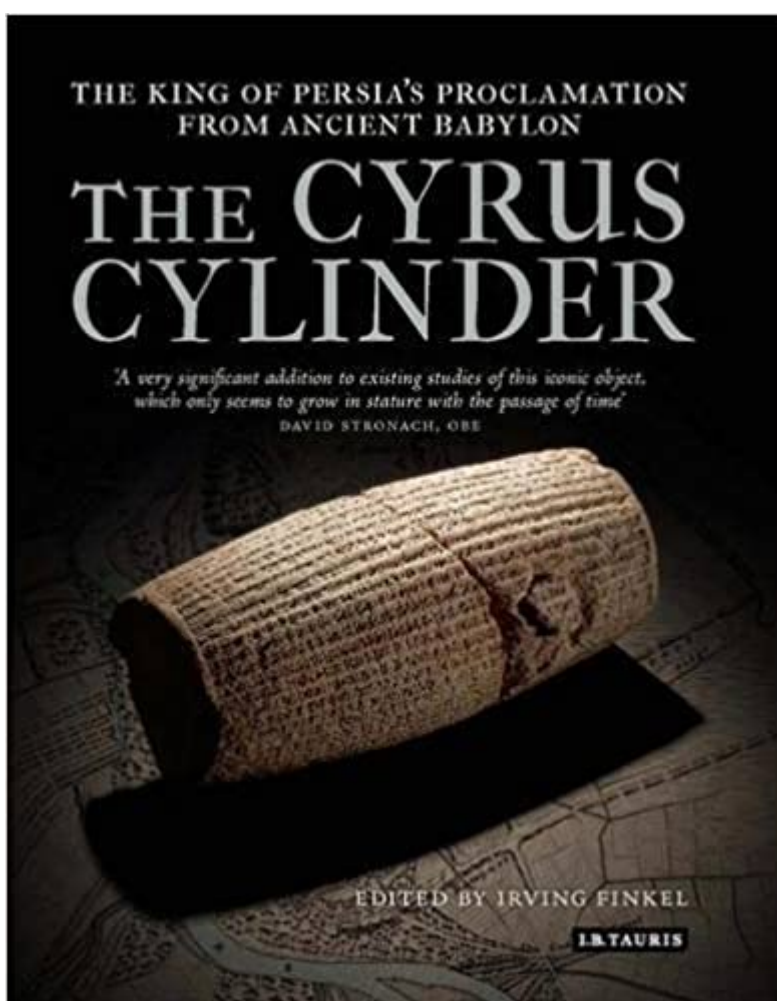


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# The Cyrus Cylinder: The King Of Persia's Proclamation From Ancient Babylon



## Synopsis

Some historical artifacts are destined forever to alter how the ancient world is perceived. The unearthing in today's Iraq (in 1879) of a clay cylinder-shaped decree from Cyrus the Great, founder of the Achaemenid dynasty of Persia, stands in the same tradition of game-changing discoveries from antiquity as Hammurabi's famous law code or the intact tomb of the boy-king Tutankhamun. For the Cyrus Cylinder contains in microcosm the whole history of its period. Inscribed with an account of the conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE by the Persian King, it records an event which launched one of the greatest imperial adventures in history. It describes Cyrus' capture and deposition of Nabonidus, last native Babylonian ruler (represented by the Cylinder text as an oppressor of his own people) and proclaims the Persian as a liberator. His annexation of Babylon was to become the platform upon which the Achaemenid military machine built its later vast imperium. But the Cylinder is more than an ancient exercise in propaganda. It has also been called the world's first declaration of human rights, setting out the decree by which Cyrus freed the Jews from captivity in Babylon. This important volume is the first to discuss the Cylinder and its remarkable history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The Cyrus Cylinder is one of the most important records of antiquity, from the greatest of the near eastern empires: the Achaemenid Persian. The Cylinder is fascinating for the story of its discovery, its reconstruction and later history, even its forgery on Chinese bone. This presentation of it by several experts, fully illustrated and in color, offers a great deal for any reader engaged by how we

reconstruct antiquity, as well as for dedicated scholars." - Sir John Boardman, FBA, Emeritus Lincoln Professor of Classical Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford

"The Cyrus Cylinder represents a very significant addition to existing studies of this iconic object, which only seems to grow in stature with the passage of time. With reference to Irving Finkel's observations, it is of great interest to learn that the text existed in more than one format. That is to say that two newly identified fragments from a conventional tablet show that Cyrus' exceptional message was not only written on barrel-shaped cylinders that were intended for interment in the foundations of major structures, but that it was also written on large flat tablets that were very possibly intended for public display. In line with certain statements in the Book of Ezra, this finding could also lend new authority to a supposition that Cyrus issued separate proclamations addressed to separate components of the population of Babylon." - David Stronach, OBE, Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Archaeology, University of California, Berkeley

'Few ancient testimonies have had as fascinating a history or as controversial an interpretation as Cyrus's building inscription from Babylon. The more it is used as a historical source and/or a political tool, the more grateful we are not only to have an edition of the text based on state-of-the-art research but also reliable information on the historical background of Cyrus's message and on the history of the artefact itself.' - Josef Wiesehöfer, Professor of Ancient History, Kiel University

I. L. Finkel is Assistant Keeper of Ancient Mesopotamian Script, Languages and Cultures in the Department of the Middle East at the British Museum, UK. He is co-author (with M J Seymour) of *Babylon: Myth and Reality* (2008), and editor of *Ancient Board Games in Perspective* (2007).

This artifact found in the wall of a prominent religious building in the ruined ancient city of Babylon, in current Iraq, is a 539 BC Babylonian cuneiform inscription by Cyrus II, King of the Persian Empire, declaring his bloodless conquest of Babylon the will of god Marduk. He continues to pound his chest, spelling out his titles, including 'king of the universe,' his royal lineage, and his release of various ethnic groups held in bondage by Babylonian King Nabonidus. Incredibly, I could not find the exact dimensions of the Cyrus Cylinder in the narrative, but there is a photograph of it with a scale. It is not really a cylinder but barrel-shaped, slightly swollen in the middle. My careful measurements reveal a length of 19.13 cm (7.60 inches), the center diameter 8.62 cm (3.39 inches) and the tapered end diameters 6.72 cm (2.65 inches). The cylinder appears as three glued-together fragments, two larger ones received by the British Museum from the discoverer in 1879, and the smaller one, only authenticated in 1971 when located within the

Yale Babylonian Collection. In the "Discovery" chapter, mind-boggling artifact inventories and shipment schedules confuse not only the reader, but, apparently, also the involved archaeologists and British Museum curators. However, it is clear that Hormuzd Rassam, the British Museum's leader of excavations at Babylon, departed the dig site, leaving one of his overseers, Dawood Toma, in charge, who discovered the famous "true cylinder without breaks"; small February-March 1879. Toma included this unbroken Cyrus Cylinder with other artifacts in cases which were carried by donkey from Babylon to Baghdad, unpacked by the Baghdad Consulate, cleared by an Ottoman representative, repacked by a local merchant and placed on a ship to London. All cases were inspected by British customs and delivered to the British Museum, where the cylinder was found broken with pieces missing. The author assumes that someone in this chain of transporting the cylinder is guilty of intentionally breaking the cylinder and keeping some fragments. During this period, antiquity dealers believed that multiple pieces of an intact discovery would fetch a total higher price than the unbroken original. The British Museum has almost continuously exhibited the Cyrus Cylinder, including the recent 2007 opening of the Rahim Irvani gallery for Ancient Iran. In 1971, it was loaned to Iran for their celebration of Cyrus II founding the Persian Empire 2500 years earlier, which is also the origin of the Iranian calendar. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi established a tent city near Persepolis to accommodate 600 members of royalty and leaders from around the world. Unfortunately, the chapters on displaying the cylinder in the British Museum and Iranian locations are filled with uninteresting logistics. However, the last chapter, a Persian Perspective, is an excellent historical analysis of Babylonia, Assyria, and Persia from the seventh century BC through the reign of Cyrus II, starting in 550 BC. His descendants would rule the Persian Achaemenid Empire, which, at its maximum, extended from Libya to the Indus Valley, until its conquest by Alexander the Great in 330 BC.

great book about the history of this discovery and translation help understand history a little better would recommend for anyone studying the old testament

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