The religion of the Persian kings – Zoroastrianism

- The chief of the Gods was Ahuramazda
- In the 6th century BCE a prophet called Zoroaster adapted this religion. He said life was a war between good (Ahuramazda) and evil (Ahriman). He said Ahuramazda would win this conflict and help people resist evil
- The Persians though earth, air and fire were important
- Magi (priest) adopted Zoroastrianism and became the ceremonial class. This class of magi carried out religious rites for the state (sacrifice and tending fire alters)
- The Persian associated wild animals and crawling insects with evil so they killed them
- Speaking the truth was an important part of religion and was incorporated into education
- The truth equated to loyalty and disloyalty and challenges to their kingship were described as the ‘lie’
- They believed in the sacred nature of earth and air, corpses could not be buried or cremated. Corpses were left on a high platform to be picked clean by birds.
- Herodotus records that the magi never buried one of their own “until the body had been torn by a bird or dog” (book 1, 142)
- The body was covered in wax after this ritual to prevent the deteriorating flesh from polluting the earth.
- The bodies of Persian kings were placed in stone cut tombs where they also would not defile the earth as they decayed.
- Cyrus the great was buried in a freestanding stone tomb at Pasargade and the remain of a similar tomb for Camyses 2nd have been found near the site. Darius 1st began the tradition of a rock cut tomb at Naqsh-i-Rustam where Darius 1st, Xerxes, Artaxerxes 1st and Darius 2nd are buried.

Zoroastrianism, propaganda and the Persian kings

- Persian kings used religion for propaganda purposes
- Inscriptions from Persepolis and Susa acknowledge Ahuramazda as the protective god of the empire, and the endorser of the Achemenid ruler.
- Darius and Xerxes say they were chosen by Ahuramazda
- Ahuramazda is shown as a winged deity hovering above the king and his subjects in royal bas reliefs including the Behistan rock and Persepolis images.
Religions in the Empire

- Persians incorporated advanced civilizations with established religions.
- Egyptians whose deities include the Pharaoh, multiple gods (Isis, Osiris, Ra) and worship of the sacred Apis bull. Temple priests managed religious observance and maintenance of land holdings under the overall management of the Pharaoh.
- Babylon: chief deity was Bel Marduk.

Less advances area of Empire (such as black sea tribal areas) religion was often animistic with beliefs in nature spirits.

Persian Kings and level of tolerance towards other religions - a strategy for control of the Empire

- Kings after Cyrus 2nd appear to have deliberately used religion as a means of promoting imperial allegiance.
- Cyrus, Cambyses and Darius appear to foster a tolerance to other religions as a means of promoting loyalty.
- Cyrus cylinder: he refers to daily worship of Marduk.
- Cambyses is shown on the Apis stele honouring the dead Apis bull of Egypt.
- Darius is believed to have restored Jewish temples in Jerusalem.
- A reason for the clear religious tolerance in the empire is the Persian kings recognition of tolerance as a means of discouraging rebellion and gaining loyalty.
Egypt:

- Darius restored a part of the temple revenues reduced by Cambyses and the building of a huge temple to Amun-Re in the oasis of El Khargeh. He also gave support to the Apis-Osiris cult at Memphis.

- A statue of Darius found at Susa (larger than life size) is made out of local limestone, and thought to be a copy made there by Egyptian craftsmen of an original erected in the temple of the god Atum at Heliopolis. The statue is on a rectangular block, on the sides are carved kneeling figures with their hands above their head (representing people of the empire). Carved on the statue: *Behold the statue of stone which Darayavahu the King had made in Egypt in order that he who hereafter shall see it may know that a Persian man holds Egypt ... I am Darayavahu ... May Ahuramazda protect me and all that has been done by me*. The statue is inscribed with a description: *image made in the exact likeness of the perfect god, master of the Two Lands, which His Majesty had made in order that a monument of him should be set up abidingly, and that his person should be remembered beside his father, Atum ... for the length of eternity*.

Darius and the Jews

- Exiled Jews returned to Jerusalem in the time of Cyrus.
- In the second year of Darius, the foundations for the previously destroyed temple were laid. Darius upheld Cyrus' decree and funded the rebuilding of the temple.

Conflicting perspectives of Xerxes

- Conflicting judgment of Xerxes' religious tolerance.
- Tightened control of religion in rebellious areas (maintaining the use of religion for political control, but his policy was not as liberal as that of Cyrus 2nd, Cambyses 2nd, and Darius 1st).

  This assumption is based on the Daeva inscription (recorded how he treated false gods) and it was also based on the interpretation of Olmstead. Was intolerant of some religions, in this case the worship of Daevas. Another negative source is Herodotus who said Xerxes destroyed temples and sanctuaries in countries outside the empire (destruction of Athens) 
  "Everywhere they went, there was devastation by fire and sword and towns and temples were burnt." *Herodotus 8.36*

- Granger disagrees that Xerxes was less tolerant than his father. "He was not intolerant in comparison to Cyrus and Darius."

Daeva Inscription

- Does not identify which country worshiped Daevas.
- First rebellion country mentioned may have been a reference to Egypt in 486BCE.
Second reference is unclear. Maybe a reference to people of the black sea, Granger believes it is a propaganda statement rather than about religious intolerance. (It is similar to the Behistan rock inscription)

In this inscription Xerxes is upholding the importance of Ahuramazda, but also stressing the importance of Atra (righteousness in thought)

Herodotus’ recording of the burning of temples shows he was avenging the burning of the temple of Sardis by the Athenians during the Ionian revolt. It is not an indication of religious intolerance

Xerxes religious policy

XERXES AS AN UPHOLDER OF ZOROASTRIANISM- THE ACHAEMENID KING
DP- Persian concept of Kingship

- Cyrus the great (559-30)
- Cambyses (530-522)
- Darius 1st (521-486)
- Xerxes 1st (486-465/4)
- Artaxerxes 1st (465/425)
- Xerxes 2nd (425-424)
- Darius 2nd (424-404)
- Artaxerxes 2nd (404-359/8)

- Darius, Xerxes and Artaxerxes convey similar impressions of themselves, therefore maintaining a consistent representation of Achaemenid kingship.
- In inscriptions these kings look the same they are only identifiable by their name inscribed beside them.

Arrange these bits and pieces in order of importance

- Religious and hereditary sanction for his rule; by the grace of Ahuramazda and as a Achaemenid descendant. Did not claim to be god, only divine sanction for his rule. Cyrus established a tradition of being presented not as a conqueror but by the grace of Ahuramazda.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPT</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>SOURCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4. Absolute power | - autocrat (single ruler)  
- Not a co-regent | - Granger believes the crown prince was given experience in significant administrative positions.  
- Evidence of Xerxes position in Partha in 498BCE and a position in Babylon 498BCE support this belief. Babylon texts refer to the building of a house for the kings son (498) and its completion (496) |
| 1. Religious and hereditary sanction for his rule | - By the grace of Ahuramazda  
- descendant of Achaemenid king  
- not claim to be a god  
- Claimed divine sanction  
- Cyrus established tradition of being presented not as a conqueror but by the grace of Ahuramazda (through his propaganda in Babylon and Pasargad) | - Achaemenid inscriptions  
- Harem inscription (talking about how Darius chose him to be king)  
- Behistun rock  
- Trilingual inscription |
3. There was only ever one king
- Empire was never divided between two or more sons of the king
- The king decided who was going to be the next king
- Granger does not believe the king and crown prince were co-regents
- Olmstead believes this was the position of Satrap of Babylon (for the crown prince)

7. Throne names
- Darius means “holding the good”
- Xerxes means “ruling over heroes”
- Greek sources indicate that the Persian Kings took throne names
- Granger believes that kings took new names when appointed ruler.
- Although Xerxes name is believed to be his birth name as it appears in 498BC text from Parthia which identifies Xerxes as a kings spear bearer

8. The king ruled from several capitals
- He did not preside over his court at only one place
- Susa = administrative capital, where the king spent most of the year
- Summer he would move to Ecbatana to escape heat
- Palace at Persepolis was not a gov. capital but a ceremonial one used for the new years festival
- Foundation inscription at Persepolis
| 9. The king of kings lived in great luxury | - Showed how important he was in Persian society  
- Income from estates, workshops, tribute and taxes | - The palaces  
- The Oxus treasure  
- Information from Herodotus (who describes his entourage on war expeditions) and he talks about the Oxus treasure. He also records the treasure captures after the battle of Plataea  
- Plutarch (who describes the way the Persian kings lived when on campaign) |
|---|---|---|
| 5. Tribute | - Included gold, ivory, slaves and incense  
- Continual demand for funds  
- Gold/silver melted into ingots and then minted into coins  
- Expenses=government expenses, defence, personal court expenses (feeding the officials), harem, guards, transport, maintenance of buildings  
- Maintained kings image of prestige and greatness | - Apadana relief satrapies bearing tribute |
| 10. Importance of the king | - Portrayed in Persian art  
- Promoting himself | - Persian art  
- Treasury relief of Persepolis (king on raised platform, square beard, on a throne with stool for feet)  
- Herodotus notes impressive nature of the king (get quote) |
| 2. Expansion and building tradition | - Cyrus the great established expansion as a component of a successful | - Cyrus cyclinder, conquering of Babylon |
| King. And a tradition of building an impressive capital |
|Cambyses and Darius consolidated this expectation |
|Cyrus made Pasargadae as his capital |
|Darius built at Susa and beginning building at Persepolis |
|Portray themselves as great fighter, impressive rulers, assert basis for right to rule |

| Cambyses conquering of Egypt on apis stele |

| 6. Protector of the Empire |
|Fighting lion monsters |
|Protector of law and order associated with his adherence to Ahuramazda |

| Inscriptions at Naqsh-i-Rustam and from a field near Persepolis |

**DP- Background and rise to prominence**

**EARLY CAREER- FAMILY BACKGROUND- XERXES ANCESTRY, THE ACHAEMENID DYNASTY, WHAT DID XERXES OWE TO HIS FAMILY BACKGROUND**
Herodotus records that Xerxes was son of Darius and Atossa, the daughter of Cyrus the Great.
Xerxes does not mention Atossa, only Darius.
Darius was not a direct descendant of Achaemenes.
Xerxes was the first born son of their marriage (520 BCE).
Livius comments: Darius and Atossa had 4 sons. Masistes (meaning “the greatest one”) was the 2nd son (he may have been Ariamenes). He was a commander during Xerxes’ campaign, he was killed after 479 BCE because of rebellion attempt.
Achaemenes was the 3rd son, Persian satrap of Egypt after Xerxes repressed its rebellion. He commanded part of the Persian navy in Greek wars (killed during reign of Artaxerxes during rebellion).
Hystaspes was the 4th son, satrap of Bactria.
Herodotus records: other marriages of Darius, Atossa’s sister Artystone and daughter of Otanes (general supporting Darius’ kingship) and to the Daughter of Gobryas (a general).
There were sons older than Xerxes.
Marriages seem to suggest Darius was marrying to consolidate his position.