

(ii) Arch of Titus - 2018

(a) What event is shown on this panel and to which monument does it belong?

The event shown is the triumphal procession in Rome to celebrate the Roman victory over the Jews between 66 AD and 70 AD. The Romans ruthlessly destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and exiled thousands of Jews from the Holy Land. The Romans then ransacked the temple for its treasures. The panel is from the Arch of Titus in Rome, built to honor Emperor Titus's great victory over the Jews.

(b) Describe what is happening in the scene.

In this scene, the treasures of the temple are being marched to the archway in a procession. The focus point of the scene is the great menorah which stands out in higher relief. There is free space behind it so that any onlookers will be drawn to it, once again highlighting its importance. Not only is it a symbol of the Jewish people and Titus carrying the menorah back with him showcased their defeat, but it is also a treasure and symbolizes the wealth Titus's victory comes with.

As depicted is the litter on which the menorah is carried as well as sacred silver trumpets, all of which were stolen from the temple in Jerusalem. The soldiers parade the temple treasures to the arch where later they will be placed in the temple of peace for safekeeping. Other soldiers at the back hold placards telling the onlookers of the revolt and the retrieved items. This process appears to be coming toward us, while the procession heads for the temple.

(c) Comment on the sculptor's use of high and low relief in the panel.

The low and high relief in the panel provides it with brilliant sense of perspective that is "almost perfect". the relief is used to depict the scenery in the background or something that can be seen from a distance. The arch is a perfect example of low relief being used to demonstrate perspective. It looks further away than that of the structures in high relief like the front row soldiers in the procession and the menorah. These items in the foreground look closer than the arch.

The high relief is also used as a way of highlighting the importance of the treasure from the temple in Jerusalem. The menorah on the litter is in high relief so that it stands out from the rest of the figures. Similarly, some of the drapery is carved in high relief, giving it the appearance of being in the foreground which adds to the perspective.

The heads of some of the soldiers are shallower than that of some of the other figures and items in the foreground. This gives the illusion that some of the men are a little further away than others. The different levels of relief also changed our impression of the procession's direction. The viewer feels as though the procession is coming towards them [low to high relief] before veering off towards the arch [high to low relief.]

(d) What is your view on Wheeler's remark that the sculpture has got the perspective “nearly right”?

The accuracy of perspective cannot be denied. The use of low and high relief to create a sense of space and depth is evident. The viewer or onlooker certainly feels as though they are looking at the procession coming towards them and then proceeding away into the distance. What's more is unlike the likes of the Ara Pacis where the figures are all the same height, the heights of the soldiers differ on this arch and there is space above their heads. In fact, the perspective on the panel shown is quite well done.

It is however on the panel with Titus in his chariot that Wheeler's comment about the perspective being “nearly right” is agreeable. While using the high and low relief to create perspective, the arch takes a frontal technique in terms of the horses and chariots [similar to the arch of Septimius Severus]. This frontal technique makes the horses and chariot look awkward as the arch of Titus is twisted and contorted to confront the viewer. While this could be intentional so that onlookers have a clear view of the emperor on his chariot, it changes the perspective to look awkward. While the Romans cared more about the story than the technique, Wheeler is surprised that the Romans never seemed to fully grasp the idea of perspective.