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Monticello, the
Home of Thomas Jefferson

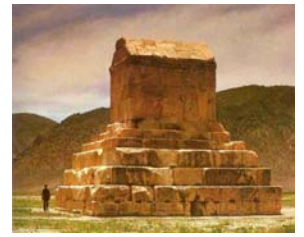


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Mausoleum of Cyrus the Great
ca. 530 BC *

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 ostensibly diametric opposites 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 the Great'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, with their inmost beliefs, values and convictions. The *Cyropaedia* describes Cyrus's character, that made him into an ideal ruler. It is an exposition of timeless qualities of leadership. Thus it has since served as the World's manual of leadership, from Alexander, Scipio, Cicero, Caesar, Machiavelli who read and drew inspiration from it, so on to our times. In the estimation of Peter Drucker, widely recognized as the father of modern management science, this first book on leadership remains the best book. 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

There is perhaps no more fitting appellation for Thomas Jefferson than the *Apostle of Americanism*, which he has aptly been called. 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 'the *Land of Aryans*'. In the course of time the term *Aryana* underwent phonetic changes to evolve to today's *Iran*. "Aryan" had no physical connotations prior to its re-adoption in Europe as a self-designation in the 19th century and meant, simply, noble. In India, ancient cousins of the Iranians also referred to themselves as "Aryan", in Sanskrit meaning noble. In the language of their distant cousins in far west Europe, Old Irish, its cognate *eire* likewise meant noble.

In due course in the southern and warmer reaches of *Aryana*, called *Parsa*, being 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 to-day. Cyrus then was also the gentile savior of the Jews and other nations and tribes hitherto in a state of captivity. Cyrus fulfilled the function of *Anointed of the Lord* (Isaiah 45), a rendition in English of Hebrew *mashiah*, or Messiah.

The central link between the Founders of America and Cyrus and his successors, the *Cyropaedia*, is augmented by the accounts of the Bible and other sources, including inscriptions remaining of Cyrus's successors, such as those that Darius commissioned to be hewn 'in Aryan'³ and in other languages. The discovery and decipherment of inscriptions extant of Cyrus himself postdates the American Revolution. The proclamation of freedom on the Cyrus Cylinder, inscribed on a small clay tablet from ca. 537 BC, which has been on a tour in the US from the British Museum is regarded by many as the first draft and by some 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 fulfilled. 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"⁴ - 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 the vizier, nearly a thousand years ago, said: "kingship and religion are like two brothers; whenever disturbance breaks out in the country, religion likewise suffers."⁵ 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. The older, native heritage represents the beliefs and values of the Iranian people, and is in dire need of expression in their government for the sake of world peace and for Iran's own sake.

Cyrus's rule as related in the *Cyropaedia* and other classical sources, in contrast to that of the Babylonians and others before him, is secular. The separation of church and state and freedom of religion under him is augmented by records of his successors such as Darius, which had caught Jefferson's attention. In his extensive studies in various fields of knowledge and inquiry, and in his initial process of developing as an intellectual, then progressing to a polymath, Jefferson made notes of the passages in the various books he read that were of interest to him, passages manifestly he knew he wanted to refer to again, much the same as scholars reading innumerable books do today but using copying machines and cameras. This collection became Jefferson's *Commonplace Book*. He, as scholars today, did not record what he already knew or was obvious, but in the main made note of what he felt he was apt to forget later. The separation of church and state were of interest to him and to Voltaire, whose great work on history, *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, was standard reading for intellectuals in the Age of Enlightenment, going through no less than 27 editions. Note no. 852 in Jefferson's *Commonplace Book* which he took from Voltaire's *Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations*, indicates his interest in the issue of separation of church and state, in the aftermath of invasion and forcible conversion of Iran to Islam. The Magi, a number of whom Matthew reports went bearing gifts to find the infant Jesus, were priests of Zoroastrianism:

"Then that ancient religion of the Magi fell, that the conqueror Darius had respected, as he never disturbed the religion of conquered peoples. The Magi regarded their religion as the most ancient and the most pure. The knowledge that they had of mathematics, astronomy and of history augmented their enmity toward the conquerors the Arabs, who were so ignorant. They [the Magi] could not abandon their religion, consecrated for so many centuries. Then most of them retreated to the extremities of Persia and India. It is there that they live today, under the name Gaurs or Guebres."⁶

Gaur, or *Guebre*, is a derogatory term in Islam meaning infidel,⁷ referring to Zoroastrians. An authority on Jefferson's *Commonplace Book*, Gilbert Chinard of France, who then became a

professor at Johns Hopkins and eventually at Princeton, has worked out the range of dates for Jefferson's notes in his *Commonplace Book*. Chinard writes : "it seems that we may assume with reasonable certainty : that the bulk of the *Commonplace Book* represents the notes taken by Jefferson on law, political science, and religion during his formative years."

Jefferson drafted the *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom* in 1777, which through Madison's close collaboration with Jefferson later became a cornerstone of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution. Thomas Jefferson's *Statute for Religious Freedom in Virginia* firmly established the separation of Church and State. Initially, in 1779-82, since it would deprive vested interest of its privileges, the statute encountered opposition in the Virginia legislature. Later, while Jefferson was ambassador to France, he was working closely with his longtime friend Madison, their letters coded such that the British would not be able to spy on them along the route. Madison managed to gather the support of minority sects and get the statute passed through the Virginia legislature ca. 1786. The prevalence and usage of the phrase *separation of church and state* to-day in modern English and in other languages in and outside the US may be traced back to that 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.⁸ 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. Raby observes : "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."⁹ This has been validated by another feat of forensic analysis by the Chief Curator of Rare Books at the Library of Congress, Marc Dimunation, who found the ink consistent with Jefferson's other markings.¹⁰

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,¹¹ 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 Scottish mentor at the College of William and

Mary, in the early 1760s, William Small. Jefferson later expressed how deep his gratitude was to William Small, and regarded him “as a father”¹².

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.”¹³

Her ‘history of Cyrus’ refers to the *Cyropaedia*. Cyrus and the Persians were Zoroastrians, the ethical religious belief system taught by Zarathustra. The beliefs and values of Zoroastrianism survive among the people of Iran in the form of Persianized Islam, with its tenets markedly different from those of orthodox Islam (though this is not to be sought in the politics). Zoroastrianism also survives, albeit in small numbers, in its own right, in Iran, India and around the world. Centuries after the invasions of Iran and forcible conversion to Islam, which began in the 600s AD, groups of Iranians emigrated to India, much as the Pilgrims to the shores of America, and have since been called Parsees, or Persians. Their population is estimated at over one hundred thousand. There are also Zoroastrians in Iran itself, their numbers being smaller than those in India. There are a few thousand in the US, in Canada, in Europe and smaller numbers in other countries. While conversion of Moslems to any faith is prohibited within Islamic countries, regarded as apostasy and punishable by death, there have been modern conversions outside the realm of Islam. One example was Charles D. Poston (1825-1902) ‘Father of Arizona’, who, upon travelling to see the Parsees in the 1860s and learning about their religion, adopted Zoroastrianism. Of Zoroastrianism Poston wrote : “the great Zoroaster had promulgated the sublime laws announced to him by the “Bright shining essence of light” for the government of mankind”¹⁴.

Being free to practice their religion and having a strong work ethic, the Parsees prospered in India. Their experiences further enabled them to sympathize with those in need. Once refugees, they have been able to practice philanthropy. In the American Civil War, the Parsees sent generous aid to the Sanitary Commission, as reports Alfred Martin: “As for the generosity of the Parsees, it is unrivalled, extending far beyond the limits of Bombay. It went to Russia at the time of the Crimean War, when Florence Nightingale described the Parsee community as “the salt of the Bombay community”. It went to France in 1859, when the terrible inundations necessitated the supplementing of local aid by foreign help, and the Parsees were among the first to respond and among the most liberal of the contributors. It went to the United States at the time of the Civil War, our Sanitary Commission receiving a handsome remembrance from the followers of Zoroaster in India, sent, they said, because of their sympathy with the suffering soldiers and the Cause of Freedom and union.”¹⁵

The aid, intended for both sides, was fated to end up in the industrial, well organized North with its more developed infrastructure and lines of command and communications. The agrarian South had fewer such means and was unable to plan and organize its logistics as well in order to stay even with the North. The South lacked a sanitary commission or supply lines on a par with the North.

The core of the Zoroastrian religion was agrarianism, as the effective means for man in each generation of producing an honest livelihood, without appropriating from others, directly or indirectly. Washington, Jefferson, Madison were Southerners and planters, and even Dr. Franklin the scientist regarded farming as “the most honorable of all Employments, in my opinion, as being the most useful in itself, and rend’ring the Man most independent.”¹⁶ Jefferson proclaimed that “those that labor in the earth are the chosen people of God.”¹⁷ Washington was in full concurrence with them, so much so that the roots of agriculture in America became embedded more than ever before and formed the economic base of the United States. The ideology of agrarianism went further, and virtually became incarnate in the South.

Jefferson possessed also the other works of Xenophon, one of which, *Oikonomicus*, rendered into English as an ‘essay in estate management’, describes those who later succeeded Cyrus. In those days leaders and emissaries from various nations went to Persia to seek aid, be it economic, political or military, as they journey today to the United States. In a Socratic dialog in *Oikonomicus* Xenophon reports how to the astonishment of the Spartan leader who had gone to see the Persians seeking aid in Sparta’s long conflict with Athens, he found the Persian nobility proud to garden with their own hands. The traits of character of Cyrus and his successors are directly traceable to Zoroastrianism.

Jefferson, in his embassy to France and in many ways, was successor and heir to Benjamin Franklin, senior-most among the first tier of the Founding Fathers, to whom he referred as the ‘immortal Doctor Franklin’. Jefferson became a polymath, much as Benjamin Franklin. When Jefferson went to Paris as ambassador (1785-89), he found Ben Franklin the most respected man in France, foreign or native. Earlier, when Benjamin Franklin had been in London (1757-1775), he had found the *Avesta*, the corpus of holy books of Zoroastrianism, just a year after it was published in Paris by Anquetil-Duperron (1771), a French scholar of the orient who had spent about six years among the Parsees in India learning about their faith, and together translating the *Avesta* into French. It was the first time the *Avesta* became accessible in Europe, in any European language.

It is remarkable that nearly a century before the “brilliant young German philologist,”¹⁸ Martin Haug, made the discovery that it was the Gathas within the *Avesta* that were the words of Zoroaster himself and among the oldest parts, Benjamin Franklin, among all the matters, scientific

and political, that his mind was occupied with, had reached a similar conclusion, as stated in his letter to the president of Yale University Ezra Stiles: “Dear Sir : There is lately published in Paris a work entitled *Zend-Avesta* . . . I have cast my Eye over the religious part; it seems to contain a nice morality, mixed with abundance of prayers, ceremonies, and observances. If you desire to have it, I will procure it for you. There is no doubt of its being a genuine translation of the books at present deemed sacred, as the writings of Zoroaster, by his followers; but perhaps some of them are of later date, though ascribed to him.”¹⁹ Franklin ends the letter informing Stiles how Henry Marchant, who was then visiting him from Rhode Island, having been referred to him by Stiles, “understanding you are curious on the Subject of the Eastern ancient Religions, concludes to send you the Book.”²⁰

Jefferson, as with fellow Founding Fathers, being Deists, Unitarians and products of the Age of Reason and then of Enlightenment, took it upon himself to go through the Bible and produce an edited version of the New Testament bereft of what was seen then as its miracles and mythology which had gone unquestioned by many over the ages, but on the other side of the spectrum troubled intellectuals, leading many to adopt the ‘*irreligion of thinking men*’. This became known as the Jefferson Bible. Jefferson had meant to carry out the same for the Old Testament, but this being a long undertaking, and his attention needed to numerous other projects and issues, he lamented lacking the time to do so. Zoroastrianism as taught by its prophet, and in its later teachings maintaining consistency with his teachings, once its starting dogma, of the existence of the Wise Lord, is accepted, is a rational belief system, appealing to intellectuals. The Jefferson Bible and in particular its ethics correspond to and bear a close resemblance to the teachings of Zoroaster. The traits of character of Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia* derive from the principles of Zoroastrianism.

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.”²¹ America’s founders saw virtue as essential to the formation and subsequent development and preservation of the Republic they were founding. 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. George Washington, upon ending his second term as President (1797), in a letter advised his brother in-law: “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.”²² Benjamin Franklin preached much the same. 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.”²³ Xerxes, successor to Darius, wrote similarly. The tone of his statement similar and traceable to Cyrus’s final address and will in the *Cyropaedia*.

Of the two main students of Socrates whose works are extant and through whose works, aside from minor fragments from others, Socrates is known at all, Plato and Xenophon, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and many others over the course of history held Xenophon in far greater esteem than Plato, for his clarity and forthrightness and for the application of philosophy to practice.

John Adams adored Xenophon, whom he regarded as “my favourite author, that ancient and immortal husbandman, philosopher, politician and general.”²⁴ 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, his mission mainly to counter French influence under Napoleon. He was 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. 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 writes:

“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.”²⁵

Xenophon describes Cyrus in this respect and how he was perceived by 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.”²⁶

Jefferson, early on as US minister to France, 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 U.S. *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 since served as an aid 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 in 1787, the year most delegates from the colonies 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 such as that in ancient Athens where a mob tried and executed Socrates, and a *republic*, what the founders meant the United States to be:

"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."²⁷

John Adams stated much the same. Madison wrote a treatise showing the failures of prior forms of government, in which he exempted that of the Persians. The Founding Fathers 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, in words that seem as though just written in our age:

"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."²⁸

In coming to know the character of Cyrus and the Founding Fathers closely, it becomes manifest that they, in particular Jefferson and Cyrus, were kindred spirits. One spirit, it seems, recognized this kinship and became inspired by the other, and the results then became history. The Founding

Fathers, not knowing initially whether their experiment would be successful, sought a model that was close to their own, that validated their ideas by virtue of its success in the past. This they found in ancient Persia. Thus Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum, who with his team, and colleagues at the Sackler Museum and elsewhere, has vied 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."²⁹

President Harry Truman, coming from humble origins, was a self-educated man. The Hebrew Old Testament ends with the decree of Cyrus to rebuild Jerusalem and restore the Jews to their home. 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 establishing Israel as a state.³⁰

The Old testament ends with the recognition of Cyrus by Yahweh and the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. David Ben Gurion, principal founder of the modern state of Israel, wrote of the ending of the Old Testament: "Beyond question Cyrus was deserving of these eulogies."³¹ Cyrus and his fellow Persians were saviors of the Jewish nation then, 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, and 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 has done to-day. The Persians assigned to it a Jewish governor, Nehemiah, from among the now Persian Jews. The prophet Second Isaiah, regarded universally and continuously since then as the greatest prophet of the Old Testament, extols and names Cyrus not only as Messiah but 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.³²

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 . . . A much more important belief that the Jews borrowed from Zoroastrianism was their changed conviction about the coming of the Messiah . . . From the Persians the Jews learned that they, too, awaited a *Saoshyant*, a Redeemer. But the Redeemer of the Persians was not to be just a national hero who would bring glory and power to the Persians. Their *Saoshyant* would redeem all of mankind from the powers of the Evil Spirit. The Jews, too, began to think of their Messiah, their Redeemer, as more than just a national hero who would restore the

Jewish kingdom to its glory . . . By the time the Jews returned to Palestine and, with the help of King Cyrus, rebuilt their Holy Temple in Jerusalem, their religion had greatly changed.”³³

Initially the Jews would not return. They sought to establish a lobby at the Persian court to further their interests. In our days AIPAC in the United States is but a re-creation of the Jewish lobby at the Persian court. The Jews’ homeland had become but a wasteland after their fifty years of captivity in Babylon, as it had been in many parts, prior to 1948. Implementing the decree of Cyrus the Persians led, financed, provided security and supplies for the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of the Jews to their homeland. Arabs and others sought to undermine the process of re-building Jerusalem. The Persians, further, decreed the collection and publication of the law, and the books that came to be the Bible, which was carried out ca. 440 BC by the Persian Jews led by Ezra. While the Persians had the full power to exert their will, their decrees did not compel anyone to do such work. Rather, in respecting individual liberty, they sought volunteers for its implementation. Thus the last words in the Hebrew Bible (II Chronicles 36) are: “Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up.”

The empire that Cyrus founded, the *Achaemenian* empire, lasted from about 550 to 330 BC. During this period, marriages occurred between Persian men and Jewish women. As men conducted the battles and accordingly fell in battle, their numbers were reduced below that of women in society. Thus a man could have several wives. Conversely, several women would be dependent on one man. Jewish women had entered Persian harems, the epitome of which is the story of Esther the Jewish Queen of Persia from the Bible. The Aryan tradition of descent was patrilinear, while the Semitic tradition was matrilinear, and there being no conflict, the children were legitimate heirs on both sides. They were accepted and loved. They inherited beliefs from both parents, both traditions. The Persian Jews formed the polity of the new moral, messianic and spiritual faith we know as Judaism, from which in due course emerged a number of sects, including Christianity. Although Solomon, David, Moses and Abraham predated the new religious beliefs, they would assume roles in a largely retroactive sense in the broader context of Judaism. As Arnold Toynbee, University of London notes of the Persian Empire: “it deliberately maintained complete religious toleration . . . Consequently there was an active intercourse between local religions in and after the Achaemenian Age, and Zoroastrianism eventually had a great influence on Judaism, just because it was not propagated by force. The origins of Zoroastrianism and Judaism in their present form, and of Christianity and Islam too, can be traced back to the religious ferment in the First Persian Empire.”³⁴

In recent times in the West, Zoroaster, or to use his Persian name *Zarathustra*, has been known, or rather, been misunderstood, through the works of Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, in which his

depiction of Zoroaster is the opposite of what Zoroaster was and taught. As Nietzsche later clarified in his autobiography *ecce homo*, or how he [philosophically] became what he is, morality, what Zarathustra taught, was what Nietzsche, through his logical analysis sought to nullify. Nietzsche : “I have not been asked, as I should have been asked, what the name of Zarathustra means to me, in my capacity as the first immoralist; for what distinguishes this Persian from all others in the past is the very fact that he was the exact opposite of an immoralist. Zarathustra was the first to see in the struggle between good and evil the essential cycle in the working of things. The translation of morality into the realm of metaphysics, as force, cause, as end in itself, is his work. . . . The self-overcoming of morality through truthfulness, the moralist’s self-overcoming of himself into his opposite— into me—that is what the name Zarathustra means to me.”³⁵ Nietzsche’s ideology was later adopted by the Nazis.

As Xenophon describes in the *Cyropaedia*, the qualities of leadership of Cyrus were such that they rose above nationalism, sectarianism and partisanship. Thus he was able to draw together disparate peoples and nations, from various parts of the then known world, many of whom were situated so far apart that they did not know or could not meet each other, some of whom were at odds, some in enmity, some at war with each other, yet “all they asked was to be guided by his judgment and his alone.”³⁶

As has been noted by Neil MacGregor and others, often leaders from across the political spectrum have identified with Cyrus, ranging from US President Truman to Prime Minister Ben Gurion of Israel, and in Iran itself from the late Shah to those who overthrew him, such as Ahmadinejad. The same is observed regarding Zoroastrianism. After World War II 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, while promoting the culture, preservation and advancement of Nordic peoples and their purity of thought, had not sought this at the expense of extinction of others. This is in part because he was inspired by Joseph Arthur, Count Gobineau, who regarded the Jews as an intelligent people. Besides Cyrus and Darius, we see from Jefferson’s notes that he also showed a keen interest in the government of ancient Anglo-Saxons. Gunther regarded the Germans, as many other populations, as ethnically diverse. He saw the drive toward imperialism as the cause, in the end, of decay among Nordic peoples, and his opinion in this regard casts doubt as to whether he supported the idea of a Third Reich. At the end of World War II, after a detention of about three years during which his role was investigated, Gunther was exonerated and set free. He wrote in 1927 with deep convictions regarding Zoroastrianism, alternatively referred to (after *Ahura Mazda*, the Wise Lord) as *Mazdaism*:

“In Zarathustra’s teaching that lofty ethical sense characterizing the old Persians rises to sublime heights . . . Mazdaism, which this great religious founder brought his people, is important for the understanding of the Nordic spirit . . . 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 behavior. Zarathustra’s teachings are set forth in the Gatha songs of the Avesta . . . 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 . . . The more Mazdaism discloses itself to research, the clearer do we see the true greatness of the Persians and their culture, which stands as an equal beside that of Greece and of Rome, while ethically it is above them. Gobineau it was who first pointed out how little our ‘general education’ knows of Persia compared with its real importance.”³⁷

Though perhaps not immediately perceived by an unknowing or untrained observer of Iran, 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 media in the West being of the politics, the Iranian people’s culture and values are still deeply rooted in the ideals of Cyrus and Zoroaster. This is partly because “the Persians were Persians first and Moslems afterwards” (Richard Frye, 1951).³⁸ Though little known or covered by 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.”³⁹

Just as the Thirteen Colonies then needed the help of a sympathetic great power, France, to succeed in their quest to be free and be able to express their values in government, so does Iran to-day. But contrary to what some have 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. Rather, the bona fide, steadfast political support of the US and its encouragement of allies to do so is what is needed and what would fulfill that purpose. Moral support, words, and diplomacy, can achieve what cannot be accomplished by way of arms.

THE AUTHORS



PHOTO SOURCE: KASHI & NIRVANA ANOOSHEH

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 in 1920. 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 or no 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 his 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 together closely. His studies and research were inter-disciplinary and included pre-Islamic history, Persian literature, Zoroastrianism, Judea-Christianity, biblical history, comparative religion, linguistics and Indo-European studies and later included 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 more extensive biography of Dr. Frye may be found at: <http://richardfrye.org/biographies.html> Their research, of which this 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.

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FOOTNOTE TO THE PHOTOS

* Although Jefferson's beloved Monticello (www.monticello.org) near Charlottesville, VA needs little introduction, the mausoleum of Cyrus may need some illumination from the past. Alexander admired Cyrus and was an avid reader of the *Cyropaedia*. The ancient 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 Alexander's advisor and military engineer, Arrian reports of the tomb of Cyrus:

"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."⁴⁰

Plutarch (ca. 85 AD) reports of Alexander's visit to the tomb of Cyrus:

"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."⁴¹

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