

[b] There was a revolt in Egypt in 405 BC and the Persians could do nothing about it. So it was a loss for the Empire of Egypt, which remained a free agent after this.

Cyrus the Younger, brother to the King had been caught in an assassination attempt at the time of Artaxerxes's coronation. He was, through the pleadings of the Queen mother, forgiven and made governor of a province in Asia Minor.

[c] In 401 BC, Cyrus revolted and supported by 10,000 Greek mercenaries, he marched east to contest the throne. He was defeated and killed at Cuaxa in 401 BC.

The Greek mercenaries were not destroyed and, although severely harried, they left the field in good order and marched north to the Black Sea and then home. [This is the famous march of the 10,000 recorded in the *Anabasis* of Xenophon. It actually demonstrated the internal weakness of the Persian infrastructure to cope].

[d] An uprising also took place of the satraps, the governors of the provinces. One of these, Aroandadas, of Armenia, had stamped his own coinage in defiance of the King. Aided by Greek mercenaries, they launched an attack against Egypt, but it was called off when it was clear that Egypt had her own internal rebellion, the Pharaoh's brother was the reason. Artaxerxes was able to defeat the satraps who were now left alone, without their mercenaries, to face him.

Artaxerxes III Ochus [359-338 BC]

Came to the throne because of harem intrigue and counter plot. He exterminated all his rivals and cemented his position.

[a] Egypt, since her revolt in 405 BC, had been a free agent. Now an **expedition** was mounted to get it back in 351-350 BC.

[b] There were **revolts** in Sidon, Palestine and Phoenicia which were crushed in 345 BC.

[c] Aided by fresh mercenaries from the Asia Minor cities, **Artaxerxes regained Egypt in 343 BC**. But the local Egyptian dynasty fled and set up an alternative government in Nubia, where it maintained an independent kingdom, awaiting a revival.

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Meanwhile Philip of Macedon II was gaining in power in Macedonia. Athens, was refused support from Persia in the event of Philip, and so when the whole of Greece was united under Philip, then the Persian control of Greece was lost and a united Greece was impervious to Persian gold.

Artaxerxes was poisoned by his physician under the orders of the eunuch Bagoas.

Arses [338-336 BC]

Arses was made king under the auspices of the eunuch Bagoas, he did not do as Bagoas wanted. He attempted to poison the eunuch, but was himself killed in retaliation. Bagoas now engineered the accession of Darius III, a 45 year old satrap of Armenia.

Darius III Codomannus [336-330 BC]

[Manfredi, in his novel of Alexanders Life, records at this time that Philip of Macedon, at a time when Alexander and his six friends were in exile in the northern areas of Macedonia, was visited by his informer Eumolpos of Soloi. He informed Philip of the arrival on the throne of Darius III as arranged by Bagoas. Darius III had a grandfather Ostanos who was the brother of Artaxerxes II. Eumolpos made it clear that Darius III had intentions of taking control of the Strait and re-affirming his right over all the Greek cities of Asia Minor.

Two of Philip's four commanders, Attalus and Parmenion moved into Asia with an army of 15,000 men. They were greeted as liberators by the cities of the west coast of Asia Minor.[vol1. chapter 32]]

[a] In **337-336BC, Darius was able to put down the rebellion of Khababash in Egypt.**

[b] The end came to the Persian empire when Philip of Macedon's son, **Alexander the Great**, inflicted a heavy loss on the Persians at Granicus in May 334 BC. Alexander's army went on and Persepolis fell to the invader in April 330 BC.

[Greek and Macedonian soldiers settled in large numbers in Mesopotamia and Iran. Alexander encouraged intermarriage and fostered the Greek culture; yet he retained a great deal of the Archaemenid infrastructure and administration, Indeed, he introduced Oriental elements into Greek culture and political situations.

Alexander, on his death in 323 BC left no heir. His Macedonian generals warred over the control of the vast Empire. In Iran, Seleucus I Nicator had consolidated his control over the previously Persian empire.]