

Forgotten Empire

The British Museum in London is Hosting a Magnificent Exhibition about Ancient Persia

London - Manal Amir

It is unique as many of the displayed items are shown for the first time outside Iran. The exhibited collection was gathered from different places; some from the British Museum's own collection while some of the items on display were brought from Tehran and Paris.

The exhibition sheds light on many aspects of the ancient Persian Empire which was one of the greatest empires in the ancient world stretching from the Near East to Greece. Six galleries narrate the establishment of the empire, its growth and decline.

Interaction of civilizations

The first gallery gives a general introduction to the empire through its art, architecture and a collection of antiquities.

This exhibition sheds light on the period of King Darius (C. 486 BC); the greatest Persian emperor, descended from the Achaemenid dynasty, under whom the empire reached its zenith.

A magnificent statue of King Darius, made in Egypt, welcomes visitors to the first gallery. It shows Darius wearing a Persian coat with a dagger in his belt. The base of the statue contains 24 cartouches that represent the diverse ethnicities of the empire's people; Egyptians, Meds, Persians etc. In the front and back of this statue's base is an image of Hapi; the Egyptian God of the Nile. There is also a hieroglyphic inscription that shows the interaction between the two civilizations, which enriched Persian art and architecture. The statue of Darius stands proudly opposite a big map that shows the borders of his vast

empire at its peak, when it stretched from North Africa to India and from the Aral Sea to the Persian Gulf. The diversity of Persian territories was reflected on four images of four men carved in stone who symbolise different ethnicities. The first image is of a Persian, another of a Med, and the other two of an Ethiopian and Seljuk. The two main ethnic groups were the Persians and the Meds.

إناء شرب ذهبي،
همدان

Gold drinking
vessel, Hamadan





Gold griffin-headed armlet from the Oxus treasure, Tadjikistan

رأس حيوان خرافي ذهبي، من كنوز بلاد ما وراء النهر



لوح قرميد ملمع وبارز، سوسة، جنوب غرب إيران
Glazed brick relief panel, Susa, South-West Iran

One of the interesting antiquities exhibited in this gallery is a big stone on which stories and legends about religions and Gods are inscribed; the human search since eternity for truth and salvation. Most of the inscriptions during this period were in the three main languages of the empire: Old Persian, Elimat, and Babylonian

Palaces of Kings

The next gallery brings one's attention to the luxurious palaces of the Persian emperors especially Darius (486- 465 BC). It reflects a unique and diverse architecture as Darius brought workmen from different corners of his Empire: Assyria, Asia Minor, Egypt and India, to build his magnificent palace at Persepolis.

A huge carved stone is placed at the entrance to this gallery which shows a royal hero stabbing a monster.

Alongside this piece of architecture stands another large carved stone brought from the Persian palace in Persepolis. It shows people going about their daily lives.



Cyrus Cylinder, إسطوانة سايروس، بابل
Babylon, Southern Iraq

A statue of a guard dog stands in the middle of the gallery; it is made of metal and placed on a stone base guarding the remains of the Empire.

The largest item in this gallery is a massive bell; it is a base of columns brought from Darius Palace at Persepolis.

There is a big screen at the end of this gallery featuring a graphic reconstruction of Darius palace based on remains which are still found at the site of the palace in Persepolis. There are lots of sculptures and drawings on stones scattered around the gallery.

At the door that leads to the next gallery there is another huge stone which shows two soldiers wearing Persian coats. They belong to the Persian army that once had more ➤



Silver foundation plaque of Darius I. Features the same text in Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian, in Persepolis

لوح تأسيسي فضي منقوش من زمن داريوش الأول، وقد كتب النص باللغات الفارسية القديمة، العيلامية والبابلية، بيريسي بولس

in another stone that shows a local Arab ruler lying in bed holding two vessels similar to the ones displayed.

Control of Empire

The next gallery shows how this empire, once the largest on the face of earth, was controlled. Persian culture emphasised the importance of horses and horsemanship, not only for the daily transport and running of the Empire, but also for military purposes. Persians were keen to teach their children the art of horsemanship at an early age. The importance of horses can be sensed in the many gold, silver and metal horse sculptures in this gallery.

There are also a number of currencies from the period of Darius: all the displayed coins show the king holding a bow. The coin was called daric, and may well have been named after King Darius or darayan, the Persian name for gold.

The next gallery exhibits some of the empire's treasures and jewelry. Gold earrings, necklaces and bracelets worn not only by women but also men. Much of the jewelry was never worn and was just for show inside the palaces.



أقراط ذهبية، باسارغاداي
Pair of gold earrings, Pasargadae



The Persians, like their Egyptians counterparts, took some of these luxurious aspects with them to the after life. In the middle of the gallery is a bronze bath, dating back to 400BC, that reconstructs a burial found by a French archaeologist last century. Inside the bath was a skeleton wearing a lot of jewelry: necklaces, bracelets and two symbols of the after life; a silver bowl, two jars and two coins.

End of Empire

The last gallery narrates the fall of the empire, which was brought to an end by Alexander the Macedonian, whose marble portrait bids farewell to visitors. ■

than 10,000 soldiers. These two soldiers are holding arrows that point to the next gallery; the "Royal Table". The Royal Table gallery displays royal

Persian tableware: gold and silver drinking vessels, jugs and bowls of different shapes and sizes. It reflects the luxurious and lavish life style of the royals, which is also portrayed

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