The Cyrus Cylinder

Use this guide to explore the Cyrus Cylinder, a proclamation by the Persian king Cyrus the Great that gives rare historical insight into ancient Persian culture. The cylinder will be on display at the Getty Villa in the exhibition *The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia: A New Beginning* from October 2 to December 2, 2013. Read the information and follow the instructions to complete the activity below.

One Ruler, Three Views: Analyzing Texts

Cyrus the Great of Persia (circa 600–530 B.C.) ruled from 559 to 530 B.C. Because of his skills in building and managing his kingdom, the Persian Empire grew even after his death and became the largest the world had ever known. Working with a partner, read these three very different texts about Cyrus. Each in its own way represents him as a model ruler. Discuss with your partner what each text says.

1. The first is a proclamation by Cyrus himself after he conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. It describes his behavior, reception by the conquered, and support from local gods.

2. The second is a biblical quote from the book of Ezra, of uncertain date but possibly the mid-fifth century B.C, describing divine support for Cyrus by "the Lord, the God of Israel."

3. The third is a description of Cyrus as conqueror and humanitarian, written by Xenophon, a Greek general of the fourth century B.C. Xenophon actually fought the Persians himself, although well after Cyrus's time, and despite the fact that the Persians were his enemies, he admired Cyrus greatly.

Why is Cyrus famous as a model king? With your partner, use the worksheet to describe positive attributes of Cyrus mentioned by all authors. (Try to identify similar qualities of Cyrus even if they are not described in exactly the same way.) Then discuss qualities that are unique to each author.

COMPARE	CONTRAST
Identify and describe at least one positive attribute of Cyrus as a good leader noted by all authors.	**Identify at least one idea about Cyrus as a ruler that is specific only to this author.**
CYRUS	**CYRUS**
EZRA	**EZRA**
XENOPHON	**XENOPHON**

1. **Cyrus Cylinder, lines 20–34** (lines 22–23 omitted; bolded words added to identify names)
   British Museum translation:
   http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/articles/c/cyrus_cylinder_-_translation.aspx
   (Cyrus's own words, inscribed on a clay proclamation about his conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C., shortly after his victory)

   20) I am Cyrus, king of the universe, the great king, the powerful king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters of the world,

   21) son of Cambyses, the great king, king of the city of Anshan, grandson of Cyrus, the great king, king of the city of Anshan, descendant of Teispes, the great king, king of the city of Anshan. . . .

The Cyrus Cylinder
Achaemenid, after 539 B.C.
Found in Babylon, Iraq
Terracotta
Length: 22.5cm
Image courtesy of and ©
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24) My vast troops were marching peaceably in Babylon, and the whole of Sumer and Akkad had nothing to fear.

25) I sought the safety of the city of Babylon and all its sanctuaries. As for the population of Babylon who as if without divine intention had endured a yoke not decreed for them,

26) I soothed their weariness; I freed them from their bonds(?). Marduk **(GOD who helped Cyrus)**, the great lord, rejoiced at my good deeds,

27) and he pronounced a sweet blessing over me, Cyrus, the king who fears him, and over Cambyses, the son my issue, and over my all my troops,

28) that we might live happily in his presence, in well-being. At his exalted command, all kings who sit on thrones,

29) from every quarter, from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea, those who inhabit remote districts and the kings of the land of Amurru who live in tents, all of them,

30) brought their weighty tribute into Shuanna **(BABYLON),** and kissed my feet. From Shuanna I sent back to their places to the city of Ashur and Susa,

31) Akkad, the land of Eshnunna, the city of Zamban, the city of Meturnu, Der, as far as the border of the land of Guti—the sanctuaries across the river Tigris—whose shrines had earlier become dilapidated,

32) the gods who lived therein, and made permanent sanctuaries for them. I collected together all of their people and returned them to their settlements,

33) and the gods of the land of Sumer and Akkad which Nabonidus **(FORMER KING deposed by Cyrus)** —to the fury of the lord of the gods—had brought into Shuanna, at the command of Marduk, the great lord,

34) I returned them unharmed to their cells, in the sanctuaries that make them happy…

2. **Biblical reference: Ezra 1.1–4**

2011 New International Version:

http://biblehub.com/ezra/1-1.htm

(Jewish account of the actions of Cyrus after he conquered Babylon, possibly written in the mid-fifth century B.C.)

1) In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:

2) "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.

3) Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them.

4) And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.'"

3. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* (The Education of Cyrus)
Project Gutenberg, translated by Henry Graham Dakyns, edited by F. M. Stawell:
http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=2085
(A sort of historical novel about Cyrus written by an admiring Greek general in the early fourth century B.C.)

Book 5, chapter 3, lines 46–47

46) So the officers went to their quarters, and as they went they talked of Cyrus, and what a marvellous memory he had, always naming each officer as he assigned him his post. 47) The fact was Cyrus took special pains over this: it struck him as odd that a mere mechanic could know the names of all his tools, and a physician the names of all his instruments, but a general be such a simpleton that he could not name his own officers, the very tools he had to depend on each time he wanted to seize a point or fortify a post or infuse courage or inspire terror. Moreover it seemed to him only courteous to address a man by name when he wished to honour him.

Book 7, chapter 5, line 76

76) [Cyrus:] "We must watch ourselves; we must not surrender to the sweetness of the day. It is a great work, methinks, to found an empire, but a far greater to keep it safe. To seize it may be the fruit of daring and daring only, but to hold it is impossible without self-restraint and self-command and endless care."

Book 8, chapter 2, lines 1–3

1) In the first place he [Cyrus] never lost an opportunity of showing kindliness wherever he could, convinced that just as it is not easy to love those who hate us, so it is scarcely possible to feel enmity for those who love us and wish us well. 2) So long as he had lacked the power to confer benefits by wealth, all he could do then was to show his personal care for his comrades and his soldiers, to labour in their behalf, manifest his joy in their good fortune and his sympathy in their sorrows, and try to win them in that way. But when the time came for the gifts of wealth, he realised that of all the kindnesses between man and man none come with a more natural grace than the gifts of meat and drink. 3) Accordingly he arranged that his table should be spread every day for many guests in exactly the same way as for himself; and all that was set before him, after he and his guests had dined, he would send out to his absent friends, in token of affection and remembrance.