



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 6-12**

Lesson # (if appropriate): The Achaemenid Empire-Lesson 3

Subject of the Lesson: Cambyses II and the Beginning of Darius' Reign

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Lesson Duration: approximately 1- 1.5 hours

Cambyses II

(R. 530-522 B.C.E)

(Persian: Kambujiya)



After Cyrus II's (Cyrus the Great) death in 530 BCE, Cambyses became the second Achaemenid Emperor of Persia (530 B.C.E to 522 B.C.E.) He was the eldest son of Cyrus II (Cyrus the Great), founder of the Achaemenid Empire and his mother was Cassandane. Cambyses reigned for only eight years but his achievements although few but important and noteworthy.

Before his death, Cyrus assigned Cambyses with the task of conquering Egypt, the last of the four superpowers of the region. Upon his father's death, Cambyses continued Cyrus' massive military buildup. This included Persia's first fleet of ships, something that Persians up to that time did not have as they did not have a need for it. Cambyses wisely realized that his army could not pass the barren wastelands between southern Palestine and the Nile delta in Egypt. He knew that his army can be supported by the Persian fleet of ships sailing along the nearby coast. Persia's transformation as solely

a land power to that of land and sea widened its prospects for further conquest later achieved by Cambyses' successor Darius and Xerxes.



Persian ships supporting the army crossing the desert to Egypt

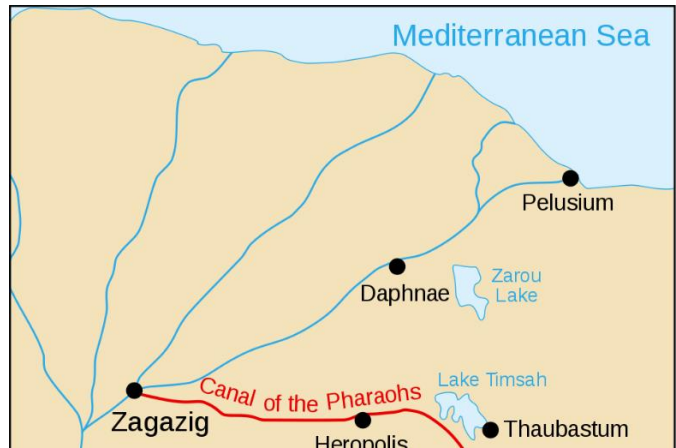
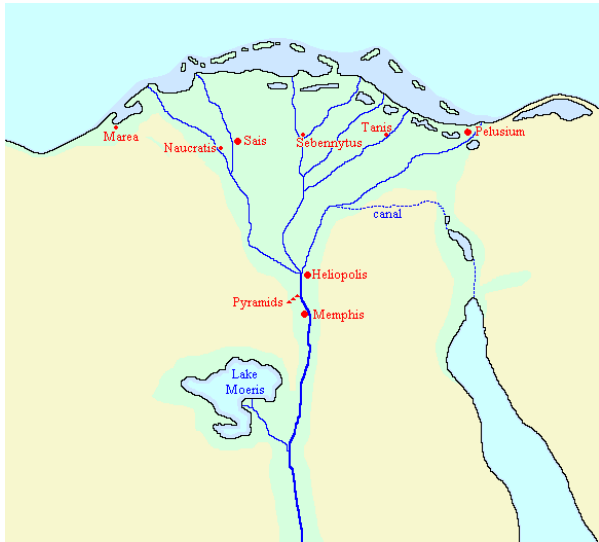
Evidently, in 526 BCE, Cambyses committed an act that has given him a violent reputation. Cambyses' younger brother, Bardiya (called Smerdis by Greeks), who is believed to have been Cyrus' favorite son having had a humanitarian nature close to that of Cyrus the Great and thereby loved by the people, had inherited the eastern satrapies per Cyrus' wishes. It is believed that before marching to Egypt, Cambyses was concerned about Bardiya taking advantage of his absence, start a rebellion and usurping the western portion of the realm. Cambyses planned a secret assassination which was carried out.

Herodotus writes:

“Cambyses dreamt that a messenger came to him from Persia with the news that Smerdis was sitting on the royal throne and that his head touched the sky. In alarm lest the dream should mean that his brother would kill him and reign in his stead. Cambyses sent Prexaspes, the most trusted of his Persian friends, to make away with [kill] him. Prexaspes went up-country to Susa and did the deed—according to one account he took his victim out hunting, according to another he lured him down to the Persian Gulf and drowned him.”

In early 525 BCE, Cambyses entered Egypt at the head of a huge army. Egyptians' capable pharaoh, Amasis had just died leaving his young inexperienced son Psamtik III (Psammetichos) in charge. The armies met near Pelusium, on the seacoast just east of the Nile Delta. The Egyptian army was no match

for the well-trained Persian army and the Persians were victorious in a short-lasting battle, with Psamtik III fleeing the battlefield. There was no further opposition to Cambyses and this way the fourth superpower of the region became part of the Persian Empire and the Persian satrapy.



Pelusium in Egypt

Cambyses remained in Egypt for 3 years. The nature of his stay is unknown. There are accounts of his cruelty during his stay in Egypt such as abusing and burning Amasis' mummified corps, publicly mutilating a sacred Egyptian bull, and attempting to invade Nubia without having sufficient preparations hence causing starvation of his soldiers. Modern scholars have dismissed these charges as greatly exaggerated if not outright fabrications. For example, while it has been confirmed that Cambyses campaigned in northern Nubia, his reasons for cutting short the expedition remain unknown and the charges of his thoughtless lack of preparation seem absurd considering his recent careful preparations for invading Egypt. On the other hand, there is evidence that Cambyses ordered the execution of Psamtik and damaged/looted some Egyptian temples; however, thou at odds with Cyrus' policy it was common of the victors and conquerors of the time.



(Picture: Cambyses II conquest of Egypt)



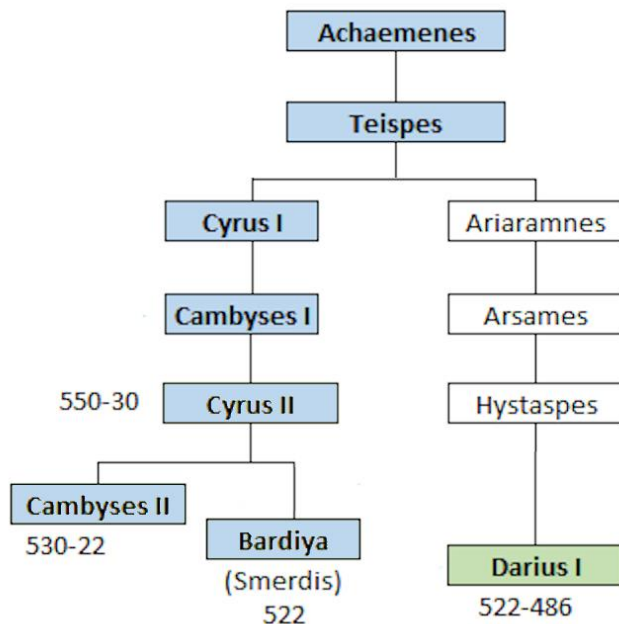
In 522 BCE, Cambyses decided to return to the homeland of Persia. He had just begun his journey when he received news that a usurper by the name of Gautama (called “false Smerdis” by Greeks) had started a rebellion and stolen the throne at Ecbatana. Gautama had claimed to be Cambyses brother Bardiya to whom he had an uncanny physical resemblance.

A portion of the famous inscription later carved by Darius on the face of the cliff in Behistun southwest of Ecbatana reads:

“After Cambyses went to Egypt.... There was great deceit in the land, both in Persia and Media and in the other provinces...There rose a Magian [Median priest], by name Gautama... On the fourteenth day of the month Viyakhna [March 11, 522 BCE] he rose up. He deceived the people saying, “I am Bardiya, son of Cyrus, brother of Cambyses”. Then all the people became estranged from Cambyses and went over to him [Gautama]...He seized the kingdom.””

The events of the following weeks and months remain unclear but shortly after hearing about Gautama’s rebellion, Cambyses died under mysterious circumstances. With Cambyses dead, Gautama held the throne for seven months (March to September 522 BCE). Then a small group of powerful Persian nobles conspired to destroy him. Having done the deed, they placed one of their own on the throne-Darius (Dariush in Persian) who belonged to a branch of Achaemenid family hence had a legitimate claim to the throne. Darius says on the Behistun carving:

“On the tenth day of the month Bagayadi [September 29], I slew that Gautama the Magian and his chief associates, [at] a stronghold...[in] the land of Nisaya in Media; I deprived him of the kingdom; by the will of Ahura-Mazda [the chief Persian God], I became king.”





Cambyses II accomplished two important tasks:

1. Created Persia's first naval fleet.
2. Conquered and added Egypt, the last superpower of the region to the Persian Empire.

Why did Darius and other noblemen remove Gautama from power?

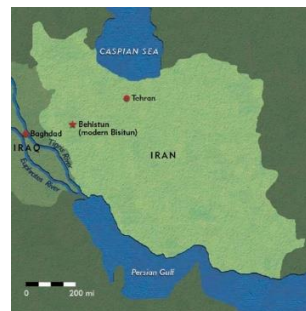
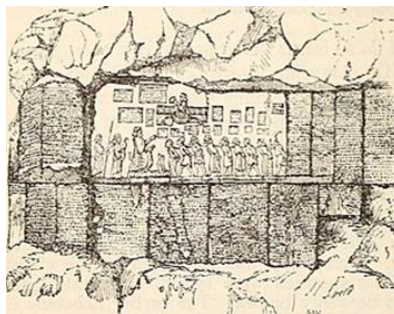
1. Darius claimed that Gautama ruled harshly, murdered many innocent people, and "the people feared him for his tyranny."
2. Other considerable evidence shows that Gautama was a zealous religious man and wanted to implement too many changes too quickly whereas the noblemen wanted to keep the status quo.

Another possibility that has been considered is that the so-called Gautama was not an imposter but Bardiya himself and Cambyses never killed him. Bardiya with help of other noblemen seized the throne. Once in power he showed himself to be a quick reformer. The noblemen decided to eliminate him and justified their act by marking him seem as an imposter and in turn leaving an image of themselves as saving the empire from a terrible ruse. If this in fact is what had happened then it would explain Darius marking the new king as cruel which is in opposition to Bardiya's character, it may also explain the mysterious death of Cambyses. His officers may have killed him in favor of his brother.

Whatever the truth, we may never know. It is certain that Darius became king late in 522 BCE and his kingship brought security, prosperity and took the empire to new heights.

Behistun carving and inscription:

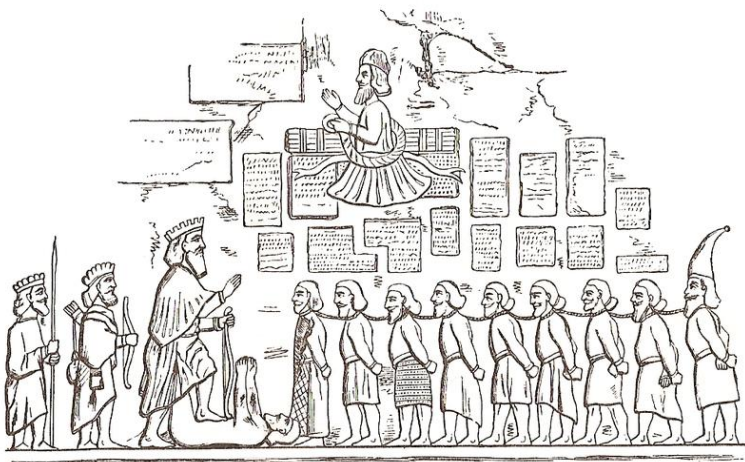
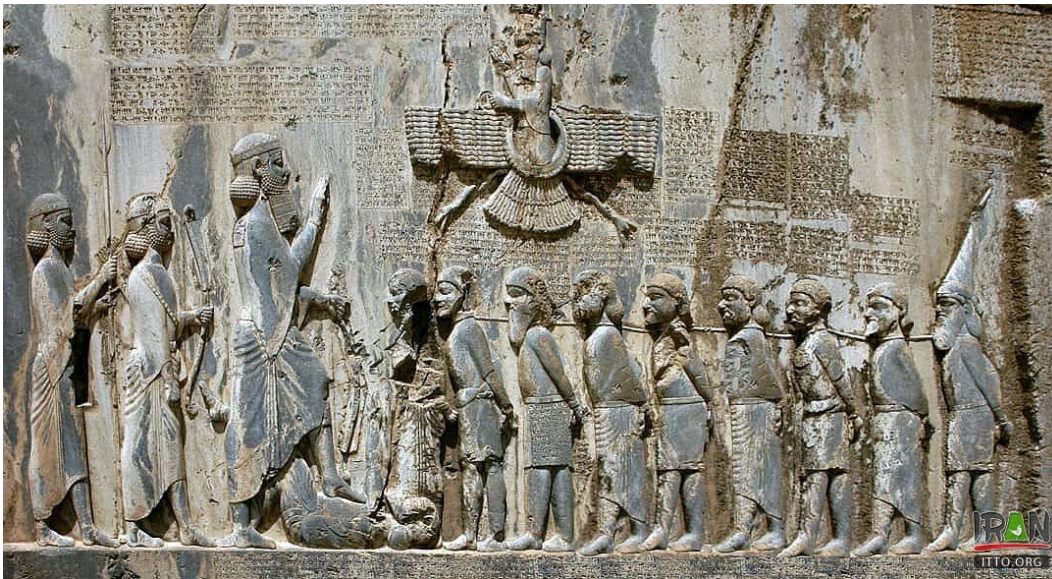
The cliff carving at Behistun is an inscription ordered by Darius after becoming the king of Persian Empire. It is a rock-relief (5 ½ x 3 meters) 100 meters from ground level, written in cuneiform text in three different languages of Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian near the city of Kermanshah in Iran. In the text Darius talks about his lineage, how Ahura Mazda chooses him to dethrone the usurper Gaumata, and unites the empire by putting an end to the multiple rebellions in different corners of the empire. When the carvings were completed, the ledge below the inscription was removed so that nobody could tamper with the inscription and allowing it to survive to today.



Behistun carving and its location on map

A.T. Olmstead in his book History of the Persian Empire writes:

“Darius, a fine Aryan type with highbrow and straight nose, stand his natural height, five feet ten inches. On his head is the war crown, and...gold band studded with oval jewels and rosettes. His front hair is carefully frizzed, and his drooping mustache is neatly twirled at the tip... The square beard is arranged in four rows of curls alternating with straight strands, quite in the manner of those of his Assyrian predecessors. A long robe covers the whole of his stocky body...and, below, the laced shoes are beneath them. The king’s left hand grasps the strung bow tipped with a duck’s head: his right hand is uplifted in worship of [the god] Ahura-Mazda...Under the king’s left foot, flat on his back and one foot lifted in agony, lies the robed Gautama, stretching out his hands in vain supplication. Before their conqueror stand the other rebels, their necks roped together, their hands tied behind their backs.”



Behistun carving in Kermanshah, Iran



Interesting fact:

The relief was first noted by Europeans in the 18th century CE and was famously copied by the scholar Sir Henry C. Rawlinson (l. 1810-1895 CE) in 1835 and 1843 CE. Rawlinson's copy of the three **cuneiform** texts enabled him, and other notable scholars of the time, to decipher them since, once Old Persian cuneiform was understood, the cuneiform of the Elamites and Akkadians (languages of Babylonian, Assyrian and Sumerian together is known as Akkadian) could be as well. The Behistun Inscription thus became the means whereby scholars could translate Near Eastern languages. The relief can still be seen today and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2006 CE.

Lesson for Student:

1. Make a PowerPoint of the lesson to present to students using maps and images to enhance the lesson.
2. Involve students in discussion at appropriate portions by asking questions such as:
 - a. Why do you think Cyrus wanted Cambyses to conquer Egypt?
 - b. Do you think it would be wise for Cambyses to order the assassination of his brother Bardiya? Why and why not?
 - c. Show images of the barren landscape between Persia and Egypt then ask a student to show on the map, how Persian ships could sustain the army.
 - d. Was any possible cruel behavior by Cambyses in line with Zarathushtra's message? Are Zoroastrian kings' actions a reflection of the Zoroastrian religious beliefs? What are the difficult decisions made by kings that may put them at odds with Zarathushtra's teachings.
 - e. Emphasize the importance of Cambyses' contributions.
 - f. Discuss the importance of Behistun inscription and its content.
3. Use the Behistun image and Omstead's description to relay a tangible experience of the inscription to the students.

Student Activity:

1. Have students solve the puzzle related to this lesson.
2. Have students draw the Behistun petroglyph.
3. Break the class into teams and give each team the drawing of Behistun petroglyph. Then ask each team to look carefully at the drawing and share their findings with class.
 - a. Examples of these findings can include:
 - i. The usurpers in binds have different clothing and hat styles showing that they are from different parts of the empire.
 - ii. Darius' feet are laid on Gautama. Why him and not all others?
 - iii. What is the significance of fravahar in the petroglyph?



- iv. The hats, beards (curly), and cloths of Persians are different from others in the carving.
 - v. Darius is much taller than others. Do you think he was a tall man or just presented as such?
4. Make a Kahoot game.

Source:

1. <https://www.livius.org/articles/place/behistun/>
2. The Persian Empire by Don Nardo
3. https://www.worldhistory.org/Behistun_Inscription/
4. <https://www.historyofinformation.com/detail.php?id=2417>
5. <https://www.arch.cam.ac.uk/about-us/mesopotamia/mesopotamia-history/mesopotamia-languages>

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