Name: _____ Date: _____

Study Guide #11**: The Persian Empire**

The Indo-Iranians: Before 1500 B.C., groups of people migrated from southern Russia into the Plateau of Iran. Two of these groups, the Medes and the Persians, settled in the Elburz and Zagros Mountains and named their new land Iran, "land of the Aryans." These people are referred to as Indo-Iranians.

Except for the northeastern section, which was open and fertile, the Plateau of Iran was mountainous, dry, and barren. The primary sources of water in most of Iran were **oases**, where water naturally filtered up from underground. People also dug tunnels called ***qanats*** that carried water for miles underground.

While some tribes developed irrigation agriculture using *qanats,* the Persians and Medes remained seminomadic. Led by local kings, they herded their horses, cattle, and sheep and often participated in raids for livestock and women.

The early tribes of Iran worshipped the sun god, Mithra, the goddess of fertility, Anahita, and several others. They also believed that fire represented the forces of nature and built temples around the naturally occurring gas fires of the plateau.

Zoroaster. Sometime before 600 B.C., a prophet named Zoroaster, also known as Zarathushtra, started a religious reform movement in Iran. He preached against polytheism and promoted the worship of Ahura Mazda and devotion to the truth. He taught that Ahura Mazda represented good, while Ahriman, the Great Liar, represented evil. Those who pursued the truth received everlasting life, while those who lied would suffer in hell. Zoroastrianism won many converts, but never took the place of the traditional polytheistic Iranian religion.

From Kingdom to Empire. The Medes grew in power, conquering the other Iranian tribes and imposing greater controls and higher taxes on their subjects, including the Persians. In 550 B.C. Cyrus II, king of the Persians, overthrew the Median king and set up a vast empire in western Asia. He also established the **Achaemenid dynasty**. His son Cambyses II added Egypt to the empire and was followed by his cousin, Darius I, who continued expanding the Persian Empire and instituting administrative reforms.

Imperial Administration. Darius turned the Persian Empire into a prosperous, stable, and well-organized system. He appointed governors to rule the provinces and then used imperial agents to keep watch over them and control his possessions.

Darius's roads, including the "Royal Road" from Sardis to Susa, connected the provinces. He also allowed his subjects to maintain their local customs, as long as they paid tribute to him and furnished troops for the royal army. While this army was large and formidable, troops from various provinces were allowed to keep their different cultures, tactics, and weapons, resulting in a disorganized army.

In an attempt to maintain uniformity of law over a diverse empire, the Persians set up the "Laws of the Medes and the Persians," which emphasized justice and fairness.

The Imperial Economy. The Persian Empire's major economic activity was agriculture, supported by a sound currency based on the silver **shekel** and the gold **daric**, which became the chief gold currency in the world of trade. The empire's revenue came from taxing the provinces and was used to finance the army, the administration, and the royal court.

Society and Culture in the Empire. Socially, the empire was ordered with the king at the top, nobles in the middle, and slaves at the bottom. The status of women varied from province to province. The Persians borrowed art forms from the provinces, combining them into a particular Persian style featuring sculpture, metalwork and jewelry that celebrated the empire's power.

Answer the questions below in your own words and in complete sentence. Highlight your evidence.

1. Where did the Indo-Iranians live before migrating to Iran?

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2. What religious views did Zoroaster preach?

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3. What military accomplishments did Cyrus II achieve?

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4. How did Darius control the provinces of the Persian Empire?

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5. What were the provinces required to contribute to the empire?

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6. How did the Persians try to maintain fair and just control over the provinces?

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