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Monticello, the
Home of Thomas Jefferson

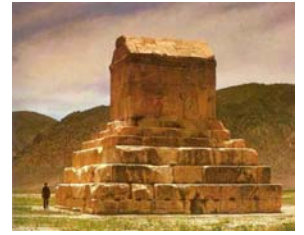


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Mausoleum of Cyrus the Great
ca. 530 BC *

JEFFERSON AND CYRUS

HOW THE FOUNDING FATHERS OF AMERICA, IN THEIR OWN WORDS, WERE INSPIRED BY CYRUS THE GREAT : A SYNOPSIS

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Though twenty-three centuries apart in time, continents apart in space, their systems of republican and monarchical government seemingly the diametric opposite of each other, the Founding Fathers of America and the founders of the Iranian state were close in the realm of ideas - ideas that underlie systems of governance vying to institute liberty and justice. America's Founding Fathers were avid readers of Cyrus's biography, the *Cyropaedia*, written by a student of Socrates, Xenophon, being the masterpiece among his works. Leaders at any age stand to benefit from inspiration, which plants its seeds for later manifestation and realization. Such inspiration that the Founding Fathers drew from Cyrus, amidst all the ancient and modern sources they were exposed to, was because they found his ideas and aspirations resonating with their own inmost beliefs, values and convictions.

The *Cyropaedia* has since served as the World's manual of leadership, from Alexander, Scipio, Cicero, Caesar, Machiavelli who read it and on to our times. In the estimation of Peter Drucker, widely recognized as the father of modern management science, the first book on leadership was still the best. His biographer and student William Cohen writes: "Despite all the books published on leadership by well known academic researchers and successful CEOs, Drucker never altered his opinion. Xenophon was still the best."¹

In characterizing the place of Jefferson in the American ethos the late Gore Vidal told NPR:

"If there is such a thing, which I think there is and others perhaps do not, as an American spirit, then he is it. . . . And it still goes 'round; it still inspires, and it is still the essence of whatever spirit we still have and that we once had, indeed."²

Long before the ancestors of Americans and Europeans emerged from the dark ages, their older cousins established a state further East, which they named after themselves, *Aryana*, denoting *Land of the Aryans*, and in the course of time underwent phonetic changes to evolve to today's *Iran*. "Aryan" had no physical connotations prior to its re-adoption in Europe in the 19th century and meant, simply, noble. In due course in the southern and warmer reaches of that area, *Parsa*, today's Persia, arose Cyrus who with his successors created and for over two centuries maintained the World's first multi-national, multi-lingual multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic *Unity of States*, much as the United States is to-day. Cyrus was the gentile savior of the Jews and other nations and tribes, and about 500 BC, as said in Isaiah 45, fulfilled the function of *Anointed of the Lord*, a rendition in English of Hebrew *mashiah*, or Messiah.

The central link between the Founders of America and Cyrus and successors, the *Cyropaedia*, is augmented by the accounts of the Bible and other sources, including by inscriptions remaining of the latter, such as those that Darius commissioned to be hewn, as he states, "in Aryan", and in other languages.

The proclamation of freedom on the Cyrus Cylinder, a small clay tablet from ca. 537 BC, which has been on a tour in the US is regarded by many today as the first charter of human freedom and human rights. In our day we have been witnessing the evolution of the United States, partly by manifest destiny, partly by default, toward fulfilling the role that Cyrus and his successors knew the need for, created and realized. Yet Persians have been regarded more or less as barbarians in the West, mainly based upon other Greek sources. Among the Greeks, the term 'barbarian' was used to refer to people speaking a language other than their own, a usage that reflected the influence of Egypt. Herodotus reports : "The Egyptians call all men barbarians who do not speak the same language as themselves"³ - a misnomer which has come down to us. The Greeks themselves, however, regarded the Persians in a different way, because the first great empire established by the Persian Achaemenids probably for the first time in history enunciated a secular code of laws, the laws of the king. So the legal framework which the Persians initiated was secular, and may have been copied by the Romans later. This is an essential consideration for people who are studying history, because the Persians not only instituted their secular law, but asked the Egyptians, the Hebrews and others to codify their own law books relating to domestic law, civil law and religion. But above them all was the secular law of the king. This separation of church and state has always been a feature of the Persians and their culture, but not so of the Semitic cultures of the Near East and of Egypt too; for them church and state work together and could not be separated. Throughout history the Persians have always insisted upon separation of church and state, where they complement and bolster each other but one is not above the other. Thus Nizam al-Mulk says: "kingship and religion are like two brothers; whenever disturbance breaks out in the country, religion likewise suffers."⁴ This heritage represents the beliefs and culture of the Iranian

people, millennia old and in dire need of expression in their government, for the sake of world peace and for Iran's own sake. Thus Iran was not barbaric but, quite the contrary, the builder and promoter of civilization. The Caliphate of the Arabs and down to Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader today, have maintained the opposite, always keeping church and state together.

There is perhaps no more fitting appellation for Thomas Jefferson than the *Apostle of Americanism*, which he has aptly been called. Among his many accomplishments, Thomas Jefferson's *Statute for Religious Freedom in Virginia* firmly established the separation of Church and State and became the basis of the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights. The prevalence and usage of the phrase *separation of church and state* in modern English dates back to said statute.

Several years ago, a friend, Cyrus Kar, began a project to produce a documentary for his namesake, for which we have been acting variously in the capacities of consulting scholars and donors. One of the findings of Kar during his research was two editions of the *Cyropaedia* in Thomas Jefferson's library.⁵ Later, we found other works dealing with Iran in Jefferson's library such as *The Persian Expedition* and *Oikonomicus*.

A recent, brilliant work of scholarly forensic analysis by Julian Raby, Director of the Freer and Sackler Galleries, and colleagues, revealed Jefferson's keen interest in the *Cyropaedia*. Of his two copies of the *Cyropaedia* that have survived one is an edition from 1767, having the original Greek on the left and the Latin translation on the right, on each opening. Julian Raby describes: "What's extraordinary is that he scratched out one line . . . The particular passage that was crossed out is a problematic passage in the manuscript . . . it is quite clear that Jefferson himself must have been collating line by line between his earlier edition and this later edition."⁶

Caroline Winterer of Stanford University reports of copies of the *Cyropaedia* in the libraries of Benjamin Franklin as well as Adams and Jefferson, and how Jefferson wrote to a friend in 1787 seeking books which included an edition of the *Cyropaedia* in Italian,⁷ indicating his having read the originals and perhaps other editions, but interested in clarification of some fine points.

Neil Macgregor reports that Scottish intellectuals of the Age of Enlightenment had consulted the *Cyropaedia*, from whose midst came Jefferson's mentor in the early 1760s at the College of William and Mary, William Small. Jefferson later expressed how deep his gratitude was to William Small, and regarded him "as a father"⁸. Wm. Scott Harrop of the University of Virginia reports: "Family letters provide further hints of Jefferson's high regard for Xenophon and the *Cyropaedia*. In early 1803, Anne Cary Randolph wrote to "Dear Grand Papa" that her brother, Jefferson Randolph, was busy "translating the history of Cyrus by Xenophon."⁹

The 'history of Cyrus', or *Cyropaedia*, is a treatise on the traits of character of Cyrus, which made of him the ideal ruler. It describes timeless qualities of leadership. Cyrus and the Persians were Zoroastrians, an ethical religious system which survives among the people of Iran in the form of Persianized Islam as well as in its own right in India among the Parsees and in Iran though with far fewer nominal confessors. Cyrus's traits derive from Zoroastrianism. Jefferson, from the Age of Reason and of Enlightenment, took it upon himself to produce an edited version of the New Testament bereft of what was seen then as its mythology which has given solace to many but has troubled intellectuals over the ages, leading many to adopt the '*irreligion of thinking men*'. This became known as the Jefferson Bible. As, once its starting dogma of the existence of the Wise Lord, is accepted, Zoroastrianism as taught by the prophet is a rational system, the ethics in the Jefferson Bible correspond to and bear a close resemblance to the teachings of Zoroaster. The traits of Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia* in turn follow the principles Zoroastrianism teaches to man. As has aptly been put by George Cawkwell of Oxford, the *Cyropaedia* is "a delineation of virtue as embodied in the person of the founder of the Persian empire."¹⁰

America's founders saw virtue as essential to the formation and subsequent development and preservation of the Republic they founded. They repeatedly beseeched its practice, their own record being replete with it. *Virtue* was what Revolutionary America ran on. The underlying, recurrent theme in the *Cyropaedia* and nearly all of Xenophon's works is virtue. Thomas Jefferson advised his nephew Peter Carr in 1785 : "from the practice of the purest virtue you may be assured will derive the most sublime comforts in every moment of life, and in the moment of death."¹¹ George Washington, upon ending his second term as President (1797), in a letter to his brother-in-law stated: "Without Virtue and without integrity, the finest talents and the most brilliant accomplishments can never gain the respect or conciliate the esteem of the truly valuable part of mankind."¹² Benjamin Franklin preached much the same.

Of the two main students of Socrates whose works are extant and through whose works, aside from minor fragments, Socrates is known at all, namely Plato and Xenophon, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and many others held Xenophon in far greater esteem than Plato. Adams adored Xenophon whom he regarded as "my favourite author, that ancient and immortal husbandman, philosopher, politician and general."¹³ Adams, further, related to Jefferson how he had gone over the *History of Persia* in two volumes by British Ambassador Sir John Malcolm looking further for Cyrus. Malcolm in the early 1800s had arrived in Iran with a retinue of five hundred, mainly to counter French influence, after having been assigned to the post by Earl Cornwallis who, subsequent to his defeat at Yorktown by America and France in 1781, was now the Governor-General (viceroy) of India. John Adams persuaded his son, John Quincy Adams, later to be President, to read the *Cyropaedia* at a young age, though this pressure may have had the opposite result from what Adams wished to achieve. Jefferson made it requisite for students seeking to

enter the University he founded, the University of Virginia, the ability to find their way around the works of Xenophon and classical authors in the original Greek or Latin.

Thus it came that the morals of Jefferson, fellow Founding Fathers and posterity bear a close resemblance to those of Cyrus, what he practiced and preached. In a letter to his grandson Francis W. Eppes in 1816 Jefferson wrote:

“Never suffer a thought to be harbored in your mind which you would not avow openly. When tempted to do anything in secret, ask yourself if you would do it in public. If you would not, be sure it is wrong. . . . Whenever you feel a warmth of temper rising, check it at once and suppress it, recollecting it will make you unhappy within yourself and disliked by others.”¹⁴

Xenophon describes Cyrus in this respect and how Cyrus was perceived by his followers:

“His own temperance and the knowledge of it made others more temperate. When they saw moderation and self-control in the man who above all others had licence to be insolent, lesser men were the more ready to abjure all insolence of their own. But there was this difference, Cyrus held, between modesty and self-control: the modest man will do nothing shameful in the light of day, but the man of self-control nothing base, not even in secret. Self-restraint, he believed, would best be cultivated if he made men see in himself one who could not be dragged from the pursuit of virtue by the pleasure of the moment, one who chose to toil first for the happy-hearted joys that go hand-in-hand with beauty and nobleness.”¹⁵

Early on as US minister to France (1785-89), Jefferson sent about 200 books in two crates to James Madison, his close friend and political lieutenant, on the various forms of government known then and pertinent histories and philosophies. The copy of the *Cyropaedia* that came to be Madison’s is apt to have been among those. Thus when it came time in 1787, Madison had made himself most knowledgeable in the subject of governance and ready to lead the Philadelphia Convention which led to the formation and adoption of the US Constitution. Madison managed to persuade George Washington, initially reluctant and not knowing what was in the plans, to attend, which assured the attendance of all others. When in Paris, Jefferson at the invitation of America’s friend Lafayette, came to exercise an influence on the French Revolution in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*.

Along with the Declaration of Independence, the Federalist Papers have served as an aid since then to first ratify, then interpret, the Constitution. Central to this collection of papers since that time has been Federalist Paper No. 10, authored by Madison, published 1787, the year most

delegates agreed on the new Constitution. Titled *The Utility of the Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection*, the distinction there is made clearly by Madison between a crude democracy and a *republic*:

”Hence it is that such democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths.”¹⁶

John Adams stated much the same. The Founding Fathers thus ensured the term ‘democracy’ as understood then would be absent from the Constitution. In the *Cyropaedia* Xenophon contrasts other forms of government with that of Cyrus:

“We have had occasion before now to reflect how often democracies have been overthrown by the desire for some other type of government, how often monarchies and oligarchies have been swept away by movements of the people, how often would-be despots have fallen in their turn, some at the outset by one stroke, while those who have maintained their rule for ever so brief a season are looked upon with wonder as marvels of sagacity and success.”¹⁷

In coming to know the character of Cyrus and of the Founding Fathers closely, it becomes manifest that they, in particular Jefferson and Cyrus, were kindred spirits. One spirit perhaps recognized this kinship and became inspired by the other, and the results then were history. Thus Neil McGregor, Director of the British Museum, who with his team, has vied, perhaps more than any other scholar, to bring the message of the Cyrus Cylinder to the world, aptly remarked to the BBC:

”The story of Persia – Iran – is part of the story of modern United States.”¹⁸

The Hebrew Old Testament ends with the decree of Cyrus to rebuild Jerusalem and restore the Jews to their home. President Harry Truman, coming from humble origins, was a self educated man. As regards biblical history Truman knew the significance of Cyrus when he declared "I am Cyrus, I am Cyrus" in response to Jewish elders gathered in New York to thank him for his role in establishing Israel as a state.¹⁹ David Ben Gurion, principal founder of the modern state of Israel, wrote of the conclusion of the Bible : “Beyond question Cyrus was deserving of these eulogies.”²⁰ Cyrus and the Persians were the saviors of the Jewish nation, as the US has been in our day. They restored Israel as a state, and enabled the return of the Jews to what had been their homeland, from which they had been uprooted (597-587 BC). The Persians maintained it under their protection as the Persian province of *Yehud*, much as the US does today, and assigned to it a Jewish governor from among the now Persian Jews. The prophet Second Isaiah, regarded universally and continuously since the Babylonian Exile (587-537 BC) as the greatest prophet of the

Old Testament, extols and names Cyrus also as the Lord's *Shepherd* (44:28), a term which, in this sense, in Psalms 23:1 is intended by David to mean the Lord Yahweh himself.²¹ Joseph Gaer, Founder & Director, Jewish Heritage Foundation, explains: "The Persians called the people of the Kingdom of Judah *Jehudis*, from which we get the word *Jews* . . . The Persians were friendly towards the Jews, and their king, Cyrus, permitted them to return to their land and rebuild their kingdom. And because the Persians were so friendly, the Jews studied the Persian religion, and learned many things from them."²²

After WWII and the fall of the Nazi regime, of the two top ethnologists of the state Alfred Rosenberg and Hans Gunther, Rosenberg was found guilty of planning and promoting the extinction of the Jews at the Nuremberg trials and along with others executed for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Gunther had not done so and was free. He had promoted Nordicism and the purity of thought, regarding the Germans, as many other populations, as ethnically diverse. Of Zoroastrianism, alternatively called *Mazdaism*, he wrote (1927) : "This is the first self-conscious religious creation in history -- long before Buddha and the oldest Jewish prophets -- and also the earliest to give an ethical meaning to the whole world process and to the State, and to look on man as playing a part in this far-spread ethical system through his behaviour . . . Thus for the first time in the world's history a conception had arisen of a positive religion, which spread over the whole earth in the form of ethical systems of various kinds. And thereby the conception of culture was at one stroke brought into the world, clear-cut and with deep foundations. Mazdaism is the loftiest religious creation that has been produced by the peoples of Nordic origin"²³.

Though perhaps not ostensibly perceived by the untrained observer, due to the absence of Persian culture and values in the politics of Iran today, and the preponderance of what is reported of Iran in the West being its politics, the Persian people's culture and values are still deeply rooted in the ideals of Zoroastrianism and Cyrus. This is partly because "the Persians were Persians first and Moslems afterwards" (Frye 1951).²⁴ Though little known to the Western media, the fact has not escaped the attention of astute visitors, such as Dr. R. S. Morton: that "The Iranians who accepted the Mohammedan religion did not altogether forsake their loyalty to Zoroastrianism, for they subtly developed a type of Islam which embodies many of the ancient religious ideas."²⁵

Just as the Thirteen Colonies then needed the help of a sympathetic great power, France, to succeed in their quest to be free and to be able to express their values in government, so does Iran to-day. But contrary to what has been suggested or offered, the Iranian people do not need military aid, or military intervention, which would in fact be counter-productive to that purpose, not to mention to peace, regional and world stability. The bona fide, steadfast political support of the US and its encouragement of allies likewise, rather, is what is needed and what would fulfill that purpose. Words and diplomacy can accomplish what cannot be done by way of arms.

THE AUTHORS



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Richard Nelson Frye has researched and taught the history of Iran, the Near East and Central Asia at Harvard University for over six decades, where he earned his PhD in History and Philology in 1946, and has been Aga Khan Professor Emeritus of Iranian Studies. He was born in Alabama. His parents had emigrated from Sweden in the early 1900s. He is married and has had four children. Dr. Frye was a founder of the Center for Middle East Studies (CMES) at Harvard. Referred to *a pro pos* as “dean of the world’s Iranists”, he needs little introduction to experts in the field. Fluent in Persian, Turkish, Arabic, German, Russian, French, Italian and knowledgeable in other living and extinct languages, he has lived and worked in Iran, Afghanistan, and other areas of Iranian culture, such as Tajikistan, and has conducted research and taught in Germany and other countries. His work has covered the spectrum of Iranian cultural studies and several books and many articles over the years have served as reference works on the subject. Some of the professors in this field were his students. In recent years he has delivered lectures before audiences in Iran (in Persian) and in the US, advocating the separation of religion and state in Iran, expounding its underlying basis in history and literature since 550 BC, through late antiquity and medieval times.

Afshin Zand grew up in Iran, where his father was working closely with American engineers and technicians employed and settled with their families in Khuzestan, as colleagues and neighbors building a TVA (*Tennessee Valley Authority*). He developed a lifelong passion for history and philosophy during family visits to numerous nearby archeological sites, influenced by his father’s interest, from whom he also inherited a love for formative America. At about age 12 his family moved back to Tehran where his father taught at a branch of Harvard Business School, *Iran Center for Management Studies*, whereupon during his sabbatical at HBS (1975-76) he was given an honorary MBA. At age 15 Afshin was sent to England to complete his high-school education. He then came to the U.S. and attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) where he earned the BSEE in 1982. He worked extensively in the high technology sector, and has been awarded patents for his inventions. To fulfill his life-long passion in history, Afshin pursued professional studies in cultural history at Harvard University, as student of Dr. Frye during 1985-1993, where they worked closely. His studies and research were interdisciplinary and included pre-Islamic history, literature, Zoroastrianism, Judea-Christianity, biblical history, comparative religion, linguistics and Indo-European studies and later also covered contemporary history. His studies were carried out as non-degree professional development and fulfilled the requirements for PhD and beyond. His focus was the causality of historical events, transformations and developments in particular as rooted in value systems and religious beliefs.

The authors resumed collaborating on cultural history and holding lectures around 2003. They both may be reached at: <http://richardfrye.org/contactus.html> A fuller biography of Dr Frye may be found at: <http://richardfrye.org/biographies.html> Their research, of which this paper is a brief summary, is articulated in greater depth and breadth in their upcoming book, *Jefferson and Cyrus*. To reserve a copy, go to: <http://richardfrye.org/contactus.html> . For further details prior to the publication of the book, readers may refer to the authors’ booklet by the same title.

FOOTNOTE TO THE PHOTOS

* Although Monticello (www.monticello.org) needs little introduction, the mausoleum of Cyrus may need a little illumination from the past. The historian Arrian (ca. 140 AD), nicknamed “*Young Xenophon*”, was the author of the *Expeditions of Alexander*. Quoting from one of Alexander’s companions Aristobulus, who was his advisor and military engineer, Arrian writes : “The tomb was in the royal park at Pasargadae : a grove of various sorts of trees had been planted around it; there were streams of running water and a meadow with lush grass.”²⁶

Plutarch (ca. 85 AD) reports of Alexander’s visit to the tomb: “Having discovered that the tomb of Cyrus had been rifled, he put to death the perpetrator of the deed, although the culprit was a prominent Macedonian native of Pella, by name Polymachus. After reading the inscription upon this tomb, he ordered it to be repeated below in Greek letters. It ran thus: "O man, whosoever thou art and whencesoever thou comest, for come I know thou wilt, I am Cyrus, who won for the Persians their empire. Do not, therefore, begrudge me this little earth which covers my body." These words, then, deeply affected Alexander, who was reminded of the uncertainty and mutability of life.”²⁷

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