# Achaemenid Empire

The Achaemenid Empire, also identified as the First Persian Empire (c. 550-330 BCE), was a Southwest Asia empire founded by Cyrus the great after overthrowing the median confederation in the 6th Century BCE. The empire got its name from Achaemenes who was ruling Persis from 7605- 675 BCE. Persis was a land that was bounded by River Tigris on the West and by the Persian Gulf on the South. The dynasty later expanded into ruling significant parts of the ancient world. The empire is overextended from the east through the Indus valley and from the Greece northeastern border through Macedon making it the highest empire in the world. Achaemenid Empire had series of monarchs that strived to unify its disparate nationalities and tribes through the construction of complex roads. The paper will present an analysis of the Achaemenid Empire including its kings, their achievements, tax, and ruling system, architecture, and expansion and conquers.

## Cyrus the Great

Cyrus II of Persia was responsible for establishing the Achaemenid Empire. The empire was able to embrace all the ancient near East civilized states expand vastly and in the long run conquer the Caucasus, parts of Europe and a significant portion of central Asia and southwest Asia under the rule of king Cyrus (Briant 393). Cyrus the great managed to create the world’s largest empire that stretched from the Hellespont in the West and the Mediterranean Sea to the River Indus in the East. Cyrus the great’s reign lasted for around 29 and 31 years. He was able to establish his empire by conquering different empires, which include the Median Empire, Lydian Empire and lastly the Neo-Babylonian Empire. He was able to lead an expedition to the central Asia that led to significant campaigns described as bringing every state into subjection without exception. Cyrus died in December 530 BC the Massagetae battle along Darya, and thus he never ventured into Egypt.

Cyrus the Great is remembered for his significant achievements in the military strategy, politics, and human rights. He also had a significant role in the western and eastern civilization. He had a role in the definition of modern Iran’s national identity. Cyrus had a great respect for the religions and customs of the lands that he could conquer. He was successful in establishing a centralized government and administration that was working to the profit and advantage of its subjects. According to Briant et al. (394), he left a legacy in the Jewish religion through the Edict of Restoration where the people of the Jewish faith could identify him as the anointed of the lord because of his rules while in Babylonia.

## Darius the Great

Darius I who was Achaemenid Empire’s third king is also identified as Darius the great. He was known to be greatest among all the kings of Persia. He fought two disastrous wars with the Greeks, and he extended the borders of the empire into Europe and India. He came up with a government that served as a model to other future governments. Darius was able to build two capital cities one at Persepolis and the other at Susa. He founded the “Ears and Eyes of the King “spy network which could give him important updates within the empire (Briant 395). He came up with an elaborate postal system and build roads that the residents use up to today. He came up with a tax collection system, and he gave the locals a chance of keeping their religions and customs. During his reign, he gave an order of dividing the empire to districts that were named Satrapies.

Darius rose the throne by overthrowing after overthrowing the magus usurper of Bardiya, and he had the help of six Persian noble families. Darius had plans of organizing another expedition that was against the states of Greek after being aware of the Persian defeat in the battle of marathon. He had taken three years getting his ships and men ready for war where there was a revolt in Egypt. The revolution worsened his health condition, and it led to his death. Darius’s body was embalmed and entombed in a tomb cut from a rock on October 486 BCE (Briant et al. 396). He is remembered for establishing the Aramaic official language and the formation of Egypt’s codification of laws. He also came up with a sustainable and regulatory tax system.

## Xerxes the Great

Xerxes I (519 BC-465 BC) commonly known as Xerxes the Great was the fourth king of Achaemenid Empire. Xerxes was Darius’s chosen successor and Darius the great identified him in 487-486 BC when he decided on leaving for a dangerous expedition. Xerxes was Atossa and Darius’s oldest son and a descendant of Cyrus. Xerxes became a king in 486 BC at the age of 36 years. He was able to suppress the Babylonian and Egyptian revolts that had broken out in the previous year. Xerxes appointed Achaemenes who was his brother to be the satrap or governor of Egypt (Briant et al. 397).

He outraged the Babylonians in 484 BC by seizing and melting down Bel, their golden statue something that made the Babylonians rebellious. Xerxes was successful in bridging the Hellespont during his second attempt. He was able to conclude an alliance with Carthage thereby depriving Greece the support of Agrigentum and Syracuse who were the influential monarchs. He managed to complete the construction projects left by his father in Persepolis and Susa. The buildings that he completed include the hall of a hundred columns, the gate of all nations, the apadana which is Darius’s palace and the treasury. Xerxes died in 465 BC after being murdered by Artabanus (Briant, 398).

## Expansion

Different monarchs who brought together its distinct tribes through the construction of a complex road network ruled the Achaemenid Empire. The empire which was in the form of a standard administration around Pasargadae city that was set up by Cyrus c. in 550 BCE. Cambyses II succeeded his father Cyrus in 530 BCE after his death, and he was able to conquer Cyrenaica, Nubia, and Egypt in 525 BCE before meeting his death during a revolt in 522BCE. Guatama who was a Zoarastrian priest staged a coup through the impersonation of Bardiya, Cambyses II’s younger sibling and seized the throne. This occurred when the king was absent for long, working in the expansion campaign. In 522 BCE, Darius I overthrew Guatama, and he strengthened the Achaemenid empire territories. The action was the start of the consolidation of the empire’s lands.

Darius I together with his son Xerxes were the rulers of the Persian plateau and the areas previously held by Assyrian empire, i.e., Cyprus, Levant, and Mesopotamia between c. 500-400 BCE. They were eventually in control of Egypt, and the expansion proceeded with the Armenian and Anatolia plateau, Macedonia, parts of Greece southern Caucasus, Hindu Kush, Jaxartes areas, Oxus, Aral Sea, northern Libya, part of north Arabia and the western Indus basin. During its peak, the empire covered over 44% of the people’s population within the globe, the highest figure for an empire in the entire history (Wiesehöfer 77).

## The ruling System

The Achaemenid Empire was a medieval monarchy meaning that their primary source of wealth was land. Different classes of people could give land to the other groups. The safety and help of the lower class could be a guarantee if they were willing to give part of their plant produces as a tax. The dynasty was a multi-state empire under the leadership of Cyrus the great, and there were four capital cities such as Susa, Babylon, Ecbatana, and Pasargadae (Kuhrt 113). The region had autonomy in the form of a satrapy system. A governor was identified as a satrap while a satrapy was an organizational unit based on a geographical basis. The state secretary and the general could report to the central government and the satrap. There could be 20 or 30 satrapies depending on the period. The empire under the rule of Cyrus had an organized army it highly trained soldiers. Cyrus, I was able to revolutionize the economy by putting it on gold and silver coinage system. Moreover, this made the empire powerful.

## Tax System

Taxation was a crucial element in the Persian state administration. The subjects had an obligation of delivering gifts only under Cambyses and Cyrus II’s rule while regular taxes emerged during the reign of Darius I. There was the existence of state taxes during Cyrus’s regime but there was no strict regulated tax system since individuals who could not afford to pay taxes could instead deliver gifts. Darius, I established a new state taxes system in 519 BCE that could happen by measuring the parasangs and classify it depending on the size of the harvest and the crops that are cultivated. All the satrapies had to pay silver taxes set for each provincial region depending on the land’s fertility and crops available (Cook 135). The calculation of the taxes could be through the average harvest yield over several years in agreement with the individual province cadasters.

## Conquers

Cyrus, I took part in different conquests, and he could emerge victoriously. He won Assyria after defeating Medes. In 546 BC, he conquered Lydia that was under the rule of King Croesus making him possess a significant part of Asia Minor. The Chaldean Empire surrendered Babylon in 539 BC without a fight. Cyrus was able to claim the ancient city and easily acquire Palestine (Burn et al. 304). The Jews had an opportunity of returning to their homeland and rebuilding their place of worship. Cyrus was able to bring down exotic Massagetae where they were subdued after getting drunk from taking wine. For more than 60 years, Cyrus together with his successors Darius I and Cambyses swept the west, east, and north with the aim of expanding the Achaemenid Empire.

## Achaemenid Art and Architecture

Materials like jewelry, metal table cutting, weaponry, seal cutting, pottery, and decoration were useful in making Achaemenid Empire’s art. The Persians were great weavers, and they could also practice pottery. The Susa palace was constructed using yak timber, cedar timber turquoise, silver, carnelianthe, and stones lapis-lazuli (Cook 181). The Achaemenid architecture and art contributed to the development of the Persia since Cyrus could accept people of different cultures from his conquests.

## Conclusion

The Achaemenid Empire had another name the Persian Empire, and it was founded by Cyrus the great. The empire had a series of kings namely, Cyrus the great, Darius the great and Xerxes the great. Each king had a significant contribution to the empire. The empire was able to expand to different places covering approximately 44% of the world’s population. The Achaemenid Empire entailed the medieval monarchy under the rule of its kings. Some satraps were in charge of different administrative units. The kings were part of varying conquest during their reign that gave them an opportunity of significantly expanding the empire in a different direction. There was a set tax system depending on the reign of each king. During the rule of King Cyrus I, people could deliver gifts or taxes, but during the time of Darius, the taxes could be through the harvest.

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