

XENOPHON'S CYAXARES: UNCLE OF CYRUS, FRIEND OF DANIEL

RODGER C. YOUNG*

Abstract: *The history of Cyrus the Great is mostly constructed from the Greek authors Herodotus and Xenophon. A major difference in their accounts is the existence or nonexistence of a king named Cyaxares who ruled over the Medes at the same time that Cyrus led the Persians. This king is not mentioned by Herodotus, whereas he plays a significant role in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. The present article shows that the narrative of the *Cyropaedia* for the time of Cyrus is more consistent with the accounts in the biblical books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel than the narrative derived from Herodotus. It also shows that the current consensus that favors Herodotus is built on an insecure foundation, whereas accepting Xenophon's account, in addition to its better agreement with Isaiah and Jeremiah, also provides an explanation of some difficult passages in the book of Daniel.*

Key words: *Cyrus the Great, Cyaxares II, Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, Book of Daniel, Medes and Persians, Darius the Mede, Belsazzar*

The history of Cyrus the Great, the Persian conqueror who allowed the Jews to return from their Babylonian exile, is mostly constructed from the Greek authors Herodotus and Xenophon. Their accounts differ significantly. One major difference is the existence or nonexistence of a king named Cyaxares who ruled over the Medes at the same time that Cyrus led the Persians. This king is never mentioned in the *Histories* of Herodotus, and indeed there is no room for him in the sequence of events that Herodotus gives for the career of Cyrus. In contrast, Cyaxares plays a significant role, second only to that of Cyrus, in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* ("The Education of Cyrus"). The present article will show that what Xenophon wrote about the Persians, Medes, and Cyaxares for this time is more consistent with the accounts in the biblical books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel than is the overall picture given by Herodotus. It will also present a theory about why Herodotus omitted Cyaxares. In spite of this better agreement with the biblical texts, modern scholarship generally favors Herodotus over Xenophon in reconstructing the history of the Medes and Persians in the sixth century BC.

Herodotus lived from ca. 484 to ca. 425 BC. He wrote his *Histories* in about 430 BC. The alternate title, *The Persian Wars*, shows that he was primarily concerned with the wars between the Greeks and the Persians, starting with events related to the Trojan War and ending shortly after the Battles of Plataea and Mycale (479 BC). Xenophon (ca. 428 – ca. 354 BC) completed his *Cyropaedia* in about 370 BC, approximately 60 years after the publication of Herodotus's *Histories*. Xenophon's

* Rodger C. Young resides at 1115 Basswood Lane, St. Louis, MO 63132. He may be contacted at ryoung8@yahoo.com.

knowledge of the times of Cyrus the Great came largely from the time he spent with Greek mercenaries fighting on behalf of Cyrus the Younger in an unsuccessful struggle against Artaxerxes II for the kingship of Persia, a struggle described in his most famous composition, the *Anabasis*. As Xenophon explains in the introduction to the *Cyropaedia*, his purpose in writing this later work was to examine the characteristics of a great leader—the ideal king. It is widely recognized that in so doing Xenophon idealized his portrait of Cyrus. Because of this acknowledged idealization, modern historians tend to discount many of the historical details found in the *Cyropaedia*.

I. THE EARLY YEARS OF CYRUS: CONFLICTING ACCOUNTS IN HERODOTUS AND XENOPHON

One factor that weighs in favor of Xenophon's account of Cyrus versus that of Herodotus is that Herodotus's story of the early years of Cyrus is clearly fabulous. Among other difficulties he portrays Cyrus as the son of a common person and not the son of a king, whereas there are cuneiform texts in which Cyrus claims that his father Cambyses, grandfather Cyrus I, and great-grandfather Teispes were all kings of Persia before him. An additional reason for rejecting Herodotus's account of Cyrus's origin and youth is his statement that "there are no less than three other accounts of Cyrus which I could give" other than the one he presented (*Hist.* 1.95.1). The choice he made may have been because that version was the most entertaining of the four.¹

In brief, Herodotus's tale said that Cyrus's grandfather Astyages, king of Media, was warned in dreams that his daughter Mandane would give birth to a child who would eventually usurp his throne. In order to prevent this, Astyages had Mandane marry a Persian commoner named Cambyses so that the child would not be part of his royal house. Then, when his daughter was about to bear her son, Astyages commissioned one of his servants to go to Mandane in Persia and slay the child. The servant was unwilling to kill the child himself, and so he committed the task to a certain herdsman. The herdsman's wife was about to give birth, and when she did the child was stillborn. The couple buried the stillborn child and pretended they had carried out their commission, thereafter raising Cyrus themselves. When Cyrus reached manhood and his true identity was revealed, Cyrus and the Persians became inveterate enemies of Astyages, eventually defeating him in battle and confining him to his palace. (This is unlikely in itself and casts doubt on Herodotus's whole scenario about Astyages; would a conqueror leave a conquered king in his capital while the conqueror was involved in foreign campaigns?) After that, the domination of the Persians over the Medes continued for several years before and after the capture of Babylon. According to Herodotus, when Cyrus conquered As-

¹ Perhaps more likely, the fabulous tale was chosen because it illustrated a recurring theme of Herodotus, that the fates always recompense in this life any evil deed, such as was supposedly perpetrated by Astyages.

tyages he made the Medes "slaves instead of masters and the Persians, who were the slaves, are now the masters of the Medes" (1.129.4).

Xenophon agrees with Herodotus that Cyrus's mother was Mandane, daughter of Astyages king of Media, but Xenophon makes it clear that the Cambyses she married was king of Persia, not a commoner. As mentioned above, this is in keeping with the cuneiform evidence that Cyrus's father Cambyses I was king of Persia. Xenophon relates that when Cyrus was twelve or slightly older, Mandane took him from Persia to Ecbatana, the Median capital, at the request of Astyages. The boy and his grandfather immediately developed a liking for each other, and when Mandane wanted to return, Astyages requested that the boy remain with him in order to complete his education. Cyrus agreed, saying he especially wanted to learn to ride a horse, a skill at which the Medes excelled but that the Persians did not practice at the time. The cordial relations between Astyages and his grandson continued during the years while Cyrus grew to manhood, and in no instance does Xenophon portray anything but affection between grandfather and grandson as long as Astyages was alive.

Since Herodotus's *Histories* was widely known among Greek *literati*, Xenophon would have been acquainted with what Herodotus wrote regarding the Medes, the Persians, and Cyrus the Great. According to Steven Hirsch, "Furthermore, Xenophon's story of the interview between Cyrus and Croesus, the captured king of Lydia, virtually proves his familiarity with the Herodotean version, for his alteration of the Herodotean account of these events amounts to an implicit criticism of Herodotus' treatment of the role of Delphi (*Cyropaedia* 7.2.9–28)."²

It is significant that Xenophon's account of the birth, family, and early upbringing of Cyrus bears no resemblance to Herodotus's account that conflicts with the royal birth of Cyrus. It was as if Xenophon saw no need to explicitly refute such a fabulous tale because it was patently false. And yet one basic corollary of the story line espoused by Herodotus is the majority opinion of historians today: That is that there was a conflict between Cyrus and his grandfather Astyages that culminated in a battle in which Astyages was dethroned and Cyrus and his Persians took the rule over the Medes, all of this happening approximately eleven years before the capture of Babylon.

II. RELATIONS BETWEEN MEDES AND PERSIANS: HOSTILE (HERODOTUS) OR AMICABLE (XENOPHON)?

It has been remarked that, according to Herodotus, Cyrus defeated the Median army and then dispossessed his grandfather as king of Media, keeping him captive for the rest of his life and making slaves of the Medes. In contrast, in the *Cyropaedia* the relations between Cyrus and Astyages were always affectionate. Further, the *Cyropaedia* characterizes the interactions between the Medes and Persians as

² Steven W. Hirsch, "1001 Iranian Nights: History and Fiction in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*," in *The Greek Historians: Literature and History: Papers Presented to A. E. Raubitschek*, ed. M. Jameson (Saratoga, CA: ANMA Libri, 1985), 72.

generally harmonious, with Cyrus and the Persians subordinate to the Medes until sometime after the fall of Babylon, after which the Persians were in the ascendancy. Although Cyrus was recognized as a great leader because of his skill in leading the army, in the *Cyropaedia* he is portrayed as always acting in accordance with the principle that he was accountable to the Median king. This was true from the beginning of his generalship over the combined forces of the Medes and Persians, and it was still his practice when Babylon fell to the forces under his command.

1. *Agreement of Medo-Persian relations in the Cyropaedia with the book of Daniel.* This state of affairs as taken from the *Cyropaedia*, with the Persians generally subordinate to the Medes until after the capture of Babylon, is consistent with passages in the book of Daniel. Significant in this regard is Daniel 5:28, where the writing on the wall at Belshazzar's banquet pronounces the judgment: "Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians." Other mentions where the Medes are named first when listed with the Persians, indicating that the Median king had supreme authority even after the capture of Babylon, are 6:8, 12, and 15.³ Herodotus, however, said the Medes were made slaves of the Persians several years earlier (1.129.4).

2. *Agreement of Medo-Persian relations in the Cyropaedia with the book of Isaiah.* Isaiah has quite a bit to say about Babylon, and so we might expect that at least one of the Isaianic passages would shed light on events related to the fall of Babylon to the Medes and Persians. Sections dealing with Babylon are all of chapter 13, chapter 14:3–11 and 21–23, chapter 21:1–10, chapter 39, chapter 46:1–2 and 11, chapter 47, and chapter 48:14, 15. In addition, the prophecies about Cyrus as the one who would allow the Israelite captives to return and start rebuilding the Temple (44:28; 45:1–6, 13) are relevant to the situation in Babylon in 539 BC and shortly thereafter.

The difficulties in applying the Isaianic passages to specific events in the histories of Babylon, the Medes, and the Persians are twofold. The first difficulty arises because in Isaiah, and extending later into the book of Revelation, Babylon symbolically stands for the great world-system that pridefully asserts its independence of God. This is shown in Isaiah 13:2–13, where the calamities that were announced against "Babylon" (v. 1) are best understood as referring to God's final judgment on the whole earth (תְּבִלָּה, v. 11) before transitioning to a more restricted locale and event in verses 14–16. Similarly, the taunt against Babylon in 14:3–11 is followed by a prophecy of the pride and doom of an individual who is either the end-time anti-christ or the devil himself instead of any historical Neo-Babylonian king. Isaiah's prophetic vision uses the historical Babylon as a type to illustrate more sweeping and cosmic spiritual truths.

The second difficulty is that even in those passages that are best interpreted as referring to localized, historical disasters coming to the city on the Euphrates River, interpreters have varied widely on which of these calamities Isaiah is referring to in his various pronouncements. Granted that Isaiah's prophecies expand a specific disaster or disasters coming to the city of Babylon so that they foreshadow more

³ Esther 1:19, describing a later time, mentions Persians and then Medes.

cosmological warnings of God's wrath, what are the historical types that foreshadow the eschatological antitype? Gary Smith lists eight calamities befalling Babylon, starting with the conquest of Babylon by Sargon II in 710 BC and ending with Xerxes putting down two revolts of the city in 484 and 482 BC.⁴ One of Smith's eight events is the fall of the city to the forces under Cyrus in 539 BC. Many interpreters take this event as Isaiah's main historical type of temporal judgment. However, the cuneiform texts related to the final days of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (discussed below) indicate that Cyrus by no means destroyed the city, even being content to reign in it quite peacefully after his conquest. Further, Cyrus did not destroy the idols of Babylon, as described in Isaiah 21:9; instead, according to the declaration of the Cyrus Cylinder, he restored the idols that Nabonidus had removed from their proper sanctuaries.⁵ The takeover of the city by the Medes and Persians was one of the more merciful victories of antiquity. In that event Belshazzar and some others were killed, but the city was left intact and became one of the three capitals used by Cyrus. In light of these considerations, Gary Smith has convincingly argued that the main temporal judgment on Babylon, at least as described in Isaiah 46 and 47, was fulfilled in the razing of the city by Sennacherib in 689 BC.⁶ According to Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "The destructions brought about by Sennacherib were the most tragic events in the history of Babylon."⁷ Sennacherib boasted, "The city and its houses,—foundations and walls, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. The wall and the outer-wall, temples and gods, temple-towers of brick and earth, as many as there were, I razed and dumped them into the Arahtu canal ... I flooded its site with water, and the very foundation thereof I destroyed."⁸

The destructions wrought by Sennacherib therefore are the most fitting fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies of doom against temporal Babylon, but that does not exclude other judgments referring to other time periods. Such other judgments are hinted at in Isaiah 13. The chapter begins with the heading of an "oracle concerning Babylon," but, as mentioned above, verses 2–13 describe the more cosmic judgment on "spiritual Babylon." Verses 14–16 then transition to what appears to be a temporal judgment of the specific city at a specific time, and this, as was discussed in the previous paragraph, would best fit the singular most devastating destruction of the city, that of Sennacherib in 689 BC. However, the city was rebuilt after that, most notably by Nebuchadnezzar II, and so the utter and permanent desolation described in the latter verses of Isaiah 13 cannot be taken as a consequence of Sennacherib's destruction. Instead, there is a transition to another judgment, this time by the Medes: "Behold, I am stirring up the Medes against them, who have no regard for silver and do not delight in gold. Their bows will slaughter

⁴ Gary V. Smith, "The Destruction of Babylon in Isaiah 46–47," *JETS* 58.3 (2015): 531–37.

⁵ *ANET*, 316a, b.

⁶ Smith, "Destruction of Babylon," 537–38, 544.

⁷ Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556–539 B.C.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 106.

⁸ Daniel D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 17.

the young men; they will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb; their eyes will not pity children” (Isa 13:17–18, ESV). The remainder of the chapter, verses 19 to 22, describes the desolation of Babylon that began after the times of the Medes and Persians: “It will never be inhabited or lived in for all generations” (v. 20). By the first century BC, the city had fallen into such ruin that Strabo wrote of it, “The Great City is a great desert.”⁹ Its desolation continues to the present time, all efforts of Saddam Hussein notwithstanding. In Isaiah 13 the judgment on Babylon that is intermediate between this final desolation and the earlier time of Sennacherib is attributed, not to the Persians, but to the Medes.¹⁰ This is consistent with Xenophon’s portrayal of Medo-Persian relations at the time and is inconsistent with Herodotus’s assertion that the Medes became slaves of the Persians some years earlier.

3. *Agreement of Medo-Persian relations in the Cyropaedia with the book of Jeremiah.* By the time of Jeremiah, the desolations that Isaiah had foretold for Babylon by the hand of Sennacherib were past history and the city was experiencing a revival of its fortunes under Nebuchadnezzar. The next calamity, however, was still future, and as in Isaiah, Jeremiah’s two chapters (51 and 52) name the Medes as principal perpetrators of that calamity. Jeremiah also names the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz as allies of the Medes (51:27). The Persians are not named but would be included among “every land under their [the kings of the Medes] dominion” in verse 28. Jeremiah echoes Isaiah: The city that was so great in his day “shall be a perpetual waste” (Jer 51:26, ESV; also v. 29, “a desolation, without inhabitant”). Jeremiah’s prophecies, as well as Daniel’s contemporaneous texts that name the Medes before the Persians, are therefore compatible with Xenophon’s account that has the Persians still under the authority of the Medes when Babylon was taken in 539 BC. In contrast, the modern consensus, following Herodotus, makes the Medes subservient to the Persians several years before the conquest of Babylon.¹¹

⁹ Strabo, *Geogr.* 8.8.1, 16.1.5.

¹⁰ In Isaiah 21:2, Elam and Media are named as besiegers of Babylon. Some interpreters take Elam in this verse as a more ancient name of Persia, and so this could refer to the combined forces of Media and Persia taking Babylon in 539 BC. Others disagree with the identification of Elam as Persia. Another argument against assigning the fulfillment of this prophecy to 539 BC is the incompatibility of the destruction of Babylon’s idols in verse 9 with the takeover by Cyrus. In his commentary on Isaiah, Smith writes that 21:2 “probably relates to the Assyrian attack on Babylon around 689 BC. Babylon’s neighbors [Elam, Media] are being encouraged to attack the Assyrian invading forces (21:2) to divert their attention from Babylon.” Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, NAC 15A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 371.

¹¹ When deciding between the histories of Xenophon and Herodotus regarding Cyrus, the French historian Charles Rollin wrote, “But what decides this point unanswerably in favor of Xenophon, is the conformity we find between his narrative and the Holy Scripture; where we see, that instead of Cyrus’s having raised the Persian empire upon the ruins of that of the Medes, as Herodotus relates it, those two nations attacked Babylon together, and united their forces to reduce the formidable power of the Babylonian monarchy.” Charles Rollin, *The Ancient History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Macedonians and Grecians*, 4 vols. (New York: John Wurtele Lovell, [1879]), 1:588. Rollin’s French original was published in 12 volumes, 1730–1738. It is not to their credit when modern critics place little weight on the testimony of Scripture in deciding historical issues.

4. *Agreement of Medo-Persian relations in the Cyropaedia with the Harran Stela.* The Harran Stela was commissioned by Nabonidus, last Babylonian king, as a testimony of his devotion to “the Divine Crescent,” the moon-god Sin.¹² The stela is recognized as a genuine text of Nabonidus, written, according to Beaulieu, in the latter part of his reign, probably the fourteenth or fifteenth year, 542–540 BC.¹³ This was three years or less before Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar would see their kingdom fall to the Medes, Persians, and their allies. In this text, Nabonidus mentions in passing that his principal enemies at the time were “the king of Egypt, the Medes and the land of the Arabs.”¹⁴ There is no mention of a Persian king; Cyrus or his father Cambyses I would have been included as part of the Median enemy. Nabonidus, as ruler of the Babylonians, was surely well informed about who his enemies were. In his view the Medes were the dominant force at that time, not the Persians. The importance of this inscription in showing that, as late as the fall of Babylon, the Medes still had the supremacy over the Persians, as implied in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel and as reported by Xenophon, can hardly be overstated.

III. CYAXARES II: NONPERSON (HERODOTUS) OR KING OF THE MEDES (XENOPHON)?

1. *The early years of Cyaxares.* During the time of Cyrus’s education among the Medes, Xenophon introduces his uncle, the crown prince Cyaxares, son of Astyages and grandson of Cyaxares I, kings of Media. The interplay between these two is a major subtheme in the *Cyropaedia*. According to Herodotus, Cyaxares II did not exist; rather, Astyages was old and without a son when Cyrus was born (*Hist.* 1.109.3). The existence or nonexistence of Cyaxares II is thus a critical difference in comparing the accounts of Herodotus and Xenophon. The current consensus among historians who follow Herodotus on the question of Medo-Persian succession allows no place for Xenophon’s Cyaxares II. According to Herodotus, Cyrus the Great immediately replaced Astyages as king of Media and Persia. Cyaxares, however, appears again and again at significant junctures in Xenophon’s narrative. If, following the account of Herodotus, there was no such person, it is difficult to understand why Xenophon would have invented him. He could well have developed the main themes of his book—the education and character of Cyrus, and his digressions on the ideal ruler and military commander—without such a person.

Cyaxares’s grandfather who preceded Astyages on the throne of Media was also named Cyaxares, so that according to the modern practice of assigning Roman numerals, the subject of the present study should more properly be called Cyaxares II. In the ancient Near East, it was often the custom that a ruler would take the

¹² For translations of the Harran Stela, see ANET, 562a–563b, and Hanspeter Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros’ des Großen: Samt den in ihrem Umfeld entstandenen Tendenzschriften; Textausgabe und Grammatik*, AOAT 256 (Münster: Ugarit, 2001), 486–99.

¹³ Beaulieu, *Reign of Nabonidus*, 32.

¹⁴ ANET, 562b.

name of an illustrious ancestor or predecessor. Cyrus himself was Cyrus II, son of Cambyses I, son of Cyrus I. Cyrus the Great was therefore named after his grandfather Cyrus I, and his son, Cambyses II, was similarly named after *his* grandfather. For Cyaxares II to have the same name as his grandfather was in keeping with the customs of the time.

It was also the custom that when a king began to rule, he would be given a throne name in addition to his given name. The original name of Artaxerxes I was Cyrus; that of Darius II was Ochus; that of Artaxerxes II was Arses; that of Artaxerxes III was Ochus; and that of Darius III was Artashat.¹⁵ Often it is this throne name that was used in official records, and this is the name usually given in modern histories. Xenophon, however, provides only the one name for Cyaxares II, and so if there were a distinct throne name, it must be looked for in other sources. It will be seen later that three such sources provide the throne name of Cyaxares II.

The first time that Cyaxares is mentioned is when Cyrus, as a youth of about 12, begged to go with his uncle on a hunt. During the hunt, Cyaxares was distressed because his young charge was too impulsive and even reckless in pursuing the game (*Cyr.* 1.4.5–9). In the next mention of Cyaxares (1.4.16–24), Cyrus was about 15 years of age when Cyaxares was commanded by his father Astyages to join him in attacking some Babylonian troops who had made a foraging and hunting incursion into Median territory. Cyrus accompanied them and, to the consternation of his grandfather, drove his horse ahead of the detachment led by Cyaxares in a charge against the Babylonian plunderers, “and Cyaxares did not fail to follow, partly perhaps not to be shamed before his father” (1.4.22).

2. *Beginning of the war against the Babylonians.* The *Cyropaedia* then progresses to a later time when Astyages had died and Cyaxares was now the king of the Medes, and under him Cambyses I was king of the Persians. Cyaxares learned that the Babylonians were recruiting allies to attack the Medes, and he requested troops from Cambyses to aid in facing the threat. Cyrus had now finished his education among the young men of Persia, which means he was about 27 years of age (*Cyr.* 1.2.8, 9; 1.5.4). He had also learned the skills of generalship that Xenophon, himself one of the ablest generals of antiquity, expounds upon at length in the *Cyropaedia*. Cyrus was by this time less rash, and in preparation for the coming conflict he sought by all means possible to determine the strength, disposition, and tactics of the enemy before engaging them in battle.

Cyaxares requested that Cyrus lead the Persian forces, to which the Persian Council of Elders assented. As the army set out, Cambyses gave his son much strategic and tactical advice as he accompanied him as far as the border of Media. After the successful outcome of the initial battle, Cyrus found it wise, by a combination of force and diplomacy, to add to the armies that would be on his side, since the Babylonians and their allies outnumbered the forces of Cyaxares and Cyrus and their allies. The *Cyropaedia* is woefully lacking in chronological markers for the years

¹⁵ Rüdiger Schmitt, “Achaemenid Throne-Names,” *Annali dell’Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 42 (1982): 83–86, 90.

preceding the fall of Babylon, with the exception of those sentences that give Cyrus's age as about 27 when he engaged in this first battle with the Babylonian confederacy. Although no strict chronology is given, the ensuing stratagems to increase the fighting force seem to have taken about a year. During this time the Babylonians appointed Croesus, king of Lydia, to lead their forces in the anticipated struggle. According to the Nabonidus Chronicle, Cyrus and his forces defeated Croesus and took his capital, Sardis, in the ninth year of Nabonidus, 547 BC, in the month Aiaru (Iyyar, April/May).¹⁶ If this was a year after Cyrus's assuming generalship of the Medo-Persian coalition at age 27, it would make him about 36 years old when Babylon was taken in 539 BC and about 45 years old when he died in 530 BC.¹⁷ That he was about 28 when Sardis was taken is consistent with the "Dream Text" of Nabonidus that calls Cyrus a "young servant" of Marduk when he became leader of the Medes and Persians.¹⁸ The Dream Text is recognized as a propaganda piece that was created by the Persians after the fall of Babylon and which the authors pretended was written by Nabonidus two years before the city was captured. But even when the propagandistic nature of the text is acknowledged, falsifying the age of Cyrus would serve no purpose, and so the Dream Text's remark about Cyrus's youthfulness is evidence that Cyrus could not be identical to Darius the Mede, who was about 62 years of age when the Medes and Persians captured Babylon (Dan 5:31 [6:1 MT]).

3. *The character of Cyaxares, as portrayed in the Cyropaedia.* Some caution should be used in giving credence to all the details in the portrait of Cyaxares that Xenophon gives because he may have used Cyaxares's personality as a literary foil to the idealized character of Cyrus. A significant contrast between the two is an account of the importance that Cyaxares placed on an ostentatious show of his wealth and the trappings of royalty, versus the plain garb and simpler lifestyle of Cyrus and the Persians, who are portrayed as living in unaffected simplicity of dress and appetites like the Spartans. Xenophon was an admirer of, and well acquainted with, the Spartans, and modern commentators recognize that he projected much of what he knew about them onto the Persians of Cyrus's day. Nevertheless, the portrait given of Cyaxares is consistent in showing his desire to accept admiration for his royal status and his opulent costuming. He thus spends considerable time dressing in

¹⁶ ANET, 306a. See also Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, ed. Benjamin R. Foster (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 237, and A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, TCS 5 (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1975), 107. Because of the difficulty in reading the toponym that is usually restored as "Lydia," various scholars have attempted to identify the defeated enemy as someone other than the Lydians. For a refutation of these views, see Stefan Zawadzki, "The Portrait of Nabonidus and Cyrus in Their (?) Chronicle: When and Why the Present Version was Composed," in *Who Was King? Who Was Not King? The Rulers and the Ruled in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Petr Charvát and Petra Maříková Vlčková (Prague: Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 2010), 146–47.

¹⁷ This would seem to be contradicted by the statement in *Cyropaedia* 8.7.1 that Cyrus "was now a very old man" when he died. Because Xenophon does not give a more exact figure, he simply may have assumed that Cyrus died of old age, since his passing is described as peaceful.

¹⁸ For a translation of the Dream Text, see Beaulieu, *Reign of Nabonidus*, 107–8, 210–11, 14.

order to receive a delegation from the king of India and is distressed that Cyrus did not do the same (2.4.1–5).

He had a “reputation for being violent and unreasonable” (4.5.9); he was also given to excessive euphoria. In the first battle against the Babylonian confederacy, Cyrus and his Persians distinguished themselves, and the Babylonians and their allies fled. In celebration of the victory, Cyaxares, who had not taken part in the battle but who received spoils from it, was “busily engaged in making merry” (4.1.13). Cyrus then urged that they press their advantage and send out a force to cut off any stragglers from the Babylonians. Cyaxares grudgingly agreed, but allowed only those Medes to go with Cyrus who willingly volunteered (4.1.19, 4.2.11). The next day, when Cyaxares recovered from his drunkenness and saw that most of his Medes had accompanied Cyrus, his mood changed. “In keeping with his reputation for being violent and unreasonable” (4.5.9), he sent an emissary after Cyrus, demanding that the Medes with Cyrus come back.

Cyrus delayed the emissary and pursued his goal of adding allies, after which he asked Cyaxares to come join him on the border of the Babylonian territory “to hold a council of war concerning the disposition to be made of the forts which they had captured, and, after reviewing the army, to advise what steps he thought they ought to take next for the future conduct of the war” (5.5.1). Cyrus ordered that the finest tent be made available for his uncle, as well as singing girls and other spoils of war. But when Cyaxares arrived and saw the army, which was now augmented by the Hyrcanians and Armenians that Cyrus had gained to their side, and compared those with the fewer number of troops that he himself was commanding, he again became morose and jealous, so that he would not return Cyrus’s welcoming kiss (5.5.6). After much diplomatic speaking on Cyrus’s part, in which Cyrus pointed out that what was accomplished was entirely to Cyaxares’s benefit, Cyaxares was appeased and retired to his splendid tent. Cyrus also requested that Cyaxares prepare to announce on the morrow his decision about what the army should do next.

They met the next day, after Cyaxares “came out in gorgeous attire and seated himself on a Median throne” (6.1.6). For Cyaxares, outward show and obsequious admiration from the people were essential prerogatives of his position as king, so much so that his consequent shortsightedness in matters of policy could produce undesirable results and disrupt relationships with those who were closest to him. Cyrus, recognizing this, allowed Cyaxares to make the decision about whether the army would continue the campaign or return to Ecbatana. Cyaxares announced that the campaign should be continued, so that Cyrus achieved his goal without losing the support of his uncle and overlord. This deference of Cyrus to Cyaxares is an artfully developed theme of Xenophon, second in its artistry only to his several discourses on the skills required to be a great general or leader of men. It will come to the fore when considering Xenophon’s account of Cyrus’s wisdom in dealing with his uncle after Babylon fell to the forces under the command of Cyrus.

The mood swings of Cyaxares characterize what is called in modern terms a bipolar behavioral disorder. No ancient writer would have been aware of such a diagnosis. This suggests that Xenophon’s informants in the time of Artaxerxes II

may have passed on a fairly true-to-life portrait of an individual who suffered from this affliction.

IV. THE FINAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE BABYLONIANS

It was eight years from the defeat of the Babylonian coalition led by Croesus and the takeover of his Lydian kingdom (547 BC) to the final assault on the city of Babylon. During this time Cyrus was active in recruiting new allies, using stratagems of propaganda, force, and diplomacy that are well described by Xenophon. Among the governors whom Cyrus persuaded to abandon their allegiance to the Babylonians were Gadatas, governor of a province that is not named, and Gobryas (Ugbaru), governor of the Gutians.¹⁹ Both governors had been wronged by their Babylonian overlord, and Cyrus skillfully used this to win them to his side. Although the name of the king they rebelled against is not given, Cyrus describes him as “this young fellow who has just come to the throne” (5.2.27). His name is given in the book of Daniel: Belshazzar, son and coregent of Nabonidus. Nabonidus had retreated to the desert to worship the moon-god, or possibly to conquer the Arab kingdoms, while Belshazzar ruled in Babylon. The *Cyropaedia* calls Belshazzar a king (4.6.3), as does the book of Daniel and a cuneiform text called “The Verse Account of Nabonidus.”²⁰ Modern writers who follow Porphyry in claiming that the book of Daniel, or at least its prophetic parts, were written in the second century BC are therefore incorrect in their assertion that Daniel’s calling Belshazzar “king” is evidence of a late-date composition of the book.²¹ The correct use of this title indicates just the opposite.

Xenophon and Herodotus agree that Babylon was taken when the besieging army diverted the waters of the Euphrates and then entered the city via the riverbed. According to the *Cyropaedia*, the invading army took advantage of the fact that “a certain festival had come round in Babylon, during which all Babylon was accustomed to drink and revel all night long” (*Cyr.* 7.5.15). Herodotus affirms that it was the time of a festival (*Hist.* 1.191.6). In this regard both accounts are in agreement with chapter 5 of Daniel that describes Belshazzar as participating in a feast when the city was taken. Xenophon adds another detail that is lacking in Herodotus but that also agrees with Daniel: The king of Babylon was slain on that very night (*Cyr.* 7.5.26–30). The *Cyropaedia*’s graphic account of the slaying of Bel-

¹⁹ Various scholars consider that the Gutians may be ancestors of the modern Kurds: Jamie Stokes, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Peoples of Africa and the Middle East* (New York: Infobase, 2009), 380; Egon von Eickstedt, *Türken, Kurden und Iraner seit dem Altertum* (Stuttgart: Gustav Fischer, 1961), as reviewed by D. P. Erdbrink in *Central Asiatic Journal* 12.1 (1968): 64–65; Alexander Prokhorov, “Guti,” in *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 31 vols. (New York: McMillan, 1973), 7:498.

²⁰ ANET, 313b: “He [Nabonidus] entrusted the ‘Camp’ to his oldest (son), the first-born.... He let (everything) go, entrusted the kingship to him, and, himself, he started out for a long journey.... And he, himself, took his residence in [Te]ma.” To state that the book of Daniel is wrong in calling Belshazzar a king (Dan 8:1) because Nabonidus only “entrusted the kingship to him” would be incorrect.

²¹ “The fact remains that there is no evidence to corroborate the claim of Daniel 5 that Belshazzar was king in any sense at the time of the fall of Babylon.” John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 32, 33.

shazzar should be included in every commentary on Daniel. Other details found in the *Cyropaedia* but not in Herodotus are the importance of Gobryas/Ugbaru in taking the city and in the preparations beforehand. Herodotus makes no mention of this important figure, who, according to the Nabonidus Chronicle, became governor of the city after the successful takeover.²² Neither does Herodotus have any mention of Belshazzar. As will be seen later, Herodotus's failure to mention Belshazzar in spite of his being the king in the city when Babylon was taken indicates Herodotus was following the propaganda line promulgated by Cyrus and his successors, which omitted individuals who would be an embarrassment to their narrative on the capture of Babylon.

V. CYRUS INVITES CYAXARES TO BABYLON

The next events after the capture of Babylon form an interesting account that, if true, reflects favorably on the character of Cyrus. According to the Nabonidus Chronicle, seventeen days after the forces under Gadatas and Gobryas took control of the city, Cyrus entered as conquering hero. He was now in a position to be declared "King of the World," and, what was important in that day, "King of Babylon." His popularity with the army must have been immense; this is a repeated theme of the *Cyropaedia* that there is no reason to doubt. But, according to this same source, he was still *de jure* under the authority of Cyaxares, who was king and overlord of both the Medes and the Persians. Cyrus would have remembered the trouble earlier when his uncle became jealous after Cyrus's first victory. What would Cyaxares's attitude be now when all glory was going to Cyrus because of the capture of Babylon?

Conscious of the possible antagonism from his uncle, Cyrus, after he had settled affairs in the city, went to visit Cyaxares in Media. "And when they had exchanged greetings, the first thing Cyrus told Cyaxares was that a palace had been selected for him in Babylon, and official headquarters, so that he might occupy a residence of his own whenever he came there; and then he also gave him many splendid presents" (*Cyr.* 8.5.17). The diplomacy was successful: Cyaxares responded by offering his daughter as wife to Cyrus, "and with her I offer you all Media as a dowry, for I have no legitimate male issue" (8.5.19). The marriage of Cyaxares's daughter to Cyrus, with the dowry representing the handover of the kingship to him, is therefore the fulfillment of the vision of Daniel chapter 8, where a ram representing the kings of Media and Persia has two horns and the longer (Persian) horn grew up later. After this it was "the Persians and the Medes," as in the book of Esther, rather than "the Medes and the Persians."

Interestingly, Xenophon's happy tale of Cyrus's wisdom in dealing with his problematic uncle has in its favor evidence from an ancient inscription. The "Nabonidus Chronicle" is characterized by many scholars as a propaganda piece that pretended to come from the court of Nabonidus but was really the product of the Persian rewriting of history after the fall of Babylon. In the propaganda, however,

²² ANET, 306b; Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 239.

there would be no reason to falsify the chronology of the events related to the capture of the city and immediately following. Amélie Kuhrt relates that historians derive from this source the “only chronologically fixed data” for dating events related to the reign of Cyrus and the fall of Babylon to the Medes and Persians.²³ According to the Chronicle, Gobryas (Ugbaru) and the army entered the city on the 16th of Tashritu (Tishri), October 12, 539 BC.²⁴ On the third day of the next month (Arahshamnu/Heshvan: October 29), Cyrus entered the city. On the eleventh day of the month (November 6), the old warrior Gobryas died. The next sentence relates that the wife of the king died. Although the month in which she died is no longer legible, the fact that mourning was from the 27th of Adar to the third of Nisan indicates that she died earlier in Adar (February/March).²⁵ The king was surely Cyrus, because the conquerors would be unlikely to mourn for the wife of the defeated Belshazzar or Nabonidus. Although the first wife of Cyrus is never mentioned in the *Cyropaedia*, there is some mention of his two sons, the elder of whom, Cambyses II, was made coregent by Cyrus before he died. Given that the king’s wife who was mourned was the first wife of Cyrus, insight is gained into why Cyaxares gave his daughter in marriage to his recently widowed nephew. This notice in the Nabonidus Chronicle about the king’s wife therefore adds plausibility to the *Cyropaedia*’s anecdote about Cyaxares giving his daughter in marriage to Cyrus. Herodotus also notes that Cyrus’s wife died while Cyrus was still alive, and Cyrus “mourned deeply when she died before him, and had all his subjects mourn also” (*Hist.* 2.1.1).

VI. THE THRONE NAME OF CYAXARES II

If the above scenario as derived from Xenophon is correct, with Cyaxares coming to Babylon and reigning there for a little more than a year before his death, then it is clear that his throne name was Darius. Daniel’s “Darius the Mede,” like Xenophon’s Cyaxares, reigned in Babylon right after Belshazzar was slain and the city was taken,²⁶ after which he was succeeded by Cyrus. Daniel’s Darius must have been the highest authority in the empire, because no one of a lesser status would have had the authority to issue a command against praying to any king or god for thirty days except him (Dan 6:7, 12). This level of authority rules out any governor such as Gobryas being Darius the Mede. Darius himself could not issue such an edict if he were under the jurisdiction of Cyrus or any other king. The one scenario that allows this kind of presumption on the part of Darius is that which is offered by the *Cyropaedia*: Cyaxares/Darius was, until his death, still the overlord of Cyrus and of all the Medes and Persians.

²³ *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period* (London: Routledge, 2007), 47.

²⁴ ANET, 306b.

²⁵ Regarding the month involved, the restorations and translations of Glassner (*Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 239) and Grayson (*Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 110, 111) that give Adar are to be preferred over the reading in ANET, 306b that gives Arahshamnu/Heshvan.

²⁶ Dan 5:31 (6:1 MI).

The command itself must be characterized as foolish, because even in a polytheistic society it would have had undesirable repercussions such as opposition from the priestly caste, as well as from many of the common people who were used to making supplications to their favorite gods or goddesses. How could Darius be so shortsighted as to accede to a request like this from his counsellors? It would seem that the counsellors were aware of a weakness in the character of their ruler: When it came to his own importance and powers, he was prone to delusional thoughts such as accompany, in modern terms, bipolar disorder. The thought of himself as temporarily exercising the power of the gods might appeal to someone afflicted with this malady. The counsellors could have recognized and taken advantage of these characteristics, even though they would not have had the modern understanding of what produced such a weakness of character. In any event, the counsellors were successful: Cyaxares/Darius issued the decree that would put him in the manic state of the-god-who-answers-prayers for thirty days.²⁷ The character of Cyaxares, as portrayed in the *Cyropaedia*, therefore provides insight into why the Darius of Daniel chapter 6 would agree to such an irrational and shortsighted scheme.

When Daniel survived his night in the lions' den, another aspect of Darius's character—his temper—worked to the doom of the plotters. Here it would seem sufficient that only the men who promoted the plot against Daniel would be sacrificed to the lions, but Darius exceeded this by having their children and wives included, and the lions “overpowered them and crushed all their bodies”²⁸ (Dan 6:24 [6:25 MT], author's translation). The disproportionate anger exhibited by Daniel's Darius has its counterpart in the “violent and unreasonable” nature of Xenophon's Cyaxares. It could also be argued that Darius's concern for his friend Daniel while he was in the lions' den has its counterpart in Cyaxares's occasional display of warmth toward his nephew in spite of their differences in judgment and personality, although this is a less distinctive personality trait than the excessive desire for adulation and lack of self-control exhibited by Cyaxares/Darius. Those more distinctive characteristics, as delineated in the *Cyropaedia* for Cyaxares, help explain the actions

²⁷ Andrew Steinmann writes, “This decree would make sense if the thirty days are during the time when the images of the gods, which had earlier been removed from their temples and brought to Babylon, are being returned. During this period, the priests are not able to offer prayers or sacrifices in the temples. The decree makes Darius the high priest, through whom all prayers are brought to the gods. This proposed decree not only allows worship to continue while the gods are absent from their temples, it also appeals to Darius' ego.” *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2008), 315. Nabonidus had brought the images from the surrounding cities to Babylon. According to the Nabonidus Chronicle, Cyrus had them restored to their cities, the restoration taking place between Kislev 539 and the end of Adar 538 (November 25, 539 to March 23, 538 BC). This timeframe agrees with the chronology advocated here for Cyaxares reigning in Babylon.

²⁸ Aramaic ܩܪܝܗܘܢ. For ܩܪܝܗܘܢ, Gesenius gives the meanings “(1) a bone ... (2) body, as in Arabic.” Although Gesenius has been criticized as placing too much emphasis on Arabic cognates, the meaning “body” fits better in this verse than the usual translation as “bone.” We would not expect that all two-hundred-plus bones in a human body were crushed (ܩܪܝܗܘܢ) in all of the individuals involved. The usual interpretation that this is hyperbole is not necessary if Gesenius's second definition is allowed, although such a rendering is not favored in recent lexicons.

of Darius when he is flattered to give in to a plot of his counsellors that could only bring trouble to his kingdom. In short, the personality of Xenophon's Cyaxares helps us understand what seems like an improbable, and certainly irrational, course of action taken by Darius in Daniel 6.

That Darius was the throne name of Cyaxares is also supported by references in two early authors, Berossus (3rd century BC) and Harpocration (2nd century AD). It is thought that the source of Berossus's information was the cuneiform trove of records found in the Esaglia temple of Babylon,²⁹ while Harpocration was associated with the great library at Alexandria and thus would have had access to many ancient works that were lost when the library was burned. Berossus's work survives only in extracts by later authors, who themselves were quoting abridgements by Alexander Polyhistor and Abydenus. The relevant passage from Berossus is found in Josephus (*Ag. Ap.* 1.153/1.20) and in a passage that survives only in the Armenian translation of Eusebius's *Chronicle*. The Josephus passage deals with the defeat of Nabonidus by Cyrus, after which Nabonidus "was humanely treated by Cyrus, who dismissed him from Babylonia, but gave him Carmania for his residence." The extract from Eusebius agrees with Josephus's citation, but adds to it: "(But) Darius the king took away some of his province for himself."³⁰ The timeframe is the time of the defeat of Nabonidus, not the time of Darius I Hystaspes (522–486 BC). The Darius who took some of the province of Carmania for himself, thus overriding the disposition of Cyrus, must have had authority over Cyrus at this time (539 BC), which agrees with the relationship between Cyaxares II and Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia*, but which finds no counterpart in Herodotus and the standard narrative of Cyrus's status and career.

In his commentary on the book of Daniel, C. F. Keil wrote, "Finally, the Darics also give evidence for Darius the Mede, since of all explanations of the name of this gold coin (the Daric) its derivation from a king Darius is the most probable."³¹ Keil then cites Harpocration, who wrote regarding the daric, "But darics are not named, as most suppose, after Darius the father of Xerxes [Darius I Hystaspes], but after a certain other more ancient king."³² The current consensus, following Herodotus, maintains that there was no king named Darius before Darius Hystaspes. The information given in Berossus and Harpocration, however, is consistent with the existence of the king named Darius in Daniel 6, and both sources are consistent with the name "Darius" being the throne name of Xenophon's Cy-

²⁹ Beaulieu, *Reign of Nabonidus*, 88; Gerald P. Verbrugge and John M. Wickersham, eds., *Berossus and Manetho, Introduced and Translated: Native Traditions in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 15–24.

³⁰ Josef Karst, ed., *Die Chronik aus dem Armenischen übersetzt mit textkritischem Commentar*, vol. 5 of *Eusebius Werke* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1911), 246.

³¹ C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, in *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. M. G. Easton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1872; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 200.

³² Harpocration, *Lexeis of the Ten Orators* Δ 5, Δαρεϊαδός.

axares II.³³ Both sources indicate that Darius had the authority to issue coinage or to countermand a decree from Cyrus.

There remains a major problem: Why do we not have any contract texts that are dated to a year of Cyaxares II? A part of this answer might be that many contract texts have never been translated, thousands of them in the British Museum alone, and so it may be that some will yet come to light. But it is also possible that some have already been found. Suppose such a tablet were found with the inscription dating it simply to a year of “Darius, King of Babylon.” Given the current consensus, there is virtually no chance that this would be considered as coming from the time of Cyaxares II, who eminent scholars for centuries maintained had the alternate name of Darius. It would be assigned instead to Darius I or another of the two Dariuses who bore that name. Until a tablet is found that has other information on it that rules out these other Dariuses, it should be expected that any contract text from the time of Cyaxares II/Darius “0” will automatically be incorrectly identified.

VII. CYAXARES IS EXPUNGED FROM HISTORY³⁴

1. *Early scholarly acceptance of Xenophon’s account.* The identification of Xenophon’s Cyaxares II with Daniel’s Darius the Mede is an idea that is neither novel nor of fringe status. It was advocated by Josephus in the first century AD³⁵ and was favored by Jerome in the third century.³⁶ Later scholars who held this opinion were John Calvin in the sixteenth century, James Ussher in the seventeenth, and Charles Rollin and William Lowth in the eighteenth.³⁷ Nineteenth-century advocates in-

³³ A more extended treatment of these passages in Berossus and Harpocration may be found in Steven D. Anderson and Rodger C. Young, “The Remembrance of Daniel’s Darius the Mede in Berossus and Harpocration,” *BSac* 173.691 (2016): 315–23.

³⁴ The references in the following section to 1,800 years of scholarship that accepted the identification of Darius the Mede with Cyaxares II are taken largely from the research of Steven D. Anderson, whose Ph.D. dissertation at Dallas Theological Seminary (“Darius the Mede: A Reappraisal,” 2014) investigated the historical and archaeological arguments supporting this identification. The dissertation was expanded by Anderson into a self-published book. A recent commentary on the book of Daniel finds Anderson’s arguments compelling: J. Paul Tanner, *Daniel*, ed. H. Wayne House and William D. Barrick, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 45–60. It is hoped that researchers and writers will be open to the insights that Anderson’s research provides for understanding the book of Daniel and historical circumstances related to the end of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

³⁵ *Ant.* 10.248/10.11.4: “Darius, who with his relative Cyrus put an end to the Babylonian sovereignty, was in his sixty-second year when he took Babylon; he was a son of Astyages but was called by another name among the Greeks.” The only Greek historian who is known to refer explicitly to a son of Astyages is Xenophon, so the “other name” that Josephus did not supply was very likely Cyaxares. Had Josephus filled in the name it would have done much to lessen the assurance of those who confidently assert that both Darius the Mede and Cyaxares II are fictitious characters.

³⁶ Jerome, *S. Hieronymi presbyteri opera: Pars I: Opera exegetica 5: Commentariorum in Daniele libri III<IV>*, Corpus Christianorum: Series latina, vol. 75A (London: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1964), 820–21, 829.

³⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, trans. Thomas Myers, 2 vols., in *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 45 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1852; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 1:347–48; James Ussher, *The Annals of the World, Revised and Updated by Larry and Marion Piene* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2003), 117a, originally published in 1658; Rollin, *Ancient History*, 1:588;

cluded Adam Clarke, Thomas Hartwell Horne, Wilhelm Gesenius, Humphrey Prideaux, E. W. Hengstenberg, C. F. Keil in the Keil and Delitzsch commentary, and Otto Zöckler in Lange's Commentary.³⁸ These eminent writers were not mindlessly quoting each other regarding the identification of Cyaxares II with Darius. They had observed the striking similarity of circumstances and personality for the two characters, so that Keil wrote, "The account given by Xenophon regarding Cyaxares so fully agrees with the narrative of Daniel regarding Darius the Mede, that, as Hitzig confesses, 'the identity of the two is beyond a doubt.'"³⁹

2. *The cuneiform texts.* In the late 1800s several cuneiform texts dealing with the end of the Neo-Babylonian Empire were found and translated. These included the Cyrus Cylinder,⁴⁰ the Verse Account of Nabonidus,⁴¹ the Nabonidus Chronicle,⁴² and the Dream Text (Sippar Cylinder) of Nabonidus.⁴³ None of these texts named Cyaxares II, and, more than that, most of them had Cyrus taking over the kingship of Media and Persia directly from Astyages, with no room for an intervening Median king. The conclusion seemed obvious: historians must put aside 1800 years of scholarship that favored Xenophon over Herodotus. It was now understood that Cyrus became king of both Media and Persia by defeating the Medes, including his grandfather Astyages, several years before the fall of Babylon in 539 BC, just as Herodotus said.

3. *More recent scholarship on the texts.* Later scholarship, however, began pointing out some problems with the cuneiform texts. If the supposed coup of Cyrus was such a definitive act, why could these texts not agree on when it happened and the circumstances of the coup? The Dream Text of Nabonidus said that Cyrus and the Persians defeated the Medes in the third year of Nabonidus (553/552 BC),⁴⁴ the

William Lowth, *A Commentary upon the Prophecy of Daniel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets*, 2 vols. (London: William Mears, 1726), 1:52.

³⁸ Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments*, 6 vols. (repr., New York: Abingdon, n.d.; originally published 1810–1826), 4:586b; Thomas Hartwell Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, 8th ed., 4 vols. (Edinburgh: W. Blackwell and Sons, 1839; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 4:213. Wilhelm Gesenius, *Thesaurus philologicus criticus linguae hebraeae et chaldaeae veteris testamenti*, 2d ed., 3 vols. (Leipzig: F. C. G. Vogelii, 1835), 1:349–50; Humphrey Prideaux, *An Historical Connection of the Old and New Testaments: Comprising the History of the Jews and Neighboring Nations, from the Decline of the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel to the Time of Christ*, ed. J. Talboys Wheeler, 3rd ed. (London: William Tegg & Co., 1877), 1:106–12; E. W. Hengstenberg, *Dissertations on the Genuineness of Daniel and the Integrity of Zechariah*, trans. B. P. Pratten (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1848), 40–43; Keil, *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, 192–200; Otto Zöckler, *The Book of the Prophet Daniel: Theologically and Homiletically Expounded*, trans. and ed. by James Strong, in John Peter Lange, ed., *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical*, ed. and trans. Philip Schaff, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960; German original published 1870), 7:35–36.

³⁹ Keil, *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, 198.

⁴⁰ Translations: ANET, 315b–316b; Irving Finkel, "The Cyrus Cylinder: The Babylonian Perspective," in *The Cyrus Cylinder: The King of Persia's Proclamation from Ancient Babylon*, ed. Irving Finkel (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 4–7; Hanspeter Schaudig, "The Text of the Cyrus Cylinder," in *Cyrus the Great: Life and Lore*, ed. M. Rahim Shayegan, Ilex Series 21 (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2019), 21–25.

⁴¹ ANET, 312b–315a.

⁴² ANET, 305b–307a. Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 232–39.

⁴³ Translation in Beaulieu, *Reign of Nabonidus*, 108, 211, 214.

⁴⁴ Beaulieu, *Reign of Nabonidus*, 108.

Nabonidus Chronicle seems to place this defeat in Nabonidus's sixth year (550/549);⁴⁵ and Herodotus, by giving Cyrus 29 years of reign, would place it in 559 BC (*Hist.* 1.214.3). The Cyrus Cylinder, which is apparently the earliest of these documents, does not say that Cyrus defeated the Medes in war, claiming only that Marduk "made the land of Gutu and all the Median troops prostrate themselves at his [Cyrus's] feet."⁴⁶ According to the *Cyropaedia* (4.6.1–11), the Gutians were not conquered militarily by Cyrus. Their governor Gobryas/Ugbaru submitted voluntarily because of the wrongs done to him by Belshazzar. The submission of the Medes to Cyrus could be similar, so that Hirsch comments:

But what is often overlooked is that Cyrus, in the *Cyropaedia*, does effectively execute a coup against his Median overlord... When he receives an order from the angry Cyaxares demanding that he return (4.5.10), Cyrus persuades the Medes and other allies to stay with him (5.1.19–29). Perhaps this incident is to be connected with the tradition, found in Herodotus and the Nabonidus Chronicle, that Astyages' Median troops rebelled against him and went over to Cyrus.⁴⁷

Such a reinterpretation of events in order to serve a current political need is consistent with the advice that Xenophon has Cambyses giving to his son Cyrus regarding the necessity of a general (or statesman) to use deceit: "The man who proposes to do that must be designing and cunning, wily and deceitful, a thief and a robber" (1.6.27). The *Cyropaedia* has examples of Cyrus's use of deceit to achieve his ends. Further, the cuneiform texts mentioned as supporting Herodotus's version of Medo-Persian relations are increasingly recognized as propaganda created by Cyrus and later Persians to provide a narrative in which the Medes, instead of being friends of the Persians (Xenophon), were their enemies (Herodotus). Hirsch represents the caution of more recent scholarship in accepting the testimonies of the cuneiform texts when he observes: "The real Cyrus was a master of propaganda, as can be seen from the Cyrus Cylinder, the Babylonian verse chronicle of Nabonidus' fall, and the stories of Cyrus' merciful treatment of conquered kings, all no doubt propagated with Cyrus' encouragement or active participation."⁴⁸

What would be the purpose of this propaganda, if the picture provided by Xenophon represented the true state of affairs? The answer can be found, in part, in the Harran Stela, which is also propaganda, but this time from a Babylonian perspective, that of Nabonidus. It will be recalled that Nabonidus named as his principal three enemies the Egyptians, the Medes, and the Arabs, with no mention of the Persians. For the Babylonians in the years immediately preceding the capture of Babylon, the Medes were the hated enemy. Cyrus could take advantage of this by making clear that he was not a Mede, and even further advantage if he could twist the facts a little to say that he had made the Medes "bow in submission," as he

⁴⁵ ANET, 305b; Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 235.

⁴⁶ Finkel, "Cyrus Cylinder," 5.

⁴⁷ Steven W. Hirsch, *The Friendship of the Barbarians: Xenophon and the Persian Empire* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1985), 81.

⁴⁸ Hirsch, *The Friendship of the Barbarians*, 177n69. Hirsch is summarizing Max Mallowan, "Cyrus the Great (558–529 B.C.)," *Iran* 10 (1972): 10–11.

states in the Cyrus Cylinder. Later Persian propaganda could make this stronger by claiming a military conquest, until Herodotus, a century later, received a version in which the Persians not only conquered the Medes militarily but also made slaves of them. For Cyrus, starting the rewrite of history in this way would be consistent with the advice he received from his father. The cuneiform texts, particularly the Cyrus Cylinder that was composed at his command, show that the *Cyropaedia* was reporting an aspect of Cyrus's policy that is true to the contemporary inscriptional evidence.

How does this affect the question of the existence or non-existence of Cyaxares II? Taking into consideration the enmity of the Babylonians toward the Medes, it would not have looked good for Cyrus to admit that he was under the authority of a Median king when his forces captured Babylon and Cyrus entered into the city 17 days later "without any battle, ... as a friend" according to the rewrite of history contained in the Cyrus Cylinder. Any "friendship" with the Babylonians would not be convincing if Cyrus was perceived as acting under the authority of the hated Medians and their king. The way to resolve this would be to omit altogether, in the accounts designed for mass consumption, any mention of Cyrus's Median overlord.

If it seems hard to believe that Cyrus could have omitted an important historical figure from the account of the taking of Babylon, then it should be remembered that Belshazzar is also missing entirely from the Cyrus Cylinder, unless he, and not Nabonidus, is the "weakling" or "low and unworthy man" referred to in the opening lines.⁴⁹ It would be expected that some reference would be made to Belshazzar in the Cylinder's narration of events surrounding the capture of Babylon, but only Nabonidus is mentioned there. The reason for passing over the person of Belshazzar is clear: according to the Cyrus Cylinder and subsequent Persian propaganda, Marduk replaced Nabonidus with Cyrus as king of Babylon because Nabonidus, in his worship of the moon-god, neglected the homage due to Marduk. But this narrative does not fit the fact that Belshazzar was an avid and faithful worshiper of Marduk. The solution: expunge Belshazzar from what would become the standard narrative, a narrative that was perpetrated in the cuneiform texts and, after their discovery in the late nineteenth century, continues to our own day. Belshazzar, long absent as a distinct person from that narrative, was restored to his rightful place when, beginning in the 1860s, texts were deciphered showing his name. These discoveries vindicated Daniel's account and its authorship in the sixth century BC. By the second century, all knowledge of Belshazzar had apparently been lost, except as found in the book of Daniel and writings derived from it, implying that the book of Daniel must be dated before the second century.

⁴⁹ Both Schaudig and Cogan think the reference is to Nabonidus, while van der Spek and Finkel interpret it as a reference to Belshazzar. Schaudig, "Text of the Cyrus Cylinder," 21; Mordechai Cogan, "Achaemenid Inscriptions: Cyrus: Cyrus Cylinder," *COS II*, 315; R. J. van der Spek, "Cyrus the Great, Exiles, and Foreign Gods: A Comparison of Assyrian and Persian Policies on Subject Nations," in *Extraction and Control: Studies in Honor of Matthew W. Stolper*, ed. Michael Kozuh et al., SAOC 68 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2014), 252; Finkel, "Cyrus Cylinder," 4.

Belshazzar has now been restored, but the Persian rewrite has been more successful for Cyaxares II. According to the prevailing consensus that bases much of its support on the Persian propaganda texts produced by Cyrus and his successors, Cyaxares II remains just as much a nonentity as that curiously similar biblical character, Darius the Mede.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Cyaxares II, according to Xenophon's <i>Cyropaedia</i>	Darius the Mede, according to the book of Daniel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current consensus among conventional historians is that he did not exist. However, no adequate motive is given for why Xenophon created this supposedly imaginary figure. • A contemporary of Cyrus the Great—his uncle. • King of the Medes (<i>Cyr.</i> 4.5.8). • Also had authority over the Persians as late as shortly after the capture of Babylon in 539 BC (<i>Cyr.</i> 8.5.17). • Died within two years after the capture of Babylon. Succeeded by Cyrus (<i>Cyr.</i> 8.6.22). • Only one name given, although Josephus said that Darius “was called by another name among the Greeks” (<i>Ant.</i> 10.248/10.11.4). • A “reputation for being violent and unreasonable” (<i>Cyr.</i> 4.5.9). • Vainglorious. Cyrus could change his course of action if offered something that would bring him greater praise and wealth (<i>Cyr.</i> 4.5.51–53; 5.5.1–2, 38–40; 8.5.17). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current consensus among non-conservative Bible critics is that Darius did not exist. However, no adequate motive is given for why the author of Daniel would create him. • A contemporary of Cyrus the Great. • King of the Medes (Dan. 5:31). • Also had authority over the Persians shortly after the capture of Babylon in 539 BC, as evidenced by his decree of Dan 6:6–9. • Died not long after the capture of Babylon. Succeeded by Cyrus (Dan 10:1, 11:1). • Only one name given, although other kings during this time had a given name as well as a throne name (Dan 5:31). • Unreasonable and disproportionate anger (Dan 6:24). • Vainglorious. His counsellors recognized this, persuading him to issue an edict that would make him the focus of everyone’s prayers (Dan 6:6–9).

Stepping back and looking at the issue from a distance, it seems strange that ancient sources give us two individuals, supposedly separate, who nevertheless occupied the same place at the same time. More importantly, these individuals, according to their respective sources, shared a unique characteristic: They were simultaneously, in 539 BC, the supreme authority over Babylon, the Medes, and the Persians. This in itself indicates they were the same person. The alternative is that they were both fictitious. It could not be that just one was fictitious (whether Xenophon’s Cyaxares or Daniel’s Darius), because if it is accepted that one was a real person, the similarity of characteristics (place, time, authority) guarantees the exist-

ence of the other, and that they were the same real person. If both are assumed fictitious then it should be asked why Xenophon and the author of Daniel independently created imaginary figures that either of their accounts could do without, and why these two independent authors also gave their supposedly imaginary figures similar characteristics of nationality, royal status, and temperament.

Until those who hold to the nonexistence of Xenophon's Cyaxares and the corresponding nonexistence of Daniel's Darius find a better explanation, these circumstances are best understood by accepting the reality of the one individual who is the basis of both accounts, one written in Greek and the other in Aramaic and Hebrew. Accepting that Cyaxares/Darius was a real person not only makes the best sense of the existing data, but it also affords new understandings of circumstances related in the *Cyropaedia* and the book of Daniel. For biblical scholars, an example of such an insight is how the idiosyncrasies of Xenophon's Cyaxares—his apparent bipolar disorder and need for adoration by his subjects—explain why the Darius of Daniel 6 could be persuaded to issue a self-glorifying edict that could only have negative consequences. Xenophon's picture of Cyrus's subordination to his uncle also explains Darius's authority to issue such a command. For classical scholars, the obvious independence of Xenophon's writings about Cyaxares II and the author of the book of Daniel's narrative of Darius the Mede, and yet the striking similarities of the two (supposedly distinct) individuals, should give a new appreciation that Cyrus was in reality the master of propaganda that the *Cyropaedia* claims for him. In van der Spek's words, "Cyrus was very successful in his propaganda and modern historiography is still influenced by it."⁵⁰ Cyrus's propaganda is perpetuated to the present day in scholarship that denies the existence of Cyrus's uncle as portrayed in the *Cyropaedia* or of Daniel's king and friend as portrayed in the book of Daniel, despite the obvious affinities between the two portraits and the independence of the sources presenting them.

⁵⁰ Van der Spek, "Cyrus the Great," 260.