

# “The Cyrus Cylinder & Ancient Persia: Charting a New Empire” Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art Summer 2013



The Cyrus Cylinder. Baked clay. Achaemenid, 539-538 B.C. Excavated in Babylon, Iraq, in 1879. British Museum 90920. © Trustees of the British Museum

The Iranian American Jewish Federation of NY (IAJF) proudly co-sponsored the exhibit of the Cyrus Cylinder, one of the most famous surviving icons from the ancient world. Excavated at Babylon in 1879, the Cylinder was inscribed in Babylonian cuneiform on the orders of Persian king Cyrus the Great after he captured Babylon in 539 B.C. It marks the establishment of Persian Rule and records how Cyrus restored shrines and allowed deported peoples to return home. Although not mentioned, it is thought to be at this time that the Jews returned to Jerusalem to build the Second Temple, as recorded in the Bible. The Cylinder and sixteen related works, all on loan from the British Museum, reflect the innovations initiated by Persian rule in the ancient Near East (550-331 B.C.).

A unique aspect of the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum was its display within the galleries of Ancient Near Eastern Art. The objects from the permanent collection – including the famous lions from Babylon – provided a stunning backdrop. Also on display were the works of art from the Metropolitan’s Department of Drawings and Prints and Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts that celebrated Cyrus and his legacy as a liberal and enlightened ruler.