1) Geographical Environment

Geographical setting, natural features and resources of ancient Persia and its empire

- The Achaemenid empire was the largest to ever arise in antiquity
  - Covered 6 million km²
  - Stretched from the Caspian Sea in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south; from Egypt in the west and the Indus River in the east
- Located in Persia, or modern day Iran
- Imminent access to trade routes of the Silk Road and Persian Royal Road
- Thus, the Persian empire encompassed a wide variety of ethnicities, including
  - Babylonians
  - Medians
  - Indians
  - Lydians
- The central and oldest part of the empire was a vast plateau surrounded by mountain ranges
- The land also featured rivers for water supply and fertile valleys that were irrigated for farming and maintained by consistent rainfall
- This irrigation allowed the harvesting of cereal crops and fruit trees
- Great in size, the Persian empire was also rich in resources
  - Metals included copper, gold, iron, lead, tin and silver
  - Building materials included cedar, granite, limestone and marble
  - Featured much wildlife, as well as exotic animals from regions of Africa and Asia such as elephants
  - Cereal crops and fruit were produced plentifully
  - Livestock (incl. cattle, goats, and sheep) were herded across the empire and provided many goods such as food, wool, and leather
  - Horses were essential for the Persian cavalry
  - Fisheries supplemented domestic demand and were exported to external markets
- Inscriptions at Susa also tells of the access to vast human resources available to the Persian empire
  - Median goldsmiths
  - Lydia stone cutters

* Significant Sites

Persepolis

- Raised upon a natural terrace on the south-western plain in Persia
- Founded by Darius I in 518 BC, according to foundation inscriptions
  - However it was Xerxes that contributed them most architecturally to the site
    - Finished Apadana
    - Imperial treasury
- Triplyon
  - Gateway of all Lands
    - Building continued into the reigns of Artaxerxes, nearly 100 years later
  - Originally name ‘Parsa’ however due to subsequent Greek influence it became known as ‘Persepolis’, or the ‘city of the Persians’
  - 72 km from Pasargardae, 480 km from Susa
  - Grandest and remotest of significant sites
    - It appears that Herodotus did not know of Persepolis’ existence, it not manifesting in his writing once
  - Suggested by Olmstead to be the ceremonial capital of the Persian empire and the location of the annual New Years ceremony
    - The layout of the buildings reflect this, the Apadana capable of accommodating for huge crowds
      - Herzfeld suggests it could hold over 10 000 people
  - Features significant amounts of royal inscriptions and bas-reliefs justifying the right of the king’s to the throne
  - Contributions by Xerxes established an architectural legacy for its ornateness and prestige as a dynastic centre
  - Public buildings – Apadana, Hall of 100 Columns
  - Private buildings – Triplyon, Palaces of Darius and Xerxes, Harem, Treasury
  - Destroyed in 330 BC by Alexander the Great in retaliation for the burning of the acropolis during the Persian invasion of Greece

* “Whatever good construction is seen, all that by the favour of Ahuramazda we built”
  - Gateway Inscription

Ecbatana
  - Capital of the Ancient Median Empire
    - Brought under Persian rule after it was conquered by Cyrus the Great I 550BC
    - This conquest referred to in the Nabonidus Chronicle
  - Herodotus gives us a detailed description of the palace
    - Deioces, Median king, demanded a “palace worthy of the royal dignity”
      - Built on the Iranian plateau, the fortress was guarded by 7 “large and strong walls”
      - Each wall was painted a different colour, the inner two overlaid with silver and gold
  - Polybius of Megalopolis wrote that the city was far richer and more beautiful than any other city in the world
    - Citadel had impressive fortifications
    - Walls were built in ceder and cypress wood, covered in gold and silver
    - Roof tiles, columns and ceilings were plated in gold and silver
  - Xenophon of Athens suggested Ecbatana became the summer residence of Achaemenid kings
Persian presence is indicated in bell shaped columns as seen at Pasargardae and Persepolis and gold rhyton similar to that found in the Oxus treasure.

Pasargadae
- Capital established by Cyrus the Great
  - According to Strabo, Pasargadae was built on the site where Cyrus defeated Median leader Astyages in 550BC
- Most likely the location where the inauguration of kings took place
- Complex includes
  - 2.5 km of parks, gardens and waterways
  - Two major palaces
  - Two pavilions
  - Large terrace
  - The Zendan (sacred precinct)
  - Fortified hilltop platform
  - Tomb of Cyrus the Great
- Enclosed in mud brick walls approximately 4 metres high
- Apadana and palaces built in white plastered mud brick
- No elaborately sculpted terrace facades however the door jambs were frequently decorated
  - "I am Cyrus the King, an Achaemenian"
- As typically nomadic people, Cyrus borrowed architectural features from other cultures;
  - Assyrian horses, lions and bulls
  - Egyptian winged genius
  - Mesopotamian wings
  - Greek column bases and stone

Susa
- One of the oldest cities in the world
  - Urban settlements tracing back to 4000BC
  - Originally the capital of Elam
- Rebuilt by Darius I after destruction in 645-640BC
- Well located for agriculture, trade and was linked by road to other centres such as Ecbatana, Babylon and Pasargadae
  - Fertile agricultural area
  - Suggested to have been an administrative capital
- Herodotus calls it the place where the "Great King had his residence" and where "the money is laid up in treasuries"
  - Herodotus was unaware of another Persian capital
  - May not have actually been the kings residence as, trapped in a mountain basin, the area was exceptionally hot in summer
- Architectural incorporates elements of conquered Babylonian and Lydian civilization, such as, the construction of a rock platform and columned hall
- Inscription at Susa describes the location of natural sources and the origination of labour force
  - "The gold was brought from Lydia"
“The cedar timber, this was brought from a mountain named Lebanon”
“Silver and ebony was brought from Egypt”
“The goldsmiths who wrought the gold, they were Medes and Egyptians”

The Behistun Inscription

- Inscription located between Iran and Baghdad in a village previously known Bagastâna, meaning “the place where gods dwell”
- The monument is consistent of four parts
  - A large panel depicting Darius and his subjects
  - A trilingual cuneiform text in Old Persian, Akkadian and Elamite telling of the kings conquests
- The inscription commemorates the military victories of Darius the Great (522 – 486)
  - Explains how the god Ahuramazda chose him to dethrone the usurper, his quelling of revolts and defeat of foreign enemies
- Inscription focused on Darius’ legitimacy to the throne and his victories over rebellious states
  - Accompanied by bas-relief showing Ahuramazda above the image of Darius
- Upon completion, the ledge below the inscription was removed, therefore no one could tamper with the inscription and made it extremely difficult to read

Naqsh-I-Rustam

- Designated Achaemenid burial ground and located most of the royal tombs, 6km from Persepolis located in the mountain range of Husain Kuh
- First chosen as a burial site by Darius I
  - Darius’ tomb was 22.5 metres tall and 18 metres deep
  - Enclosed four vaulted tombs intended for Darius and his closest family
- Later tombs imitated this style of cliff façade tomb, this was also in protection for the tombs
- Tombs also located on the site include;
  - Xerxes
  - Artaxerxes
  - Darius II
    - However none of these have been identified beyond doubt, except for Darius’
- Featured a relief depicting the king on an altar below Ahura Mazda, hands raised in worship
  - King is supported on a foundation supported by bearers from each 30 subject nation
  - Also features a trilingual text
- Excavated in 1936
2) Social Structure and Political Organisation

♦ Roles of the king

- The Persian kingship was a hereditary monarchy originating with Achaemenes, an eponymous tribal ancestor
- The role of the king can be organised into 7 factions
  1. **Absolute authority**: The king’s word was edict, or law, and his orders were mandatory, however he could call upon a body of advisors (e.g. in the decision to invade Greece). The king was not only the King of Persia but also the king of the whole empire.
  2. **Protector of Persian people and his empire**: The king owned all the land and all the people within his empire. This concept is called ‘bandaka’ (bondsmen) and implies the status of the Persian people relative to their king – the king offering fair kingship in return for loyalty and tributes
  3. **Chief administrator**: Empire administered by royals and nobles through highly centralized satrapial system. Effective administration was dependent on the caliber of the king and the implementation of pragmatic policies allowing subject states to follow their own customs, traditions, laws, government and religion
  4. **Commander in chief of the army**: It was within the king's powers to personally lead an army, for example Xerxes in the second Greek invasion and Darius against the Scythians. Suggested by Herodotus and inscriptions by Darius and Xerxes
  5. **Contribution to building programs**: A tradition established by Cyrus, Achaemenid kings were expected to add to, or start new infrastructural monuments, e.g. Darius established Susa and Persepolis. These were used to portray kings’ as great rulers of a wealthy empire and asserted the basis for their right to rule.
  6. **Sacral kingship**: This entitles a union and collaboration with the gods. It was expected of Great Kings to maintain that they were not gods, but a man who, by virtue of the attributes given by the gods, was perceived to be above all other mortals
  7. **Choice of successor**: It was also the role of the king to choose his successor. This was usually given to the first born son, however, as in the case of Xerxes, strict rules of lineage did not specifically apply

* “Within these lands, whosoever was a friend, him have I surely protected; whosoever was hostile, him have I utterly destroyed”
  – Behistan Inscription, Darius

* “By the favor of Ahura-Mazda these are the countries of which I was king...I had lordship over them. They bore me tribute”
  – Daeva Inscription, Xerxes

♦ Images of the king

5
— It is the concept of kingship that guides the images of the king, many of
these images composed by the king himself, thus preserving an element of
political propaganda and bias
— According to Granger, previous perceptions of Xerxes were
Hellenocentric and tainted by 19th Century orientalism, however has since
come under much revision as archaeological evidence provides a different
view
— Most Persian images of the king were by official decree, those of Darius
and Xerxes most commonly found in Persepolis
— Judging from reliefs, it is suggested that no one could enter the presence
of the king without invitation
  - When granted permission, proskynesis was a gesture towards the
  king recognizing his status
  - Ordinary subjects would bow down with their foreheads touching
  the ground and nobles would kneel, raising their hand to their
  mouth in an act of respect
    • Treasury relief
— Most representations of the king followed a number of consistent
frameworks, glorifying the power and contribution of not only each
individual king, but the Great Kings of Persia as a collective body
  - This notion is further supported by the unaltered depiction of each
  king, many dynasties difficult to determine
• The greatest king on earth
  - Recognised no equal, “I am Xerxes, great king, king of kings”
  - Regalia of kingship (e.g. crown. Robe, throne, gold scepter etc.)
  - Power of life or death over tributes
  - Granted power by Ahura Mazda
  - Great wealth from tribute, head of powerful army, king of greatest
  ancient empire
  - Stock appearance; tall, regal and handsome, often with long beard
    • Evidence: Apadana reliefs, descriptions from Herodotus
      and Plutarch
• Favoured by the gods
  - Empire granted by gods and all battles supported by them
  - Granted throne by Ahuramazda
  - Ahuramazda endorsement and protection over building programs
    • Evidence: Behistan Inscription, epigraphy at Persepolis and
      Susa
• Legitimate foreign successor
  - Sacrificed to local gods and appeared in local dress
  - Assumed foreign titles of leadership
  - Accepted all foreign tributes as equal to those of Persian descent
  - Pragmatism encouraged the acceptance of foreign cultures
    • Evidence: Apadana relief, Darius as Egyptian king in the
      ‘Suez Canal’ Stela → assumption of pharonic titles
• Arbitrator of justice
  - Taught to speak the truth and oppose the ‘lie’
  - Supporter of truth and justice, suggested to be a bringer of peace
King's edicts appeared to have become law and stored in judicial archives

- Evidence: Darius' tablet at Susa, Behistan Inscription,
  Darius codified Egyptian laws, Darius’ autobiography (“the lie I hate”)

**Warrior king**

- Trained in battle techniques
- Portrayed as slaying mythological enemies to suggest the conquest of all possible enemies
- Leader of the greatest army in ancient world
  - Evidence: Persepolis reliefs, Darius’ autobiography, Behistan Relief (Darius’ victory over Gaumata), Daric coins with king as a warrior, Daeva Inscription

**Great hunter**

- Expectation to protect empire meant the slayer of real and mythological beasts
  - Evidence: Seal of Darius slaying a lion from chariot, reliefs at Persepolis, Daeva Inscription

* “Several statements demonstrate the care with which the new king connected himself with the work and person of his father”
  – Briant

* “When I became king, I built much excellent construction. What had been built by my father that I protected”
  – Harem Inscription, Persepolis

◆ **Role and Nature of the Bureaucracy**

* “The empire derived its fundamental energy from the authority of the king himself”
  – J Hicks

➢ Olmstead estimates the Persian Empire had a total population of approximately 55 million
  - For an empire this large to effectively run, an efficient bureaucratic system was necessary

➢ Political stability of the empire was maintained in three manners;
  - Divine sponsorship of the supreme god Ahura Mazda
  - Body of laws based on precedent
  - The word of the king

➢ Persian bureaucracy was inherited from Babylon, Assyria and Elam as well as their previous kinsmen, the Medes
  - These systems were adapted by the Achaemenids as suited to the needs of the empire
  - Darius in particular remodelled the system that ruled for nearly 200 years, focusing mainly on
    - Administration
    - Communication
Economic organisation

- Achaemenid society was feudal and hierarchal, the king distributed power among the military and nobles by assigning them land in accordance with the defined social strata.

- Society was generally divided as:
  1. The king
  2. Royal family (nobles)
     i. Upper nobility
     ii. Lower nobility
  3. Priests
  4. Foreign Scribes
  5. Artisans
  6. Peasant farmers

- Although the king’s centrality to the empire was frequently referenced, he was supported by a wide base of high officials.
  - Inscription at Susa shows nobles in a combination of Persian and Median dress.
  - Apadana relief also shows the nobles standing behind the king in support.

- These nobles formed the basis of the bureaucracy, Persian civil and military administration and command.

- Although typically part of the royal family, non-royals could attain a status in the royal court of that of the imperial family.
  - This was usually achieved through military capability or loyalty.

- Nobles often assumed roles such as satrap, commanders of the army or admirals in the navy.
  - Typical of feudal society, these nobles received the greatest land from the King.

* “Phylacus was enrolled among the king’s benefactors, and presented with a large estate in land”
  – Herodotus

* “The substantive power of the Great King lay in patronage and pecuniary rewards: all officers served at the King’s will and all administration was beholden to the royal fiscally”
  – Granger

- Royal nobles were given honourary titles in recognition for their immediate support of the king, these included:
  - Arstibara: Spear bearer
  - Vacabara: Bow bearer
  - Hazarapatis: Commander of the Immortals, the king’s bodyguards, and Royal Guard. Also ushered in those who wished to speak to the kings at the royal court.

- The king would consult these in times of great decision makings, for example Xerxes decision to invade Greece.
  - Mardonius, a high ranking noble in the Persian court, persuaded Xerxes to go ahead with the military intervention.
His uncle, Artabanus, spoke out against the invasion, however was ignored.
The Oxus treasure and palaces of Ecbatana, Susa, Persepolis and Pasargadæ suggest nobles lived a lavish lifestyle.

**Provincial Governments**

The Persian empire persisted until 330 with the defeat by Alexander the Great.

How an empire so large maintained stability for so long has been largely attributed to its efficient military system and the organisation of imperial and provincial administration.

* “[Persian Empire] required great political and military acumen to keep it together: and keep it together the Persian did for some two centuries”*  
  – Granger

Persian administration was usually tolerant and broadminded.

Subject states could:
- Follow their own customs
- Continue to worship their religions
- Follow their own law
- Retain their form of government
  - Provided they paid their taxes, obeyed the king and supplied troops when necessary

* “There is no nation which so readily adopts foreign customs as the Persians. Thus they have taken the dress of the medes, considering it superior to their own; and in war they were the Egyptian breastplate”  
  – Herodotus

The Persian Empire was divided into provinces for administration purposed, each paying a tax or ‘tribute’.

* “King Darius says: Within these lands, whosoever was a friend, him have I surely protected”  
* “These are the countries which are subject to me; by the grace of Ahura Mazda they became subject to me; they brought tribute unto me”  
  – Behistan Inscription

Satraps and Satrapies

⇒ *Satrap:* From the Median word meaning ‘protector of the realm’; the provincial governor of a satrapy
⇒ *Satrapy:* Vassal state of the Persian Empire, organised for military, administrative and communication efficiency

Satraps were representatives of the king and were directly responsible to him, essentially held the power of the king in a provincial circumstance.

The exact number of satrapies is debated, due to the fluctuating nature of the empire a specific figure will remain difficult to determine.
The most important satrapies were often given to royal princes trusted by the king:
- Artaphernes, Darius’ brother, was satrap for Lydia
- Achaemenes, Xerxes’ brother, was satrap for Egypt
Position often held for life; Arsames ruling Egypt for 52 years
Some positions were hereditary, posing a “threat to the central authority which could not be ignored”
  – Olmstead

Xenophon states military and civil powers were normally separated to act as a check on each other and to prevent the acquisition of too much power

The king appointed satrap secretaries and garrison commander:
- Both reported directly to the king
- Royal secretary, or scribe, was authorized to use the king’s seal
  - Herodotus also suggests officials called the ‘king’s eyes’ roamed the empire reporting on provincial affairs, however their role is debated

Satraps required the approval of the king for major decisions and were responsible for:
- Collecting tribute
- Raising military levies
- Dispensing justice
- Administering the economy

Legal system and laws
- Reliefs at Persepolis indicate a clear court protocol was followed:
  - King upon his golden throne set on a dais with fringed canopy featuring Ahuramazda
  - Officials surrounding the king
  - High ranking Median official, sometimes the hazarapartis, in the forefront of the court
  - Hall positioned with guards
- Scribes – The Persians and Medians did not write, but instead used scribes to codify laws and make other necessary written notices. Scribes were also used to translate text into all three of the ancient languages used in royal archives to accommodate all linguistic groups of the empire
  - Persepolis Fortification Tablets
- When Darius seized the throne, he
  - Divided the empire into seven regions
  - Combined local law and Persian law
  - Introduced a degree of equality into the judiciary
  - Codified laws
  - Dispatched travelling judges to satrapies
  - Introduced regulations about the tribute payments
- Both Darius and Xerxes stressed the importance of fairness, the truth and maintaining good order
* “Ahuramazda helped me; because I was not wicked, nor a liar, not tyrannical, neither I nor my family. I walked according to right and justice”
  – Inscription at Persepolis, Darius

* “I am ruler over them. They bear me their tribute. What is said to them from me, that they do. My edict that they hold”
  – Inscription at Persepolis, Xerxes

➤ Both inscriptions indicate that the Great Kings intended to uphold just laws
➤ Granger emphasizes the importance of the ‘Lie’ in Achaemenid society, the lie observed as a violation of human and divide laws, the liar condemned as faithless and disloyal

* “The most disgraceful thing in the world, they think, is to tell a lie”
  – Herodotus

♦ **Nature and role of the army**

➤ The army of the Persian empire fulfilled two important duties;
  o Conquering territory
  o Maintaining the integrity of the empire by suppressing revolts
➤ Despite two minor losses to the Greeks, the Persian army was relatively successful in securing the great landmass

**Army**
**Role (activities, expectations, purpose)**

➤ The **role** of the army can be divided into four central functions;
1. **Military campaigns**: This role may be divided into two sub-functions; expansion of the empire and maintenance of the empire. An expectation of the king was to expand the empire, as seen in Darius 513 Scythian campaign and both Greco-Persian wars. Suppression of revolts was also crucial, as observed in the 484 and 482 Babylonian revolts. In doing so the Persians showed themselves to be highly organised and capable “**first class preparation**” (Cook) in mobilizing vast and heterogeneous forces
2. **Garrisons**: Special military units were quartered at strategic points on roads and fortresses and naturally fortified points, e.g. the Cilian gates. Soldiers would be stationed on the borders of unsettles or recently conquered land to quell unrest. Efficient communication and roads connected military colonies.
3. **Protection of the king**: Of the 10 000 Immortals, were 1000 Imperial Guardsmen appointed solely to the protection of the king and stood under command of the hazarapartis
4. **Construction and maintenance**: When not engaged in battle, Kuhrt suggests military colonists were employed to maintain roads and canals. A systematic road scheme linked much of the empire and was largely attributed to the work of the army. This also kept a
The large majority of Persian society occupied and employed in times of peace.

- In support for his imperial rule, the king could call upon satrapies to provide troops in wartime
  - Organised into 6 large corps commanded by 6 chief marshals of the Persian mobility
- The hazarapartis was crucial to the army as commander in chief, Herodotus referencing Hydarnes at the time of the Persian wars giving advice to Xerxes
- The king would also sometimes personally lead the armed forces, each of the Great Kings trained in military tactics
  - E.g. Xerxes and Darius in the Greek Wars

* "As a horseman I am a good horseman; as a bowman I am a good bowman; as a spearman I am a good spearman, both as a foot soldier and as a horseman"
  - Behistun Inscription

**Nature (size, composition, organisation, armour and weapons)**

- Herodotus is the principle source for the size and **nature** of the Persian infantry
  - His description of Persian weapons, armour and satrapal contingents is largely supported by glazed brick reliefs at Susa and bas reliefs of Persepolis
  - However his figures of the size of the army and navy are unreliable, believed to be great exaggerations

- Army consisted of
  - The Immortals
    - Imperial Guard
  - Persian/Median infantry
  - Satrapal contingents of foot soldiers
  - The cavalry
  - Spearmen
  - War-axe carries
  - Archers

- Overtime the nature of the army changed from a disorganised troop levied only in times of conflict, to an army with a core of highly trained permanent troops
- The composition of the army was exceptionally diverse, due to the multiculturalism of the empire
  - Trained regular units, or ‘Spada’ (generally Persian or Median)
  - Conscripts, made up majority of the army (subject states)
  - Hired mercenaries, drew from troops stationed at garrisons, paid foreign soldiers (foreign soldiers, e.g. Greeks fought for silver, Scythians betrayed Greeks at Marathon)
- Immortals received regular pay, could bring their families on campaigns and were given great prestige as well as the best weaponry and armour
Persian Elamite scripts and writing from Xenophon indicate the army was organised into corps of ten, one hundred, one thousand and ten thousand.

Xenophon also wrote of a system that rewarded courageous acts of leadership through promotion on merit.

- An example of this was the replacement of the Immortals from any regiment, a motivation for all soldiers.

The wartime dress of the Achaemenids was Median in origin and often foreign soldiers were armed according to their native customs.

Herodotus gives a description of Persian infantrymen which has been largely supported by Greek vase paintings and reliefs at Susa and Persepolis.

- \[ \text{"They wore soft caps called tiaras, multicoloured sleeved tunics with iron scale armour"}\]

- \[ \text{"They carried short spears, large bows, cane arrows and daggers hanging from their belts beside the right thigh"}\]

Both Herodotus and Xenophon referred the appearance of a cuirass, or breastplate, supported by depictions of spadabaras on Greek vases.

Weaponry and tactics of the Persian army tended to rely on long distance fighting, such as archers, who would then be followed by the cavalry or infantrymen.

Weapons most commonly depicted include;

- Short, stabbing spears
- Long pike spears
- Bow and arrow

Chariots also featured in Persian battle tactics, however primarily for the transportation of the king.

Navy

- As a landlocked country, Persia had never been a maritime power and had never engaged in sea battles independently, instead relying on maritime subject states of Egypt, Phoenicia and Cyprus.

- The Persians did however use ships to transport horses and supplies.

- In order to protect these fleets, battle ships were developed, using rowers to build speed and ram enemy ships.

  - By the time of Xerxes invasion into Greece, the state of the art ships at the time were triremes, capable of holding 180 rowers.
  - 1200 triremes accompanied this invasion (Hrdt.), 800 according to Green.

  - Four Persian admirals were Achaemenes, Megabazus, Prexaspes and Ariabignes.
  - Inexperienced in naval battle and unaware of Greek coastline, therefore relied on native commanders.
Crew were equipped with weapons such as javelins, axes and swords
The Persian navy preferred to capture and loot enemy ships rather than sink them, thus the common use of riphooks

Workers and artisans

Apart from the noble elite, the Persian tribes consisted of either nomadic herders or settled farmers
The ordinary Persian, Median or satrapal subject supported the king in one of two ways;
  o As part of a feudal system, workers were liable to recruitment into the foot soldier army or as rowers in times of conflict
  o In peace time, workers were expected to labour on the estates of nobles and on the building projects of the kings

Persepolis Fortification Tablets
• Administrative records inscribed on clay tablets in Elamite cuneiform
• Owe existence to Alexander the Great’s burning of Persepolis, the fire baking the clay preserving them for over 2000 years
• Kept by agencies of the Achaemenid imperial government
• Over 30,000 have been found, 2000 translated
  o Each tablet generally recorded a single transaction
• Include records of transactions associated with foodstuffs, provisioning of workers and travellers, and management of flocks
  o It appears Persepolis had an office dedicated to the processing of such records
• Treasury Texts - These tablets provide valuable information about the life of the ordinary kurtash, or worker, as they include ration payments, income and occupations
  o Basic daily ration is believed to be around one and a half quarts of barley and half a quart of beer or wine

Roles and status of women

Evidence reveals that women, both royal and non royal, could exert a level of independence as legal entities that could buy, sell or lease property
The Achaemenid dynasty founded a precedent of equality and freedom to be perpetuated until its collapse in 330 BC

Royal women
• Role of women in the Persian royal court was established within a framework defined by their relationship with the king
• Suggested by Plutarch, the mother and wife of the king asserted the greatest influence
  o Artystone, the wife of Darius I, owner of three land estates. Thirty-eight letters bearing her personal seal confirm her autonomous management of a great workforce and production of large quantities of grain
Brosius, suggesting Artystone travelled to Babylon on behalf of her husband to oversee tax expenditure and collect rental payments; corroborated by Persepolis Fortification Texts (PFT).

- Royal women could act as regent, suggested by the Avestan text stating, "May a good ruler, man or woman, reign in both the material and spiritual existences".
  - According to Herodotus, it was Atossa, Xerxes mother, who held "all the power".

Non-royal

- Little income disparity between equally placed men and women
  - Koch in fact suggesting women earned some of the highest salaries recorded in treasury archives

- Evidence reveals Irdabama, administrator of private property, could dispose of large quantities of products, such as 33,870 quarts of barley (PFT 0577), and order "150 kurrima of grain" (PFa 27)

- Another example of a prominent non-royal woman is found in Treasury records alluding to Madamis, a high tax paying land lord, suggested by Price to have earned herself the title of arashshara, or Great Chief

- The recording of "Irdabama tibba makka”, meaning "consumed before Irdabama", is insinuated by Brosius
  - A phrase usually pertaining to the king’s court, Henkelman suggests that Irdabama possessed a court of her own, her table accounting for one tenth of the products consumed at the kind's court
    - Further supported by the use of her own personal seal (PFS 0051)

- Vassal states (satrapies) and subject people within the empire

- According to Granger, ancient Persia was a multi national, multi legal and multi cultural state that was kept together by allowing maximum autonomy in local affairs and maximum control garrisons
- The Daeva Inscription and the Behistun rock list the subject states, while Persepolis and Naqsh-I Rustam show the peoples of the empire supporting the king
  - Although not enslaved, these people owe allegiance to their king
- The Great King relied on these vassal states to provide labour for various tasks, sometimes this work was unpaid, often however it was
- The majority of subject people within the empire were:
  - Free farmers
  - Tenant farmers
  - Landless labourers
- Slavery was also present, often manifesting in the form of conquered peoples forced into hereditary bondage
- Relationship with vassal states and subject people – this administration is often subject to much debate, the general agreement settling on a tolerant precedent established by Cyrus II and continued by Darius I, allowing
subjects to follow their own laws, religion, customs and government provided they paid tribute and supplied troops when necessary
  o In vassal states such as Egypt and Babylon, the King assumed local titles, e.g. pharonic titles in Egypt
  o Darius presents himself as a liberator of subject states and a conqueror of rebel kings
    ▪ The reliefs at the temple of Hubris in Egypt illustrate Darius making offerings to the gods of Mut and Ptah, suggesting he supported the local religions
    ▪ A statue of Darius I at Susa was made in Egypt and features Egyptian traits, suggesting he adopted local customs

* “Within these lands, whoever was a friend, him I have surely protected; whoever was hostile, him I have utterly destroyed”
  – Behistun Inscription

o Xerxes however is often acknowledged as an intolerant leader, however modern historiography challenges this notion
  ▪ The main evidence supporting this image is Herodotus’ account of the punishment of Babylon and Egypt after revolting, Xerxes ‘stealing’ a statue of Marduk, and the Daeva Inscription

* “He marched against those who had revolted from him; and having reduced them and laid all Egypt under a far harder yoke than ever his father had put upon it”
  – Herodotus

* “I destroyed the sanctuary of the demons, I made proclamation, ‘The demons shall not be worshipped, there I worshipped Ahuramazda”
  – Daeva Inscription

o Briant claims these assumptions “hold no water”
o Granger emphasizes Xerxes was a “king in context”, burning Greek temples was a political and military action rather than a show of religious intolerance, Daeva not mentioning a specific country and therefore likely to be a propaganda statement similar to Darius’ Behistan
  ▪ Cultural imperialism rather than religious intolerance

3) Economy
  ♦ Importance of agriculture

  ➢ The richest land of the Persian empire lay in conquered river valleys, most prominently in the Nile Valley of Egypt, the Tigris floodplain of Assyria/Babylon and the Indus Valley
    ▪ Barley, date palms, flax, rice
  ➢ Other satrapies, and the Persian empire itself, contained large expanses of good grazing land as well as river systems such as the Oxus River
Land owners of large estates enjoyed military detachments, judicial administration and economic management
  o The best agricultural land in the empire belonged to the Great King and the noble court
  o Other land was assigned to nobles who paid a land tax to the king
According to Herodotus, land was measured out in parasangs on the basis of tribute taxations paid
The agricultural environments were essential to the maintenance of the Achaemenid centralized control, sustaining the dynasty with food and resources, compensated for the desert heartland

* The predominant form of economic activity in the majority of the lands brought under the imperial rule by the Persians was agriculture”
  -- Dandamaev

**Economic exchange throughout the empire**

**Taxes - Tributes**
  ➢ Direct taxes consisted of produce, the Apadana reliefs representing this process of giving animals to be slaughtered for the king
  ➢ According to Herodotus, Darius was recognised as a ‘tradesman’ or ‘accountant’ for his systematic taxation
  ➢ Each satrapy was required to pay a fixed yearly amount in gold and silver, and each vassal state paid a fixed tribute in kind
    o Silver and gold went to the imperial treasury, produce used to feed the court and army
  ➢ Taxes went towards maintenance of garrisons, official wages and support building programs
  ➢ Agricultural taxes were levied in fixed amount regardless of the fluctuating quality of harvest
    o Under Darius all land was surveyed and divided into parasangs, which established an estimate of yield based on average of the harvest or a quota system
    o This is not technically a tax as it was not based on a percentage of each years production but was a “reasonable figure based on a reasonable average of production” (Cuyler Young Jnr)

**Indirect taxation**
  ➢ Indirect taxation provided a significant income for the king and covered income from port duties, exchange fees and land taxes
    - Bas reliefs at Persepolis depict subjects bringing tribute

**Gifts**
  ➢ Some areas did not pay monetary tribute but were required to provide gifts to the Great King, these regions, outlined by Herodotus, include India who paid in 360 talents of gold dust and Assyria who paid in ‘finery’
  ➢ Theopompous summarized these gifts “delivered to the king in the form of gifts; carpets, clothing, texts, furniture of artistic workmanship, gold and silver vessels, an innumerable quantity of weapons, also, pack animals to be
slaughtered, even spices, silk, cotton fabrics and in general everything for which any use whatsoever could be found"

- Many of these items are depicted in the Apadana reliefs and remains have been found in treasuries at Susa and Babylonia

* “Persia alone has not been reckoned among the tributaries – and for this reason, because the country of Persians is altogether exempt from tax”
  - Herodotus

**Trade**
- To facilitate effective trade Darius;
  - Established a well maintained road system (primarily the Silk and Royal roads)
  - Conducted state sponsored voyages in exploration of new markets and resources
  - Linked the Nile with the Red Sea by what is now the Suez Canal, ensuring routes across the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf
  - Standardised weights and measures throughout the empire
  - Created a imperial coinage system

- Much archaeological evidence of trade remains in the form of cylinder seals to stamp documents and boxes and weights found in royal treasuries
- Darius used weights to standardise tribute payments around the empire
  - Evidence for this is in the black limestone royal ‘cubit’, or ruler, found in Susa bearing his inscription

* “I am a Persian I commanded this canal to be dug from the Nile...This canal was dug out as I commanded and ships went from Egypt through this canal into Persia as it was my desire”
  - Red granite stele found in canal, Darius I

**Banking**
- Before the rise of the Achaemenids, banking operations had been carried out by temples and princes
- However, as trade boomed under the Achaemenids, private banking operations became regulated under systems of Babylonian origins
- Documents from the House of Murashu and Sons of Nippur, firmly show lending money and tax collection prospered in the empire
- Interest rates ranged between 20 and 50%
- The creation of the ‘cheque’ can be attributed to ancient Persia

**Coinage**
- “The Great King stores away the tribute which he receives after this fashion he melts it down and ...when money is wanted, he coins as much of this bullion as the occasion requires”
  - Herdt
Although satraps were allowed to maintain their traditional economies, to facilitate trade Darius introduced the Daric, a standardised coinage system. Prior to this, payment was measured out in bushels (grain measures).

Only a small percentage of precious metals is believed to have been minted into coins, and only Darius was allowed to mint gold coins. Both darics (gold) and sigloi (silver) coins were minted and were composed of 98% pure gold and 90% pure silver.

The coins depicted a slim, bearded king in a crouched position, wearing a royal robe and crown; he carried a spear, quiver and bow. The coins were known by the Greeks as ‘archers’.

Uniform weights and measures were standardized to a certain extent however often varied throughout the broad empire. Babylon used ‘the stones of the king’, Egypt used ‘the stones of Ptah’. Persian weights were modelled off the Assyrian weights, and were often a pyramidal shape called a ‘karsha’. Duck shape weights have also been found in the treasury and are believed to represent half a karsha.

This standardization benefit traders and merchants, facilitating trade throughout the empire. An example of a royal ‘cubit’ has been found and is a ruler in black limestone about 45.7 cm long with the name and titles of Darius inscribed on it.

A large portion of archaeological evidence from the Persian empire appears in the form of cylinder seals and seal stones used to stamp wax impressions on documents and boxes.

The Royal Treasury

Royal Treasuries were crucial for Persian financial administration and storage of wealth. 139 Treasury tablets have been found. Records indicate there were treasury officials at Persepolis, Susa, Ecbatana, Babylon, Sardis and Memphis. Over 30 000 Fortifications texts from Persepolis record detailed payments of provisions, both daily and monthly, to workers, craftsmen, royal households etc.

The texts name officials such as Pharnaces, who held important positions within the treasury. The hierarchy of officials included work assigners, ‘apportioners’ of rations and chiefs who were most likely foremen. The wealth of the empire can be observed in the expansion of the Persepolis treasury, twice.
♦ **Technology – Weapons**

- The principle weapon used by the Persians in offensives was the bow and arrow, supported by its frequent recurrence in bas reliefs at Persepolis and glazed brick work from Susa.
- The second weapon used by the infantry was the spear, also depicted in similar reliefs.
  - A gold plaque from the Oxus Treasure shows a man with a dagger (akinakes), felt head protection and a quilted jacket, illustrating a similar image as described by Herodotus.
- For hand to hand combat the Persians were armed with a 7 foot stabbing spear fitted with an iron head.
  - The Immortals, according to Herodotus, had a counter weight of gold in the shape of a pomegranate.

* "They wore... multicoloured sleeved tunics with iron scale armour... and trousers... they carried short spears, large bows, cane arrows and daggers hanging from their belts beside the right thigh”
  - Herodotus

- The bows were wooden, coated in horn, small in size and easy to use mounted or mobile.
- Arrows were of cane or reed with three feathered flights and triangular sectioned bronze.

♦ **Building Material**

- Forests were prized for their valuable resources, thus were well managed but were not evenly distributed throughout the empire.
- Raw building materials were however readily available throughout the middle eastern empire, particularly mud brick, stone and timber.
  - Monumental buildings made extensive use of all three.
- Baked bricks were used in the construction of wealthy homes, forts and temples, prominently Susa.
  - Bricks were baked, glazed and bound with a mortar of bitumen; a mineral readily found in Iran.
    - Bitumen was a central material to the Achaemenid’s and modern Iranians, utilizing it as a waterproof sealant, mortar and common adhesive.
- Wealthy homes were also characterised by the inclusion of landscaped courtyards, such as that at Pasargadae.
- Ordinary houses were constructed of unbaked mud bricks possibly on a fired brick or stone foundation.
- The roof consisted of whole and split timber beams covered in reed matting, a layer of lime and a thick layer of mud or lime plaster.
- Walls were likely plastered smooth with mud or a lime plaster and decorated with paint or coloured washes.
Transport and communication

* “[Roads provided] an efficient system of communication that allowed the imperial authority;
  * To control conquered territories and maintain securities
  * Collect and transport produce and people
  * Provide an ever present reminder of its power and potential”
  − Dusinberre

Communication often proved difficult in the vast Persian empire due to the varying terrain and navigability of wide rivers, deserts and mountain ranges

However, the empire was invaluably linked by the Royal Road, stretching from Sardis to Susa, running through crucial provincial cities

Royal Road Network

* “Royal stations exist along its whole length, and excellent caravanserais; and throughout, it traverses an inhabited tract, and is free from danger”
  − Herodotus

Good transport was fundamental to the trade and administration of the Persian empire, thus emphasising the crucial role of the Royal Road
  o The network of semi-paved roads serviced approximately 8000 miles of the Persian empire, the Royal Road comprising 1600 miles

In preparation of campaigns, for example Xerxes expedition into Greece, Thracian and other roads were expanded to facilitate the movement of supplies and forces
  o Paths were cut into rocks and mountains, for example Mount Athos and the Trojan Mount Ida
    − Routes were effectively surveyed before embarking

Horses were central to transport in ancient Persia however were used most prominently for riding rather than pulling

According to Herodotus, the road was 2500 kilometres long, taking one over 90 days to travel the roads extent

The system of roads required its own administration, involving work teams specializing in road maintenance, construction, bridge building and surveyors
  o Voyagers were searched upon their movements, a clear example of this is the secret message from Histiaios tattooed on the scalp of a slave from Susa to Miletus encouraging the Ionian Revolt

* “On the borders of the Cilicians you will pass through two sets of gates and guard posts”
  − Herodotus
The network of roads connecting the empire are referred to in the Persepolis Fortification tablets, recording the authorization required by travellers.

According to Kuhrt, official authorization was required to draw supplies at stopping points and such issues were carefully logged.

- An example of a ‘passport’ has survived, and it specifies officials in charge by name, provisions to be provided and for what duration.

* "Everywhere there are royal stations with excellent resting places, and the whole road runs through the country which is inhabited and safe”
  — Herodotus

**Darius’ Canal**

- Linked the Nile with the Red Sea by what is now the Suez Canal, ensuring routes across the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf.
- The canal was 250 m long and has been credited to Darius since the discovery of the Chalouf Stele;

* “King Darius says: I am a Persian…I ordered to dig this canal from the river that is called Nile and flows in Egypt, to the sea that begins in Persia”

**Communication**

- Official royal mail and couriers travelled quickly along these roads providing essential communications for efficient administration of so large an empire in the circumstance of an urgent message;

* "According to the number of days of which the entire journey consists, so many horses and men are set at intervals, each man and horse appointed for a day’s journey. Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor darkness of night prevents them from accomplishing the task proposed to them with the very utmost speed. The first rides and delivers the message with which he is charged to the second, and the second to the third...as in the torch race among the Greeks...this kind of running of their horses the Persians call angareion”
  — Herodotus

- PFT called this system of horse changing pirradazis.
- From these tablets, a continuation of the road from Susa to the formidable Persian gate to Persepolis is recorded at a distance of 552 km.
- The road that connected Babylon and Ecbatana which crossed the royal road near Opis continued far east and was later known as the Silk Road.

* “There is nothing mortal which accomplishes a journey with more speed than these messengers”
  — Herodotus

**Other forms of transport and communication**

- As well as the road network, including the Royal Road and the Silk Road, there were a number of other methods to communicate, such as;
Fire signals
Bridges
Boat ferries
Darius’ Suez Canal
Warning beacons
  • Mardonius signalled his arrival in Athens this way
Shouting across valleys
  • Darius in Scythia had an Egyptian whose voice could carry across the Danube

**Crafts and industry: wood, stone and metal**

- As well as agricultural, the Persian empire included a large manufacturing base featuring industries such as:
  - Clothing
  - Leather
  - Pottery
  - Metalwork
    - These products are illustrated on the Persepolis Apadana reliefs and in the Oxus Treasure
    - An inscription by Darius at Susa identifies the precious and semi precious stones in the empire as well as the wood and workmen incorporated in the building of his palace

Stone and metal
- Asia minor was possessed ample sources of metals, most prominently copper and silver, Egypt and the Indus Valley supplying gold
- Evidence of the stonemasonry, quarrying and building skills of the Empire can be found at Pasargadai, Susa and Persepolis
  - Fortification tablets also provide a record of payment to the workers involved
- As well as minerals such as gold, precious stones such as turquoise, were brought from Choresmia and inlayed in Persian jewellery
  - Oxus Treasure
  - Earrings from a woman’s tomb in Susa
- Stone pillars were central to Achaemenid architecture
- Stone masons who wrought the stone were brought from Ionia and Sardis, the men who worked on baked brick were Babylonian and the sculptors who adorned the walls were Medes and Egyptian

Wood
- Ernst Herzfeld, the archaeologist who conducted the first large scale excavation of Persepolis, suggested stone capitals of the main buildings imitated an earlier wooden versions of similar designs
- Wood was used in the roofs of major buildings in palace complexes, indicated by the inscription at Susa
“Timber, cedar, was brought from Lebanon...Teak was brought from Gandara and Carmania...the men who worked on the wood, they were Sardians and Egyptians”

Role of foreign workers

-Foreign workers were often imported to craft stone and mental
  - Ionian Greeks were used in stone cutting, evidence to support this includes Ionian script near a quarry at Persepolis, mason’s marks at Susa and Persepolis, some which are identical indicating the same workers, and ‘doodles’ on Persepolis walls
- ‘Kurtash’ were widely employed around the empire, their rations listed in PF tablets
  - Including Egyptian and Carian stone masons, shepherds, carpenters, blacksmiths, jewellers and sculptors
-PF texts name individuals foreign craftsmen at Persepolis who may have been requested to work, Briant considering special cases of highly skilled persons such as architects and consultants
  - Documents recorded movement between 150 and 1500 workers from one site to another
  - Henkleman and Stolper ask “were they seasonal workers on corvee duty or rather dependant and even exploited part of the ...population”

4) Religion, death and burial

- Religious beliefs throughout the empire – Ahura-Mazda

Zoroastrianism

- Traditionally polytheist, around 600BC a new religion was founded in Persia by prophet Zoroaster who wrote his religious beliefs in a sacred book known as the ‘Zend Avesta’
- Zoroastrianism taught that there was one god, Ahura Mazda, or ‘wise lord’, the source of all creation
  - Zoroastrianism rests on the view of life as a struggle between good and evil
- The monotheism of Zoroastrianism however did change, the struggle developing into one between the goodness of Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, darkness and evil
- Those who followed Ahura Mazda, the god of good, did not lie and obeyed the king and would experience happiness after death
  - Those who followed Ahriman consciously chose to lie and disobeyed the laws of the king
  - It is suggested that it was Darius who adopted this slightly modified Zoroastrianism
- Granger suggests that the religious beliefs of the general Persian population had not been displaced by the emergence of Zoroastrianism; earlier Persian customs and beliefs in deities or spirits continued as the worship of Ahura Mazda became characteristic of the royal and noble class because of its prominence in the images and inscriptions of the king
In epigraphic depictions, Ahura Mazda appeared as a winged disc with and without human form
- The symbol was a combination of the wings and body of a falcon and a crowned depiction of the king, joined by a ring
  - Doorjamb of the Tripylon at Persepolis
- The Great Kings used this belief to support their right to rule, claiming divine sanction in the support of Ahura Mazda
- Inscriptions of Darius and Xerxes indicate their belief in the deity as a supreme being, the protector of the empire and the creator of all, the law of Zoroastrianism was, to them, binding on all those who supported Ahura Mazda

* "By the grace of Ahura Mazda I am king; Ahura Mazda has granted me the kingdom"
  - Behistan

* "A great God is Ahura Mazda, who created this earth... who made Xerxes king, one king of many"
  - Daeva/Harem Inscription

Bel Marduk
- The deity Marduk was the principle Babylonian god at the time of Cyrus the Great’s conquest of Babylon
  - However, Cyrus’ conquests and rule of Babylon was one marked by reverence for local gods; his support for Marduk and the Esagila noted on the Cyrus Cylinder
- Marduk was honoured for bringing order and life to the cosmos and defending all other gods against a usurper, celebrated at the Babylonian New Years Festival
- Marduk is typically represented walking or in a war chariot, holding a sceptre and either a bow, spear, net or thunderbolt
- The religious focus of the religion of Bel Marduk is the Esagila shrine and the ziggurat called Etemenanki
  - At the Esagila complex was the sacred statue of Marduk that Xerxes is reputed by Herodotus to have removed, supported by Green on the basis of punishment for the recent revolt
    - However Granger argues that further references to the statue in Herodotus implies the statue had not been removed

Hebrew Beliefs
- Hebrews who had entered the land of Canaan in Palestine established the precursor of modern day Judaism
- A monotheistic belief, the Hebrews, or Jews, believed in the single god Yahweh who was present in all aspects of the universe
- Core tenets to the Hebrew belief were the ten commandments, a combination of religious duties and moral laws, and the Torah, a criminal code and guide for living
- It was believed that their god would lead them back to the ancestral holy land of Canaan from which they had been removed by 6th Century Babylonian conquest
  - This defeat also destroyed the First Temple, the centre of ancient Jewish worship, and exiled the Hebrews to Babylon
    - However after Cyrus conquered the Babylonians, the Hebrews were returned to Palestine and restored their temples

**Egyptian Gods**
- The Ancient Egyptians were polytheistic, and believed in as many as 2000 deities
- The strongest of Egyptian traditions is the notion of Divine Kingship, the belief the Pharaoh was not only the political leader but also a god
- This dependence on religion meant Egyptian priests were exceptionally powerful, controlling religious observance and had considerable economic influence
  - A number of Egyptian temples had land holdings
- One cult that featured prominently in Egypt was that of the Apis bull, a cult centred on Memphis and based on the association with Ptah, the bull
  - A 524 tomb of the Apis bull is inscribed with the name of Cambyses and a limestone stele illustrates Cambyses as Egyptian pharaoh worshipping the bull
  - Two stelae from Memphis depict the Persian king in Egyptian dress offering sacrifice to the Apis Bull, feature both Darius and Cambyses

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<td><strong>Darius I</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>– Acknowledge the claim of intolerance from Herodotus, then dispute with MH</td>
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**Religious policy throughout the empire**

- Contrary to the traditional view of religious intolerance from the time of Darius and Xerxes, Granger believes that the Persian kings did not impose their own religious beliefs on their subjects.
- In official inscription and images, Persian adherence to Ahura Mazda was a factor of propaganda rather than religious extremism.
- Ahura Mazda and the Zoroastrian faith feature prominently in inscriptions at Behistan, Susa and Persepolis.
  - This religious distinction contrasting from the behaviour typical of predecessors Cambyses and Cyrus II.
- The strongest piece of evidence for the tolerance of early Achaemenids is the Cyrus Cylinder.
  - Cyrus also passed down his pragmatic policy of tolerance onto his son Cambyses who assumed the role of King of Babylon, continued the worship of Bel Marduk and the Apis Cult as recorded on a limestone stele.
- Both Darius and Xerxes validated their right to rule in numerous inscriptions, particularly Behistan and Susa.
  - Olmstead suggested that this reiterated the right to rule and lineage succession.

"By the favour of Ahuramazda my army smote that rebellious army exceedingly."

- Darius recognised the value of supporting the key religions of the Empire as a means of actively dissuading rebellions.
  - For example, in Egypt Darius contributed generous funds to the search of a new Apis bull, and on its sarcophagus contained.
- Traditional views of Xerxes religious policy was that he assumed one of intolerance, four pieces of evidence support this claim:
  - Daeva Inscription → "smote the Daeva"
  - Herodotus → statue of Marduk
    - Burning temples in Athens
  - Apis Cult → Xerxes name did not appear on sarcophagus.
- However, modern revisionism has challenged much of this leading scholars being Briant and Granger.
  - Granger argues that the Daeva inscription is merely mimicking Darius’ inscription on column 5 at Persepolis, the failure to specifically identify that Daeva’s it what makes it controversial.
  - Archaeological evidence suggests the temple of Marduk was added to not destroyed, the gold statue of Marduk existing well after the suppression of the rebellion; Granger suggests the statue that was taken was not one of Marduk but may have looked similar.
  - Granger also argued Xerxes burning of Greek temples was military not political.
- On an imperial level, the Great Kings followed a policy of reasonable tolerance with some recognition of the role of the king and the support of a local religious leader.
◆ **Rituals and practice - the Magi**

- The Magi were a Median tribe that became the controllers of ritual practices under the Achaemenid empire.
- Although they were not Zoroastrian, the Magi were the official priests from the time of Darius.
- PFT reference the Magians as accountants and controllers involved in administration.
  - The tablets also suggest the Magi were present at the royal court.
- Other roles of the Magi included:
  - Responsible for the lan-sacrifices, for which Darius allotted every month 30 litres of barley or flour, fruits and 10 litres of wine (only sacrifice mentioned in the PFTs).
  - Fire rituals.
  - Accompanied the king on his campaigns.
    - “Xerxes sacrificed a thousand oxen… and the Magi made libations of wine to the spirits of the great men of old”
      - Herodotus
  - Consulted as interpreters of dreams and omens.

* “They also worship the sun, moon, the earth, fire, water, and winds, which are their only original deities”

* “The actual worshipper is not permitted to pray for any personal or private blessing, but only for the king and for the general good of the community”
  - Herodotus

◆ **Fire Rituals**

- A principle component of Zoroastrianism was the fire altar; a crucial role of the Magi was to tend to these structures.
- Archaeological remains indicate the fire rituals manifested in two forms, freestanding small stone structures and more imposing buildings such as at Susa and Naqshi-Rustam.
- These fire altars were square towers set on top of a stepped, windowless platform.
  - Although some debate exists about the function of these structures, reliefs on royal tombs at Naqsh-I Rustam and a gold plaque from the Oxus Treasure depict the king tending to a fire altar.
  - Xenophon and Strabo also noted the prevalence of fire rituals in the Achaemenid empire.
- Boyce described the temple fire as “that of the hearth fire raised to a new solemnity”.
- It is suggested that citizens brought the ashes of their own domestic fires to be combined with the ritual fire to Ahuramazda.

◆ **Royal Funerary Customs**
Textual evidence for Achaemenid burial traditions is limited to Classical sources, however as the structure of the tombs still remain, much has been gained from archaeological evidence.

The tombs of the Achaemenid kings are perhaps the greatest testament to their commitment to Zoroastrianism.

Zoroastrian priests are believed to have followed this practice, their ancient Iranian belief in the four sacred elements, water, soil, air and fire, should not be polluted by corpses.

Cyrus the Great’s body was buried preserved, indicating a partial compliance with Zoroastrian funerary customs.

Therefore bodies were exposed on Towers of Silence and stripped clean by birds, the bones collected and put in ossuaries or chambers known as ‘astoddn’, the place of bones.

“For what is more blessed than to be united with earth, which brings forth and nourishes all things beautiful and all things good”

– Xenophon

The most dramatic change in Achaemenid burial practices manifested in Darius’ shift from freestanding tombs to rock cut monumental tombs.

His tomb was cut into the mountain at Naqsh-I Rustam.

The façade of the tomb is in the shape of a cross, on the upper part Darius is shown in front of a winged figure, a fire alter and crescent moon, on a throne supported by the people of the empire.

The same façade was mimicked by other Persian kings, as was the interior.

Beyond the entrance were three smaller vaulted chambers, each containing three graves, or burial cists, prepared for the king and his closest family members.

The king was often buried with his crown and inside golden coffins.

It is clear that each part of the empire followed its own traditions for burying the dead.

“The body of a male Persian is never buried, until it has been torn either by a dog or a bird of prey... The dead bodies are covered with wax, and then buried in the ground”

– Herodotus

“They smear the bodies of the dead with wax before they bury them, though they do not bury the Magi but leave their bodies to be eaten by birds”

– Strabo

5) Cultural Life

Art

Achaemenid art largely centres around monumental sculptures and architecture, stone artefacts, glazed brick reliefs, jewellery and metal vases or bowls.

These products incorporated various proximate satrapial elements, resulting in a distinctly Persian style.
Due to the nomadic roots of Persian and Median culture, much of the art is also believed to be relative to Asian textiles, prominently rugs, carpets and robes
  - These textiles were a combination of Assyrian, Lydian, Babylonian and Egyptian styles
  - However most of these textiles were destroyed in Alexander’s demolition of Persepolis or have disintegrated over time
    - Depicted in Persepolis reliefs

Persian stone art is largely imperial and associated with significant palace sites
  - These sites are the home of freestanding sculptures, glazed bricks and bas reliefs
  - Such monumental sculpture and architecture is a clear expression of Achaemenid Persian royalty and imperial ideology

Jewellery, although usually exclusive to the upper class, was wide in variety

Palace and rock reliefs
  - Imperial art was predominantly palace reliefs imprinted on the glazed brick walls
    - It is suggested that these were once painted due to traces of pigment
  - The best example of relief structures is Persepolis, adorned with decorated doorjams, staircases and walls
  - These imperial bas reliefs intentionally used repetitive patterns and images to convey a grandiose ornamental impression
    - The purpose of this art is solely political, emphasising the size, wealth and expanse of the Achaemenid empire
  - Doorjambs predominantly depicted the strength of the Great King
    - In the Palace of Darius, the king is depicted fighting mythological monsters such as a lion-like monster

Apadana relief
  - Reveals in detail the appearance of Persian and Median nobles, foreign dignitaries and tributary nations paying their respects to the Great King
    - Tribute bearers from all the foreign satrapies manifest much of the image, each clothed in native dress to indicate a level of acceptance
  - The central image presents a depiction of the Persian court, flanked by an illustration of the Immortals
  - Persian and Median nobles are depicted symmetrically, however are differentiated by clothing and hair details
  - Clothing appears richly embroidered and suggests a level of high quality

Treasury relief
  - The bas relief depicts a specific scene in the royal court of King Darius
  - Flanked by two immortals, the image represents the hazarapat bowing in a sign of respect towards the king (proskynesis)
  - Behind the king is Xerxes, the royal bow bearer (vacabara) and the royal axe bearer stand
Bas-reliefs
- The courtyards of Darius' Susa were decorated by panels of glazed brick constructed by Babylonian craftsmen
- Evidence of pigment indicates they were once painted in bright colours to increase their visual effect
  - One panel depicts a frieze of royal guards, the Immortals

Rock reliefs
- Rock reliefs can be found on two sites; Behistun and Naqsh-i Rustam
  - Behistun depicts Darius' account of his succession to kingship and acts as a warning to other rebels, legitimises his rule through the presence of Ahura Mazda and is a clear image of Darius' suppression of people of the empire
  - Naqsh-I Rustam depicts Darius standing on a three-stepped pedestal in front of an altar, worshipping Ahura Mazda, the scene supported by throne bearers from the 28 nations of the empire. On the side panels are the kings weapon bearers and Persian guards

Sculptures
- There are very few stone structure, or free standing statues, as they are believed to have been destroyed by Alexander and his army
- However, large stone structures, such as Xerxes gates (two colossal stone monuments), remain at Persepolis today and were intended to impress and intimidate
  - The most noteworthy statue found is the freestanding Egyptian statue of Darius in Persian dress found at Susa, providing a further example of the use of foreign craftsmen in Persian art
    - The statue is inscribed with the three official languages of the empire, but also in Egyptian hieroglyphs
- At Pasargadai a four winged figure dressed in Egyptian style can also be considered an example of the blend between Assyrian, Egyptian and Persian culture
- Other stone sculptures have been found in the Palace of Xerxes and the Treasury at Persepolis, respectively a stone guard dog and an arrangement of three lions
- Carved capitals were a prominent example of Persian innovation and craftsmanship, prominent at all palace sites
  - At Persepolis, the Gateway of All Nations is flanked by two Assyrian human headed, winged bulls (lamassu)
  - Other animals depicted throughout the sites include griffins, horses and lions

Jewellery
- Persian jewellery and other metal artefacts attest to the immense wealth of Persian elite, skilled craftsmen of the empire and their culturally sophisticated nature
- Jewellery combined metalwork with finely cut stone and onyx inlaid into metal shapes
Inlays included stone, glass and faience and often featured intricate details.

- Gold jewellery and metal vessels were constructed using wax casting.
- The main jewellery finds have been the Oxus treasure, the Pasargadae hoard and a tomb from Susa.
  - The most popular inlays were turquoise, agate and onyx and designs were intricate designs featuring animals and repetitive motifs.
    - Earrings found at woman’s tomb of Susa support the notion of inlaid precious stones.

**Oxus Treasure**

- The collection was found near the Oxus River believed to have been stolen from the royal sites and buried and has become the most important collection of gold and silver to have survived from the Achaemenid period.
- The collection’s provenance is definitely not local and features 170 gold and silver items.
- It features model chariots, figures, armbands, seals, rings and coins.
  - Gold griffin headed armlet

**Pasargadae Hoard**

- Excavated from a garden in Pasargadae, the hoard was found in the base of a water jug and contained a large number of beads in a variety of materials including gold and silver.
- The hoard includes armlets, earrings and silverware, such as two silver spoons.

What does evidence reveal about the purpose of art in Persian society?

- Political propaganda → imperial in nature
- Wealth of empire → showed vastness of empire, positive depiction
- Cultural tolerability → extent and cultural blending of empire
- Technology → aimed to impress

**Architecture**

General overview of Persian architecture

- Large artificial terraces
- Marble reflected in the sun
- Large slender columns, bell-shaped capitals, back to back animals
- Architectural blending of Babylonian and Assyrian design
- Double turning staircase
- Single audience chamber hall Apadana

Major building projects

- Persepolis terrace
  - Built upon a raised terrace into which an elaborate system of drains was set.
- Pasargadae gardens
Paradesio of Cyrus II, watered by diverting water from the nearby river Pulvar into stone channels

- The first Suez Canal
- Bridging the Hellespont
  - Main source for this project is Herodotus, revealing the Persian the double row of boats lashed together to create a roadway with the capability of transporting men, supplies and cavalry
- Mount Athos Canal
  - Using teams of satrapial workers, notably Phoenecians, Xerxes reformed Darius’ error in 493 BC

Pasargadae
- The earliest architecture at Pasargadae differs heavily from the later structures at Susa and Persepolis
- Pasargadae is not founded on a raised platform and is of a much simpler floor plan
  - However, an unfinished building on the site does include a large terrace
- The complex features an Assyrian styled entrance gateway and throughout discrete buildings are set into paradesio gardens
  - Lydian stone columns also appear throughout the complex
- The grounds are irrigated for maintenance of the paradesio and the complex also features a fire temple attended to by the Magi

Susa and Persepolis
- The palaces of Susa and Persepolis were built later into the Achaemenid dynasty and were designed to be of a more impressive stature
- The double staircase entrance of Persepolis itself is built into a large artificial terrace and is marked at the top by the Gateway of All Nations
- Four columns supported the foods, capitals shaped as pal leaves
- The Apadana and the Hall of One Hundred Columns are marked by their
- At Susa, baked bricks were used in the construction of walls and to preserve reliefs
- At both sites, a myriad of materials were used and sourced from all over the empire
  - The Susa inscription lays testament to this

**Writing**

Royal inscriptions - Behistan
- The royal inscriptions of the Persian empire are written in three scripts;
  - Old Persian (royal)
  - Susian/New Elamite (administrative)
  - Babylonian/Akkadian (non-Persian language)
- The Behistan rock is the first use of the trilingual format and represents the narrative of the king
  - Darius’ use of the trilingual format indicates an intention to disseminate this information to the wider empire
The foundation inscription at Persepolis conveys the use of old Persian and Elamite, the text chiselled into the rock of the terrace wall.

"According to tablets inscribed in Old Persian and Elamite found at Persepolis, it seems that Darius planned this impressive complex of palaces not only as the seat of government but also, and primarily, as a show palace and a spectacular centre for the receptions and festivals of the Achaemenid kings and their empire.”

Dandamaev

Persepolis Fortification and Treasury tablets

- The collection of Persepolis Fortification Tablets was found in the north eastern corner of the terrace and includes over 30,000 small tablets from the time of Darius I, a large portion of these remain un-translated
- Many of the tablets were not written at Persepolis, some originating from other sites such as Susa
  - This suggests Persepolis may have been an administrative archive
- Majority of the tablets record transactions of food, workers provisions and ration payments around the empire
  - One tablet recording the movement of “the sheep of the King; from Persis to Susa” by 700 shephards
  - Other tablets also include the payment of women in rations of barely, fruit and wine
- The Treasury tablets cover the reign from Darius I to Artaxerxes I, a period of roughly 70 years and approximately 700 have been found
- These tablets record the issue of payment to workmen at Persepolis, identifying nationalities such as Lydians, Ionians and Egyptians
  - These tablets are all local and record either the actual payment or the work for which the payment was to be made
- The tablets provide evidence of transactions, letters and brief administration notes, as well as including instructions from members of the royal family, officials and goods to be sacrificed to the gods

6) Everyday life

- Daily life and leisure activities

- The majority of artefacts that have survived from the Achaemenid empire are of an administrative or imperial providence, thus evidence of daily activities is scare
  - The main written source is Herodotus, writing from observations of a Greek

Elite Persians and Median Nobles

- Those of the noble court often lived in close proximity to the king and usually held estates of land that, although they visited, often did not reside there permanently
- Daily activities for a Persian bureaucrat revolved largely around court or satrapial administration with periodic inspections of large, agricultural estates
The Oxus treasure is one of the key hoards relative to daily activities and indicates a high standard of living; bowls of silver, elaborate drinking cups, jewellery and a small statue of a richly dressed Persian all support the image of a wealthy and lavish lifestyle.

“Throughout their lives, high ranking individuals were surrounded with precious objects; they ate from gold and silver bows and wore dazzling jewellery”

British Museum

Leisure pursuits include hunting wild animals, evidence to support this includes a seal of blue chalcedony depicting a Persian horseman hunting a line and the frequent images of the king hunting mythical creatures.

- Herodotus also reaffirms this, indicating the teaching of young Persians “to ride, to draw the bow, to speak the truth”
- The Behistan inscription also sees Darius boast “as a horseman, I am a good horseman, as a bowman, I am a good bowman”
  - According to Xenophon, as the importance of riding and hunting as a key feature of the education system began to lapse towards the end of the Achaemenid empire, as did the strength of Persian leaders and military officers.

Persians were not taught to read and write as a part of their education, this was perceived to be the role of specially educated scribes who recorded the orders of the Persian administration and royals.

Herodotus also refers to the importance of family and continued lineage, “next to prowess in arms, it is regarded as the greatest proof of manly excellence to be the father of many sons”.

The presence and upkeep of the paradesio indicates that gardening or garden walks were a prominent part of Achaemenid leisure.

Reliefs in the palace of Darius also depict servants bringing food and dishes before the king, indicating banquets and feasts as important in the lives of both the elite and ordinary people.

Ordinary people

- Although little evidence remains for the lives of ordinary Persian families, it can be deduced that life revolved around the family (Mnana) and the clan (Vis), a large group composed of a number of families
  - Several clans made up a tribe
- Few more ordinary ceramic and clay pots that differ from the more prominent and lavish ornaments continue to support the cultural sophistication of Achaemenid existence.
- PPT recorded payments indicate that worker rations were not exceptionally strict and were usually paid in commodities, such as grain and beer, rather than in monetary forms.
- Strabo suggests that due to the high value of children in Persian society, polygamy may have been encouraged.

Clothing
According to Herodotus, the Persian elite wore “richly embroidered clothes”, supported by a silver statuette from the Oxus treasure and bas reliefs from the Apadana.

The ordinary dress of every day Persians was most likely a tunic and trousers of leather hides, and probably a loose felt cap, belt around the waist and shoes tied with string.

Richer classes generally adopted the Median costume; long robes with loose hanging sleeves, tunics, embroidered trousers and elegant shoes.

Like most Orientals, the Persians were fond of ornaments, thus men of rank were often seen doused in gold jewellery.

There was little difference in the dress of men and women; women’s tunics were usually wider and longer than men.

Priests and the Magi were clothed in white whilst performing their official duties (except for fire rituals in which they wore purple), the cut of their garments varying on their rank.

They were also forbidden from wearing any form of ornament during celebrations, but were to carry around a cane rod.

Evidence:
- Glazed brickwork at Susa depicts the Immortals ceremonial dress.
- Herodotus gives a detail recount of each nations military costume, within the context of the Persian wars.
- Oxus treasure and Pasargadae hoard.

Food:
- Traditionally, the Achaemenid’s ate one meal each day, however, on days of significance, this meal could extend for the majority of the day.

According to Strabo, the “daily nourishment of the Persians consists of bread, barley cake, cardamom, grains of salt and roast or boiled meat; with it they drink water.”

This is further supported by PFT, outlining the payment of workers in rations that predominantly included barely as the staple payment.

This was then milled and made into bread or cake.

Meat included goat, camel, horse, ox, mutton and poultry but was not as common.

Beer, wine and water were the predominant liquids consumed, beer often given as an alternative to monetary payment.

However, in earlier days of the Achaemenids, their sobriety was noted.

Herodotus and Xenophon suggest that later in the dynasty, the Great Kings became more decadent, indulging in alcohol and greater feasts.

Fruits included dates, figs, plums, apples and walnuts.

There is also considerable evidence for feasts or celebrations, including luxury tableware as found in the Pasargadae hoard and the Oxus treasure.

According to Heraclides, the Persian state provided their workers and employees with meals as partial payment of salaries and distributed food among workers.
Ctesias suggests that 15,000 men dined daily at the court, Heraclides asserting these feasts were highly organised and as a result not wasteful.

Aelian describes dinnertime customs, one’s knife held in the right hand, food in left.

“Food at the king’s palace is also elaborately prepared with superior excellence”
Xenophon

“Of all the special days of the year, a Persian most distinguishes his birthday and celebrates it with a dinner of special magnificence”
Herodotus

Dining was an important part of ancient Persian life and Herodotus makes a special note of its significance.

“The richer Persians cause an ox, a horse, a camel, and an ass to be baked whole and so served up to them: the poorer classes use instead the smaller kinds of cattle. They eat little solid food but abundance of dessert, which is set on table a few dishes at a time... They are very fond of wine, and drink it in large quantities”

Occupations

The range of occupations throughout the empire is largely dependent on the social status of the individual.

Achaemenid occupations largely included:

- Palace elite (bureaucrats, satrapial administrators and those who assigned roles at court)
- Priests and Magi
- Scribes
- Merchants
- Craftsmen and artisans (e.g. stonemasons, jewellers and sculptors)

The most populous occupation however was free and tenant farmers.

- Divisions of society were made at a tribal level, most of these tribes were either nomadic herders or settled farmers.
- As a largely agrarian society, the Persian’s depended heavily on this lower portion of the social hierarchy.
  - According to Dandamaev, free workers were recruited from neighbouring satrapies at harvest time.
    - These workers could not be sold, thus were not actually slaves, however they were considered non-citizen workers and relocated as necessary around the empire.
  - All farmers held the status of skauthis, or peasants.

Much evidence remains to support the prominence of such occupations, the most comprehensive being the S, as well as inscriptions such as that at Susa.