



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 6

Subject of the Lesson: Hormazd IV and Khosrow II

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Background:

Khosrow I (531-579 CE) was one of the great kings who ruled during the Sassanid Empire. He abolished the Mazdakism influence in Persia and implemented many reforms that were designed during his father, Kavad I's reign.

Hormazd IV

Upon the death of Khosrow I his son Hormazd IV became king. His mother was a Turkish princess. He was tolerant of Christians and other religions in Iran. During his reign, Iran was fighting on two fronts; the Romans in the west and the Turks in the northeast. By 588, the Romans had been fought to a standstill and the Iranian commander in chief in the east, Bahram Chobin, and a member of a great aristocratic family, Mehran, had defeated the Turks and re-asserted Sassanid authority as far as the Oxus River and the city of Balkh in Bactria.

However, in a war with Rome, the Iranian army under the General Bahram Chobin was defeated. Hormazd heaped insults at the General. In anger against his unfair treatment, Bahram attacked the capital Ctesiphon. In a coup led by Hormazd's brothers-in-law, Bendoy and Bestam, Hormazd was removed from crown, detained, blinded, and killed. Bahram wanted the throne for himself; however, the Persian nobles did not regard Bahram as a rightful heir and supported Hormazd's son, Khosrow (Khosrow II). In the battle that followed between Khosrow II and Bahram, Khosrow's army was outnumbered and when his defeat became evident, Khosrow sought refuge with the Roman Empire and asked for their aid.

Khosrow II- Known as Khosrow Parviz

(r. 590-628 CE)

Khosrow II, grandson of Khosrow I, was able to regain the throne with the help of the Romans on the 27th of June 590 CE. In return for the Romans' aid, Khosrow returned the land that Persia had gained in northern Mesopotamia, Transcaucasia, and an equal share of Armenia and Iberia. Bahram Chobin was defeated in battle, and fled east to Balkh where he was later assassinated on Khosrow's orders.

To celebrate his victory, Khosrow's coins, were surmounted with the figure of two large wings representing Verethraghna, the god of war and victory.



Silver Coin of Khosro Parviz at Estakhr
[www.wikipedia.org]

He stayed on good terms with the Roman Empire for the first eleven years of his reign. Shirin, a Christian from Khuzestan, was the most influential of his wives. It is said that she was influential by having the royals favor the Christians in Mesopotamia and called for the construction of a church and monastery close to the palace in Ctesiphon. The story of Khosrow and Shirin is one of the famous tales of the Shahnameh.

Roman Wars Phase 1 (603-615)

In 602, a Roman army officer, in rebellion, executed the Roman Emperor Maurice and five of his six sons. Theodosius, his eldest son managed to escape and took refuge in Khosrow's court. Khosrow, willing to repay the offer from when he needed aid to regain his throne, officially coronated Theodosius as the Roman Emperor in Ctesiphon and went to war to gain back Theodosius' throne.

Over nine years (607-15), the Persians had many key gains, including Theodosiopolis (captured in 608), Edessa (captured in 609), Caesarea of Cappadocia (611), Antioch (612), Syria and northern Palestine.

Khosrow intervened in Jerusalem to stop an ethnic massacre in 614 and in 615 from advancing across Asia Minor and arrive onto the shores of Bosphorus Strait, across from Constantinople.

The above wars were to put Theodosius on the throne, however, in doing so Khosrow gained territory and other benefits of war. These early victories earned Khosrow II the title "Parviz" (the victorious).



Above: Roman and Persian frontier

Roman Wars Phase 2 (615-26)

The sight of the Persian army so close to Constantinople, prompted the Romans to offer peace without any preconditions. The Roman senate was ready to make massive territorial concessions, accept tributary status, and choose whoever Khosrow would nominate as their ruler- thus the formal restoration of Theodosius. With this offer from the Roman senate, Khosrow would not only accomplish the purpose of the war but would gain much more than what he had dreamed in tribute.

Khosrow however, did not accept the peace. There is no evidence as to why he did not accept peace, but most probably he hoped to neutralize (render ineffective, destroy or make into a vessel state) a long-time enemy, the Roman Empire, once and for all.

Between 615-624, the Persian offensive fought alternatively between the northwest and the south. In 619 Alexandria was taken and by the end of 620 the whole Egypt was under firm Persian control. Khosrow then concentrated on taking control of Asia Minor, however, Khosrow's plan did not go as expected and his army was scattered by the Romans, and he fled south to safety.

The Romans rallied and invaded Iran, captured Ctesiphon, and destroyed the great fire temple, Adur-Gushnasp. The Iranians fought back and recaptured the capital, Ctesiphon and the Romans were driven out of Iran. Adur Gushnasp was rebuilt.

The Turkish khaganate joined forces with the Romans. In the following year, 625 the Roman and Turk forces proved fatal and weakened the Persian stronghold. With many decades of war exhausting both sides, there was no definite guarantee of success.



Above: The Sassanid Empire in 620 CE

Domestic Affairs during Khosrow Parviz's reign (602-26)

Khosrow was foremost a war leader. He first addressed internal enemies and then turned his attention to the longtime rival to the west. However, decades of war without final victory had taken its toll.

- The lower-level military men suffered losses with years of service.
- The high-level aristocracy was discontented with Khosrow's absolute rule without any regard for others' wishes.
- The merchants suffered from the difficulty of moving goods during the war.
- The citizens were suffering from the high taxes that they were expected to pay for the war.

At no stage, despite Roman provocations, did Khosrow abandon the long-established religious tolerance in Persia. Despite the efforts of the Romans to provoke the Iranian Christians against Khosrow, he was considered a beneficent ruler who attended to their concerns.

In 614, with the capture of Jerusalem, the Persians also took the True Cross, which Christians believed was the actual cross used at the trial and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. The loss of the True Cross caused panic and anger among the Christians of the Byzantine Empire (or the Eastern Roman Empire). Christians in ancient Persia, however, rejoiced when the True Cross was brought to Ctesiphon. At this time, Persia had many Christians who did not follow the type of Christianity found in the Byzantine Empire. The Persian Christians had differing opinions about the trinity and Jesus' human nature and divinity.



The Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem after the Persians conquered the region, but this freedom was reversed two years later due to increased opposition from the Christians in Palestine.

During Khosrow II's reign the Zoroastrian church became very powerful, controlling the lives of ordinary Zoroastrians. Zoroastrians were expected to have large number of ceremonies performed on every occasion and observe the strict rules of cleanliness and ritual purity, leading to a general dissatisfaction among the Zoroastrian followers.

Sassanid Persia remained a poly-ethnic pluralist society even at the climax of wars and despite the political and economic strains.

Khosrow Parviz's Death

After the losses of 626, Sassanid forces were stretched thin maintaining control and defending borders.

Heraclius, the head of the Roman army marched toward Kurdistan. The battle of Nineveh was a decisive engagement in which the Persians fought hard and suffered heavy losses. Many of the senior officers including the chief leader of the Persian army Raszad were killed. However, the Persians kept their fighting formation and did not withdraw until they had to take a defensive position in the foothills of the nearby mountain range. Heraclius marched toward Dastgerd, Khosrow's favorite palace in Mesopotamia. Khosrow escaped to the capital, Ctesiphon, to strengthen the city and his forces. A group of Persian noblemen along with Khosrow's son Sheroe, from his wife Maria, planned a coup against Khosrow. Khosrow II was captured and killed.

Sheroe was crowned king and renamed Kavad II, in 628 CE, opening the door for peace and negotiation with the Roman Empire. A peace treaty was accomplished two years later in 630. He died a few months after taking the throne from the plague. His seven-year-old son, Ardashir III was named 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.

Activity for Students:

1. Example open discussion questions:
 - a. Do you think Khosrow Parviz should have helped Theodosius, the Roman son of the Roman Emperor? What would you do and why?
 - b. Should have Khosrow Parviz accepted the offer of peace by the Romans when he was at the gates of Constantinople?

- c. Why do you think the cards turned on Khosrow Parviz when a coup was created to overthrow him?
- d. What were some of Khosrow Parviz's leadership skills that were in tune with Zarathushtra's message? Which were not?
2. Give students a blank map and have them draw the boundaries of the Persian and the Roman Empires, then draw the Persian Empire's gains if Khosrow Parviz had accepted the peace offering of the Romans.
3. Tell students the brief story of Khosrow and Shirin from Shahnameh and have them act it out. This story can be found in Dick Davis' English translation version of the *Shahnameh*: <https://www.amazon.com/Shahnameh-Persian-Book-Kings/dp/0143104934>
4. Break the class into four groups and have each group take the role of low-level military men, high-level military men, merchants, and citizens. One representative from each team should tell the class the concerns of their group. These concerns can come from the civilians' daily lives, the wars, the leadership, etc.
5. Make a poster of what you think was most beneficial and damaging to the Persian Empire and its people during Khosrow Parviz's reign.
6. Draw Khosrow Parviz's coin.

Sources:

1. <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/khosrow-ii>
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khosrow_II#/media/File:Roman-Persian_Frontier_in_Late_Antiquity.svg
3. https://www.worldhistory.org/Khosrow_II/

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