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Cyrus the Great: An Ancient Iranian King. Edited by Touraj Daryaee. Afshar Publishing: Santa Monica 2013. xv + 98 pp. ISBN 978-0-9854981-1-5

Cyrus II was one of the great leaders of the 6th century BC. Originally the king of a small sub-kingdom of the Medes, by the time of his death thirty years later Cyrus had conquered all the great powers of the day: the Medes, the Lydian Kingdom, and the Neo-Babylonian Empire creating the first true world empire. However, unlike the better known Alexander the Great, Cyrus II was more than a great conqueror setting up the administrative framework for an empire that would last for two hundred years. In addition Cyrus has a favourable press in the Hebrew scriptures and Babylonian chronicles for his religious policies. Despite Cyrus's importance in Iranian and World History the available sources for this king are slim. As a result the number of English-language works on Cyrus is deplorably low. Excluding those works focused on analyzing Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, a search of the World Cat libraries database shows a grand total of four works in English have been published between 1850 and 2014 on Cyrus II, of which this book is one¹.

Cyrus the Great: An Ancient Iranian King is not per se a biography, but a collection of essays on topics relating to Cyrus II and his reign. Edited by Touraj Daryaee, one of the premier historians of Sasanian Iran, *Cyrus* sets out to provide "readable, yet scholarly exposition about Cyrus by experts in the field...for general readers."² After a forward by Ari Rezi of the Farhang Foundation and brief introduction by Daryaee there are five chapters relating to Cyrus followed by two translations of the Cyrus cylinder in English and modern Persian. Short bibliographies of further reading suggestions follow each chapter, rather than having a combined listing of works at the end of the book.

In "Cyrus the Great" Pierre Briant, one of the premier historians of ancient Iran provides a brief sketch of the military actions that built the Persian Empire before looking at the non-Greek evidence that has emerged to provide greater information on Cyrus's origins. Based on the information from the Cylinder of Cyrus, and other seals, Briant notes that Cyrus was the descendent of the Kings of Anshan, a product of the ethnogenesis between the immigrating Iranian steppe tribes and the older far more established Elamite civilization. Briant also touches on the question of if Cyrus was a part of the Achaemenid dynasty glorified by the later Darius I. The administration of the new empire is also covered as Briant points out how Cyrus was concerned with setting up collaboration between the Persian conquerors and the native populations. Briant concludes by looking at the reception of Cyrus's memory by Alexander the Great after his conquest of the Persian Empire.

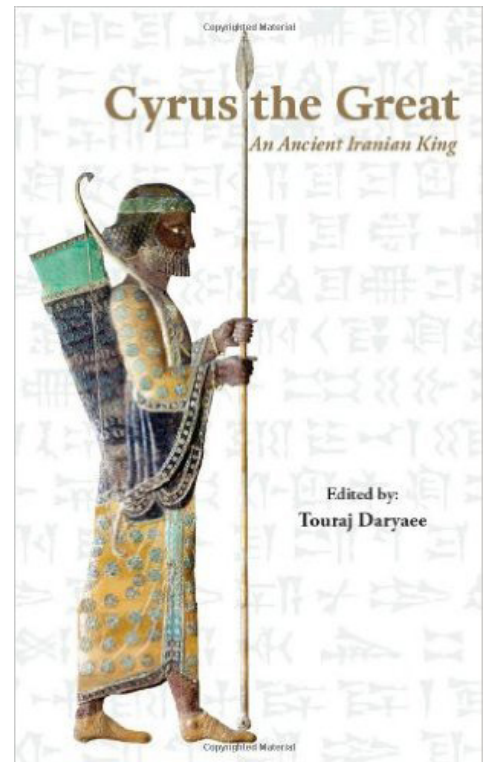
With "Religion of Cyrus the Great" Touraj Daryaee tackles the twin issues of tolerance and religion. Daryaee first looks at the religious policies of Cyrus, specifically how notably tolerant they were towards the people that he

¹ This stands in high contrast with the overflowing number of works on Alexander the Great appearing each year.

² DARYAEE 2013 xv.

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had conquered. He notes that in both the main examples of Babylonia and the Jewish people Cyrus has a reputation of being a restorer of proper religious functions. Daryaee also notes that the idea of restoring order has specific roots in the Iranian Zoroastrian religion, specifically the concept of the Iranian King restoring order on earth as the agent of Ahura Mazda. From here Daryaee looks at the far trickier question of what Cyrus's personal religious beliefs were. He notes that the evidence is limited and circumstantial but would tend to point towards Cyrus honouring Iranian religious traditions.

"Pilgrimage to Pasargadae" by Ali Mousavi traces how Cyrus's capital was perceived successive rulers of the region of Fars down to the early 20th century. Mousavi notes that due to the respect of Alexander and the Greeks for the memory of Cyrus Pasargadae was able to avoid the fate of being destroyed like Persepolis. However, the site was little used by the successive dynasties that dominated Iran in antiquity. As such by the period of Islamic conquest and dominion much, if not all, of the history of the site had slipped into legend. The result was that Pasargadae became associated with two historical/semi-historical figures: the proto-Iranian hero king Jamshid and the legendarily wise King Solomon. Indeed the tomb of Cyrus instead becomes associated with Solomon as the tomb of his mother, Bathsheba. Mousavi concludes by looking at how Europeans slowly but surely began exploring the site and piecing together the ancient history of the city.

With "The Form, Language, and Contents of the Cyrus Cylinder" Matthew W. Stolper looks at the scribal tradition of cylindrical seals that the Cyrus Cylinder belongs to, and how it differs somewhat from those used by the Neo-Babylonian rulers that preceded Cyrus. From there Stolper provides a summary of the cylinder before looking at how the inscription was composed, how it differed from earlier efforts by not immediately focusing on Cyrus but began with narration from the god Marduk, and who the intended audience might have been. Stolper then notes that the cylinder depicts Cyrus as the rightful ruler of Babylon, and its tributary empire, providing an ultimately false sense that Babylon has become the centre of Cyrus's empire. Also of interest is the association of Cyrus with his son Cambyses, paralleling inscriptions from the Neo-Babylonian predecessor to Cyrus, Nabonidus, on his son. Stolper also points out that a temporary administrative solution of incorporating Babylon into the greater Persian Empire as a sub-kingdom under the rule of Cambyses was used prior to its full incorporation into the Empire as a province.

The final essay chapter, "Cyrus and Pasargadae", from David Stronach begins by looking at the history of the archaeological excavations at Pasargadae beginning with the first formal excavations in 1928. From there Stronach looks at the reasons for Pasargadae's location, it was the site of Cyrus's victory over the Median King Astyages; how Cyrus had the craftsmen needed to build a memorial city and palace thanks to his conquest of the Lydian kingdom of Croesus; and how planned the construction of the city was. The remainder of the chapter looks at the main monuments that have been excavated or investigated by archaeologists and historians, specifically the Tomb of Cyrus, Gate of Cyrus, Audience hall, palace and fourfold garden.

The remaining two chapters are, as noted earlier,

translations of the Cyrus Cylinder into English and modern Persian. While I cannot attest to the Persian translation, the English version is clear and readable. While detailed commentary is not provided directly, much of chapter 4 by Matthew W. Stolper can provide at least introductory notes on the inscription.

This slim book packs a large amount of information in a very small package. However, *Cyrus the Great* proves to be the rare case where the parts are greater than the sum of the work. While each of the chapters are informative, providing greater understanding of Cyrus and his times, these chapters stand alone for the most part. There is not a sufficient introduction to Cyrus to provide a full context for the majority of the information in the chapters. This is a case where the brevity of the book, just 98 pages including the index, works against the reader. Briant's chapter in particular can be singled out as being too short for a complete introduction, rushing through 30 years' worth of events and only touching on important background to the later chapters. While the illustrations are well chosen the diagrams found in Chapter 5 are too small and unclear for the reader. Also, a map of the Near East and the extent of the Empire under Cyrus II would have been appreciated as not everyone has access to historical atlases.

However, despite the above concerns, this is an important volume in the corpus of Achaemenid history. The book itself is a well-produced paperback, the detachable included bookmark is a nice touch, and is easily affordable. As an introduction to Cyrus, or as a biography, *Cyrus the Great* does not work. However, as a supplement to the more detailed chapters on Cyrus II found in the major books looking at Achaemenid Iran *Cyrus the Great* is a success.³ Recommended for upper-level undergraduate and graduate-level courses as a supplement to main readings.

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³ Most recent of the short introductions is WATERS 2014. The most comprehensive history of the Achaemenid Empire is BRIANT 2002. The best political history, though hard to obtain and extraordinarily expensive, is DANDAMAEV 1989.