

# Ancient Persian Civilization

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- Students hear about **Iran** through **media** and in the **political context** → **conflict with U.S.**
- How much do we know about Iran? (people, places, events, etc.)
- How much do we know about Iran's history?
- Why is it important to know about Iran's history?

It helps us put today's conflicts into context:

- 1953 CIA coup (overthrow of the first democratically elected Prime Minister: Mossadegh)
- Hostage crisis (1979-1981)

## Today we learn about:

- Zoroastrianism (early monotheistic religion, roots in Judaism, Christianity, Islam)
- Cyrus the great (founder of Persian empire, first declaration of human rights)
- Foreign invasions of Persia (Alexander, Arab invasion, etc.)
- Prominent historical figures (Ferdowsi, Avicenna, Rumi, Razi, Khayyam, Mossadegh, Artemisia, etc.)

Sounds interesting!

Do we have educational films about them?

Yes, in fact most of them are available online!

# Zoroaster

- Zoroaster: religious leader
- Eastern Iran, exact birth/time not certain
- Varies between 6000-1000 BC
- Promotes peace, goodness, love for nature
- Creator: **Ahura-Mazda**



Three principles:

*Good thoughts*

*Good words*

*Good deeds*



Influenced Judaism, Christianity, Islam



# Ancient Iranian Peoples

- Middle of 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium (Nomadic people)
- Aryan → Indo European tribe → Indo-Iranian
- Migrated to Iranian Plateau (from Eurasian plains)  
(Persians, Medes, Scythians, Bactrians, Parthians, Sarmatians, Alans, Ossetians)
- The word **Iran** comes from the word → Arya: means *Noble* (in Sanskrit)

## Medes: West, NW

- First Iranians to achieve political organization
- Their dress, ancestor of modern western suit
- Their mantle, developed into the religious and academic robes

## Persians: East, SE

# The Persian Empire (550-330 BC)

- The world's largest empire based on % of world population (44.5%)
- Tolerance & diversity
- First cylinder of human rights
- Role of women in the society
- Administrative & architectural achievements



# Cyrus the Great (576–530 BC)

Cyrus: mother's father → Median ruler  
father → Persian ruler

Founded the **Achaemenid Empire** by uniting the **Medes** and the **Persians**.



- Achievements in **human rights, politics,** and **military strategy.** Influence on both *Eastern* and *Western* civilizations.
- Cyrus conquered Babylon in 540 BC → released the captive Jews to return to the promised land. Mentioned in the book of Isaiah & the old testament.
- Cyrus showed great respect towards the religious beliefs and cultural traditions of other races. These qualities earned him the homage of all the people over whom he ruled.



# The First Charter of Human Rights

A baked-clay Aryan language (Old Persian) cuneiform cylinder, discovered in 1878 in Babylon, now in the British museum.

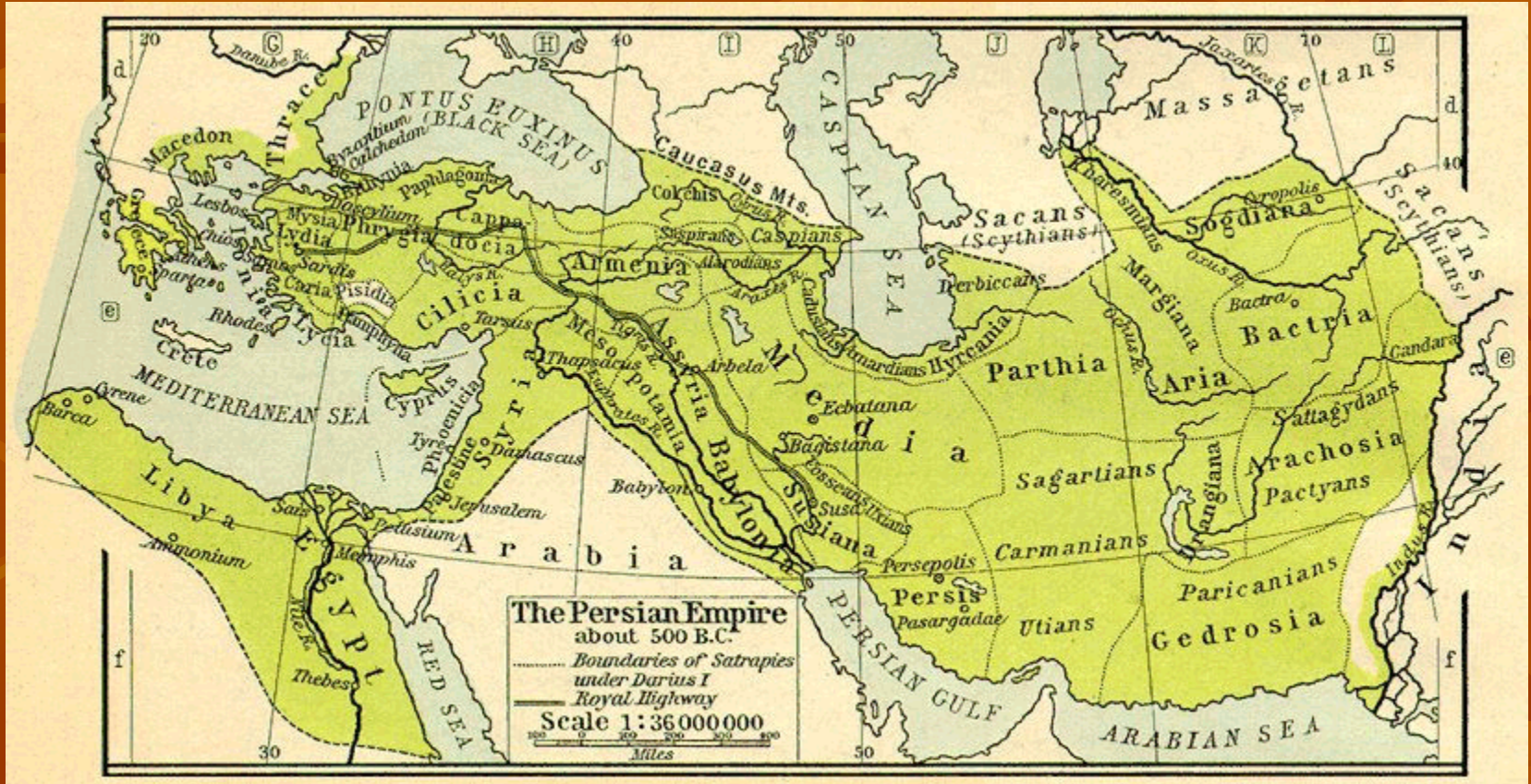
In 1971 the United Nations published translation of it in all the official U.N. languages.



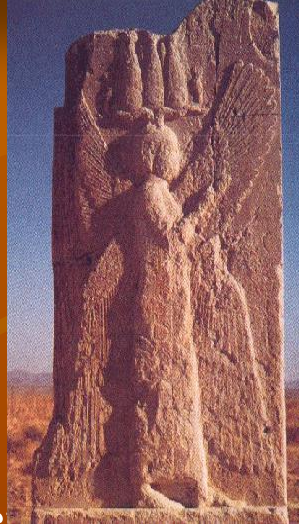
*I am Cyrus.*

*King of the world... When I entered Babylon... I did not allow anyone to terrorize the land... I kept in view the needs of Babylon and all its sanctuaries to promote their well-being... I put an end to their misfortune...*

# Map of the Persian Empire 500 BC







## The oldest intact Achaemenid Bas-relief

- located at Pasargade (1 of 4 capitals of the Persian empire) shows a four winged, crowned figure.
- The two horns of the crown are mentioned in the Bible in the dream of Daniel, the design of the Crown has Egyptian elements, the costume is thought to be Babylonian, while wings are Persian Symbols.
- This sculpture, reflects Persian's dedication to the philosophy of **Multiculturalism and diversity**.

# Persian Empire: Achaemenids

- Four capitals: *Ecbatana, Susa, Persepolis, Babylon*
- Bureaucracy
- Rich economy & taxation
- Women in the work place: Chiefs, Navy captains (Artemisia), had paid maternity leave!
- Multinational and multilingual: Media, Lydia, Egypt, Babylonia, all the way to Ethiopia
- Did not impose religion, traditions, language to others
- Built bridges, roads, canals (Darius pre-figured Suez canal: Red sea-Nile-Mediterranean)
- Model for later empires and nations

# Defeat of Persian Empire

- Alexander the Great invaded Persia in 330 BC and burned the ceremonial capital of Persepolis
- Theories: a) it was an accident  
b) it was revenge (burning of Athens by Xerxes)
- Alexander was an admirer of Persian empire and declared himself an Achaemenid king
- Alexander married Darius's daughter in the mass wedding of Susa (he arranged his officers to marry noble Persian wives, 324 BC)

## Some time-lines

- Achaemenid B.C. 550-330, Cyrus, Darius
- Alexander the Great B.C.330, and the Seleucid period.
- The Parthians B.C.247-A.D.224 Khorasan, NE of Iran
- The Sassanians, A.D. 224. Zoroastrianism as the official religion
- Arab Invasion, A.D. 637.

# The Parthians B.C.247-A.D.224

- Archers
- Feudals
- Tolerance of other religions



# The Sassanids, 224-650 AD

- Considered civilized world + Roman Empire
- Zoroastrianism as the official religion in order to stop domination of Christianity
- Extremely Nationalist
- Centralized bureaucracy
- minted silver coins, model for later European coinage
- Maintained roads, bridges, canals, silk road

## Arab Invasion 642 AD

- The Sassanids were at constant wars with the Roman Empire
- Financially and militarily exhausted
- They were vanquished by nomadic tribesmen armed with a newly acquired faith: Islam
- The Arab Caliphate mostly borrowed the civilization that was already established by court of Sassanids
- Arab Caliphate: Forced Islam and Arabic language many Persians fled to other countries including India in order to practice Zoroastrianism (Parsi's)

## **Dynasties after the Arab Invasion**

- Arab Caliphate (642-1220)
- Regional Dynasties
- Mongol Invasion (1220): brutally destroyed cities, libraries (with hand-written manuscripts), hospitals, slaughtered entire populations. Estimated death ranged in the millions.
- Safavid Dynasty (after 9 centuries of foreign or fragmented rule)
- Afghan Invasion (1722)
- Qajar Dynasty (1795)
- Pahlavi Dynasty (1925)
- Islamic Revolution (1979)

## Some Interesting Figures

- Razi (865-925): physician, chemist, and philosopher, invented the medical usage of alcohol
- Ferdowsi: author of, Shahnameh, the Book of Kings, wrote his epic story with minimal usage of Arabic words in 1010. It consists of mythical stories of pre-Islamic Persia.
- Shahnameh's chief **epic hero** is a noble knight named **Rostam**, who embodies values such as integrity, strength and chivalry (great character for students to explore)
- Avicenna (980-1037): wrote **The Cannon of Medicine**, an encyclopedia of all the then known medical knowledge from across the world. Translated into Latin and remained the most influential book of medicine in the world until the 17th century



- Khayyam (1048-1122): mathematician, poet, and astronomer, reformed the Persian calendar, one of the most accurate calendars in the world and still in use to this day. Helped build an observatory in Isfahan. Wrote about enigmas of human existence, celebrating the divine gifts of love & life.

*If with wine you are drunk be happy,  
If seated with a moon-faced beauty, be happy,  
Since the end purpose of the universe is nothing-ness;  
Picture your nothing-ness, then while you are, be happy!*

خیام اگر ز باده مستی خوش باش  
با ماه رخی اگر نشستی خوش باش  
چون عاقبت کار جهان نیستی است  
انگار که نیستی، چو هستی خوش باش



- Rumi (1207-1273): the greatest mystical poet of the Persian language elevated Sufism to unprecedented heights. Although a Persian, he lived in Anatolia (his parents had migrated in fear of the Mongols' brutality).
- Although extremely deep and philosophical, his poetry is so versatile that it can even benefit children.
- His story of the Merchant and the Parrot is taught at middle-school in Iran.
- A simplified version of the story can be found at:  
<http://rogernolan.blogspot.com/2009/12/indian-parrot-by-rumi.html>

- Sa'di (1213-1292): His poems emphasized the unity of all mankind regardless of nationality, race, or religion. His poems exercised wide influence in India, Central Asia and as far as the Muslims in China.

*The children of Adam are limbs of each other  
Having been created of one essence.*

*When the calamity of time afflicts one limb  
The other limbs cannot remain at rest.*

*If thou hast no sympathy for the troubles of others  
Thou art unworthy to be called by the name of a man.*

بنی آدم اعضای یکدیگرند  
که در آفرینش ز یک گوهرند  
چو عضوی به درد آید در روزگار  
دگر عضوها را نماند قرار  
تو کز محنت دیگران بیغمی  
نشاید که نامت نهند آدمی

## **on-line resources about Ancient Persian Civilization**

- **Engineering an Empire: The Persians** (history Channel)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mm4cRQX5Jzg>

- **Persepolis Recreated**

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-8885711635322743711#>

- **Iran: Seven faces of civilization**

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-5356229498218843348#>

# More online resources about Iran

- Rageh Inside Iran (life in Iran today)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJTzcPhJ3Qk>

- IRAN Documentary Yesterday and Today

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D61uriEGsIM>

- In Search of Cyrus The Great

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YebB4nVw\\_Mg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YebB4nVw_Mg)

- Mystic Iran

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7n9SpvsHtk>

- Jews in Iran

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2Skmj8q0Wg>

**Additional useful information:**  
**What is the difference between  
“Persian” and “Farsi”?**

- '*Farsi*' is the native name of the Persian language; just as the Germans refer to their language as '*Deutsch*', the French '*Francais*' and the Spanish '*Espanol*'.
- The Academy of the Persian Language and Literature has delivered a pronouncement on the English name of Persian language and rejected any usage of the word '*Farsi*' instead of Persian in the western languages (November 19, 2005).



# What is the difference between “Iran” and “Persia”?

- Iran means “*Land of the Aryans: local name since the Sassanid era.*”
- Persia is the way Greeks pronounced Pars (land of Persians).
- The country was internationally known as Persia until 1935, when Reza Shah changed the country’s official name to Iran.

# **The Film we watch today:**

## **Magic of Persia: Age of Awakening by Aryana Farshad**

- Shot entirely across ancient Persia, from historic city of Pasargade, resting place of Cyrus the Great to the majestic city of Persepolis and biblical city of Susa, "Age of Awakening" will take the audience into the heart of this ancient land where the first declaration of human rights was born.
- Not available online, but available for purchase.