

Lesson 3 Reading

1. Questions

- 1. What were the two main cities of the Elamites?**
- 2. Who did the Elamites join to fight the Assyrians?**
- 3. Did the revolts against Assyria work?**
- 4. In what year did the Elamite Kingdom fade?**
- 5. What were the 5 cities competing for power in the 6th century?**
- 6. Who conquered them all?**
- 7. There existed 13 kings in the Achaemenid Empire over what period of time?**
- 8. How many ruled for six or less years?**
- 9. How many kings were there during the Sasanian Empire?**
- 10. How many miles across did the Achaemenid Empire span?**
- 11. What were travelers' options?**
- 12. What was the population of the Achaemenid Empire in 480 B.C.E.?**
- 13. What was the Persian word for protecting the king?**

14. For what 2 reasons is it good to use languages that could be understood by a ruler's subjects?

15. Name 2 ways Cyrus allowed his subjects to have independence.

16. What do scholars believe classes looked like in the Achaemenid Empire?

17. How were classes set up in the Sasanian Empire?

18. How were slaves treated?

19. What were 2 principles in Zoroastrianism?

20. What religion/s of today does Zoroastrianism share any ideals with?

2. Pros vs. Cons

Fill out this Pros vs. Cons graphic organizer with at least 3 things for each column.

Persia

Pros (Good)	Cons (Bad)
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Persia

Introduction

Picture an ancient empire so large that it included part or all of more than 20 countries that exist today. Imagine an

empire with connected territory in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Suppose that this empire included Egypt and shared borders with the Aegean Sea to the west, the Arabian Peninsula to the south, and the Indus River to the east. What conclusions could you draw about such an empire from this description?

All the details you just put together are characteristics of the first and largest empire of ancient Persia. Even if you have never heard of ancient Persia, you could figure out some things about it from the information above. You could conclude that it was an important power in more than one region. You could be pretty sure that a large bureaucracy of workers ran the government. You could guess that such a large state might not always get along with its neighbors. And since such a vast empire no longer exists, you could conclude that it came to an end. Lastly, you might wonder why you have not heard more about it before.

If you reached any of these conclusions, you have realized some important facts about ancient Persia. It was run by a large bureaucracy. It allied with, fought with, conquered,

and was conquered by its neighbors until it came to an end when the Arabs took over the region. Ancient Persia has a lot in common with other ancient empires. But, for various reasons, we have less information about the Persian empires than we do about other ancient civilizations.

In this lesson you will read about ancient Persia and its empires. You will learn how we know about it and why our knowledge is limited in some areas. Then you'll learn about how the empires were connected to each other and what we know about life in the empires. Finally, you'll explore some of the ways that the culture of ancient Persia still lives on today.

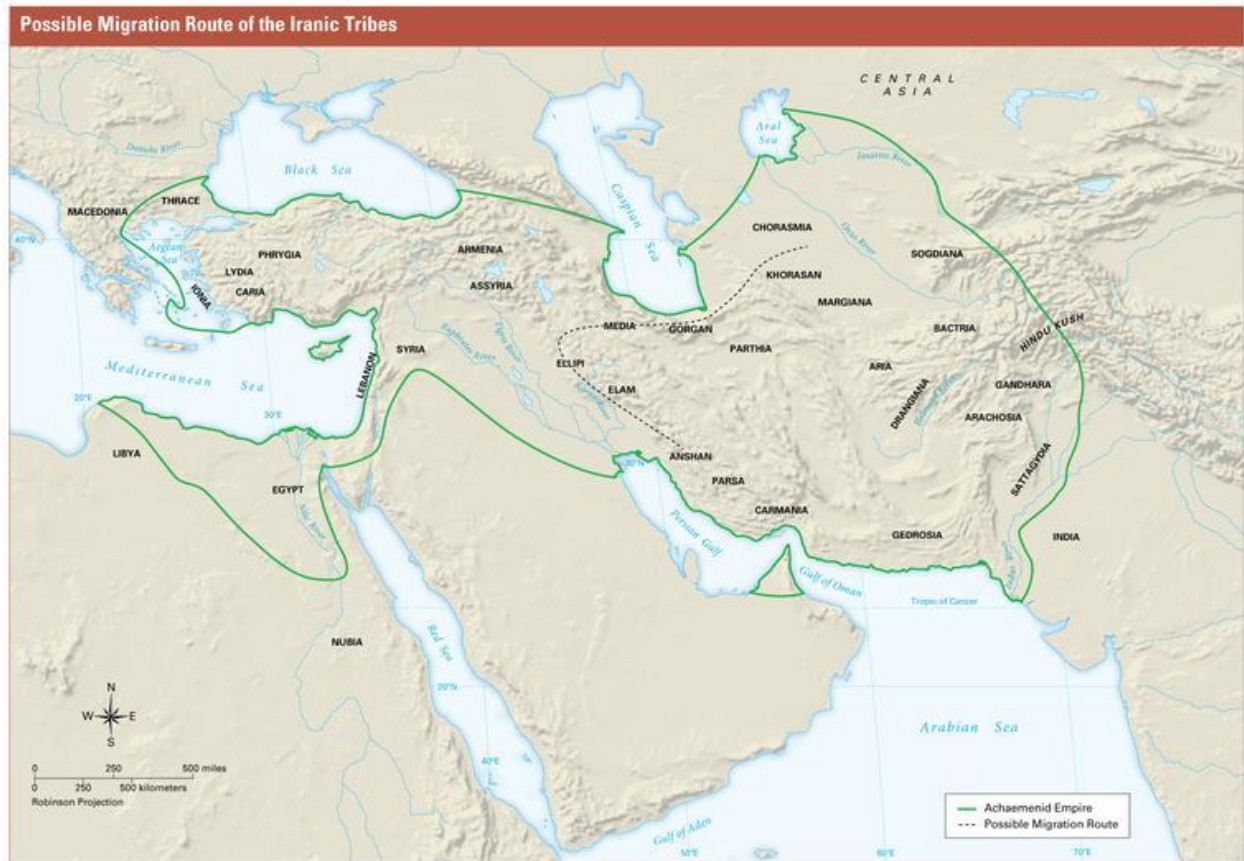
How Did the First Persian Empire Arise?

The Elamites had been a strong, but small kingdom. Anshan and Susa (SOO-zuh) were their two main cities. Elamite rulers called themselves “king of Anshan and Susa” from the second millennium B.C.E. In 691 B.C.E., the Elamites joined the Babylonians in fighting the Assyrians and continued to support the Babylonians

when they revolted against Assyria. But the revolts did not succeed.

In 646, the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal conquered Susa, and the Elamite kingdom faded. One scholar suggests that this was when the Persians came to prominence.

There is much we do not know. But we do know that the Medes became more dominant. By the time Cyrus II became king in about 559, the name of Anshan had been changed to Parsa. And the Near East looked different than when Assyria was the largest kingdom. The kingdoms competing for power in the 6th century included Media (MEE-dee-uh), Lydia (LIH-dee-uh), Babylonia, Elam, and Egypt. Cyrus would conquer them all.



The Administration of Ancient Persia

Now we'll learn about the administration, the divisions of the empire, and how the rulers changed their use of language to address the peoples of the empire.

Challenges of Ruling Ancient Persia

Kingship in ancient Persia is likely to seem very unstable. In the Achaemenid Empire, the 13 kings over the 220-year period, three were **usurpers and six were assassinated. Of the 32 Arsacid (Parthian) kings over the 471 years of the empire, 10 ruled for six years or fewer. At the end of the Sasanian Empire, there were eight different kings between 628 and 633 C.E. Although the role of king was unstable, the administration was solid. In fact, it lasted through multiple empires.**

Challenges of Administration

The size of the empire made good administration essential. The distance across the Achaemenid Empire from southwest to northeast was more than 3,500 miles. Even though the later empires were smaller, they were still large enough to make travel challenging.

Land transportation was limited. Travelers had a choice of walking or running, riding horses or being pulled in horse-drawn carts. With relatively slow forms of

transportation, there was no way for the king to oversee the entire empire without a reliable administration.



In addition, the Achaemenid Empire contained more of the world's population than any empire before. In 480 B.C.E., its population has been estimated at between 17 and 35 million. These people spoke many different languages. How could a Persian king rule such a widespread and **diverse (dye-VURSE) population, especially one with so**

much variety? How could he rule people who didn't speak his language?

Governing the Empire

The satraps were rulers under the king. Satrap comes from a Persian word that means “protecting the kingdom.” All of the satraps were responsible for collecting taxes and tribute and delivering them to the king. They were required to send soldiers when the king made war. Not all the areas of Persia were controlled by satraps. There were also local **dynasties and kings left in place by the rulers of ancient Persia.**

The Postal Service

The king communicated with the various countries by letter. The Greek historian Herodotus explains the system like this:

No mortal thing travels faster than these Persian couriers. The whole idea is a Persian invention, and works like this: riders are stationed along the road,

*equal in number to the number of days the journey takes—a man and a horse for each day. Nothing stops these **couriers** from covering their allotted stage in the quickest possible time—neither snow, rain, heat, nor darkness. The first, at the end of his stage, passes the dispatch to the second, the second to the third, and so on along the line. . . .*

The system used a combination of couriers on horseback and runners. The road was marked with milestones, was guarded, and had inns at intervals for travelers. It made fast, reliable communication across the vast empire possible.

Kings of earlier empires, like Assyria and Babylon, created royal inscriptions in their own language only. Cyrus changed that. Using languages that could be understood by their subjects was more than just a nice gesture. It provided the possibility of getting the royal message out to more people.

Attitude Toward the Conquered

Under Cyrus and the Achaemenids, there was a balance between the authority of the rulers and the independence of the subjects. Local groups had freedom to practice their customs and were not forced into a uniform culture. Subjects were also allowed self-government.

The Silk Road

Scholars once thought of the roads as a network designed to connect major civilizations, like Rome, Persia, China, Greece, and India. They believed that silk was the main product traded across this route and that China was the only source of silk until the middle of the 6th century C.E. Some scholars also thought that the Persian empires had little role in trade beyond being middlemen on the silk road, passing products between producers and consumers.

The New View

With new evidence, we have now had to modify some of these conclusions. Evidence has changed what scholars

believe about how trade developed and which countries were trading with each other and when.

We now know that silk roads were operational thousands of years before Zhang Qian. The **steppe roads developed by the pastoral nomads that ran along the edges of the steppes and deserts had multiple roles. They served the nomads themselves, but also linked the steppe with nearby settlements. Scholars now have evidence of Chinese trade with the west possibly going back to the 6th millennium B.C.E.**

By the time the Chinese sent ambassadors to the west, there were already Eurasian routes along which trade was taking place. However, these routes—as well as the trade along them—expanded greatly thanks to the expeditions supported by the Han dynasty.

Goods Traded on the Silk Roads

The **silk roads were not limited to the transport of silk, nor was silk their only important product. Other key**

products on the silk roads included ceramics, glass, jade, precious metals, gems, and cattle.



The silk roads extended southeast to India; northwest to the Volga; southwest to the Roman Empire, Greek city-states, Egypt, and Libya; and northeast to Siberia as well as China.

Classes in Ancient Persia

There is not much written material to indicate social class in ancient Persia, until we reach the Sasanian Empire. In the Achaemenid Empire, some scholars supposed that the divisions would have followed the divisions that existed prior

to the empire. In this view, citizens were priests, warriors, and farmers. The work of priests and warriors, who were considered equal, made it possible for farmers to grow food. The king, as leader of all, was considered “first priest first warrior, and first farmer.”

Classes in Sasanian Empire: 4 Part Division

One of the ways Persians divided classes was based on citizenship within subject states. Some scholars propose that the Persians could be seen as having four classes: full citizens; freemen with fewer rights; those with partial freedom; and slaves. Nobles, administrators, priests, scribes, artisans, and farmers were among the full citizens. Slaves were treated like property. They did a range of tasks, including both household work and field labor. Some were skilled craftsmen. In at least some areas of the empire, they could own property and marry. On occasion, slaves were set free. Some were adopted by someone who was free.

Ancient Iranian Religion

Zarathustra, a high priest, understood that Ahura Mazda was the supreme god, not just one of the pantheon. He saw a strong separation of Truth and Falsehood, which is also called the *Lie*. And he believed that people followed one or the other, Truth or the Lie. He said that the bodies of the dead should be returned to nature. This meant that they shouldn't be embalmed, a process that preserved them. In addition, Zarathustra is considered by some scholars to be the first person ever to set down a belief in an afterlife in heaven for good people and an afterlife in hell for bad people. Zoroastrianism, which is named after Zarathustra, taught that the world had three levels: Earth, atmosphere, and heaven. At Earth's center was a mountain. On the south side was a sea, where the Tree of Life grew. Below the earth was Infinite Darkness. The most important celebration was the spring new year celebration. Only a priest could perform worship, which included food and drink offerings.

Peak of Hara

X'aniratha-

PLANT

Vourukasha Sea

Tree of Many Seeds

EARTH

WATER

STONE SKY

STONE SKY

STONE SKY

STONE SKY

STONE SKY