

# Cyrus conquers Babylon

**F**rom the Cyrus cylinder:

Marduk, king of the gods [of Babylon] took pity on all the settlements whose temples were in ruins, and the population of the land of Sumer and Akkad who had become like corpses. Looking for a just king, he took the hand of Cyrus, king of Anshan, and proclaimed him king over everything ... Marduk, the great lord, was pleased with Cyrus' fine deeds and great heart, and ordered that he should go to Babylon. He had him take the road to Babylon, and walked beside him, like a friend. His vast army, whose number could not be counted, flowed like water in a river, marching fully-armed beside him.

He had Cyrus enter without fighting or battle; he saved his city Babylon from hardship. He handed over to him Nabonidus, the king [of Babylon], who did not fear him. All the people [of Babylon], all the nobles and governors bowed down before him and kissed his feet,

rejoicing over his kingship, and their faces shone. They blessed and praised the name of the lord through whose help all were rescued from death and saved from distress and hardship.

Cyrus continues in the first person:

When I entered Babylon, as bringer of peace, I took up residence in the palace amid celebration and rejoicing. Marduk gave me as my destiny the generosity of heart of one who loves Babylon. I worshipped him every day. My huge forces patrolled Babylon peacefully and the whole of Sumer and Akkad had nothing to fear. I made the city safe and all its temples. I soothed the weariness of the population, who had suffered a fate they had not deserved. I freed them from their bonds. Marduk was pleased with what I had done, and he blessed me, Cyrus, the king who fears him, and my son Cambyses, and all my troops. All kings [from a long list of places] brought valuable tribute and kissed my feet. I sent back [to a long list of places] the gods

The Cyrus cylinder (about the size of a rugby ball).



whose temples had become dilapidated, and rebuilt their shrines. I collected together all their people, and returned them to their settlements.

May all the gods I returned to their temples ask for a long life for me, and mention my good deeds and say to Marduk, my lord: 'May Cyrus, the king who fears you, and Cambyses his son...' [hole in cylinder here]

Every day I increased by ... geese, two ducks, and ten pigeons the former offerings of geese, ducks and pigeons. I strengthened the great wall of Babylon. I completed the quay which an earlier king had started.

Herodotus, as usual, has some more interesting details: there was a great river (a tributary of the Euphrates) blocking Cyrus'

approach. He had no boats, and when one of his favourite horses was swept away by the current, he decided to punish the river 'so that in the future women could wade across without getting their knees wet'. He had his army dig channels to drain the water out, using shovels, and they all just walked across.

## Questions & discussion

1. The Cyrus cylinder has been called the first ever declaration of human rights. Look again at what was written on the cylinder. Is it fair to call it a declaration of human rights?
2. What do Cyrus' words tell us about his religious beliefs?
3. Do you think Cyrus would have been a popular ruler? Give reasons for your answer.

The Ishtar Gate, the gate to the inner city of Babylon. Details include lions (below), aurochs (an ancestor of cattle, now extinct), and mythological animals including the sirrush (a hybrid of cat, bird and snake). Which can you spot?

