

Darius I, The Great king of Persia (522-486 bc)

Contributed by Akbar Nemati

Darius I, called The Great (558?-486 bc), king of Persia (522-486 bc), son of the Persian noble Hystaspes, and a member of a royal Persian family, the Achaemenids. In 522 bc, on the death of King Cambyses II, a group of Magian priests tried to give the throne to one of their number, the usurper Gaumata; he pretended to be Smerdis (died about 523 bc), the murdered brother of Cambyses II.

Born: 521 BC

Died: Oct-485 BC

Cause of death: unspecified

Gender: Male

Ethnicity: Middle Eastern

Sexual orientation: Straight

Occupation: Royalty

Level of fame: Somewhat

Executive summary: King of Persia, 521-486 BC

Darius (Greek form Dareios) is a classicized form of the Old Persian Darayaohumanah, Darayavahush or Darayavaush, which was the name of three kings of the Achaemenid Dynasty of Persia: Darius I (the Great), ruled 522-486 BCE, Darius II (Ochos), ruled 423-405/4 BCE, and Darius III (Kodomanos), ruled 336-330 BCE. In addition to these, the oldest son of Xerxes I was named Darius, but he was murdered before he ever came to the throne, and Darius, the son of Artaxerxes II, was executed for treason against his own father.

According to A. T. Olmstead's book *History of the Persian Empire*, Darius the Great's father Vishtaspa (Hystaspes) and mother Hutaosa (Atossa) knew the prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) personally and were converted by him to the new religion he preached, Zoroastrianism.

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Darius, a member of the Achaemenides family, raised to the throne of the kingdom of Persia by taking part, in 522, in a plot to assassinate Smerdis, who had assumed the kingship that same year at the death of his brother Cambyses on his way back from Egypt. Both Cambyses and Smerdis were sons of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire.

The empire of Darius the Great extended from Egypt in the west to the Indus River in the east. The major satrapies or provinces of his Empire were connected to the center at Persepolis, in the Fars Province of present-day Iran. The Royal Road connected 111 stations to each other. Messengers riding swift horses informed the king within days of turmoil brewing in lands as distant as Egypt and Sughdiana.

The first two years of his reign were occupied with suppressing rebellions, the most important of which occurred in Babylonia. Thereafter he devoted himself to reforming the internal organization of Persia and making its outer borders secure. He reorganized the vast empire into 20 satrapies, built highways, organized a postal system, reformed the currency, encouraged commerce, and won the goodwill of large portions of the heterogeneous population. Because he respected their religions, he was honored by the Jews, whom he permitted to complete the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem in 516; by the Egyptians, whose high priest he consulted; and by the Greeks of Asia Minor, whose oracles supported him during the revolt of the Greek cities.

In protecting the borders of the empire, Darius conquered new territories along the Indus River in the east and in the Caucasus Mountains in the northeast, but his expedition in 516 against the tribes of the Danube River failed. In 499 a revolt broke out among the Ionian Greek cities of Asia Minor, partly encouraged by some of the Greek cities on the mainland. The revolt was suppressed by 494, and Darius prepared to punish the mainland Greeks for their intervention. In 492 an army under Mardonius, the son-in-law of Darius, crossed the Bosphorus into Thrace but was unable to reach Greece because the supply ships were wrecked off Mount Athos. Two years later, a strong Persian force under the joint command of Artaphernes (flourished 5th century bc), a nephew of Darius, and the Mede commander Datis (flourished 5th century bc) invaded Greece from the north but was defeated at Marathon. A third expedition was being prepared when Darius died. He left a detailed account of his reign, inscribed in three languages on a towering rock. This Behistun Inscription, the first English transcription of which was complete in 1849, confirms many details of the life of Darius.

Darius the Great is seated on his throne in his reception chamber while an audience of delegates from provinces around his mighty empire approaches him to bring him tribute. This particular dignitary is raising one hand to his mouth as a token of respect and honor and with the other hand he holds his staff of office showing that he was a commander and prime minister of the Medes, as seen by his round cap and uniform. Behind him are two Persian attendants holding a spear and a container of incense. Notice Darius the Great is holding his scepter of authority in his right hand and a budding flower in his left. Behind Darius stands the crown-prince Xerxes. This relief of king Darius I Seated is an important discovery in Biblical Archaeology and confirms what the Bible says regarding Darius and the Persian Empire.

"They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto Darius the king, all peace." EZRA 5:7

Enthroned in Persepolis, the magnificent city that he built, Darius I, firmly grasps the royal scepter in his right hand. In the left, he is holding a lotus blossom with two buds, the symbol of royalty.

- Material: Dark Gray Limestone Relief
- Period: Time of Darius I
- Date: 522-486 BC.
- Site: Ancient Persepolis. Iran
- Reception Chamber of the Treasury of Darius
- Height: 8.25 feet

One of the most awe-inspiring monuments of the ancient world, Persepolis was the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenian empire. It was built during the reign of Darius I, known as Darius the Great (522-485 BC), and developed further by successive kings. The various temples and monuments are located upon a vast platform, some 450 metres by 300 metres and 20 metres in height. At the head of the ceremonial staircase leading to the terrace is the Gateway of All Nations built by Xerxes I and guarded by two colossal bull-like figures.

Darius was the greatest of all the Persian kings. He extended the empires borders into India and Europe. He also fought two wars with the Greeks which were disastrous.

He established a government which became a model for many future governments;

- Established a tax-collection system;
- Allowed locals to keep customs and religions;
- Divided his empire into districts known as Satrapies;
- Built a system of roads still used today;
- Established a complex postal system;
- Established a network of spies he called the "Eyes and Ears of the King."
- Built two new capital cities, one at Susa and one at Persepolis.

From 499 to 493 BC he engaged in crushing a revolt of the Ionian Greeks living under Persian rule in Asia, and then launched a punitive campaign against the European Greeks for supporting the rebels. His forces were disastrously defeated by the Greeks at the historic Battle of Marathon in 490 BC.

Darius died while preparing a new expedition against the Greeks; his son and successor, Xerxes I, attempted to fulfill his plan.