

# The Achaemenid Dynasty

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The Achaemenid Dynasty was a dynasty in the ancient Persian Empire , including Cyrus II the Great , Darius the Great and Xerxes I . At the height of their power, the Achaemenid rulers of Persia ruled over territories roughly encompassing some parts of today's Iraq , Egypt , Syria , Pakistan , Jordan , Israel , Lebanon , Armenia , Central Asia , Caucasus and the Asian portion of Turkey .

At different times, the Achaemenids also ruled Egypt , although the Egyptians twice regained their independence from Persia. After the practice of Manetho , Egyptian historians refer to the period in Egypt when the Achaemenid dynasty ruled as the Twenty-seventh ( 525 BC - 404 BC ) and Thirty-first Dynasties ( 343 - 332 BC ) .

The last Achaemenid king was Darius III ( 336 BC - 330 BC ) , who was defeated by Alexander III of Macedon . After the Macedonian conquest, the Persian Empire was annexed by Alexander.

**Contributions** The Achaemenids should be noted for their most important contribution to the world: the first declaration of human rights. This declaration is called the "Cyrus Charter of Human Rights". Cyrus the Great, son of the founder of the dynasty, fought the Babylonians and gave the Jews freedom to practice their religion.

**History** The founder of this dynasty was supposedly Achaemenes (Old Persian Hax mani "Of Friendly Mind"), king of Anshan . He was succeeded by his son Teispes ( Cišpi ). Inscriptions indicate that when Teispes died, two of his sons shared the throne as Cyrus I ( Kuru ), king of Anshan , and Ariaramnes ( Ariaramna "Having the Iranians at Peace"), king of Parsua (later called Persa "Persia", hence Farsi , the native name for modern Persian). They were succeeded by their respective sons Cambyses I ( Kambukjiya ), ruler of Anshan , and Arsames ( Arama "Having a Hero's Might").

In 559 BC , Cambyses the Elder was succeeded as king of Anshan by his son Cyrus II the Great , who also succeeded the still-living Arsames . Cyrus II is considered to be the first king of the Achaemenid dynasty to be properly called so, as his predecessors were subservient to Media . Cyrus II conquered Media , Lydia and Babylon . His son Cambyses II added Egypt to the Empire.

Such a vessel terminating in the forepart of a fantastic lion is called a rhyton : Achaemenid, 5th century BCE Iran.

Cambyses II went insane as he planned to invade Ethiopia. Cambyses killed his brother Smerdis ( Bardiya "Exalted One"), but a Median priest, Gaumata , pretended to be him, taking his name, imitating his appearance and seizing control of the seat of power while Cambyses was still in Upper Egypt. For two years, the Persian Empire was secretly ruled by the Median pretender until a conspiracy of native Persians overthrew him.

According to Herodotus, the native leadership then debated the best form of government for the Empire. He reports that it was decided that oligarchy would divide them against one another and democracy would bring about mob rule resulting in a charismatic leader resuming the monarchy. Therefore, they decided a new monarch was in order, particularly since they were in a position to choose him. The monarch, Darius I (Old Persian Daryawu "Who Holds Firm the Good"), was chosen from amongst the leaders. He was cousin to Cambyses II and Smerdis , claiming Ariaramnes as his ancestor.

The zenith of Achaemenid power was achieved during his reign ( 521 BC - 485 BC ) and that of his son Xerxes I ( 485 BC - 465 BC , Old Persian Xšayr "Hero Among Kings"). These two rulers built great, beautiful palaces in the ancient cities of Persepolis , Susa and Ecbatana ( Hagmatana "City of Gatherings"). The Persian Empire reached its greatest extension in this period.

After the death of Xerxes I ( 465 BC ) , the decline of the dynasty began. Persia saw a sequence of weak rulers ruling the empire. Decadence became rampant and the army, finance and government administration were neglected. The last Achaemenid king was Darius III ( 336 BC - 330 BC ) , who was defeated by Alexander III of Macedon . After the Macedonian conquest, the Persian Empire was annexed by Alexander.

**Achaemenid rulers**

- Achaemenes of Anshan .
- Teispes of Anshan , his son.
- Cyrus I of Anshan , his son.
- Ariaramnes of Persia , son of Teispes and co-ruler with Cyrus I.
- Cambyses I of Anshan , son of Cyrus I.
- Arsames of Persia , son of Ariaramnes and co-ruler with Cambyses I
- Cyrus II the Great , son of Cambyses I, ruled from c. 550 - 530 BC .
- Cambyses II , his son, ruled 530 - 521 BC .
- Smerdis , his alleged brother, ruled 521 BC
- Darius I , his brother-in-law and grandson of Arsames, ruled 521 - 486 BC .
- Xerxes I , his son, ruled 486 - 465 BC
- Artaxerxes I , his son, ruled 464 - 424 BC .
- Xerxes II , his son, ruled 424 - 423 BC .

- Sogdianus , his half-brother and rival, ruled 424 - 423 BC .
- Darius II , his half-brother and rival, ruled 424 - 404 BC .
- Artaxerxes II , his son, ruled 404 - 358 BC (see also Xenophon ).
- Artaxerxes III ,his son, ruled 358 - 338 BC
- Arses , his son, ruled 338 - 336 BC
- Darius III Codomannus , great-grandson of Darius II, ruled 336 - 330 BC

The epigraphic evidence for these rulers is highly suspect, and often considered to have been invented by Darius I.