**Persian Empire:**

**Achaemenid Dynasty (549-330 BCE)**

**Cyrus the Great (600 BCE-529 BCE)**

According to the ancient historians, Astyages was told in a [dream](http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/History/madha/astyages_dreams.htm) that his grandson, the baby Cyrus, would overthrow him. To avoid this he ordered that the baby be killed. However the official delegated with the task gave the baby to a shepherd instead. When Cyrus was ten years old, the deception was discovered by Astyages, but because of the boy’s outstanding qualities he was allowed to live in exile with his mother.

Cyrus was from the city of Pasargadae in southern Iran, and was originally a vassal king of the Median Empire. He came to power when he killed his grandfather, Astyages, in 550 BCE, thus completing the prophecy. His first conquest was the city of Ecbatana that was part of the major trading route that stretched from the city of Babylon in the west, all the way east through Iran into India. It was known as the Khorasan Highway. This gave Cyrus control of wealth, as well as an easy path into the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

**1. Mark the cities on your map, and draw in the Khorasan Highway.**

**2. Using the chart below, create a timeline of the conquests of Cyrus the Great. Then locate each battle in your atlas and add them to your map so you can trace the growth of the Persian Empire.**

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| **Battle / Outcome** | **Description** |
| Battle of Pteria in Cappadocia Drawn Battle (Persians vs. Lydians) | In B.C.E. 547 Croesus marched into Median territory to met Cyrus the Great in an inconclusive Battle. He retreated to Sardis to prepare a greater army, but Cyrus pursued. |
| Siege of Sardis Persians defeat Lydia | In B.C.E.546 Croesus returned to Sardis after an inconclusive battle with Cyrus in order to gather a larger army. Cyrus however, pursued him to his own city, and besieged it. Although Sardis was a strongly fortified city, the Perians found a breach and stormed the city. |
| Siege of Babylon Persians defeat Babylonians | In B.C.E. 539, Cyrus the Great conquered the great city Babylon, under the last Babylonian King, Belshazzar, by diverting the flow of the Euphrates River into irrigation channels. He was then able to lower the level of the river flowing into the city enough so that his armies could storm the city from the river bank |
| Battle of Massagetae in Thrace Scythians defeat Persians | In B.C.E. 529 Cyrus crossed the Bosporus\* and led an army against Scythia. He was subsequently killed during a battle with the Massagetae, under Queen Tomyris. |

\*The Bosporus is the little strip of water that divides Europe from Asia. It is on the border between Turkey and Greece and is the location of the modern city of Istanbul (formerly Byzantium and Constantinople.

**Darius the Great ( 521 BCE -485 BCE)**

For a Brief period, Cambyses, the son of Cyrus the great was in charge of the Persian Empire. He committed suicide (or was possibly murdered) in 521 BCE. Darius was a cousin of Cyrus and came to power through an intriguing plot. Supposedly an imposter had taken over the thrown and claimed to be Cambyses’ brother and no one knew about it. To gain power, Darius and a group of assassins went to meet this imposter as he moved during the spring along the Khorasan highway. When they found him in a holy city seeking the advice of Magi (Persian priests), they murdered him. After his death, Darius convinced his conspirators that he was best suited to be in charge and was given the thrown.

He attempted to finish some of the campaigns of Cyrus, but also had to deal with the Ionian Revolt. This revolt is the precursor to the great Persian Wars with the Greeks.

**1. Using the chart below, add to your timeline of the conquests of Darius. Then locate each battle in your atlas and add them to your map so you can trace the growth of the Persian Empire.**

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| **Battle / Outcome** | **Description** |
| Battle of Pelusium  Persians defeat Egyptians | Fought 525 B.C.E., between the Persians, under Cambyses, and the Egyptians, under Psammeticus. The Egyptians were totally defeated, and this victory was followed by the complete subjugation of Egypt, which became a Persian, satrapy. |
| Siege of Babylon Persians defeat Babylonians | Babylon revolted in B.C. E. 520, soon after Darius came to the throne, and was retaken by an elaborate ruse. A general of Darius mutilated himself and fled to Babylon for protection. After fighting for the Babylonians for some time, and gaining their trust, he turned traitor, and gave the city to Darius. |
| Battle of Scythia Scythians defeat Persians | In B.C.E. 512, Darius invaded Thrace and crossed the Danube, leaving his boats near the river with instructions to wait 60 days for his return. The Scythians, unwilling to meet the Persians in battle, retreated, razing the land before them, and attacking Darius's supply |
| Ionian Revolt  Persians defeat Greek colonies | Seeing that the Persians were weakened by their defeat at Scythia, the Ionian Greek colonies on the coast of Lydia decided to revolt in 499 BCE. They got the help of Athens and burnt down the Persian city of Sardis. The revolt was put down without many consequences, but the Persians held a grudge to be settled later. |

**Xerxes (520- 465 BCE)**

Xerxes was the driving force of the second Persian invasion into Greece. It was the most ambitious military undertaking in the history of the world at the time, and it ended in utter disaster for Persia. Xerxes enormous armies were decisively beaten by Greek forces a fraction of their size. The event, which occurred only six years into his reign, devastated Xerxes, and although he reigned for fifteen more years, he did not undertake virtually any ambitious projects of reform or conquest during the rest of his life. Xerxes' character is described by Herodotus through a series of anecdotes which portray him as being capable of both generous magnanimity, and diabolical cruelty. He could be both meticulously cautious and thoughtlessly rash. He did not possess a firm enough constitution to prevent the crisis of the Persian war, or to handle the disaster when it occurred.

After his early military ambition in Egypt and Greece, he made no more attempts to expand the empire of his father, Darius. After crushing defeats to the unified Greek armies at Salamis and Platea, Xerxes returned to rule Persia from a safe home base. He continued many great building projects that his father was not able to complete due to wars. In 456 BCE, one of his bodyguards murdered him, but his dynasty was saved and the Achaemenids were able to retain control of the thrown.

**1. Add the locations of battles listed below to your map, and then add the dates to your timeline for Xerxes reign.**

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| **Battle / Outcome** | | **Description** | |
| Egypt | | Successfully re-conquers Egypt in 485 BCE | |
| Planning of Greek Wars | | For three years, from 483-480 BCE, Xerxes makes preparations for the invasion of Greece to get revenge for the Ionian Revolt. He collects an army of over 1 million men from difference nationalities to invade Greece. He builds a bridge across the Hellespont (between modern Turkey and Greece) and begins he invasion | |
| Victories over Greek Armies (Thermopylae, Athens) | | 480 BCE spring invasion of Greece. Early victories at Thermopylae, Artemisium, Athens. I able to destroy the Spartan advance and burn down Athens. | |
| Major Losses to Greek Navy (Salamis between Athens and Sparta) | | 480 BCE autumn, His navy is lured into the straights at Salamis and is destroyed, leaving his army with no supplies or sea support. | |
| End of Greek Invasion | | Persian army under Mardonius is defeated at Plataea in 479 BCE. | |
| Xerxes’ End | | 465 BCE Xerxes is murdered by a palace guard. | |