



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 Sassanid Empire- Lesson 4

Subject of the Lesson: Kavad I and Mazdakism

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Kavad I also spelled Kavadh and Qobad in Persian (r. 488-496 and 498/499-531 CE), was the son of Firuz (r. 457-484 CE) and succeeded Firuz's brother Balash as ruler. His youth was spent as a hostage at the hands of the Hephthalites (also known as the White Huns) but after the death of his Uncle Balash, he was called to the throne.

During his reign in 488 CE, Mazdak, son of Bamdadin introduced a new religion that came to be known as Mazdakism. To understand what followed a bit of background is needed. The unsuccessful wars of Firuz I (459-483 CE) against the Huns, the poor condition of the common people, and the drought which led to starvation during Kavad I's reign laid the foundation for the success of Mazdakism. Kavad declared his sympathies with this new religion. Most historians believe this embrace was to diminish the power of the Zoroastrian priests and/or to satisfy the common people who were accepting Mazdakism in large numbers. One of the Mazdakism beliefs that severely damaged society and brought chaos and unruliness was that the rich had to share their wealth and wives with the poor. This was very attractive to a mass of people who were in severe economic desperation. Kavad's tolerance of Mazdakism in 496 CE ended in his imprisonment in the "Castle of Oblivion (Lethe)" in Susiana, and his brother Jamasp was put on the throne.

Kavad escaped and found refuge with the Hephthalites (White Huns), whose king gave him his daughter in marriage and provided him aid to reclaim his throne. Kavad has a son from this marriage named Khosrow. With the help of the Hephthalites, in 499 CE, Kavad became king again and abandoned the Mazdak religion and persecuted its followers. However, he was not able to successfully de-root the religion, this task was left to his son and successor Khosrow I one of the most beloved and well-known kings of the Sassanid Empire.

Kavad's reign was filled with battles against the White Huns (Hephthalites) from the east, Romans from the west, and Khazars (Central Asian race) in northwestern Iran. Kavad fought the Khazars and won. He built towers in the Caucasus (Ghafghaz in Persian) Mountains to guard Iran and in part Rome from the Khazars. This fortification was funded through the Roman tax treaty with Iran.

At the same time, the Roman Empire interfered in Persian affairs in the Persian part of Armenia. While fighting the Romans in the west, Kavad received word that the Huns had attacked Khorasan. He made a 7-year peace treaty with the Romans and went to Khorasan to fight the Huns. This fight lasted for 10 years with Kavad's victory. At this time, the Roman Empire joined forces with the people in the Caucasus region to fight against Persia. Kavad fought them for many years and defeated them.



Above: Map of northwestern Iran during the Sassanid Empire.

Source: Wikipedia

Kavad's contributions:

In addition to securing the Persian borders, Kavad established many cities including Kazeroon in Pars and Gangeh in Ghafghaz (currently part of Russia). He also established a tax system to ensure fair collection and minimize corruption. This system was implemented during his son's reign Khosrow I. Kavad died on September 13, 531 CE, naming his son Khosrow as his successor.

Lesson for students:

1. Make a PowerPoint of the lesson or use the one accompanying this lesson to present the material to the students. While presenting the lesson have an open discussion.

Sample discussion topics:

- What makes people abandon what is right and invade homes and violate women?



- Do you think Kavad did the right thing to accept Mazdakism at the beginning?
- Once Kavad realized the damage Mazdakism had done to society, how should he have acted to de-root the problem?
- At times, the Hephthalites were Kavad's allies and at times his enemy. Do you see this in contemporary politics? How do you explain this?
- What were some of Kavad's actions that were in tune with or against Zoroastrianism?

Activity for Students:

1. Have students start a Venn Diagram. They will compare the similarities and differences between Kavad's actions and his Zoroastrian values with that of his son, Khosrow (which will be covered in the next lesson). Students should fill in the part for Kavad, then finish the Venn Diagram after the next lesson is taught.

Venn-Diagram template that can be used: <https://www.studenthandouts.com/graphic-organizers/relationships/blank-venn-diagram-printables-with-instructions.html>

2. Have students make a poster of Kavad I's reign. Some ideas include:
 - a. An Infographic (Here's an example for the Beatles:
<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/43980533843612036/>)
 - b. A Biography Poster (Here's an example for Steve Jobs:
<https://www.storyboardthat.com/lesson-plans/biographies/poster>)

Discuss some important elements that need to be included on the poster (i.e., name, dates, accomplishments, maps, family tree)

3. Break students into two teams and have them research Mazdakism. Then have each group present their findings to class.

Sources:

1. <https://theodora.com/encyclopedia/k/kavadh.html>
2. <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kavad-i-reign>
3. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Khosrow-I>
4. <https://www.iranchamber.com/religions/articles/mazdakism.php>
5. Iranian History for Teens by Foundation for Iranian Studies

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