



FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

Subject Category (circle one): Religion/Ceremony **History** Prayer Gathas
Comparative Religion Shahnameh

Age Group (circle one): PreK-K Grades 1-3 Grades 4-5 **Grades 6-8** Grades 9-12

Lesson # (if applicable): The Achaemenid Empire-Lesson 1

Subject of the Lesson: The Rise of the Achaemenids

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Lesson Objective: Student should have a general grasp of who Cyrus was, his lineage, and his coming to power.

Lesson Duration: approximately 1- 1.5 hours

Background Review:

Early settlements:

Long before the rise of Medes or Persia, the Near East's diversity of terrain, climate, and strategic location made it a favorable area for settlement and made it the crossroad of different cultures. As early as 3000 BCE or even earlier, the area received periodic waves of migrants especially from the steppes between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea in the North. These groups benefited from the prosperity of today's Iran and contributed to its cultural and ethnic diversity. The first political units to appear were small city states with supporting villages and farmlands in the vicinity. Eventually, these city states increased in size and became nations, forming armies and conquering nearby lands in which became an empire.

Mesopotamia:

The civilizations of Mesopotamia, around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in today's Iraq, influenced and were influenced by the civilizations of the Iranian Plateau. The main civilizations in Mesopotamia (Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian) in turn and at different times gained dominance over one another and others. Settlements in the Southwestern part of today's Iran such as Elam were under constant attack by the Mesopotamian civilizations at different times. In the last decades of 12th millennium BCE and the following 400 years, Southwestern Iran was under constant attack by these civilizations, the most powerful of which were the Assyrians. The Assyrians' methods were harsh and designed to inflict a lesson of "frightfulness". They used effective state and military strategies which the Persians later improved upon for their own advantage.



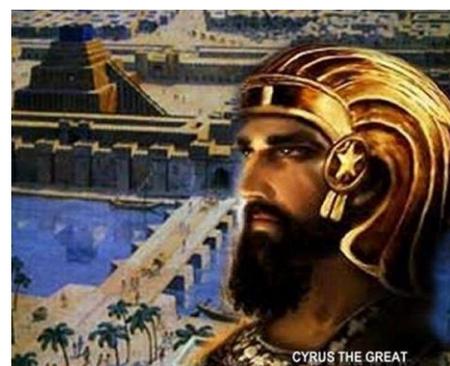
The Medes (607 B.C.E – 549 B.C.E)

Around 1000 to 1100 BCE (the time is much disputed) another wave of migration from the steppes in the North who identified themselves as Aryans descended into the Iranian plateau. The name Iran derives from *aryanam* meaning “land of the Aryans” which is what Aryans call their homeland. A group of these migrants, Mada whom we call the Medes settled in the Northwestern portion of the plateau in an area called Ecbatana (today’s Hamadan), and another group, Parsua, or Persian in English, settled in the southwestern part of the plateau in the old Elamite land of Pars (Fars).

The Medes eventually gained more power and in 625 BCE with Cyaxares II as the ruler, they joined forces with the Babylonians and defeated the Assyrians. The large Assyrian territory was divided between the victors making the Medes one of the main superpowers of the area.

The Achaemenians (550 B.C.E - 330 B.C.E)

During the Median rule, due to the lack of a central government, there were various small kingdoms including the Persian kingdom. Cyrus II (the Great) was a king of the Persians like his father, Cambyses, under the command of Astyages (last king of Medes) in Pasargadae. Due to a conflict of interest with Cyrus II, Astyages ordered his army to attack Persia and arrest Cyrus II. However, Astyages' forces were defeated, and he was captured by Cyrus' army. Cyrus II then went on to conquer the capital of the Medes, Ecbatana, in 549 B.C.E. This event ended the last kingdom of the Medes and thus was the beginning of the Achaemenid empire under Cyrus the Great. The transfer of power from Medes to Persians was like the transfer of power of one group of Iranians to another group of Iranians. Under the Achaemenid rule, the Medes were the second largest group of Iranians after the Persians. Many Median royalties and officials kept their government roles under the Achaemenids' rule.-



Above: Cyrus the Great (559-530 B.C.E)

Old Persian: *Kūruš*

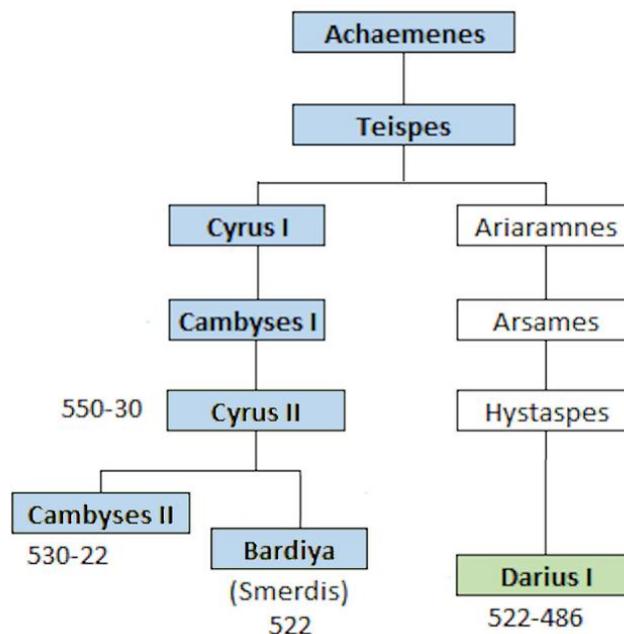
Modern Persian: Koorosh



In 550 B.C.E Cyrus the Great, the leader of the Persians, defeated the last Median King and united the Iranian people (Medes, Persians, and others) under one ruler for the first time. Cyrus became the first Persian king and went on to establish one of the largest empires in the world.

Cyrus' Lineage:

His name in Old Persian is *Kūruš* and in Modern Persian it is pronounced Koorosh. The name Cyrus which he is known as in the western world, is derived from the Latinized form of the Greek *Κύρος*, *Kýros*.



His great great grandfather was Achaemenes (Hakhamanesh in Persian) King of Anshan, today's Pars in Iran (705-675 BCE) first of his family to be king of which Cyrus II's empire was named after (Achaemenid in English and Hakhamaneshian in Persian). His great grandfather was Teispes (675-640 BCE), his grandfather Cyrus I (640-600 BCE), and his father was Cambyses I (600-559 BCE).

Cyrus the Conqueror:

Before Cyrus came to power, there were four superpowers in the area: Media, Lydia, Babylonia, and Egypt. Cyrus set to bring all these four powers under one rule.

Conquest of Media:

Cyrus ascended the Persian throne in 558 BCE at the age of about 41. With an astute sense of human nature and a strong grasp of the international political forces of his day, he must have been aware that



many of the Median nobles under Astyages, Cyaxares' successor, were unhappy with their new king. Astyages, unlike Cyaxares spent his days indulging in many excesses of the court in Ecbatana. He also realized that many in Astyages army were unsatisfied. Making careful plans, in 553 BCE he made his first blow. The details are unknown, but the conflict ended 3 years later in 550 BCE when he marched with his army directly to Media's capital Ecbatana. Cyrus captured the city and Astyages.

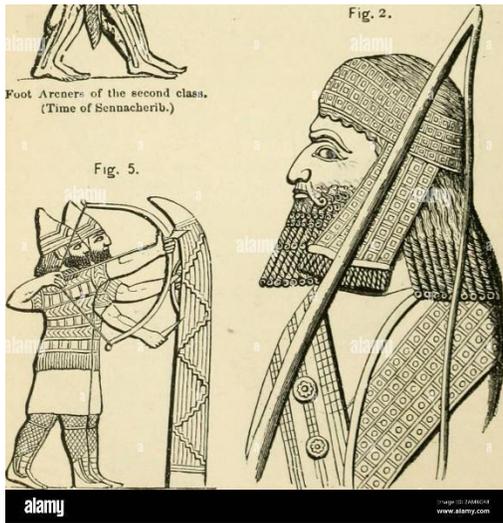
Cyrus did not destroy Media or kill Astyages, which were the normal practices of the time. He displayed wisdom and leniency of a great ruler; Cyrus honored the Medes giving many of their nobles' high positions in his court and generalships in his army. He made the Median homeland the first province or satrapy of his own empire and called it Mada and kept Ecbatana intact as his second capital after Pasargadae in the hills of Pars. Thereafter, the Persian realm was referred to as "Medes and Persians".

He also treated Astyages with kindness and allowed him to remain at court for the rest of his life. With such acts, Cyrus showed himself as a capable military man, and a strong leader displaying acts of civility and fairness thereby gaining the admiration of his subjects.

Political and Military Organization under Cyrus:

In conquering Media, Cyrus laid claim to all the land over which Astyages had ruled, including most of the former Assyrian homeland, mountainous Armenia, Syria on the Mediterranean coast, and large sections of the Iranian Plateau. Perhaps inspired by what he believed to be Persia's or his own divine destiny, he planned to further expand his realm. He realized, to do so, he needed the strongest military and political system the Near East had ever seen. He worked diligently at developing and perfecting such a system all his life.

His military was modeled largely on the Assyrian military, but he modified and improved their system. For example, the Assyrians had made major and highly effective use of a tactical feature common in the region called archer-pair, which consisted of a spearman bearing a very large, light but sturdy shield made of leather and wicker, and an archer; the spearman faced the enemy and held up the shield, behind which the archer hid and fired off volleys of arrows. The Persians called such shields *spara* and so named these tactical units *sparabara*, or "shield-bearers." Typically, the Assyrians would line these units side by side forming a single row of shield carriers backed by a single row of archers. Cyrus increased the depth of the formation and the number of archers per shield producing a heavier concentration of arrow shot.



Assyrian Archer Pair

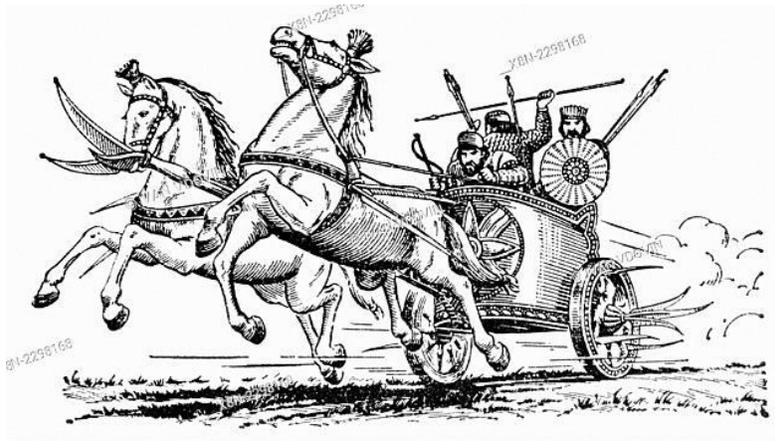


The Persian Sparabara

These formations followed a decimal system, scholar Nick Sekunda explains, “The Persian army was organized into regiments of thousand men. The Old Persian term for one of these regiments was *hazarabam*... Each regiment was commanded by a *hazarapatis*, or “commander of a thousand” and was divided into ten *sataba* of a hundred. Each *satabam* was commanded by a *satapatis* and was in turn divided into ten *dathaba* of ten men. The *dathabam* of ten formed the basic tactical sub-unit in the infantry and was drawn up in the battlefield in file.

The use of decimal system continued for units larger than regiments. Large armies contained units composed of ten *hazaraba*, or ten thousand men; the Persian term for these large groups has been lost but the Greeks called them “myriads.” The most important of the Persian myriads was the elite group that formed the king’s personal bodyguard. The best soldiers in the army, they became known as the *Amrtaka*, or “Immortals.” This name came from the practice of replacing any of their number who died thus always remaining as one thousand.

Another example of Cyrus strengthening his military tactics by improving tools that were used before him is the use of chariots for war by making them more formidable in direct frontal assaults on enemy lines. According to Xenophon, Cyrus constructed chariots with strong wheels so they would not easily break and with long axils so it would not easily be overturned. The box for drivers was made of strong timbers in the form of turret and increased in height to the driver’s elbows and covered the drivers with mail (armor) all except their eyes. He attached scythes (blades) to both sides of the wheels by intention of hurling the chariots into the midst of the enemy.

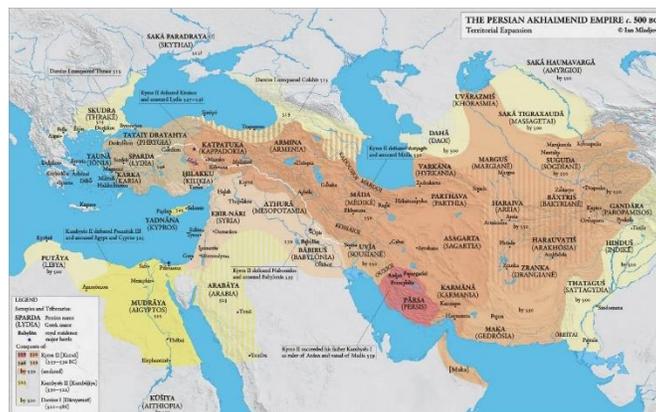


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Achaemenid Chariots

The military used men both from the nobility and commoners as the military service was compulsory for all Persian men. All Persian men between the ages of 20 and 24 were expected to train and/or fight and many chose to stay in the service until they were old as fifty.

In addition to his military, Cyrus based his political organization based on Assyrian models and making substantial improvements to the Assyrian system. The Assyrians had divided their realm into provinces, each administered by a governor who reported directly to the king in Nineveh. In similar fashion, Cyrus created satrapies, each encompassing the geography and culture of a single conquered nation. The satrap or “protector of the kingdom” who administered each satrapy wielded considerable power. To yield the possibility of the satrap rising against the king, Cyrus instituted effective checks. Although the satrap was allowed to have a small local troop to police his province, his secretary, financial officer, and the leader of the royal military garrison in his capital all reported directly to Cyrus. As an added measure he maintained a network of spies to keep him informed of all important events occurring in distant areas of the realm.

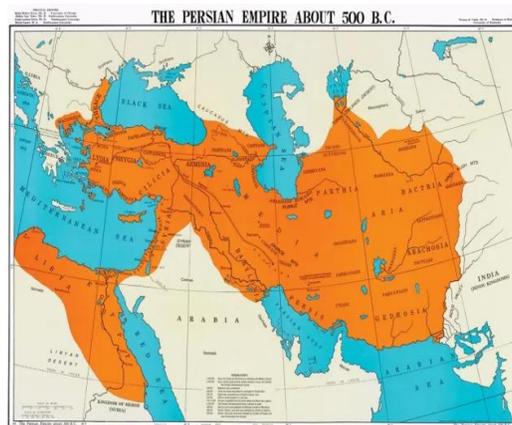


Conquest of Anatolia and Lydia:

After unifying the Persians under one ruler, Cyrus and his army set out to win control of the western portion of Iran. This included several trade routes that crossed Iran and continued through Anatolia, modern western Turkey.

In addition, Cyrus conquered the nomadic tribes who lived in the eastern section of Iran. With the perimeters of his territory secure and the income from the trade routes that he now controlled in western Iran, Cyrus and his generals expanded farther and farther into the lands that neighbored Persia.

Cyrus and his generals quickly conquered the kingdom of Lydia and Greek cities along the coast of Anatolia, thus gaining access to seaports on the Mediterranean. Unlike many conquerors, Cyrus was a gentle invader. When he conquered the kingdom of Lydia, Cyrus spared the life of the King, Croesus, and Croesus became one of Cyrus' most valued friends and advisers. Cyrus developed a reputation as a kind and merciful leader to those that he conquered.



Note: Next lesson will continue with Cyrus' conquest of Babylonia and the Cyrus Cylinder.

Lesson for Student:

1. Make a PP of the lesson to share with students.
2. Discuss the lesson objectives with students using maps and pictures. The lesson objectives can include:
 1. Who were the Medes and the Persians and their relationship to one another and the civilization in Mesopotamia.
 2. Who was Cyrus?
 3. What was the key to his success in uniting the Medes and the Persians
 - i. Unsatisfaction of Mede generals with the ruling King
 - ii. Cyrus' gained respect among Medes and Persians due to his military leadership capabilities and his humanitarian nature.
 - iii. Cyrus' goal to unite all the superpowers of the area under one rule.



1. Why did he want to do this? Territory? Power? Peace in the region?
4. He learned from the military and political success of others, especially the Assyrians, and improved their techniques.
 1. Military system
 2. Persian sparabara
 3. Chariots
 4. Political system
 5. He did not repeat the Assyrian cruelty but showed humanitarian acts unmatched of the times.
5. In this lesson students learned about two out of the four superpowers of the region conquered by Cyrus
6. Which of his actions are in line with Zarathushtra's teachings?

Activity:

1. Give students a map of the area and together mark the
 - a. homeland of the Aryans (Northern steppes between Black Sea and Caspian Sea)
 - b. Home of the Medes and the Persians
 - c. Extent of the Median Empire
 - d. Lydia
 - e. Then, give them a current map of the region and allow them to work in groups if they wish to come up with what current countries reside within the Persian Empire after the conquest of Lydia and Anatolia.
2. Have students use their phones to research the lineage of Cyrus and make a diagram
3. What do students think we as a community can learn from the culture/s residing in our city to improve our own community?

Sources:

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrus>
2. The Persian Empire by Don Nardo
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achaemenid_family_tree
4. ii) Encyclopedia Iranica Online
5. Encyclopedia Britannica as sources of my information.

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