Investigating Ancient History – B7 Palmyra and the Silk Road

This resource has been designed to support teachers by providing a range of tasks based on syllabus content. Tasks can be incorporated into context driven teaching and learning programs in full or can be used to supplement existing programs. All content is textbook non-specific.

## Table of contents

[Investigating Ancient History – B7 Palmyra and the Silk Road 1](#_Toc83060673)

[Table of contents 2](#_Toc83060674)

[Outcomes 3](#_Toc83060675)

[Historical concepts and skills 3](#_Toc83060676)

[Key terms 4](#_Toc83060677)

[Learning sequence 1 5](#_Toc83060678)

[Content 5](#_Toc83060679)

[Representations of Palmyra 5](#_Toc83060680)

[Learning sequence 2 7](#_Toc83060681)

[Content 7](#_Toc83060682)

[Geographical and historical context 7](#_Toc83060683)

[Learning sequence 3 9](#_Toc83060684)

[Content 9](#_Toc83060685)

[Archaeological and written sources 9](#_Toc83060686)

[Learning sequence 4 11](#_Toc83060687)

[Content 11](#_Toc83060688)

[History of Palmyra through sources 11](#_Toc83060689)

[Assessment task 14](#_Toc83060690)

[Outcomes 14](#_Toc83060691)

[Syllabus content 14](#_Toc83060692)

[Task 14](#_Toc83060693)

[Marking criteria 15](#_Toc83060694)

## Outcomes

A student:

* **AH11-1** describes the nature of continuity and change in the ancient world
* **AH11-2** proposes ideas about the varying causes and effects of events and developments
* **AH11-3** analyses the role of historical features, individuals and groups in shaping the past
* **AH11-4** accounts for the different perspectives of individuals and groups
* **AH11-5** examines the significance of historical features, people, places, events and developments of the ancient world
* **AH11-6** analyses and interprets different types of sources for evidence to support an historical account or argument
* **AH11-7** discusses and evaluates differing interpretations and representations of the past
* **AH11-9** communicates historical understanding, using historical knowledge, concepts and terms, in appropriate and well-structured forms

## Historical concepts and skills

* **Analysis and use of sources**
  + explain the meaning and value of sources for an historical inquiry (ACHAH007, ACHAH009)
  + analyse sources to identify and account for the different perspectives of individuals and groups in the past (ACHAH010)
  + analyse and synthesise evidence from different types of sources to develop reasoned claims (ACHAH008)
  + identify and analyse problems relating to sources in the investigation of the past (ACHAH011)
* **Historical interpretation**
  + analyse the extent and nature of continuity and change over time (ACHAH001)
  + identify and analyse the varying causes and effects of events and developments in order to construct historical arguments (ACHAH001)
  + form judgments about historical significance, recognising that significance may be attributed for different purposes
  + analyse and evaluate contested interpretations and representations of the past (ACHAH011, ACHAH012)
* **Historical investigation and research**
  + frame questions to guide historical inquiry and develop a coherent research plan (ACHAH004)
  + use evidence from a range of sources to inform investigation and research (ACHAH005)
  + acknowledge sources appropriately (ACHAH015)
* **Explanation and communication**
  + develop texts, particularly historical accounts and arguments, supported by relevant evidence from sources (ACHAH013)
  + communicate historical understanding, using historical knowledge, concepts and terms, in forms appropriate to purpose and audience (ACHAH014)

## Key terms

archaeological, caravan city, caravanserai, colonnade, cultural, decline, eastern, economic, inscriptions, reign, tariff, trade route, western

Outcomes and other elements of syllabus references in this document are from [the Ancient History Stage 6 Syllabus 2017](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/wcm/connect/fbe035bd-fbb3-45dc-a47a-4f93ce9e164c/ancient-history-stage-6-syllabus-2017.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2021.

## Learning sequence 1

### Content

Students investigate:

* Representations of Palmyra – ancient and, or, modern

### Representations of Palmyra

**Teacher note** – some of the resources referring to ISIS and the conflict in the Middle East in this learning sequence may cause distress to some students. These have been included as an important component of the investigation of the modern representation of Palmyra. Teachers should ensure that they are familiar with, and follow the [Controversial Issues in Schools](https://www.education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2002-0045) policy and consult with appropriate staff as required.

* **On your own, brainstorm what you know about Palmyra and the Silk Road. Consider anything you may have heard about on the news in recent years, its origins and purpose, and nature of trade in the ancient world. Then complete a** [think, pair, share](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/645?clearCache=1352b5a5-a68-a2fc-dea2-eb083e37d7e7):
  + **turn to your partner and share your ideas**
  + **now share your ideas with another pair**
  + **record all your ideas in your notes**
* **Complete an internet image search for Palmyra and explain what this can tell us about its historical significance?**
* **Undertake an internet image search for Zenobia and discuss the different representations.**
* Construct an annotated timeline from the ‘rediscovery’ of Palmyra (c.1691 CE) to the current day, showing the gradual destruction and decay of Palmyra.
* **Read** [Should we 3D print a new Palmyra?](https://theconversation.com/should-we-3d-print-a-new-palmyra-57014) **and** [3D printing to preserve heritage](https://3dprint.com/179081/palmyra-arch-in-italy/) **and look at the 3D models of artefacts from Palmyra. Write a 200 words response exploring the positive and negatives around the recreation of Palmyra.**
* **Visit** [Palmyra: an oasis on the road between orient and occident](https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/palmyra/8wISV5iKpyosKg) **and watch** [Early Silk Road: World History](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lLeIclx2lAU) **(duration 6:53) and** [Palmyra, Syria](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlZfMaO9xnY) **(duration 4:49) and take brief notes.**
* **Use the knowledge gained from the videos to add any new information to your brainstorm.**
* **Read the articles listed, then write responses to the questions that follow:**
  + **Outline the key features of Palmyra as an historical site.**
  + **When was Palmyra inhabited in the ancient world?**
  + **What was the significance of the city?**
  + **Outline some of the conservation issues that the city faces.**
  + **Complete a sources analysis of one of the articles, ensuring you consider the author, the audience, the purpose, its reliability, the perspective from which it is written and any bias you detect.**

**Resources:**

* + [A brief history of Palmyra](https://historyandarchaeologyonline.com/featured-content-2/)
  + [Palmyra: Liberated Pearl](https://vid1.ria.ru/ig/infografika/m2/palmyra_embed/?ifglang=en#top)
  + [Hermitage director Mikhail Piotrovsky: Palmyra must be restored](https://www.rbth.com/arts/2016/03/23/hermitage-director-mikhail-piotrovsky-palmyra-must-be-restored_578385)
  + [Desecrated but still majestic: inside Palmyra after second ISIS occupation](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/09/inside-palmyra-syria-after-second-isis-islamic-state-occupation)
  + [How ancient Palmyra, now in ISIS’s grip, grew rich and powerful](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/150826-syria-palmyra-islamic-state-isis-archaeology-history)
  + [The destruction of Palmyra by ISIS](https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/palmyra-destruction-temple-bel-triumph-arch-isis-before-after/)

## Learning sequence 2

### Content

Students investigate:

* the geographical and historical context, including:
  + the location of the site of Palmyra
  + the development of the city from an agricultural village to the hub of the Silk Road
  + significance of the Silk Road and the nature of trade

### Geographical and historical context

**Teacher note –** provide students with a blank map of Syria and its neighbours, as well as a blank map of the ancient city of Palmyra.

* Locate Palmyra using [Google Earth](https://www.google.com/earth/).
* Using the map of Syria and its neighbours, annotate the map with geographical features of the area.
* Using the [schematic map of Palmyra](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schematic_map_of_Palmyra_(empty).svg) and [Palmyra and the valley of the tombs](https://dcl.dash.umn.edu/highlights/exhibits/show/palmyra/item/733), annotate your blank map of the city of Palmyra with the following features:
  + Allat Temple
  + Damascus Gate
  + the tetrapylon
  + Temple of Baal-Shamin
  + Baths of Diocletian
  + Monumental Arch
  + exedra
  + the theatre
  + the Tariff Court
  + the Agora
  + Temple of Bel
* Watch [Silk Road Virtual Tour](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56IzyMfLJFA) (duration 14:34) and [The Silk Road: connecting the ancient world through trade](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vn3e37VWc0k) (duration 5:19) and make notes on:
  + significant locations along the route
  + nature of trade
  + why the Silk Road was important
  + the impact and importance of trade during the period.
* Use [Silk Road Cities](http://www.historyshistories.com/silk-road-city-links.html) as a stimulus to complete the following activity. Considering the perspective of a caravan trader from the Far East, create a record of a journey along the Silk Road to Palmyra during the 2nd century CE. Describe the route taken, the products carried, difficulties faced and other observations along the trip.
* Using [Palmyra](https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-middle-east/palmyra), [Palmyra Silk Roads Programme](https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/content/palmyra) and [Palmyra as a caravan city](https://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/cities/syria/palmyra/palmyra.html), create an annotated timeline showing the development of Palmyra as a hub to the Silk Road. Write 200 words explaining what it was about Palmyra that made it a successful trading hub.

## Learning sequence 3

### Content

Students investigate:

* the range of sources, including:
  + archaeological sources, e.g., the Great Colonnade, the Tariff Court, tombs, Temple of Bel and Baal Shamin, the Theatre, roads, coinage
  + written sources and inscriptions, e.g., the Palmyrian Tariff

### Archaeological and written sources

**Teacher note – teachers may wish to guide a discussion around the reasons and political ideologies behind the preservation and destruction of historical sites and artifacts. Teachers should take into consideration the** [Controversial Issues in School policy](https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2002-0045) **as a part of such a discussion.**

* Using the collection from the [Syrian Virtual Museum Project](https://virtual-museum-syria.org/palmyra/collection/), the [Legacy of Palmyra](http://www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions_events/exhibitions/palmyra/exhibition.html) and the photographs in the ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites[) gallery of Palmyra](https://www.icomos.org/en/mediatheque?search=seb_media_sarchlist_view&task=search&seb_whp_name_en=Site%20of%20Palmyra&seb_msl_whp_name=Site+of+Palmyra), build a portfolio of key sources of evidence for Palmyra. For each source include the following details:
  + photo or description of the source
  + identification of why the source is important
  + explanation of how the source informs our view of Palmyra
  + issues around the reliability of the source.
* Given the incomplete nature of the sources, what limitations are raised around their value in contributing to our understanding of Palmyra?
* Pliny the Elder in Natural History (book 5, 88.1), described Palmyra as a:

city famous for the beauty of its site, the riches of its soil, and the delicious quality and abundance of its water. Its fields are surrounded by sands on every side, and are thus separated, as it were, by nature from the rest of the world.

* + Using Pliny’s description draw a picture of Palmyra, share the finished pictures in small groups and discuss the reasons for any differences. What does this tell us about the reliability of written sources? How can we verify sources?
* Watch the first 2 minutes of [Palmyra before the destruction of ISIL](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3u8tdmV8os) and discuss as a class how archaeological sources complement written primary sources.
* Using [Palmyra: Before and after ISIS](https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/palmyra-before-and-after-isis-idUSRTSCQPG) and other sources, write an article for Archaeology Magazine addressing concerns about the destruction of Palmyrene temples and the various methods used to preserve its value. Consider:
  + the ethics and reasons for the conservation and preservation of archaeological sources
  + cost-benefit analysis of preservation
  + the value of heritage, both within a nation and globally
  + what parallels can be drawn between the recent destruction of Palmyra and the removal of colonial statues?

**Teacher note** – print the following sources from the [Aramaic Inscriptions in the Palmyra Museum](https://journals.openedition.org/syria/1478) and provide to students: Figure 1, Figure 6, Figure 8, Figure 9, Figure 12, Figure 13, Figure 16, Figure 20, Figure 30, Figure 42, Figure 43, Figure 47, Figure 56, Figure 60.

* Read [Palmyrene Funerary Portraiture](https://smarthistory.org/palmyrene-funerary-portraiture/) and summarise the main points under the headings tower tombs, individual portraiture and group reliefs. Take particular note of the influence of eastern and western traditions, social status, and the roles of men and women.
* Using the sources from the [Aramaic Inscriptions in the Palmyra Museum](https://journals.openedition.org/syria/1478) and answer the following:
  + Figure 1 – what language is it written in and what are the origins of the names?
  + Figures 6, 8 and 9 – what do these sources have in common?
  + Figures 12, 13 and 20 – what are the figures holding?
  + Figure 16 and 43 – what are the men wearing and holding and what regions do they come from?
  + Figure 30 – what role of women is being portrayed in this source?
  + Figure 42 and 47– describe the way the women are portrayed? Is this the way they would have looked in real life? Why or why not?
  + Figure 56 – what can be inferred from this source and what doesn’t it tell us about the lives and deaths of the children portrayed?
  + Figure 60 – who was Segel and who commissioned the funerary portraiture?
* Use the [Palmyrian Tariff](https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/learn/interesting_themes/items/palmira_tarif/?lng=) to answer the following questions:
  + What languages are used for the tariff? What does this tell us?
  + What was the purpose of the tariff?

## Learning sequence 4

### Content

Students investigate:

* the history of Palmyra as revealed through the sources, including:
  + Palmyra’s role as a ‘caravan city’ on the east-west trade route and meeting place for various cultures
  + economic and cultural exchange in Palmyra, e.g., the collection of taxes, trade links with India and China
  + the influence of eastern and western traditions on language, art, architecture and religion in Palmyra, e.g., Greco-Roman or Hellenistic and central Asian cultures
  + relations between Palmyra and Rome, including the influence of Queen Zenobia
  + the end of Zenobia’s reign and the decline of Palmyra

### History of Palmyra through sources

**Teacher note – depending on student’s prior learning, the teacher may need to explicitly lead the discussion around the western and eastern influences on Palmyra. The influence of eastern and western traditions on language and art have been covered in the previous learning sequences through the exploration of funerary portraiture. The influence on architecture forms part of the assessment task.**

* Using [The Silk Road to 1450](https://plantspeopleplanet.org.au/l1/l6/) summarise the importance of Palmyra as a caravan city and the cultural and economic impacts of trade
* Based on the information from [Caravanserai](https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/caravanserai/) and [Where Worlds and Ideas Connect: The Caravanserai](https://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/where-worlds-and-ideas-connect-caravanserai/) compete a [Y-chart](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/599#.YQia-JSKlk4.link) on what life in Palmyra would have looked, sounded and smelled like.
* Use the [Silk Road](https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-middle-east/silk-road) and watch [The Silk Road and Ancient Trade](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfe-eNq-Qyg) (duration 10:30) and analyse what these sources reveal about the economic and cultural exchange in Palmyra.
* Use [When Palmyra rivalled the Roman Empire](https://www.reuters.com/article/idUK270203556420150525) and [Queen Zenobia of Palmyra: facts and accomplishments](https://www.thecollector.com/queen-zenobia-of-palmyra/) to create an annotated timeline of the relationship between Rome and Palmyra.
* The [Rubble of Palmyra](https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/rubble-palmyra-syria-isis/403921/) reports that:   
  A recent study describes the extraordinary variety of the “deities of the Palmyrene pantheon”: “Bel, Belti, Nebu, Nergal, and Nanai are of Babylonian origin; Balshammin and Belhammon seem to be from Phoenicia; Ishtar and Atargatis are Aramaean; Shadrafa and Elqonera are probably Canaanite; and Arab deities include Shamash, Allat, Abgal, Manawat, and a host of others.” The oasis was an oasis of differences…Where there is one God, there is one way. Where there are many gods, there are many ways.
* Pick 5 of the gods from the article above and research what they were the god of, their cultural origins, and how the Palmyrenes adopted and then adapted them. Locate an archaeological source relating to each of the gods.
* Use the [Palmyrene Coin](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1860-0327-273) to answer the following question:
  + The coin was minted in Alexandria, has writing in Greek, and features Zenobia. What can we infer from this?
* Research the theories around the assassination of Odaenathus and use the table to rank the theories in order of which is most plausible and explain your ranking

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Rank | Theory | Explanation |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

* Use the sources below to make notes on key aspects of Zenobia’s life, including background, accomplishments, marriage, political skills and attitude towards Rome.
  + [Zenobia – empress of the desert](https://historyofyesterday.com/zenobia-empress-of-the-desert-c99931aae35c)
  + [Zenobia](https://www.worldhistory.org/zenobia/)
  + [Queen Zenobia of Palmyra: facts and accomplishments](https://www.thecollector.com/queen-zenobia-of-palmyra/)
  + [Zenobia: the warrior queen of Palmyra](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtyDxe6bSIo) (duration 10:38)
  + [Zenobia – queen of Palmyra](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwRTeXGjQwU) (duration 12:37)
  + [Queen Zenobia](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b01snjpp) (BBC In Our Time podcast – duration 42:00)
  + [Queen Zenobia, addressing her soldiers](https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.46141.html)
* Using information from the resources provided and your own research, create a [Fakebook](https://www.classtools.net/FB/home-page) profile for Zenobia that covers the key events, places and relationships of her life.
* Research the sources below and complete the table based on their depictions of Zenobia

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Perspective | Attitudes towards Zenobia | Value | Limitations |
| Historia Augusta |  |  |  |  |
| al-Tabari |  |  |  |  |
| Joannnes Zonaras |  |  |  |  |
| Edward Gibbon |  |  |  |  |
| Richard Stoneman |  |  |  |  |

* As a class, discuss which of the sources portrays the ‘real’ Zenobia.
* Write an extended response evaluating the different interpretations and representations of Zenobia and her relationship with Rome.

## Assessment task

**Teacher note –** when using this task, ensure it is placed on the school template and follows all assessment requirements.

### Outcomes

* AH11-5 examines the significance of historical features, people, places, events and developments of the ancient world
* AH11-6 analyses and interprets different types of sources for evidence to support an historical account or argument
* AH11-9 communicates historical understanding, using historical knowledge, concepts and terms, in appropriate and well-structured forms

### Syllabus content

* representations of Palmyra – ancient and/or modern
* the range of sources, including:
  + archaeological sources, e.g. the Great Colonnade, the Tariff Court, tombs, Temple of Bel and Baal Shamin, the Theatre, roads, coinage
* the history of Palmyra as revealed through the sources, including:
  + the influence of eastern and western traditions on language, art, architecture and religion in Palmyra, e.g. Greco-Roman/Hellenistic and central Asian cultures

### Task

* The [Syrian Virtual Museum](https://virtual-museum-syria.org/) has commissioned you to complete a new section of their website on the buildings of Palmyra. Use the existing sections of the museum as a guide to the format and structure of your new section on buildings. For each of the buildings provide:
  + photograph or drawing
  + physical description, including any details of eastern and or western influences
  + provenance, materials, date of construction, dimensions
  + geographic location in Palmyra
  + explanation of its purpose and significance in Palmyrene society.
* You must include the following buildings: Temple of Bel, Temple of Baalshamin, the Agora, the Tariff Court, Triclinium, Tetrapylon, the theatre, and monumental arch.
* Include an introduction to the buildings section of the website. This must include an evaluation of the value and limitations of using buildings as historical sources.
* This task could be presented as a website, PowerPoint or other suitable format.

### Marking criteria

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Criteria | Grade |
| Sophisticated examination of the significance of historical buildings  Makes a sophisticated judgement of the value and limitations of using buildings as historical sources  Communicates historical understanding logically and cohesively drawing upon a clear identification of relevant key features, terms and concepts | A |
| Clear examination of the significance of historical buildings  Makes a clear judgement of the value and limitations of using buildings as historical sources  Communicates historical understanding drawing upon relevant key features, terms and concepts | B |
| Attempts to examine of the significance of historical buildings  Attempts to make a judgement of the value and limitations of using buildings as historical sources  Communicates some historical understanding, with some identification of the key features, terms or concepts | C |
| Describes the significance of historical buildings  Description of the value and or limitations of using buildings as historical sources  Communicates limited historical understanding, with some mention of the key features or terms | D |
| Describes historical buildings  Does not address the value and or limitations of using buildings as historical sources  Communication of historical understanding is disjointed or very brief | E |