

***Ancient Egypt: The Persian Period***  
**The British Museum**

**Egypt was brought under the domination of the Persian Empire by King Cambyses, who seized Memphis in 525 BC. Egypt became a 'satrapy' or province of Persia, contributing tax and tribute to the Persian king. Aramaic became the official language of the new administrative system.**

The Greek historian Herodotus, writing at around this time, described Cambyses as having nothing but contempt for the traditions of Egypt. His successors, however, were more sympathetic, cultivating Egyptian religion and art. Darius I (521-486 BC), for example, built a temple at Kharga, and had himself represented in statues in the traditional Egyptian style. Other documents of this period, particularly autobiographical inscriptions, indicate that while some officials were willing to serve the Persian occupiers, they were among the minority.

Resistance to Persian domination resulted in the restoration of native rule under the kings of the Twenty-eighth to the Thirtieth Dynasties (overall, about 404-343 BC). These rulers drew their inspiration from the kings of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty (about 664-525 BC) and were the last Egyptian kings of Egypt. Egypt was returned to Persian rule briefly before Alexander the Great defeated the Persian armies of Darius II. Alexander's victory marks the beginning of the Ptolemaic period.