



CROESUS

CROESUS, last king of Lydia (r. ca. 560-546 b.c.e.) and brother-in-law of [Astyages](#). When the Achaemenid Cyrus the Great (559-29 b.c.e.) defeated Astyages in 549 Croesus found a *casus belli* against the Persians (Herodotus, 1.74-75). He made an alliance with Babylonia, Egypt, and Sparta against Persia, but, without waiting for their aid, he occupied the Median province of [Cappadocia](#) and enslaved its people. Cyrus countered swiftly and confronted Croesus at Pteria, where a fierce but indecisive battle was fought (Herodotus, 1.75-77; cf. 1.83; cf. Polyaeus, 7.8, and Justin, 1.7.3, who named Cyrus the victor). Croesus then withdrew and disbanded his army of mercenary troops, not expecting Cyrus to campaign in the Anatolian highlands in winter and confident that by spring his own allies would have joined him. But Cyrus pursued the Lydian forces, took Croesus by surprise in the plain beside Sardis, defeated him, and captured him in the citadel a fortnight later (Herodotus, 1.79-85), probably in mid-December (Maspero, p. 617 n. 3).

The fate of Croesus shook the Greeks and became the subject of various traditions. According to one, Croesus followed the tradition of many fallen kings and chose self-immolation; on the “Myson amphora” in the Louvre, dating from ca. 500 b.c.e., Croesus is depicted enthroned on a blazing pyre, garlanded and holding the scepter and a libation bowl while a servant named Euthymos sets fire to the pyre (Smith, 1898; Jones; Maspero, p. 619 fig.; for other references, see Burkett, pp. 7-8). At approximately the same date Bacchylides (ode III, ll. 23-62; Fagles, pp. 8-9) vividly described Croesus’ attempt at self-immolation. Herodotus (1.86-90, 1.207) reported that Cyrus



finally spared Croesus and treated him as a royal counselor. Ctesias (7, epit. 30), followed by Pompeius Trogus (apud Justin, 1.7.7), added that Croesus was given a fief near Ecbatana. Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* 7.2.5ff.) and Nicolaus Damascenus (Rawlinson, pp. 369-71) embellished this version with more fantastic details. In the Armenian translation of Eusebius' *Chronicle* (cited by Burkert, p. 7) it was alleged that Cyrus killed Croesus, but this claim directly contradicts the Greek version of the same *Chronicle* and the testimonies of those texts based on Eusebius' source (Burkert, p. 7; Kaletsch, pp. 39-40). Finally, in the *Nabonidus Chronicle* it is recorded (col. II, ll. 15-18) that in Nabonidus' ninth regnal year (547-46 b.c.e.), "In the month of Nisannu (March-April), Kurš, King of Parsua, collected his army, and crossed the Tigris below Arbela. In the month of Aiaru (April-May) he [marched] to Lu He *dāku* its king, took its booty . . . put a garrison of his own there. Afterward his garrison and the king remained there" (Smith, 1924, p. 116; Oppenheimer, p. 306; Grayson, pp. 107-08). Many scholars have restored the first missing place name as Lu[-ud-du] = Lydia and explained *dāku* as "killed," thus concluding that Cyrus defeated and killed Croesus in 547 b.c.e. (for references, see Cargill, pp. 97-110; Burkert, pp. 5ff.). It has even been asserted (Dandamaev, p. 95) that, "according to Babylonian sources, Croesus was sentenced to death." Others have proposed Armenia (Maspero, p. 617 n. 2), Su . . . (König, p. 180), ZU-x . . . (see Grayson, p. 282), or Suhi (Hinz, p. 97) for the missing place name, and still others have translated *dāku* as "defeated, crushed," thus harmonizing the Babylonian document with the Greek tradition (for references, see Cargill, pp. 103ff.). But the translation as Lydia seems untenable here (Burkert, p. 6); according to the evidence, it is impossible that Lydia was the place referred to in the *Nabonidus Chronicle* (Shahbazi, pp. 188-89), for Sardis fell in December, rather than in May. Furthermore, it is unlikely that Cyrus put Croesus to death on a pyre, for in Persian tradition the pollution of fire and the slaying of captured princes (Herodotus, 3.15-16), unless they had rebelled, were expressly forbidden. Finally, the Greek sources explicitly state that Croesus survived Cyrus (Herodotus, 3.34ff.; Ctesias, 33; Shahbazi, pp. 207, 211). Certainly Croesus' family continued to flourish in Asia Minor: His grandson Pythius, son of Atys, gave Darius fabulous gifts yet remained "the wealthiest man in all the world" next to the Great King (Herodotus, 7.27; cf. von Prášek, p. 220 n. 6).

Croesus' fall cannot be dated with certainty, but 546 b.c.e. fits both the chronological data and other historical considerations. He pioneered the coining of gold and silver money (the *croeseid*), with the image of a lion



attacking a bull (coins and coinage; *daric*). The motif of the lion and bull remained a favorite subject in Persepolitan art, however.

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