

Among the foregoing dates, the three fives and three threes are the most important. They may be taken as the turning points of all ancient history. Cyrus did not erect the Persian Empire in a single year, nor did Alexander the Great overturn it in a year. But B. C. 555 and B. C. 333 are as exact as any single dates would be, and they are easily memorized.

B. C. 555, taken as a central date for the rise of the Persian Empire, may recall also the conquest of Egypt, which so rapidly followed its rise, and the fall of the great Assyrian State, which shortly preceded. Before B. C. 555, the great empires of the Nile and of the Tigris-Euphrates valley had pursued their course for centuries without progress and without essential change. Different dynasties had replaced one another in either valley; the area of external conquest had been expanded, diminished, or divided; but the East was always the East. Great material prosperity, the highest perfection of mechanical art, fabulous luxury, despotic power of the chief, willing slavery of the masses, are always the elements of its history. But the expansion of Persia to the shores of Asia Minor brought the East into conflict with a new system of military organism, governmental institutions, and individual culture—that of the Greeks.