

Asia Minor. Then he turned south and conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.

This was an important date in ancient history since it marked the end of the first great empire and the establishment of the second -- the Persian empire.

After capturing Babylon the Persians marched to the east and conquered all the tribes as far as the Punjab, even including the northwestern portion of India.

At Cyrus' death the Persian empire embraced an area at least three times as large as that formerly ruled by Nebuchadnezzar and included at least twice as many people. Cambyses, the son of Cyrus, conquered Egypt and for a century Egypt was part of the Persian empire.

In 334 B.C. the Persian empire, which had lasted two centuries, appeared to be at the very height of its strength. Then a brilliant young Macedonian, Alexander the Great, using the excellent army developed by his father, Philip, king of Macedon, along with many additional soldiers from Greece itself, attacked the Persian empire and completely subjugated it in a series of skillful campaigns.

This marked the end of the Persian empire. The following period, in which most of its area, along with Greece and Macedonia, was controlled by men of Greek language and culture, is called the Greek or Hellenistic empire.

After twelve years of constant fighting, during which he had conquered this tremendous area, Alexander suddenly died. His generals expected to maintain the vast empire as a unit, but there was no clear evidence as to who should be its ruler. Possible candidates included an idiot half-brother of Alexander and Alexander's posthumous son. Soon the Macedonian generals were fighting for supremacy and in the process every member of Alexander's family was murdered. Within a few years each of five principal contenders held a large part of the empire and was struggling to obtain control over all of it. The fortunes of various antagonists rose and fell, and some were eliminated. Eventually three of them established lasting dynasties that ruled large sections of the empire, while a number of smaller sections became independent kingdoms. All these