



Satrapies

The Persian Empire was vast, spanning over 3,000 miles from East to West. In order to rule over such a large area, the king divided the empire into regions called satrapies. Each satrapie had its own ruler, the satrap, who was subordinate to the Persian King. The word "satrap" comes from an old Persian word that means "guardian of the realm."

The Persians were not the first empire to divide thier land into satrapies. The Medes split their empire into territories which were governed by vassal kings, independent rulers who owed their allegiance to the ruler of the Median empire. In fact, the Achaemenid (Persian) Empire itself actually began as a satrapy within the Median Empire. When the Persian Cyrus the Great overhrew the Median Empire in 550 B.C., he kept the satrap system, but the role of the satraps changed. The Persians believed that thier king ruled by divine right. Though the Satraps remained in charge of thier regions, they became answerable to the Persian King.

A satrap was like a governor. It was the satrap's job to enforce the king's laws and collect taxes for the empire. Although the satraps had power, they were watched closely by the king, who would send a royal secretary known as the "eye of the king" to visit each satrapy every year. Each satrap was also advised by a council who reported directly to the king. The chief financial officer and the head of the military of each satrap also answered directly to the king.

How did Persian Kings keep the satraps from becoming too powerful?
