



Activity 2 – The Persepolis Tribute Frieze

Introduction

Persepolis was the main capital of the Persian Empire, located in the south of modern-day Iran close to Shiraz. The city was founded about 515 BC by Darius I, who constructed a monumental palace complex on a man-made platform which towered more than 15 metres above the surrounding plain. The buildings on this terrace formed the administrative heartland of the Empire: it was here that the king met his subjects in formal audiences, here that valuable objects from around the Empire were stored, and here that fate of the 30 million people within the Empire was decided.

The buildings were lavishly decorated with precious materials, but they also housed art-work and inscriptions (messages carved into rock) which were designed to communicate particular messages; the Persepolis Tribute Frieze is one example. The frieze is a massive sculpture carved into the side of the stairway leading into the Apadana, the most important building at Persepolis. It shows delegations from all over the empire carrying tribute which was to be given to the king. The giving of tribute was a hugely important moment in the relationship between the king and the foreign countries he had conquered because tribute is the word that we use to describe items given by one party to another as a sign of submission; giving tribute to somebody meant accepting that that they were more powerful than you and that you would follow their orders.

The frieze is too big to include in full, so the image below shows just one section. The image shows a group of Scythians (Scythia was a country just to the south of modern-day Russia) carrying their tribute and walking towards the king who is not pictured. The Scythians are led by a Persian.

Evidence



Activity

What are the key messages within this image? You should think about:

- Who is represented and how they are identified
- The presentation of the Persian and the presentation of the Scythians



- The relationship between the Persian and the Scythians
- What the Scythians pictured are doing
- What the portrayal of the figures says about the king (who is not pictured)

To help you identify the key parts of the image, there is an annotated copy on the next page, which highlights the main things to think about. There is also a model answer in the 'model answer' document.

The Scythians are all armed - what does this tell you about their relationship with the king?

Comment on the demeanour of the figures

The items given in tribute are arrows and a horse - does that tell you anything about how the Scythians viewed the king?

What might the different hats mean?

What does the respective height of the figures here say about their relationship?

