Chapter 7: The Empires of Persia

Four Major Dynasties:

Achaemenids (558-330 BCE)
- Seleucids (323-64 BCE)
- Parthians (247 BCE-224 CE)
- Sassanids (224-651 CE)

Cyrus (r. 558-530 BCE)

Alexander the Great (r. 334 – 323 BCE)

Darius (r. 521-486 BCE)
The Achaemenid (558-330 BCE) and Seleucid Empires (323-283 BCE)

Under Darius I: 35 million people! 3000 miles

How does Darius portray himself NOT as a conqueror but as a legitimate ruler of this land?

Who occupied this area before the Persians?

What challenges do the Persians have in creating their empire?

What were the keys to their success?
“Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds”
The spirit of Achæmenid rule from which Cyrus the Great founded the Persian Empire (from approximately 559 B.C.) is best conveyed through the words of Darius:

“... I will not tolerate that the weak shall suffer injustices brought upon them by the mighty. What is just pleases me. ... You, my subjects, must not assume what the powerful undertake as sublime. What the common man achieves is much more extraordinary.”
Imperial Bureaucrats: Educated

What’s their job?

Problems with this new class?

Centralized Administration

What’s the evidence for this?
Zarathustra
Ahura Mazda
Angra Mainyu

Many of the same gods as the Aryans
Celebrates same virtues:
  - strength, military success, comfortable life

Zorastrianism - rituals, good vs. evil, Zarathustra,
Ahura Mazda versus Angra Mainyu
judgment day where your "good words, good thoughts,
good deeds" are assessed. **material world = OK**
(later influenced Christianity, Judaism, Islam):
  1. omnipotent beneficent deity
  2. good will prevail over evil
  3. humans must strive for highest moral standards
  4. humans will undergo judgment day
= HUGE AGRICULTURAL SURPLUS
499 BCE: Ionian Greeks rebelled in the Persian Wars

490 BCE: Darius: defeated at Battle of Marathon
Summer 480 BCE: Xerxes: victory at Battle of Thermopylae/ burned Athens

Fall 480 BCE: Xerxes defeated at Battle of Salamis

478 BCE: Delian League formed

Why were the Persians defeated by the Ionian Greeks?
The Macedonian phalanx, here shown in its fighting formation of 256 men, the syntagma.

Alexander III of Macedon
The Great
356-323 BCE

The Empire of Alexander the Great. Alexander’s conquests united Eurasia from Greece to India into a cultural and, briefly, a political unity.
The Parthian (247 BCE-224 CE) and Sasanid Empires (224-651 CE)
| Social: Development and Transformation of social structures | Initially clan based/ nomadic/ pastoralists
centralized authority (Cyrus, Darius) but not direct rule of subjects
SATRAPS governed 23 SATRAPIES/ locals helped administer satrapies
**imperial spies** (“eyes and ears of the king”)
Darius = genius = great administrator (TOLERANCE)
open lines of communication (to administer 70 different ethnic groups)
**Xerxes = ruins tolerant environment** = fall of the Achamenids
Persian Wars 500-479 BCE
Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanid Empires (Alexander’s generals) |
| Population | population 35 million (Darius)
conspicuous displays of wealth/ social extremes
**Imperial bureaucrats= very high status** (undermined authority of old warrior elite...) |
| Interaction Between humans and the environment | Present Day Iran-Iraq
Darius = W Anatolia, E Indus River Valley, S Egypt and N Armenia
Geography was mixed/challenging = development of **qanat** system
Variety of resources
Persian Royal Road 1600 miles

“Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds” |
Persepolis Bas relief
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Culture:</strong> Development and interaction of cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zoroastrianism - rituals, good vs. evil, Zarathustra, Ahura Mazda versus Angra Mainyu judgment day where your <strong>good words, good thoughts, good deeds</strong> are assessed. <strong>material world = OK</strong> (later influenced Christianity, Judaism, Islam):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. omnipotent beneficent deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. good will prevail over evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. humans must strive for highest moral standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. humans will undergo judgment day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Economic:</strong> Creation, expansion and interaction of economic systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high agricultural production/ <strong>huge agricultural surplus</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required tribute/tax from each satrapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regularized tax levies (replaced local tribute systems)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roads fostered trade/ regular markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specialized production in different areas of the empire</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=economic specialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized weights and measures/ standardized coins with value guaranteed by the state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture: Development and interaction of cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic: Creation, expansion and interaction of economic systems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>