



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 5

Subject of the Lesson: Khosrow I

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Background:

Kavad I (r. 488-496/499-531 CE) ruled Persia at a difficult time. On one hand he was constantly in battle to secure the borders of his country, there were droughts and poor economic conditions that made life difficult for the people, and there was the emergence of a new religion (Mazdakism) which led to chaos and disorderly conduct among the masses.

Between 496-499 CE, Kavad was imprisoned, but managed to escape, and seek refuge from the Hephthalites in the east. He married the daughter of the Hephthalite leader and had a son named Khosrow. Although he had older sons than Khosrow, he named Khosrow his successor. Kavad made economic reforms but did not have time to implement them.

Khosrow I (531-579 CE) was the son and successor of Kavad I. He continued his father's projects by making social, military, and economic reforms, promoting the welfare of the people, increasing state revenues, establishing a professional army, and founding or rebuilding many cities and palaces. One of the most memorable constructions was the palace he had made at Ctesiphon (near today's Baghdad, Iraq), known as Taq-e Kasra. He was interested in literature and philosophy and during his reign, science flourished in Iran. He was the most distinguished of the Sasanian kings and his name became a designation of the Sasanian kings. Due to his accomplishments, he was hailed as the new Cyrus and nicknamed Khosrow Anushirvan (the Immortal Soul). At the time of his death, the Sasanian Empire had reached its greatest extent since Shapur II.



Drachma of Khosro I in 558 CE [www.Wikipedia.org]

In 531 CE, when Khosrow took the throne, Iran was experiencing drought, shortage of food, and poor economic conditions. In addition, governors and people of power were cruel to the public, and the Mazdak religion had caused unruliness among different socio-economic classes. Soon after he came to the throne, he put an end to the Mazdakite movement by killing Mazdak.

He began his duty as King by signing a peace treaty with the Roman Empire and securing the borders of his Empire. He did so by appointing four chief commanders to guard the four frontiers of Iran from the following groups:

1. The Byzantines in the east
2. The Arabs in the Syrian Desert
3. The people of the steppes of southern Russia at the town of Derbent between the Caucasus Mountains and the Caspian Sea
4. The Turkmen residing in the steppes to the east of the Caspian Sea where he built defensive walls.



Above: Map of Sassanid Empire and its neighbors

Reforms:

Having secured the borders, he concentrated on the welfare of the people. He made the taxes a fixed sum rather than a yearly variation and lowered the tax on the common man and the land tax on farmers. Other taxes were introduced that brought stability to the income of the state and were also more fair to those who paid the taxes. His tax program lasted over a hundred years into the Islamic

conquest of Iran. He reformed the judicial system and made reforms that benefited the farmers and increased agricultural production, which brought prosperity to Iran.

Under Khosrow, the decentralization of the power of the monarch was reversed and the lower aristocracy called *dihgans* grew in importance at the expense of the great feudal lords who had been more powerful under his predecessors.



Above: Map of Sassanid Empire. The country was called Eranshahr by Iranians (Persians)

Military:

During the war, men from all parts of Iran would report to duty and when the war was over, they'd receive their wages and return home. Khosrow established a full-time professional army in his battles against:

- The Byzantines in the east
- the Hephthalites and thus extended the Sassanian frontier to Amu Darya (Oxus River)
- the Armenians and Laz people from Armenia and in Lazica in the Caucasus
- the Yemenis (Yemen)
- the Romans and the nomadic tribes in the north



Above: Map of Sassanid Empire and its neighbors

Trade and Commerce:

Khosrow considered begging a sin and beggars were punished. Everyone was expected to work and contribute to society. He brought silkworm to Iran from Khatan (North of China), and neel, a deep blue powder made by grinding lapis lazuli were brought from India. He improved roads and safety which encouraged trade and hence during his reign Iran became an important center for trade.

Patron of Education and Culture:

In 529 CE, when the ancient academy of Athens was closed, several Greek philosophers migrated to the Sassanid Empire where they were well received by Khosrow. The famous medical school of Gondeshapur was promoted further during his reign. Many books written in Seryani, Indian, Sanskrit, and Greek were translated to Pahlavi during his reign. The famous book of *Kalila and Dimna*, a collection of fables was brought to Iran and translated to Pahlavi and later to Arabic. Astronomy flourished and the table Zij-I Shahriyar (predicts the position of the sun, moon, and planets) which later became the basis of many Islamic tables originated during Khosrow's reign. Several Middle Persian books such as *The Book of Deeds of Ardeshir* is attributed to this time.

Furthermore, it is supposed that it was during this period that the stories and legends of ancient Iran were gathered into a *Khvatay-namak* which later became the basis for the *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings) by Ferdowsi. He had a capable prime minister named Bozorgmehr who became famous in stories and legends for his wisdom and abilities.



Religion:

Khosrow sent priests to different areas to teach Zoroastrianism and build fire-temples in these areas. The writing of the *Avesta* in Din Dabireh (Avestan alphabet) is believed to have begun during Shapur II's reign but continued through Khosrow's time. The Pahlavi commentary was also written down using this alphabet. This written *Avesta* and the commentary, which is called the Zand is still available to us in part. Much of it was destroyed or lost, after the Arab invasion of Iran.

Another major event during Khosrow's reign was the birth of the prophet Mohammed in Arabia, who started Islam-which soon invaded and destroyed Zoroastrian Iran.

Khosrow I, died on January 31, 579 CE.

Lesson for students:

1. Make a PowerPoint of the lesson or use the one accompanying this lesson to present the material to the students.
2. Break the class into teams and give each team a section of the lesson and have them organize then present their section to the class. Open discussions are encouraged during presentation to fill in any gaps in information.

Suggested discussion questions:

- a. What Zoroastrian and anti-Zoroastrian values did Khosrow possess?
- b. Do you think Khosrow considering begging a sin and punishing the beggars was in line with Zoroastrian beliefs? Why or why not?
- c. Why do you think Khosrow was given the nickname of Khosrow Anushirvan?
- d. Talk about how cultures share stories.
Example: the gathering and translation of the books at Gandeshapur university and later the same books being translated into Arabic.

Activity for Students:

1. Have students complete the Venn diagram that was started in the previous lesson. List Khosrow I's actions and Zoroastrian values that differ from his father's. Then, in the middle column of the Venn Diagram list the similarities between Khosrow I and Kavad's actions and Zoroastrian values.



2. Give students a map of Greater Iran and have students mark the boundaries of Iran during Khosrow I's reign and name the current countries that used to be part of the Sassanid Empire. Then have students locate the four corners that Khosrow sent guards to protect.
3. Have each student right down, if Khosrow lived today what reform would he implement and then share with the class.
Example: Khosrow's push for tax reform back then led to lowering the tax on the common man, so if he were to be alive today, he would hopefully push to tax the rich and large companies that pay minimal tax or no tax at all.
4. Have students make a poster of Khosrow I's reign.
5. To better understand what Zand Avesta is, give students word-by-word meaning of the Ashem Vohu prayer for example and then have them write in simple or everyday language (lay terms) what it means.

Sources:

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

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Date: 4/2023