

## Abstract

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### **Patterns of conquest and patterns of construction: a new look at the birth of Achaemenid art and architecture**

Professor David STRONACH

*University of California, Berkeley, USA*

It is incontestable that Achaemenid architecture finds its first monumental expression at Pasargadae, the capital and last resting place of Cyrus the Great (559-530 BC). But the exact date of Cyrus' major buildings at Pasargadae has long been a source of contention. According to Ernst Herzfeld, who excavated at Pasargadae in 1928, and who wrote about the site throughout much of his life, all the main structures were built by Cyrus in a single burst of concentrated activity during the first decade of his long reign, i.e. between 559 and 550 when he was possibly not yet totally independent and when the limits of his rule are not likely to have extended much beyond the borders of modern-day Fars.

In advancing this chronology Herzfeld appears to have taken at least part of his inspiration from what he saw to be the similar career path of Ardashir I, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, who is thought to have begun to build his capital at Firuzabad, also in Fars, while he was still a vassal of the last Parthian king. But however attractive Herzfeld found such conceivable links between two epic figures of early Iranian history, it has to be said that his high chronology for the monuments at Pasargadae was anything but beneficial to the smooth progress of early Achaemenid studies.

In this connection it is only since the middle years of the 1960's that contemporary scholars, such as Carl Nylander, have been able to show that the great stone buildings at Pasargadae made extensive use of Lydo-Ionian construction techniques such as could only have become available to Cyrus following his capture of Sardis, the capital of Lydia, in or near 546 BC. With this new chronological marker in hand we can of course dismiss the thesis that Cyrus built nothing of note during the last twenty years of his reign; and we can begin, at long last, to explore the extent to which the earliest monumental examples of Achaemenid art and architecture can be seen to reflect the overarching pattern of Cyrus' far-flung military conquests from 550 onwards.