

3 Persia Unites Many Lands

TERMS & NAMES

- Cyrus
- Cambyses
- Darius
- satrap
- Royal Road
- Zoroaster

MAIN IDEA

The Persian Empire ruled with tolerance and wise government.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Tolerance and wise government are characteristics of the most successful methods of rule.

SETTING THE STAGE The Medes, along with the Chaldeans, helped to overthrow the Assyrian Empire in 612 B.C. The Medes marched to Nineveh from their homeland in the area of present-day northern Iran. Meanwhile, the Medes' close neighbor to the south, Persia, began to expand its horizons and territorial ambitions.

The Rise of Persia

The Assyrians employed military force to control a vast empire. In contrast, the Persians would base their empire on tolerance and diplomacy. They relied on a strong military to back up their policies. Ancient Persia included what is today Iran.

CONNECT to TODAY

The Natural Wealth of Iran

Iran has always had substantial mineral wealth and natural resources. These have attracted invaders throughout the ages. In the past, its rich deposits of iron, copper, and lapis lazuli attracted bands of invading nomads and warriors, including Assyrian raiders. Equally important, Iran's mineral wealth encouraged trade with the outside world.

Today, huge reserves of oil lie beneath the surface of Iran. Various foreign powers compete for these rich oil fields. The Iranian government awards contracts to companies to develop oil fields in Iran and the Persian Gulf. Iran's economy relies heavily on revenue from its oil reserves.

The Persian Homeland About 1000 B.C., Indo-Europeans first migrated from Central Europe and southern Russia to the mountains and plateaus east of the Fertile Crescent. This area extended from the Caspian Sea in the north to the Persian Gulf in the south. In addition to prosperous farmland, ancient Iran boasted a wealth of minerals. These included copper, lead, gold, silver, and gleaming blue lapis lazuli. A thriving trade put the settlers in contact with their neighbors to the east and the west.

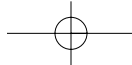
At first, dozens of tiny kingdoms ruled in the region. The Medes and others joined forces to overthrow the Assyrian Empire in 612 B.C. Eventually two major powers emerged: the Medes and the Persians. A remarkable ruler would soon lead Persia to dominate not only the Medes but also a huge empire.

Cyrus the Great Finds an Empire The rest of the world paid little attention to the Persians until 550 B.C. That year, **Cyrus** (SY-ruhs), Persia's king, began his conquest of several neighboring kingdoms in Iran. A new power was rising in the region. Eventually, the Persians extended their rule from the Indus River in the east to Anatolia in the west. This empire spanned over two thousand miles.

Cyrus's soldiers wore leather pants and thick felt boots. Riding mountain ponies, they shot arrows from the short bows that their ancestors had used on the steppes of Russia. Their leader proved to be a military genius. He led his army from victory to victory between 550 and 539 B.C. Cyrus and his armies conquered the entire Fertile Crescent and most of Anatolia.

Even more than his military genius, though, Cyrus's most enduring legacy was his method of governing. His kindness toward conquered peoples revealed a wise and tolerant view of empire. For example, when Cyrus's army marched into a city, his generals enforced strict discipline against looting and burning. Unlike other conquerors, Cyrus believed in honoring local customs and religions. Instead of destroying the local temple, Cyrus would kneel there to pray.

Vocabulary
legacy: something handed down from the past.



Under Persian rule, subject peoples enjoyed remarkable freedom. Indeed, Babylon peacefully opened its gates for Cyrus in 539 B.C. Thankful for the bloodless victory, Cyrus offered prayers to Babylon's chief god, Marduk. According to Persian accounts, "all the inhabitants of Babylon . . . princes and governors included, bowed to Cyrus and kissed his feet, jubilant and with shining faces."

Cyrus also allowed the Jews, who had been deported from their homeland by the Babylonians, to return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. Under Persian rule, the Jews rebuilt their city and temple. They also resumed their sacred rituals. Many portions of the Old Testament first appeared in written form during this period. The Jews were forever grateful to Cyrus, whom they considered one of God's anointed ones. The Hebrew prophet Ezra tells of Cyrus's kindness:

THE BIBLE

This is the word of Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord the God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he himself has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. To every man of his people now among you I say, God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord the God of Israel, the God whose city is Jerusalem.

EZRA 1:2-3.

This wise and tolerant ruler was above all a warrior. Cyrus lost his life in battle, fighting nomadic invaders on the eastern border of his empire. According to the Greek historian Arrian, his simple, house-shaped tomb bore these poignant words: "O man, I am Cyrus the son of Cambyses. I established the Persian Empire and was king of Asia. Do not begrudge me my memorial."



The tomb of Cyrus the Great still stands. It is notable for its simplicity when compared with other royal tombs of the ancient world.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Summarizing

What are some examples of Cyrus's tolerant method of governing?

Persian Rule and Religion

The task of organizing and unifying conquered territories fell to rulers who followed Cyrus. They succeeded by combining Persian control with local self-government.

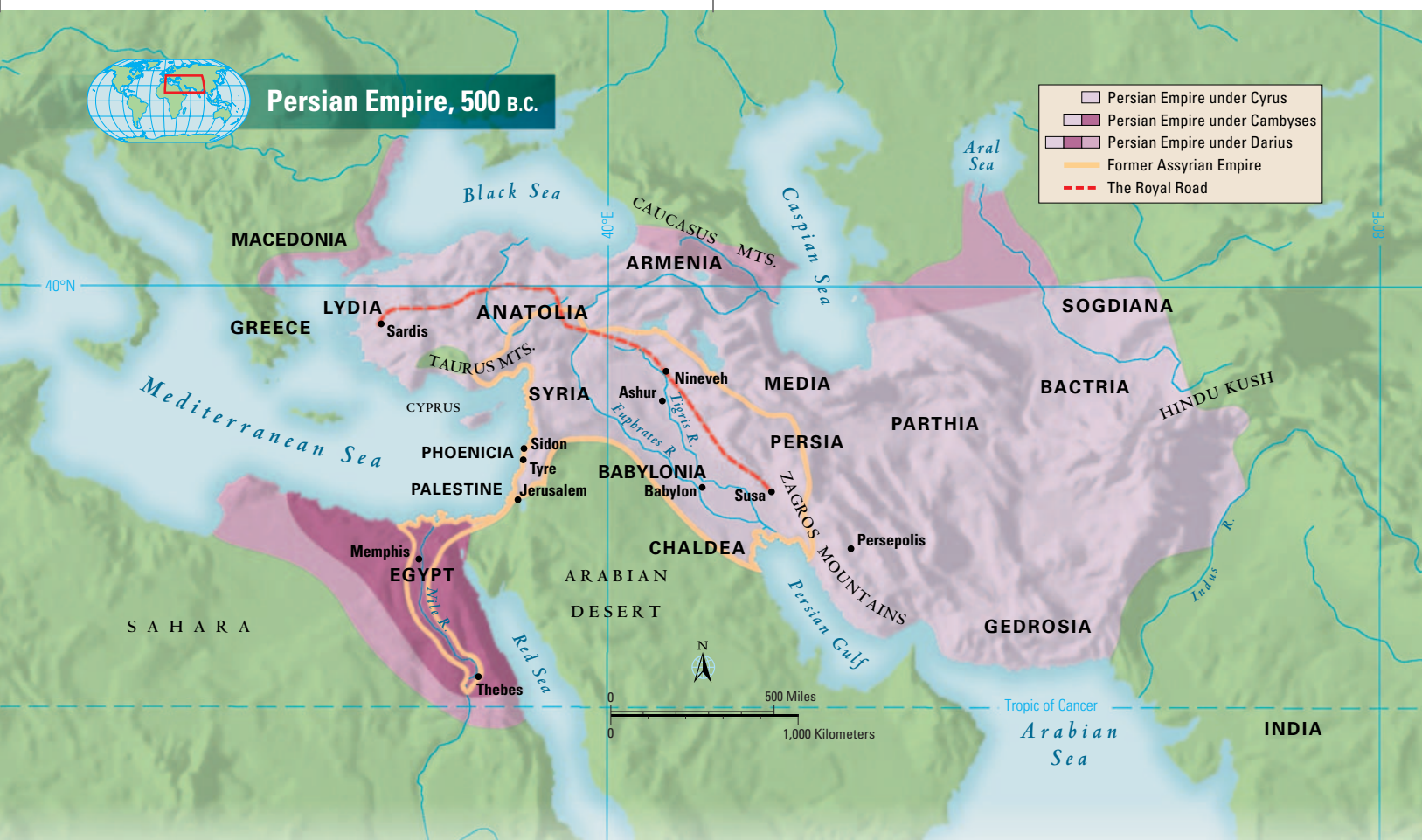
Cambyses and Darius Cyrus died in 530 B.C. His son **Cambyses** (kam-BY-seez), named after Cyrus's father, extended the Persian Empire by conquering Egypt. However, the son neglected to follow his father's wise example. Cambyses publicly scorned the Egyptian religion. He ordered the images of Egyptian gods to be burned. After ruling for only eight years, Cambyses died. Immediately, widespread rebellions broke out across the empire. Persian control had seemed strong a decade earlier. It now seemed surprisingly fragile.

Cambyses's successor, **Darius** (duh-RY-uhs), a noble of the ruling dynasty, had begun his career as a member of the king's bodyguard. An elite group of Persian soldiers, the Ten Thousand Immortals, helped Darius seize the throne in 522–521 B.C. Darius spent the first three years of his reign putting down revolts. He spent the next few years establishing an unusually efficient and well-organized administration.

Soon the new king extended Persian conquests in the east. He led armies up into the mountains of present-day Afghanistan and down into the river valleys of India. The immense Persian Empire now embraced Egypt and Anatolia in the west, part of India in the east, and the Fertile Crescent in the center. This vast empire extended over 2,500 miles from east to west. Darius's only failure, and that of his son, was his inability to conquer Greece.

This stone relief of Darius on his throne shows him receiving his heir, the royal prince, Xerxes.





GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

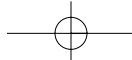
- Region** What part of the ancient world did Cambyses add to the Persian Empire?
- Region** Compare the map of the Persian Empire with that of the Assyrian Empire. What areas did the Persians rule that the Assyrians did not?

Provinces and Satraps Although a great warrior, Darius's greatest genius lay in administration. To govern his sprawling empire, the king divided it into 20 provinces. These provinces were roughly similar to the homelands of the many groups of people within the Persian Empire. Under Persian rule, the people of each province still practiced their own religion. They also spoke their own language and followed many of their own laws. This administrative policy of many groups—sometimes called “nationalities”—living by their own laws within one empire would be repeatedly practiced in Southwest Asia. This continued in the early 1900s in the Ottoman Empire.

Although tolerant of the many groups within his empire, Darius still ruled with absolute power. In each province of the Persian Empire, Darius installed a governor called a **satrap** (SAY-TRAP), who ruled locally. To ensure his satraps' loyalty, Darius sent out inspectors known as the “King's Eyes and Ears.” They checked up on the administration of each province in every corner of the kingdom. Darius also appointed an army leader and a tax collector for each province.

Two other tools helped the Persian king hold his empire together. An excellent road system and the use of standard money helped unite the empire. The famous **Royal Road** of the Persian Empire ran from Susa in Persia to Sardis in Anatolia, a distance of 1,677 miles.

Darius borrowed his second idea, manufacturing metal coins, from the Lydians of Asia Minor. For the first time, coins of a standard value circulated throughout an extended empire. No longer did people have to weigh and measure odd pieces of gold or silver to pay for what they bought. Like the road system, the wider use of standardized coins promoted trade. Trade, in turn, helped to hold the empire together.

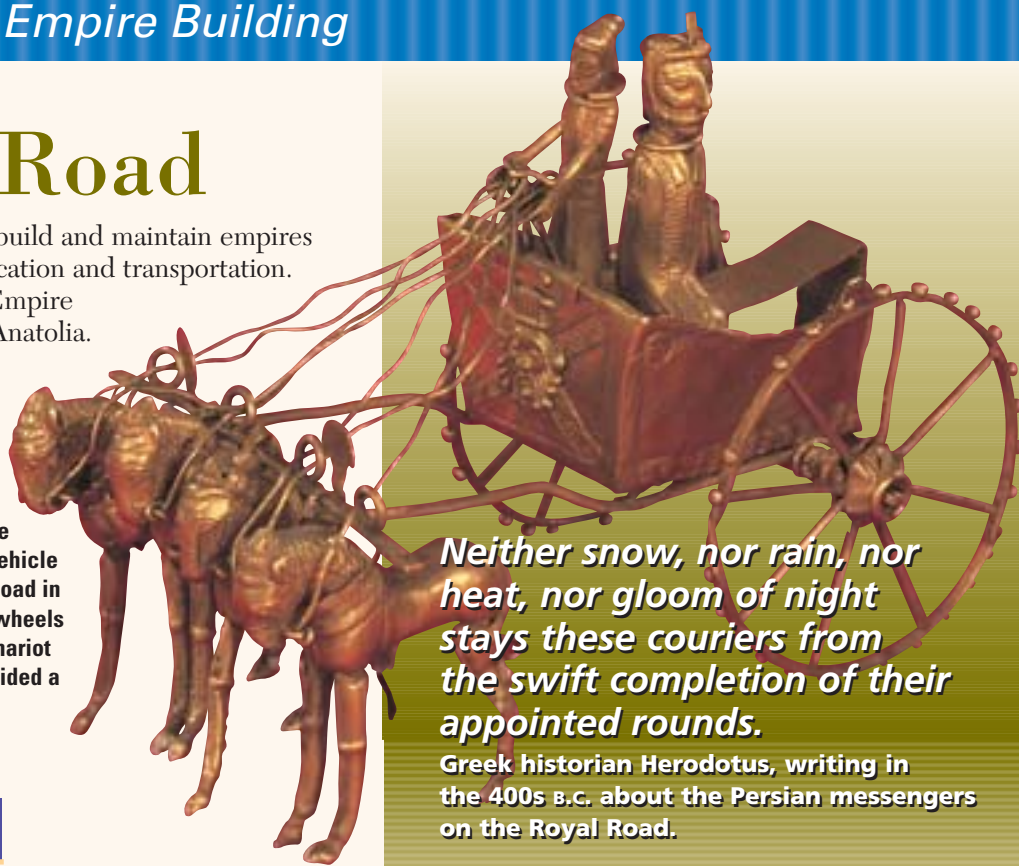


GlobalImpact : Empire Building

The Royal Road

One of the ways in which societies build and maintain empires is by establishing systems of communication and transportation. The Royal Road built by the Persian Empire connected Susa in Persia to Sardis in Anatolia. Because of this road, royal commands could quickly reach most parts of the empire.

This four-horse chariot dates from the 6th–4th century B.C. It is the type of vehicle that would have traveled the Royal Road in the time of Darius. The studs on the wheels were designed to help prevent the chariot from slipping. The large wheels provided a smoother ride over rough ground.



Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.

Greek historian Herodotus, writing in the 400s B.C. about the Persian messengers on the Royal Road.

A Ride Along the Royal Road



The Road

The road was 1,677 miles in length. There were 111 post or relay stations spaced about 15 miles apart along the road, similar to the American Pony Express system. Other roads branched off the main road to distant parts of the empire.

The Ride

Relay stations were equipped with fresh horses for the king's messengers. Royal messengers could cover the length of the Royal Road in seven days. Normal travel time along the road was longer. A caravan, for example, might take three months to travel the whole distance.

Patterns of Interaction

“There is nothing in the world which travels faster than these Persian couriers,” Herodotus wrote about the messengers of the Royal Road. Strong road networks like the Royal Road enabled empires to expand and maintain control over people and places. Like the Persians, the Inca of South America created a road system thousands of miles long. These roads allowed the Inca to extend their rule over as many as 16 million people. Empires throughout history have shared characteristics such as efficient communication systems, effective leaders, and powerful armies.



A bronze figure of a Persian horseman, 5th–4th century B.C.

VIDEO *Building Empires: The Rise of the Persians and the Inca*

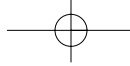
Connect to History

Recognizing Effects How would the Royal Road enable the ruler to maintain power in the empire?

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R6

Connect to Today

Comparing What systems of communication and transportation today might be compared to the Royal Road of the Persians?



Persian Religion By the time of Darius's rule, about 2,500 years had passed since the first Sumerian city-states had been built. During those years, people of the Fertile Crescent had endured war, conquest, and famine. This gave rise to a basic question: Why should so much suffering and chaos exist in the world? A Persian prophet and religious reformer named **Zoroaster** (ZAWR-oh-AS-tuhr), who lived around 600 B.C., offered an answer.

Background

Scholars know almost nothing about the life of Zoroaster. Even the date of his birth is unknown, with some historians dating it as early as the 1100s B.C., although most date it around the sixth century B.C.

Zoroaster taught that two spiritual armies fight for possession of a person's soul. The god of truth and light, Ahura Mazda (ah-HUR-uh MAZ-duh), leads one army. The god of evil and darkness, Ahriman (AH-rih-muhn), leads the other. At the end of time, Zoroaster preached, all souls would be judged according to which side they had chosen. Followers of Ahura Mazda would be lifted into paradise. Followers of Ahriman would suffer forever in a fiery pit. A collection of books called the *Avesta* became the holy writings of the Zoroastrian religion. In Zoroaster's religion, people's own choices controlled their fate. At the final judgment, those who had chosen the side of goodness would not be doomed to a dismal underworld. Instead, they would ascend to paradise.

The Zoroastrian religion developed ideas about heaven, hell, and a final judgment that

were similar to concepts in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The faith of Zoroaster spread eastward into India. There, it became the Parsi sect, the largest group of Zoroastrians in the world today. Zoroastrianism also was an important influence in the development of Manicheanism, a religious system that competed with early Christianity for believers. The cult of Mithra, a Zoroastrian god, spread westward to become a popular religion among the military legions in the Roman Empire.

The Persian Legacy Through their tolerance and good government, the Persians brought political order to Southwest Asia. They preserved ideas from earlier civilizations and found new ways to live and rule. Their respect for other cultures helped to preserve those cultures for the future. The powerful dynasty Cyrus established in Persia lasted 200 years and grew into a huge empire. Likewise in China, as you will learn in Section 4, great empires arose that dominated their regions.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Comparing What ideas and world view did Zoroastrianism share with other religions?



This stone relief from the royal palace at Persepolis depicts the Persian god Ahura Mazda. The ancient Persians believed that this god embodied light and truth.

Section 3 Assessment

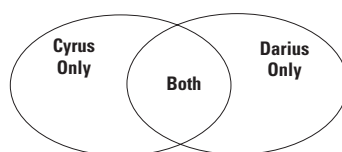
1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- Cyrus
- Cambyses
- Darius
- satrap
- Royal Road
- Zoroaster

2. TAKING NOTES

Create a Venn diagram to show the similarities and differences between Cyrus and Darius.



Which of the differences do you consider most important? Why?

3. HYPOTHESIZING

Why do you think Persians and other peoples were able to turn their thoughts to religion?

THINK ABOUT

- past history of peoples in the Fertile Crescent
- living conditions in the Persian Empire
- role of leaders in the Persian Empire

4. ANALYZING THEMES

Empire Building How did Darius's methods of administration give stability to his empire?

THINK ABOUT

- the structure of the empire
- policy of tolerance
- the role of the satrap