



### FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

**Subject Category (circle one):** Iranian Religion/Ceremony **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 number (if applicable):** Pre-Achaemenid Empire-Lesson 9

**Subject of the Lesson:** Medes

#### **Background Knowledge for the Teacher:**

Lesson Objective: Students to learn about history of Medes in ancient Iran (607 - 549 B.C.E)

Lesson Duration: approximately 1- 1.5 hours

In-Class Lesson Discussion - Teacher shares with students in short about Kingdom of Elam and how the Kingdom of Medes started:

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium B.C.E. the earliest kingdom arose in south-west Iran, called Elam. Their kingdom lasted for a long time, and eventually they lost their power to a new group of people in the region called the Medes.

Resource to be shared with students at teacher's discretion: <https://vimeo.com/63943888> - rather long, but a talk by the original excavator, David Stronach at Tappeh Noushijan. References to Zoroastrianism are made about the 20 min mark.

**Teacher** asks the following questions to provoke their curiosity:

- Who were the Medes?
- Where did they come from?
- What language did they speak?
- What did they believe in?

#### **The Medes (607 B.C.E – 549 B.C.E)**



Medes with earrings and round hats, Central Palace, Persepolis, Iran

The Medes were ancient Iranian people of Aryan origin. At the end of the 2nd millennium BCE, Median tribes began to settle in the territory of the future Media in western Iran.

Babylonia came into being in the second millennium BCE and it came to be one of the superpowers of the region. In 729 BCE it was taken by the Assyrians. In 626 BCE Nabopolassar led a revolt against the Assyrians and crowned himself king in southern Babylonia. War broke out between Babylonia and Assyria and with Media's king Cyaxares came to Babylonian king's help. They sealed an alliance through the marriage of Nabopolassar son Nebuchadnezzar to Cyaxares' daughter Amytis for whom according to Greek historian "Berossus" the hanging gardens were made to please Amytis so she would not miss being away from Media. After the Assyrians were defeated, their lands were divided among Babylonia and Media. This way Median territory and their influence in the region grew and thus the 7th century BCE, the whole of western Iran and some neighboring territories were attributed to Media. ***The boundaries of Media changed gradually over several hundred years and stretched from western parts of the Caspian Sea to Central Asia and Afghanistan.***



**ECBATANA** (Ekbātān, present-day Hamadān) was the capital of the Median empire, summer capital of the Achaemenids, and satrapal (the regional governor of Media) seat of the province of Media from Achaemenid to Sasanian times.

In the Behistun Inscription of Darius I at Behistun (Behistun Inscription was ordered by Darius I in three different languages describing his victory to kingship. The relief and accompanying text are on a cliff by the ruined city of Behistun in Kermanshah, Iran.), the name of the city appears as **Old Persian Hamgmatana**, Elamite Ag-ma-da-na; Akkadian A-ga-ma-ta-nu. It is usually interpreted as being derived from \*han-gmata- "[place of] gathering." The understanding was that before the formation of the Median state, popular assembly met there.

Ecbatana is in the Zagros mountains of central-west Persia at the base of the eastern slope of Alvand Mountain. The city controls the major east-west route through central Zagros, the so-called High Road.



**Remains of Ecbatana in Hamedan, Iran**

(Source: <https://www.welcometoiran.com/ecbatana/>)

The site of Ecbatana was probably occupied before the 1st millennium BCE although there is no historical or archeological evidence of this. According to Herodotus, Ecbatana was chosen as the Median capital in the late 8th century BCE by Deioces, founder of the Median dynasty which ruled Media for one and a half centuries.

Herodotus describes the royal complex as a palace, treasury, and military quarters built on a hill and encircled by seven rings of walls so that each topped the one beyond it by the height of the battlements.

[[ECBATANA – Encyclopaedia Iranica \(iranicaonline.org\)](#)]



**Hagmatana Hill (Tappe-ye Hagmatana), an archaeological mound in Hamedan.**

## **RULERS**

The Median dynasty rose in the year 700 BCE and existed until 550 BCE. The Medes ruled over the western part of the Iranian Plateau for 128 years.

The rule of the Median kings can be presented as follows:

Deioces (Dah-u-ka)	22 years	700–678 BCE
Phraortes (Faravartish)	53 years	678-625 BCE
Cyaxares (oo-va-kh-shatir)	40 years	625-585 BCE
Astyages	35 years	585-550 BCE



**The standing Mede:** Medes at eastern stairs of the Apadana, Persepolis, Iran

**The head image:** The Median king “Phraortes” on the Behistun relief



Iranian Kurds celebrating Nowruz.



Iranian Azeris celebrating Norouz

**The Median language** is almost entirely unknown; however, it was an Old Iranian language belonging to the same family as Old Azeri, Mazandarani, and Baluchi. Their language along with Avestan, Persian and Scythian was among the old Iranian languages and most likely similar to the Avestan and Scythian languages. Today's population of the western part of the Iranian Plateau, including many Persian-speakers, Kurds and Azeris, consider themselves to be descended from the ancient Medes.

***There is no known direct evidence of details of the Median language.*** What we know of the Median language was discovered by finding similar words of geographical places and names in other languages.

Some researchers have found signs of the Median language through Elamite and Babylonian writings that have slightly different texts and so they think they come from the Median language. Most of these “different” words are the proper names of tribes, people, and places.

It is believed that some evidence of Median language still exists in the current Taleshi language. [Ref: [fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/](http://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/)]



**Medes and Persians – Apadana Palace, Persepolis – Iran**

**The religion of Medes** is not well known. One of the reasons is that unlike the Achaemenian kings, the Median kings did not leave many writings of themselves. If they did, they have not been discovered yet.

Our knowledge of the Medes’ religion is very limited. A major archeological site was discovered between 1967-1977 by David Stronach. This structure known as Tappeh Nooshijan, near Hamadan and Malayer, Iran, is built on a rock and was a fort.

It is believed that Tappeh Nooshijan contained a fire temple room apparently used for performing religious rituals. It is known that fire temples and associated rituals were common among the Indo-European tribes. The Tappeh Nooshijan temple is one of the oldest temples discovered in Iran.



**Nooshijan Tappeh: ancient site with fire altars in it**

## HERODOTUS THE GREEK HISTORIAN



According to Herodotus, the Magi (Moghan in Farsi), belonged to a Median tribe who trained and provided priests for the Medes and Persians. The Magi apparently played important roles in the palace of the last Median King Astyages, regarding predictions and dream interpretations.

### *Three Magi in Parthian Dress*

Some Assyrian writings dating back to the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, included Median names that resemble both Old Persian and Avestan. For example, the word Arta (Avestan: Asha; Indo-European: Rata) means righteousness. From the Assyrian sources, the names of Median deities Mithra and Asramazash have been found.

Asramazash which is basically equivalent to its Aryan form “Asvrah Mazdash” is the same as Ahura Mazda. These two names were the top two deities of the Medes.



It is believed that the religion of the old Medes was a primitive form of Mazda worshipping. **The Medes would call a Mazda worshipper a “Mazdayazna”** which resembles its Avestan form *Mazdayasna*.

The religion of the Medes and the Persians, before the conversion to Zoroastrianism, was essentially the same as that of the ancient pagan Eastern Iranians (Belief in many gods such as Mithra).

## Glossary

Ecbatana	Hamadan, Hegmataneh, ancient Ecbatana, city, capital of Hamadan province, west-central Iran. It was the capital of the Medes, around 700 BCE.
Satrapal	adj. relating to a satrap or satrapy
Satrap	1. (Historical Terms) (in ancient Persia) a provincial governor 2. (Historical Terms) a subordinate ruler
Alvand	Alvand is a subrange of the Zagros Mountains in western Iran located 10 km south of the city of Hamadan in Hamadan Province. It has an elevation of 3,580m.

## Lesson for students:

1. Make a PowerPoint of the lesson and present it to students.
2. Break the lesson into two parts and break the class into two groups. Have each group present their section of the lesson to class. The teacher can help fill in the missing important information.

## Activity for Students:

1. When giving the lesson ask students to take notes as they will have to each come up with 3 questions from the lesson. After the lesson collect the students' questions and put them in a jar. Then break the class into two groups and each group will pick a piece of paper with a question written on which they will have to answer. The team with the highest points wins.
2. Make a Kahoot game.
3. Make a puzzle or a fill in worksheet and have students complete it.
4. Have students draw one of the Medians depicted at Persepolis.



**Sources:**

1. Google,
2. Encyclopedia Iranica,
3. Encyclopedia Britannica
4. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/babylonia-i>
5. [https://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/iranian/Zarathushtrian/Oric.Basirov/persians\\_and\\_the\\_old\\_religion.htm](https://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/iranian/Zarathushtrian/Oric.Basirov/persians_and_the_old_religion.htm)

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