

THE SCYTHIANS: HORSE RIDERS OF THE STEPPE

Directions: First, read the passage about the Scythians. Then, examine each primary source artifact closely and use the details you observe to draw conclusions about Scythian culture, beliefs, and daily life.

The Scythians

The Scythians were nomadic people who lived across the wide grasslands of Europe and Central Asia. They were powerful from about the 700s BCE to the 200s BCE. Because they moved from place to place, many Scythians lived in wagons or temporary camps instead of permanent cities.

Scythians were excellent horse riders and skilled archers. Warriors could shoot arrows while riding, which made them fast and dangerous in battle. Horses also helped families travel, hunt, herd animals, and trade with distant peoples.

Scythian artists created beautiful gold objects decorated with deer, horses, birds, and other animals. Archaeologists have found weapons, jewelry, clothing, and horse equipment inside burial mounds. These discoveries show that the Scythians were not simply fierce warriors. They were skilled craftspeople with a rich culture and connections to many ancient cultures.

Primary Sources



Bronze statuette of a Scythian mounted archer. Etruscan, 5th century BCE.

1. What details do you notice about the rider's clothing, body position, and horse? List at least three observations.

2. This object was made by an Etruscan artist rather than a Scythian artist. How does that affect what historians can learn from it?



3. What does the battle scene suggest about the importance of warriors, horses, and warfare in Scythian culture? Use two details from the artifact to support your answer.

4. The comb shows Scythian subjects but may have been made by a Greek craftsman. What does this suggest about contact between the Scythians and neighboring cultures?

5. What features of different animals were combined to create this griffin? What qualities might these features represent?

6. Why might a wealthy Scythian have attached a small gold griffin to their clothing? What does the ornament suggest about the wearer?



7. Based on the artifacts you examined, what values seem to have been most important to the Scythians? Use evidence from at least two artifacts to support your answer.

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1. What details do you notice about the rider's clothing, body position, and horse? List at least three observations.

Answers may include the pointed cap, fitted jacket, bent riding position, the rider seated on a horse, or the rider's arms positioned as if using a bow.

2. This object was made by an Etruscan artist rather than a Scythian artist. How does that affect what historians can learn from it?

The object shows how another culture represented Scythians, but it may not show exactly how Scythians viewed themselves. Historians should compare it with Scythian-made objects and other evidence before drawing firm conclusions. The Met identifies the figure as Scythian because of his distinctive cap and fitted jacket.

3. What does the battle scene suggest about the importance of warriors, horses, and warfare in Scythian culture? Use two details from the artifact to support your answer.

The scene suggests that military skill, weapons, horses, and bravery were important in Scythian culture. Evidence may include the mounted warrior, the fighting figures, and their weapons or armor.

4. The comb shows Scythian subjects but may have been made by a Greek craftsperson. What does this suggest about contact between the Scythians and neighboring cultures?

It suggests that the Scythians traded with Greek communities and exchanged artistic ideas. Wealthy Scythians may have purchased luxury goods from Greek craftspeople.

5. What features of different animals were combined to create this griffin? What qualities might these features represent?

The griffin combines a catlike body with a bird's head and wings. These features may represent qualities such as strength, speed, alertness, or protection.

6. Why might a wealthy Scythian have attached a small gold griffin to their clothing? What does the ornament suggest about the wearer?

The gold ornament would have sparkled in the light and displayed the wearer's wealth, status, and power. It also shows that animal designs were important in Scythian art.

7. Based on the artifacts you examined, what values seem to have been most important to the Scythians? Use evidence from at least two artifacts to support your answer.

Answers may identify values such as bravery, military skill, horsemanship, wealth, social status, nature, animals, or beliefs about the afterlife. Students should support their conclusion with specific details from at least two artifacts.