

The rich plains of Media extended north as far as Armenia and bordered on the Caspian Sea; the capital was Ecbatana.

Persia was more mountainous and colder, and extended south to the Persian Gulf; for a long time its capital was Persopolis.

II. — The Median Empire. — 27. Of the primitive history of the Medes and Persians we have very little exact information; we know only that in the beginning these two nations were subject to the Assyrians. The Medes contributed to the fall of Nineveh in 788, and thus won their independence. Media then ruled Persia.

About 606, the king Cyaxares, who had organized the Median army, allied himself with the governor of Babylon, Nabopolassar, against Nineveh. After the destruction of this city, the two allies divided the provinces of the Assyrian Empire. Assyria proper fell to the share of Cyaxares and thus the Median Empire was founded.

His son and successor was Astyages, who ruled thirty-four years. During this long and peaceful reign the Medes lost their warlike spirit, consequently they were unable to repulse the Persians under Cyrus, who took Ecbatana and routed Astyages (560).

III. — The Persian Empire. — Cyrus. — 28. Cyrus, the great Persian conqueror, put an end to the Median Empire by forcing the inhabitants to acknowledge him as their king. He then took possession of Mesopotamia and other countries south of the Caucasus. Asia grew alarmed at the young conqueror's progress and a league was formed to stop his advance. The kings of Babylon and Lydia headed this league. War was carried on for almost ten years. At first the allies were victorious, but later Cræsus, king of Lydia, was defeated and his kingdom fell into the hands of Cyrus, who made of Cræsus a friend and counsellor.