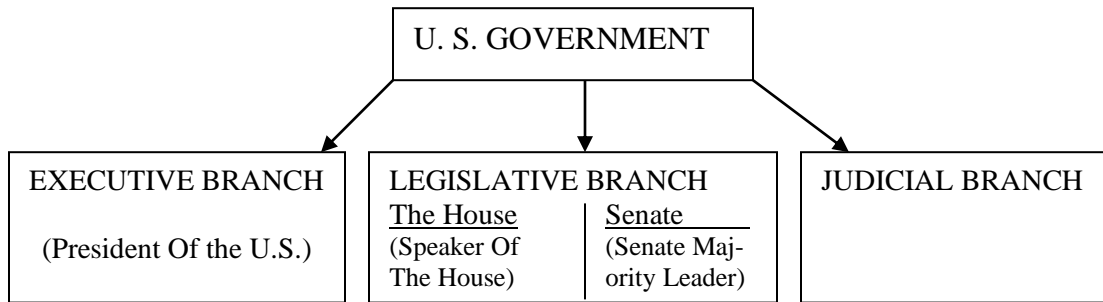


CYRUS THE GREAT AND THE U.S. EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Could the first modern-day democracy have been shaped, in part, by an ancient monarch? In an infomercial made in 2007 to promote a documentary film, I claimed that America's Founding Fathers were influenced by the ancient Persian king, Cyrus The Great.

It is the contention of this paper that Cyrus The Great's contribution to American democracy was nothing less than Article II of the U.S. Constitution establishing the Executive Branch of the Presidency of the United States. In other words, the first 'Modern-Day Democracy' owes its President to an ancient Persian monarch.



THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES

Since its ratification in 1788, the U.S. Constitution has already become one of the most studied and analyzed documents ever written. It is the blueprint for the longest-running government in history that answers to its people rather than the other way around. The authors of this document were so forward thinking that many believe they were divinely inspired.

America's Founding Fathers wrote two of the most important documents in history - the Declaration Of Independence and the United States Constitution. But only those Founding Fathers who drafted the Constitution are referred to as the 'Framers.'

The Constitution was signed by 39 Framers, but only five are considered the key thinkers behind this history-changing document - Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Alexander Hamilton.

All five of these Framers were well educated on Cyrus The Great. The West had long learned about Cyrus from the Old Testament and the 'Cyropaedia,' two books that the Framers of the Constitution were very familiar with. In fact, for as long as the West was ruled by monarchs, Cyrus had served as the gold standard by which Western kings and queens were judged.

The Cyropaedia literally means 'The Education Of Cyrus' and was written by the classical Greek author Xenophon in the 4th century BCE. Xenophon is hardly known today, so it's difficult to imagine how popular his books once were in the West. Here is what Christopher Nadon, Associate Professor of Government at Claremont McKenna College and author of 'Xenophon's Prince,' says about Xenophon:

"Everyone read him. Everyone who was educated. . . . that was the kind of furniture of the mind that an educated person was expected to have. . . . Among the founders, most of them would've been familiar with the works of Xenophon. Madison, when preparing for the federal convention took the time, and it was an extraordinary amount of time, to do a review of all ancient history looking for examples of failures and successes that could perhaps cast light on America's new situation."

One ancient success story was the monarchy of the Persian empire. Contrary to popular belief, the Framers of the U.S. Constitution had a healthy appreciation for the role of monarchy in government. In fact, what the Framers feared more than any monarchy was a Direct Democracy.

A Direct Democracy, or 'Pure Democracy,' is when every government decision is put to a popular vote. In a Direct Democracy, the majority always rules. It is what one Framers, John Adams, called 'The Tyranny Of The Majority.'

The tyranny of the majority is a natural consequence of a Direct Democracy. In a Direct Democracy, the majority can - and always will - oppress the rights of the minority.

The Framers learned about the dangers of Direct Democracy by studying the ancient democracy of Athens, Greece. In the Direct Democracy of ancient Athens every citizen (except women, slaves and minors) was allowed to vote on every government issue. In other words, the assembly of ancient Athens could technically have as many as 60,000 members.

The Athenian assembly, or Ekklesia, was responsible for putting more innocent people to death than any Persian monarch. In fact, during the dark reign of Athenian Democracy, hundreds of Greeks escaped to Persia's monarchy seeking refuge from the tyranny of the Athenian assembly.

Even Socrates, arguably the greatest mind to ever come out of Athens, was sentenced to death by the very assembly he once served. The official reason for his death sentence was, impiety and corrupting the minds of Athenian youth. But Socrates' real crime was his public criticism of the lynch mob that was the Athenian assembly.

The death sentences meted out by the Athenian assembly were so impulsive and unpredictable that the 5th century BCE historian, Thucydides (also sentenced to death), described the atmosphere in democratic Athens as:

"[Athenians] were always in fear and took everything suspiciously."

[Thucydides, 6.53.3]

Yet today the democracy of ancient Athens is celebrated as the noble forerunner of modern-day democracy, a connection the Framers were never willing to make. The Framers were well versed on Athenian democracy. But for them, it served only as an example of what NOT to do according to Professor Christopher Nadon:

"For the framers, Athenian democracy was about the worst form of democracy one could possibly imagine."

James Madison, one of the key Framers of the United States Constitution writes in 'The Federalist Papers' - No. 55:

"Had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates, every Athenian assembly would still have been a mob."

[James Madison 1788]

In fact ancient Athens is the reason why America today is not a Direct Democracy but a Representative Democracy. In a Representative Democracy all citizens are at least one vote removed from the levers of power. In other words, citizens can only vote for people who will vote on their behalf.

In the United States, even the President is not elected by the people but rather by the Electoral College, a group of delegates who vote on behalf of citizens. Every citizen can vote for President, but only the votes of the Electoral College count.

So with such a macabre history, how did ancient Athens become the picture of freedom and human rights that it is today?

PHILHELLENISM

Today Athenian Democracy is embraced as the direct ancestor of modern-day democracy because of a movement that swept across the Western world in the early 1800's called Philhellenism, which roughly translates to 'a love of everything Greek.' Spearheading the Philhellenic movement was a group of Western artists and intellectuals known as the 'Romantics.'

The Romantics were democratic idealists who single handedly changed the Western identity from a Christian one to its current democratic identity. The

Romantics laid claim to democracy as a "Western" invention and believed themselves the rightful heirs to a long line of democracies that began in Athens, Greece.

As the new birthplace of democracy, Athens, Greece became hallowed ground for Philhellenes all over the world. But Greece had long been under the control of the Ottoman empire, which incensed the Romantics. So in the 1820's, the call went out to all Philhellenes to help liberate Greece from Ottoman rule.

The Romantics were so passionate about reclaiming Greece, that they not only financed the Greek War Of Independence but in 1823 the famous British poet, Lord Byron, even died in the cause of Greek independence.

As Greece became more loved in the 19th century, its ancient enemy, Persia, became more despised. According to Tom Holland, author of the book 'Persian Fire,' this was the time when Persia's monarchy went from hero to villain virtually overnight.

"Monarchy starts to become a dirty word as a result of first the American then, of course, the French revolutions. . . . Even more importantly . . . nations of nationalism become much more important. And the first great nationalist revolt against an empire . . . is the Greek revolt against the Ottomans. And this is the subject of numerous romantic effusions from political idealists and, of course, particularly poets and the most famous one is Byron who actually dies in the cause of Greek freedom. And so from that point on, really, the idea of the ancient Greeks standing alone against an oriental monarchy, becomes a model for nationalists and lovers of liberty in the 19th century. And that really puts paid to the reputation of the Persian monarchy."

But monarchy was not always the enemy of democracy. In fact some of the earliest democracies were formed to elect kings.

THE EARLIEST DEMOCRACIES

Today it is an accepted truth in the West that Athens, Greece is the "birthplace of democracy." But we know beyond the shadow of any doubt that the Medes practiced democracy almost a century before the first democratic reforms were introduced in Athens by Solon around 592 BCE.

In ancient Assyrian texts written in 672 BCE, the Assyrian King, Esarhaddon rails against the growing power of the "popular assembly" of the Medes. In text 6, lines 212f of the State Archive of Assyria (SAA), Esarhaddon makes the Medes

swear an oath that they will stop convening their "popular assembly." The text was translated by D. J. Wiseman as follows:

“You shall not hold an (popular) assembly to adjure one another and give the kingship to one of you.”

(The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon)

This translation was verified by Professor Matthew Stolper, the leading Assyriologist at the University Of Chicago's renowned Oriental Institute. Professor Stolper confirmed that the Akkadian word "puḫru" was specifically used to mean “city assembly, popular assembly.”

This "popular assembly" may explain why the capital city of the Medes was called "Hanjamana," the precursor for today's Persian word, "Anjoman," which literally means the 'Assembly.'

The ancient Greek writer, Herodotus refers to the same Median capital as "Ecbatana," an obvious derivation of Hanjamana. If democracy was the Romantics' religion, then Herodotus was their prophet. Even their "Father Of History" tells us that Media was a democracy before it was a monarchy:

"Thus the nations over that whole extent of the country (Media) obtained the blessing of self-government, but they fell again under the sway of kings, in the manner which I will now relate."

[Herodotus: 1.96]

But before they fell under the sway of Kings, Herodotus tells us that Median kings were elected by their "assembly."

"The Medes assembled from all quarters, and held a consultation on the state of affairs. . . . The assembly was persuaded by these arguments, and resolved to appoint a king."

[Herodotus: 1.97]

Herodotus' description confirms the Assyrian king's concern that the Medes were convening assemblies to elect their own king, which undermined the authority of king Esarhaddon.

The difference between the democracy of the Medes and the Athenians was that Media had a representative democracy. The only people allowed to vote in the Median Assembly were tribal chiefs, who represented Median villages or, as Assyrian inscriptions call them, "Lords Of Townships."

One rich source for finding candidates worthy of being king was Media's Judicial Branch. Nothing was prized more among ancient Iranian tribes than the ability to adjudicate cases objectively and justly. This was the precise reason, Herodotus

tells us, why the Medes chose their first king, Deioces. Before he was elected king, Deioces was - according to Herodotus:

"an honest and an upright judge" who believed "that justice and injustice are engaged in perpetual war with one another."

[Herodotus: 1.96]

Justice and injustice locked in an eternal war with each other was the universal trademark of Mithraism. Mithraism was the religion based on 'Mithra,' the pagan 'God of Justice.' Mithra was the supreme God of the Medes. Today's Yazidi Kurds are their last-surviving descendants.

The Medes may have been the earliest recorded democracy but they were not alone. In fact, the democracy that intrigued the Framers most was not Greek; it was the Roman Senate.

ROMAN DEMOCRACY

The Romans also had an Athenian-style assembly called the 'Plebeian Council.' And just like the Athenian assembly, all eligible citizens - or 'Plebs' - were allowed to vote. But the tyranny of the Plebeian majority was checked by an un-elected Roman Senate.

It was this un-elected Roman Senate that rose to prominence among the Roman people. The Roman Senate was so resilient that it survived the Roman Kingdom, the Roman Republic, and even the Roman Empire.

The Roman Senate began much like the Median Assembly, as a council of tribal elders who came together to elect their king. The word 'Senate' even comes from the Latin 'senex,' which literally means 'old man.'

The Roman Senate also resembles the British House Of Lords in that its members are not elected - unlike U.S. Senators who must stand for election every six years. Before the House Of Lords lost much of its power to the elected House Of Commons, Great Britain was less democratic than the United States.

It was in this less-democratic environment that Great Britain was able to end slavery before the United States. What cost the United States a bloody, four-year Civil War, Great Britain was able to accomplish with the stroke of a pen, according to Professor Christopher Nadon:

"There's not a single founder who wasn't aware of the contradiction between the principles of the Declaration Of Independence, that "all men are created equal" and the institution of slavery. The problem is, how do you bring that institution to an

end. And the strange thing that turns out is that that institution is much more difficult to bring to an end within a democratic society that the founders brought forth than it would have been within, say, the kind of political society represented by Great Britain. Great Britain could more or less end slavery with a stroke of a pen in its colonial holdings. Why? Because those colonial holdings had no democratic representation in Parliament."

But the best protection against minority oppression has historically been monarchies.

MONARCHIES AND MINORITY RIGHTS

The reason monarchs were often better at protecting minority rights may be because monarchs often rose from minority groups themselves. At least that was the case with Cyrus The Great, according to Professor Christopher Nadon.

"Part of the reason that Cyrus respected the rights of the minorities was because he himself was from a very small minority faction and he understood that in order to be able to rule over others, he would have to give them a certain amount of leeway and protections."

And this is what the Framers understood that the Romantics did not, that every democracy needs a little monarchy to protect its minority from the tyranny of the majority. And the monarchy of the U.S. is the Executive Branch of the President.

A President - independent of the Legislative Branch - is not a natural development of democracy. The only historical figure that could have inspired the Framers to add a monarchy to their new democracy was Cyrus. His rulership had served as a model for Western leaders since the time of Alexander.

THE CYROPAEDIA

Before the information age, instruction manuals for rulership were scarce. But the book that Western leaders read more than any other was Xenophon's Cyropaedia. Among the Western leaders known to have read the Cyropaedia were Scipio, Caesar, Gustavus and Napoleon to name just a few.

Some believe that it was Caesar's reading of the Cyropaedia that led to his tolerant policies toward Rome's Jewish minority. Professor Christopher Nadon explains why an Athenian like Xenophon would choose Cyrus as the ideal monarch.

"The reason why Xenophon takes Cyrus as the model for the perfect king, is because of the extent of his accomplishment. This

is as far as human ambition can go, to found an empire which in Xenophon's account, more or less, encompasses the whole world."

It seemed to encompass the whole world because of the many different peoples that lived in Cyrus' empire. Professor Christopher Nadon tells us that Xenophon was particularly impressed by how much better minorities were protected under the laws of the Persian king compared to his own democratic Athens.

"What's interesting about the Cyropaedia is the fact that what's important for protecting minority rights isn't necessarily democracy in the sense of elections and democratic participation but rather extent - taking in a larger number of people with different interests, with different religions, with different ways of life and putting them, embedding them in some kind of institutional structure. That's what protects minority rights much more effectively than direct democratic political participation."

THE OLD TESTAMENT

But Xenophon was not the only one to hold Cyrus up as the ideal monarch. In the Old Testament Cyrus is again celebrated specifically for bestowing rights on minority peoples within his empire. Professor Bernard Lewis of Princeton University, calls the praise heaped on Cyrus in the Old Testament, "staggering:"

"I think that one can see that very clearly in what the Old Testament says about Cyrus. Language used about him is just staggering. He's described as God's anointed. And we don't have any comparable language from the Persian side. But we have something at least equally valid, we have his behavior; the fact that he actually restored this banished people to their original home, helped them to build their sanctuary and protected them against their neighbors. I mean that's as powerful an argument as a few verses in the Old Testament."

The Old Testament praises Cyrus for freeing all the slaves of Babylon after conquering the ancient city on October 29, 539 BCE. Among those liberated were over 100,000 Jews who had been driven into slavery 60 years earlier by the infamous Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar.

According to Hebrew scriptures, after liberating the Jewish people, Cyrus not only provided for their safe return home to Jerusalem, he even helped them rebuild their temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had razed to the ground.

In doing so, Cyrus did nothing less than save the Jewish people from oblivion. It is for this reason that Cyrus is called a Messiah in the Old Testament, the only non-Jewish figure to ever receive the title.

CYRUS'S INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN LEADERS

If there was ever any doubt as to whether an ancient Persian king could influence American leaders, it was dispelled by President Harry Truman. We know with absolute certainty that Cyrus was directly responsible for President Truman's decision to recognize the state of Israel in 1948.

As a devout Christian, Harry Truman had read all about Cyrus The Great in the Old Testament and how he helped the Jewish people return home to Jerusalem. So when David Ben-Gurion, head of the Jewish Agency at the time, announced the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, Harry Truman did what his predecessor President Franklin Roosevelt had refused to do. Against the wishes of his own cabinet, President Truman was the first world leader to recognize the new State Of Israel.

Without the support of President Harry Truman, the state of Israel would almost certainly not exist today. And without the example of Cyrus The Great, Truman almost certainly would not have supported Israel. So in a sense, Cyrus returned the Jewish people home, twice!

Five years later, when President Truman was introduced at the Jewish Theological Seminary as, "The man who helped create the state of Israel," Truman was quick to correct his friend Eddie Jacobson, saying:

"What do you mean '**helped**' create? I am Cyrus! I am Cyrus!"

But Cyrus had an even greater impact on the Framers of the U.S. Constitution. The Framers not only read about Cyrus in the Old Testament, they also had access to Xenophon's Cyropaedia. According to Christopher Nadon, it was only after the age of Philhellenism that Xenophon disappeared from the Western library:

"Xenophon falls completely out of favor in the 19th and 20th century. Up until that time, he'd been considered as a wise man. Milton calls him the equal of the divine Plato. And when Machiavelli wrote his Prince, the only book he recommends for further reading, is Xenophon's Cyropaedia. . . . Part of the reason why Xenophon becomes unpopular in a democratic age is because he glorifies monarchy."

Many monarchies - especially religious ones - have been at least as ruthless as democratic Athens. But Cyrus was a different kind of monarch. Both the Old

Testament and the Cyropaedia describe Cyrus, not as an irresponsible dictator but as "a king in council," whose powers were very much limited by custom and tradition.

This is the exact style of monarchy we see in the Executive Branch of the U.S. government. The President of the United States *is* America's king in council, if but only for four years.

THE U.S. EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The Executive Branch was created as a check against the U.S. Congress, today made up of 100 members in the Senate and 435 members in the House Of Representatives - more commonly known as 'The House'.

Not all democracies have an Executive Branch of government. The Parliamentary system of the United Kingdom boasts an Executive Branch in its Prime Minister. But the British Prime Minister almost always represents the majority party in Parliament and is therefore an extension of the Legislative Branch.

In fact, the equal to the British Prime Minister is not the U.S. President but the Speaker Of The House who also represents the majority party. But the Framers gave the President of the United States tremendous power. Not only is the Executive Office of the President its own independent branch of government, it has as much power as all 535 members of the Legislative Branch and the Judicial Branch.

The only equal to the President of the United States is the British Monarchy. But with the British Monarchy reduced to largely a ceremonial office, the United States today is more of a monarchy than Great Britain.

This perfect balance that the Framers struck by adding an Executive Branch to their new democracy gives the United States a self-healing ability. The power to correct itself can be seen, according to Professor Nadon, in the case of African Americans and women, two minority groups that originally did not enjoy equal rights in the United States:

"In the American context, the fact that women didn't have the right to vote, one would seem to think that they would be an oppressed political class. But that certainly wasn't the case, and one can see it quite clearly by comparing with the case of Blacks, obviously, as slaves and a kind of oppression that was perhaps just as invidious after their freedom when they were living within a democratic society."

It was, in the end, the Executive Office of President Abraham Lincoln that finally brought slavery to an end in the United States. The government healed itself again in 1920, when President Woodrow Wilson put the power of the Executive Branch behind the 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote.

THE FORGOTTEN LEGACY OF PERSIA

The Persian empire was unique in history for never having practiced slavery and for a level of gender equality that went unmatched in the United States until the 'Family And Medical Leave Act' of 1993, giving paid maternity leave to pregnant women. It may have taken a while but, according to Professor Nadon, the United States today resembles ancient Persia more than ever before.

"There are some similarities between the kind of protection and security that minorities enjoyed within Cyrus's empire the same way minorities are protected within the American republic. And the real connection between those is the question of extent. Because Cyrus's regime and his empire was so large, it encompassed people of different ethnic backgrounds, speaking different languages with different mores, habits, different religions."

Cyrus set the guidelines for 650 years of Persian monarchy that spanned two dynasties - the Achaemenid and Sasanian dynasties. Both Persian empires were world-class superpowers that gave minorities equal rights to participate in Persia's booming economies.

All Persian monarchs operated under a simple economic formula which scholars have dubbed, 'Pax Persica,' which means the 'Persian Peace' in Latin. The Persian Peace refers to the high priority that Persian monarchs placed on 'order,' 'security' and 'justice,' which created the fertile environment needed for businesses to grow, which then filled the royal coffers with taxes. Every social class was expected to play their part in this economic cycle, which Professor Parvaneh Pourshariati calls, "The Circle Of Justice:"

"In this system you produce, the subjects ought to produce enough wealth not only to sustain themselves but to sustain an army who, in turn, will protect the realm, who, in turn, can keep the majesty in power on the throne" . . . "The ruler is also responsible for the welfare of the country. So in the Iranian case, in the Circle of Justice case, if a ruler breaks his contract, . . . he will lose his divine grace, he will lose his legitimacy and therefore the population at large can rebel against him and bring him down."

Despite this rich history, Persian monarchs continue to be maligned today, not just in the West but by their own descendants, as "infidels." The Persian empire, once a beacon of hope and opportunity for people around the world, is dismissed by its own successors as belonging to the dark age of "jahiliyyah."

In fact, in 1979 the Chief Justice of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khalkhali, published a book about Cyrus titled, 'Cyrus The Lie And The Criminal.' In it he argues that Cyrus never existed despite a plethora of archaeological evidence to the contrary.

In his book, the Chief Justice of the Islamic Republic claims that Cyrus was a myth and part of a Jewish plot to "create a nation called ancient Persia." And although his very existence is denied, Cyrus is nevertheless characterized as a "tyrant," a "bastard" and a "homosexual."

Caught between a religious agenda in the East and a political agenda in the West, the Persian empire has become one of the most revised histories of all time. But we vilify this history at our own peril as the Persian empire holds lessons that are as relevant today as they were for the Framers over 230 years ago.

Cyrus Kar
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