



FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

Subject Category (circle one): Religion/Ceremony Celebration **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 Parthian (Ashkanian) Empire- Lesson 2

Subject of the Lesson: The Parthian Infrastructure and Art

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

The Parthian (Ashkanian) Empire (247 BC – 224 AD)

Background

After the defeat of Darius III by Alexander the Macedonian (331 BC), the Achaemenid Empire practically ended after 229 years of kingdom in Iran. Alexander then conquered Iran, the greater Khorasan and parts of India in the east. However, he died at the age of 33 in Babylon.

After Alexander's death (323 BC), his empire was divided into three kingdoms. Seleucus I, became the king of the largest of the three kingdoms which included today's Iran. Seleucids ruled Iran for 80 years until one of the Iranian tribes, namely, the Parthians, rose to power and started to challenge the Seleucids' rule over Iran. They finally overcame the Seleucids and drove them off the Iranian territories and defined new borders. Parthian Empire ruled Iran for 471 years and was one of the most important and powerful kingdoms of Iran.

Parthian Government

The Parthian Government was notably decentralized as compared to the earlier Achaemenid empire. They divided the Satrapies into smaller regions to decrease the regional power of the king or governor. The Parthian Empire also contained several subordinate semi-autonomous kingdoms some of which were Caucasian Iberia, Armenia, Atropatene, Elymais (Greek for Elam) and Persis (Pars). The state rulers governed their own territories and minted their own coinage distinct from the royal coinage. This was unlike the Achaemenid empire. The regional rulers just needed to provide Parthian government with men at time of war and pay their taxes.

Parthian Military

The Parthian empire had no standing army but was able to quickly recruit troops in the event of local crises. The main striking force of the Parthian army was its cataphracts, heavy cavalry with man and horse decked in mailed armor. They were equipped with lances for charging into enemy lines but did not

have bows and arrows. Due to the high cost, cataphracts were recruited from among the aristocratic class.



A cataphract [Source:www.wikipedia.org]

The light cavalry was recruited from among the commoner class and acted as horse archers; they wore simple tunics and trousers in battle. They used a strong and flexible composite bow and were able to shoot at the enemy while riding and facing away from them; this technique, known as the Parthian shot, was a highly effective tactic. The enemy was faced with arrows from all different directions. They used hit and run tactics.



Parthian light cavalry and Parthian shot
[Source:Wikipedia.org]

Economy and Trade: The Parthians did not destroy the cities and roads as they conquered. Having Armenia as part of their empire, gave the Parthians access to the Black Sea for trade. They had access to the Caspian Sea and with Susa as part of the empire, they used the Persian Gulf to trade with India. Fertile lands in Media and Ecbatana, plus the royal roads solidified them as leaders of the trade.

Architecture and Art: Parthian's sculptures and art had a frontal view, so the observer felt more connected with the art (the technique was later adopted by Byzantines). They built their cities in a circular fashion. They built domes that ran to the ground rather than sitting on top of supporting structures. Made beautiful jewelry with creative use of precious metal such as bronze, terracotta and stone figures. Their art has been discovered from the borders of China and Central Asia to Mesopotamia and Syria.



Right image: Parthian arch

Left image: Parthian city

Clothing: They wore loose clothing, long mustaches with closely groomed beards, puffed hairstyles with moderate length and secured with a hairband.



Above: Statue of a Parthian man

Parthian Religions

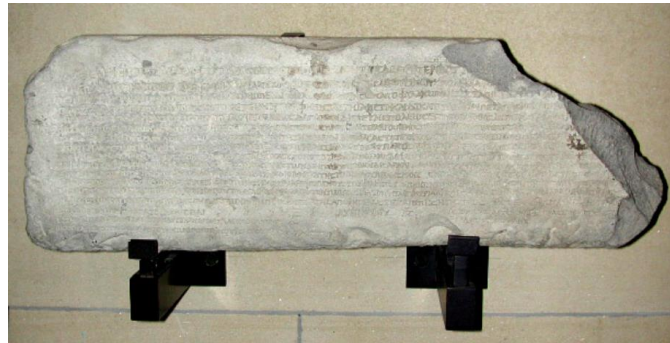
The Parthians worshiped the cult of Mithra, the same Mithraism that was embraced by much of the ancient world. The spread of Mithraism over the entire Roman empire, the absorption into Christianity of Mithraic beliefs, rites and practices, ceremonies and festivals reflect the influence of the Parthians on the ancient world.

It is also believed that Parthians widely practiced Zoroastrianism, and the holy documents of this religion were first compiled by the Parthians and used by the Sassanids. Vologases I (Volash I or Balash I) encouraged the presence of Zoroastrian priests at court. One of the Parthian kings, believed to be either Vologases I or the IV sponsored compilation of sacred Zoroastrian texts which later formed the Avesta. The Sasanian court would later adopt Zoroastrianism as the official state religion of the empire. The ostraca (pieces of pottery that have writings scratched onto them) found in Nisa (old Parthian capital, now located in Turkmenistan) confirm the connection with numerous place names that are Zoroastrian in character and were dated with Zoroastrian month names.

[Sources: www.Parthia.com & www.wikipedia.org]

Parthian Languages

Greek was the official written language on coins and elsewhere. The Greek coin inscriptions gradually disappeared on the late coins indicating the weakening of the Hellenistic influence. A Parthian inscription in Greek found at Behistun (Bisotun in Persian located in Kermanshah, Iran) is shown below which is a letter from Artabanus II (12-38 AD) (Ardavan II in Persian) addressed to the city of Susa validating the election of the city treasurer.



Parthian Relief in Greek; presently located in the Louvre Museum, Paris

[Source: www.Parthia.com]

Parthian language, also called northwest Pahlavi, Arsacid Pahlavi or Ashkani Pahlavi, is a northwestern Iranian language. Parthian, Middle Persian (MP) and Zoroastrian MP texts are written in a script derived from Aramaic (a semitic language of the Arameans i.e., Syrians). Before the Parthian empire, Parthian language was spoken only in a small region. After the establishment of the Parthian empire, it spread throughout Iran, Mesopotamia and Armenia and widely used in Central Asia. The oldest Parthian documents found include economic documents from Nisa (1st Century BC) and there are rock inscriptions dating back to the 3rd century BC. Parthian language declined when Sasanian power expanded, but it was still spoken widely until the 6th century AD. Parthian language was closely related to Middle Persian which was the official language of the Sasanian empire. Middle Persian is the main language of the



writings of the Zoroastrian and Manichaean religions and inscriptions. Middle Persian continued in use as the language of Zoroastrian communities even after the Arab conquest in 7th century AD while the language usually spoken is called New Persian from that time onward.

[Source: www.Parthia.com]

Lesson for students:

1. Make a PowerPoint of the lesson to present the lesson or use the provided PowerPoint.
2. Make a printout of each section: the Parthian government, military, trade, art, etc. and break the class into groups of two and give each group one or two of the topics. Allow them 10 minutes to discuss and have them present the topics to the rest of the class. After each presentation the teacher can explain further if needed by asking questions or just filling in the missing material presented. Include in your discussion the aspects of Parthian Kingship that was influenced by Zoroastrian beliefs (EX. tolerance of different cultures, avoiding destruction at time of conquest, etc.)

Activity for Students:

1. Give students a frontal image of a mannequin and then ask them to draw clothes and hair (including the facial hair) to match the Parthian style.
2. Ask students to share with the class one thing that they found interesting in the lesson or in line with Zarathushtra's message.
3. Make questions about the lesson. Then, individually write the questions on small sheets of paper. Fold each sheet and put them in a jar. Break the class into two teams and in turn have them take a sheet of paper out and answer the question as a team. The team with the highest correct answer wins.
 - a. An alternative option would be write words related to the lesson on individual sheets of paper. Then, break the class into two teams and play fish bowl. Here's a video on how to play fishbowl: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3IRxkmCOek>
4. Design a Parthian city (it can be a drawing, using clay, etc.)
5. Draw the trading routes during Parthian rule on a map of the area.
6. Make a Puzzle for the lesson.
7. Make a Kahoot game to share with class and use activity ideas from the "Teacher's Guide" section.



Sources:

1. *History of Ancient Iran Book by Hasan Pir Nia*
2. www.fa.wikipedia.org
3. www.parthia.com
4. www.wikipedia.org
5. <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/nisa>
6. <https://www.iranchamber.com/history/parthians/parthians.php>
7. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/arsacids-iv>

Prepared by: Adeleh Alba

Lesson and activity for student: Artemis Javanshir

Edited by: Hilda Karavi

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