# Ancient history – Persepolis



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 to ensure equity.

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## Key inquiry questions

* How, where, and why did the Persian Empire develop from the time of Cyrus the Great?
* What is the nature and condition of the remains at Persepolis? How has the site been excavated and explored over time?
* What does the site of Persepolis reveal about Persian society?
* How and why is Alexander’s destruction of Persepolis contestable?

## 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

### Related Life Skills outcomes

**AHLS6-2**, **AHLS6-4, AHLS6-5,** **AHLS6-6, AHLS6-8, AHLS6-9, AHLS6-10, AHLS6-11, AHLS6-12**

[Ancient History Stage 6 Syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/hsie/ancient-history-2017) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2017.

## Historical concepts and skills

**Analysis and use of sources**

* explain the meaning and value of sources for an historical inquiry
* analyse sources to identify and account for the different perspectives of individuals and groups in the past
* analyse and synthesise evidence from different types of sources to develop reasoned claims
* identify and analyse problems relating to sources in the investigation of the past

**Historical interpretation**

* analyse the extent and nature of continuity and change over time
* identify and analyse the varying causes and effects of events and developments in order to construct historical arguments
* form judgments about historical significance, recognising that significance may be attributed for different purposes
* analyse and evaluate contested interpretations and representations of the past

**Historical investigation and research**

* use evidence from a range of sources to inform investigation and research
* acknowledge sources appropriately

**Explanation and communication**

* develop texts, particularly historical accounts and arguments, supported by relevant evidence from sources
* communicate historical understanding, using historical knowledge, concepts and terms, in forms appropriate to purpose and audience

## Learning sequence 1 – representations of Persepolis

Students investigate:

* representations of Persepolis – ancient and/or, modern

### Learning activities

**Teacher note:** students may require support around search terms for this task. The goal is to have them find, and contrast, images of Persepolis and Persia. For example, the ruins of Persepolis present a grand city with rich art and architecture influenced by trade and contact. Modern representations, particularly from the twentieth century, tend to focus on Persia as a monocultural or ‘othered’ society, used for action and adventure video games and films. Specific cities and subject peoples are rarely mentioned. We are starting to gradually see a shift to more historically accurate and relevant recreations and representations of Persia and Persepolis through digital reconstructions.

Note that ancient written representations of the city will be explored in the final learning sequence.

* Complete a [Think-Pair-Share](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/645?clearCache=607f20d3-90d2-2ec3-ea0f-72847d60c71f) about what you know about Persepolis and ancient Persia.
* Complete an internet image search for the city of Persepolis. What features do you notice? Consider the structure of buildings and images inscribed on them.
* Complete an internet image search for modern representations of Persia and Persepolis. How do these compare to the images you found of the city? What do you notice that is similar or different to the ancient ruins?
* As a class, discuss representations of Persia in popular culture. What aspects of the society are emphasised? What is left out? How does the purpose of a representation impact its content?
* Write a paragraph to evaluate which of the modern interpretations of Persia or Persepolis you found most believable. Justify your ideas by referring to ancient depictions or ruins.

## Learning sequence 2 – the context of Persepolis

Students investigate:

* the geographical and historical context, including:
* an overview of the Persian Empire from Cyrus the Great to Darius I and early capital cities Ecbatana and Pasargadae
* geographic location of the site of Persepolis
* the discovery of Persepolis and the nature of archaeological excavation over time

### Learning activities

**Teacher note:** provide students with blank maps of the Persian empire and the city of Persepolis. There are several offered by the [History of Persia Podcast](https://historyofpersiapodcast.com/maps/) website and the [Ancient Maps Resource](https://sites.google.com/a/umich.edu/imladjov/maps) website. Teachers may want to discuss the implications of key geographical and historical details, asking questions such as ‘how would this impact the way the Persians governed?’ or ‘What does the layout of this area suggest to you about the Persians’ values?’

* Using [Timeline of the Persian Empire](https://www.thoughtco.com/persian-history-timeline-119934) and the [Persian Empire Timeline](https://www.softschools.com/timelines/persian_empire_timeline/160/), plot the following events in correct chronological order. Include a symbol or drawing to represent each development:
* Xerxes becomes ruler of the Empire
* Cyrus conquers Lydia
* Persians are defeated by Greeks at Salamis
* Darius I moves the capital of Persia to Persepolis
* Ecbatana, capital of the Medes, is conquered by Cyrus the Great
* Cambyses II invades Egypt
* Cyrus establishes his capital at Pasargadae
* Cyrus conquers Babylon
* Ionian Greeks revolt against Persia
* Persians are defeated by Greeks at Marathon
* Persian territories invaded by Alexander the Great.
* Watch [Joanna Lumley's Silk Road Adventure – The Ruins of Persepolis (4:43)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWFepyiU4x8) and then locate Persepolis using [Google Earth](https://www.google.com/earth/). Draw a map of the site that shows its location with Iran. Identify features of the geographical context on your map.
* Investigate the discovery of Persepolis and the nature of archaeological investigation over time. In pairs, create an annotated timeline from the ‘rediscovery’ of Persepolis (c. 17th century) to the present.

Useful resources include:

* [History of Iran, Parse or Persepolis](https://www.iranchamber.com/history/persepolis/persepolis1.php)
* [Discovery and Excavation of Persepolis](https://www.timetoast.com/timelines/discovery-and-excavation-of-persepolis)
* [Ernst Emil Herzfeld (1879–1948) in Persepolis](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/herz_2/hd_herz_2.htm)
* [Persepolis (Iran) – Capital City of the Persian Empire](https://www.thoughtco.com/persepolis-iran-capital-city-of-darius-172083)

## Learning sequence 3 – history of Persepolis as revealed through the sources

Students investigate:

* the range of sources, including:
* archaeological finds, architectural features and wall reliefs at the site, eg the Apadana, the terrace, the palaces, gatehouse, Hall of the Hundred Columns (Throne Hall), Tripylon staircase, Harem and treasury buildings, stone carving, glazed brick panels, Bisitun (Behistan), inscription of Darius I
* the history of Persepolis as revealed through the sources, including:
* the layout of the city of Persepolis, the features of the city and their role in everyday life
* design and ornamentation of the Achaemenid period
* the role of Persepolis as a centre of Persian power

### Learning activities

**Teacher note:** [See, Think, Wonder](http://pz.harvard.edu/resources/see-think-wonder) is a [thinking routine](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/638?clearCache=e764a0fd-35e0-3059-d3c-a01360623e1) to encourage deep engagement with an image or text. You may want to have students return to a whole class discussion after each of the 3 steps. Encourage students to focus only on what they can see in the literal sense, then move into statements that explain what they see, and finally to ask questions of the source. To extend this activity, ideas that come from the final sentence stem may be used to generate deeper research in small groups.

* Complete [See, Think, Wonder](http://pz.harvard.edu/resources/see-think-wonder) using an appropriate image from Persepolis, such as the [central relief](https://www.livius.org/pictures/iran/persepolis/persepolis-apadana/persepolis-apadana-east-stairs/persepolis-apadana-east-stairs-central-scene/) from Apadana East Stairs.
* Use the following sentence stems individually:
	+ I see
	+ I think
	+ I wonder.

**Teacher note:** Getty’s [Persepolis Reimagined](https://persepolis.getty.edu/) website is an interactive and highly visual resource that is best viewed on a computer with a mouse. You may wish to encourage students to bring earphones to class for this activity. Students can click through different buildings at Persepolis, comparing digital recreations to ancient ruins. They can read about key concepts such as imperial propaganda and hear audio of translated inscriptions. If required, this activity could be completed as a class group using a large screen and supported by teacher guidance through the website. This resource may also be incorporated into other sections of this topic, returning to examine specific sources of evidence in more detail.

* In pairs explore Getty’s [Persepolis Reimagined](https://persepolis.getty.edu/) website, looking closely at the digital recreations of buildings, artworks, and inscriptions. As you explore, complete the following:
* label key buildings at the site on the blank city plan provided by your teacher
* make a list of historical clues as to the significance of Persepolis for the Persian empire. That is, write down any specific sources you come across that might help us better understand why this city was important to Persian society.
* Using Persepolis Reimagined as well as [Persepolis: The Audience Hall of Darius and Xerxes](https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/ancient-mediterranean-ap/ancient-near-east-a/a/persepolis) [and Livius History: Persepolis](https://www.livius.org/articles/place/persepolis/), research key buildings and fill in the following table.

Table 1 – building research

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Building | Describe location, structure, and features | Explain likely uses and current condition |
| Apadana |  |  |
| Palace of Darius |  |  |
| Palace of Xerxes |  |  |
| Harem of Xerxes |  |  |
| Tripylon / The Central Building |  |  |
| Throne Hall |  |  |
| Treasury |  |  |

* As a class, discuss the See, Think, Wonder activity you completed earlier. How many of your ‘I think’ statements were supported or refuted by your research for the table? How many of your ‘I wonder’ statements were clarified? Were any new questions raised?

**Teacher note:** the resource provided below, [Parse or Persepolis](https://www.iranchamber.com/history/persepolis/persepolis1.php), includes information students have learned previously. It may be preferable to direct students to begin their reading from the ‘Palace complex’ subheading.

* Read [Why the Ancient Ruins of Persepolis is One of the Greatest Wonders of the Ancient World](https://theculturetrip.com/middle-east/iran/articles/why-the-ancient-ruins-of-persepolis-are-one-of-the-greatest-wonders-of-the-ancient-world/) and [Parse or Persepolis](https://www.iranchamber.com/history/persepolis/persepolis1.php) to answer the question that follows.

What evidence is there in the layout of the site to suggest that Persepolis was used as:

* a royal residence?
* an administrative centre?
* a ceremonial centre?
* View [The Mysteries of Persepolis: Ancient City of Gold (49:23)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3bOL8j3ypQ) and answer the following questions as you watch.
1. How has the political situation in Iran changed since the 1980s? What impact has this had on archaeological investigations?
2. Why would ancient Greek writers have focused work on discussing Persians? Examine the value and limitations of these sources.
3. Describe some achievements of Cyrus the Great.
4. Why are the tiny clay tablets found at Persepolis valuable to historians? Provide examples.
5. What do historians believe the apadana looked like in ancient times? How do you think they can build this picture of the past?
6. What clues do archaeologists use to interpret the purpose of the city?
7. What conclusions have the experts come to about the main purposes of the city? Why?
8. What do you think was the purpose of the gateway into Persepolis? Your answer must include the terms ‘power’ and ‘image’.
9. What evidence is there at Persepolis that the king’s power was not to be ignored or underestimated?
10. How does the site present an image of ‘benevolent rule’? Give examples.
11. How did the Persians manage their empire differently to other powers with subject nations?
12. Why were roads important to both Persepolis and the Persian Empire? Give details.
13. What does the site of Pasargadae teach us about Persian society? In your answer, consider the origins of the word ‘paradise’.
14. Explain why historians believe gardens were a ‘political statement’ in Persia.
15. What aspect of Persian lifestyle did the Greeks disapprove of? Why? What did the Greeks fail to truly understand?
16. Why were Greek writers fascinated by Persian feasts? What role did such feasts have?
17. Outline Alexander the Great’s interactions with the Persians.
18. Why might Alexander have felt the need to destroy the city of Persepolis? How did the Macedonians and Greeks do this?
19. In what way did the destruction of the city help to preserve it? What aspects of the site were unlikely to have survived?
20. Define these terms:
* satrapy
* satrap
* subject state.
* Examine the range of sources available at the site by researching archaeological finds from Persepolis. What has been discovered? Sort 15–20 different finds in an [affinity diagram](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/576?clearCache=c2c13f4a-f0e9-5963-fb34-598892d36a04). Compare your diagram with another student and justify your category choices and diagram design.
* Write one paragraph to describe the range of sources at Persepolis, give specific examples in your answer.

Resources:

* [Ancient Persian Art and Architecture](https://www.worldhistory.org/Ancient_Persian_Art_and_Architecture/)
* [Persepolis](https://www.worldhistory.org/persepolis/)
* [Art of the Persian Empire](https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-arthistory/chapter/persia/)
* [Achaemenid Art and Architecture](https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/art-in-iran-iii-achemenian)
* [Ancient Persian artifact "Persepolis" returns to the Oriental Institute at UChicago (3:02)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4B8ZBi-_JM)
* [Persepolis Administrative Archives](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persepolis_Administrative_Archives)
* [Livius History](https://www.livius.org/category/persia/)

**Teacher note:** in the [Jigsaw](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/546?clearCache=6ec4fbbb-8826-9123-90a8-8f4782986652) activity that follows, students are assigned a home group. Within that home group they are given, depending on the size of the class, one or 2 reliefs to investigate on their own: Apadana, North stairs, central relief, Apadana, East Stairs, central frieze, Hall of 100 columns, relief of the king, Palace of Darius, relief of a sphinx, Tripylon, Eastern gate, Ahuramazda.

Groups are rearranged and students that have investigated the same reliefs work in expert groups for approximately 15 minutes to compare and refine their research notes. In the final step, students return to the home group to teach their peers about the relief or reliefs they have become an expert in, encouraging their peers to ask questions to seek clarification. As each home group discusses their reliefs, individual students are to complete the provided table using their own words.

Before starting, you may want to model the analysis of one relief with the class. Describe the relief. What does it depict? What details can be seen? Explain the relief. What do we think the image is trying to convey? Why do you think the Persians had this made? Evaluate the relief. How useful is this source to historians investigating Achaemenid ornamentation and the role of Persepolis as a centre of power? What might limit the usefulness of each source?

* Complete a [Jigsaw](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/546?clearCache=6ec4fbbb-8826-9123-90a8-8f4782986652) group task to research wall reliefs at the site and what these reveal about the:
* design and ornamentation of the Achaemenid period
* role of Persepolis as a centre of Persian power.

Table 2 – relief investigation

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Relief | Describe the relief. What does it depict? What details can you see? | Explain the relief. What do we think the image is trying to convey? Why do you think the Persians had this made? | Evaluate the relief. How useful is this source to historians investigating Achaemenid ornamentation and the role of Persepolis as a centre of power? |
| Apadana, [North Stairs, Central Relief](https://www.livius.org/pictures/iran/persepolis/persepolis-apadana/persepolis-apadana-north-stairs/persepolis-apadana-central-relief/proskynesis-relief/) |  |  |  |
| Apadana, [East Stairs, Central Frieze](https://www.livius.org/pictures/iran/persepolis/persepolis-apadana/persepolis-apadana-east-stairs/persepolis-apadana-east-stairs-central-frieze-2/) |  |  |  |
| Hall of 100 columns, [Hall of 100 Columns, Relief of the king](https://www.livius.org/pictures/iran/persepolis/persepolis-hall-of-100-columns/persepolis-hall-of-100-columns-se-gate-2/) |  |  |  |
| Hall of 100 columns, [Hall of 100 Columns, Relief of soldiers](https://www.livius.org/pictures/iran/persepolis/persepolis-hall-of-100-columns/persepolis-hall-of-100-columns-sw-gate-3/) |  |  |  |
| Palace of Darius, [Relief of a sphinx](https://www.livius.org/pictures/iran/persepolis/persepolis-palace-of-darius/tacara-sphinx/) |  |  |  |
| Tripylon, Eastern gate, [Ahuramazda](https://www.livius.org/pictures/iran/persepolis/persepolis-tripylon/persepolis-tripylon-eastern-gate-2/) |  |  |  |

* Refer to [A glossary of key words](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/hsc/hsc-student-guide/glossary-keywords) with a focus on the difference between ‘account of’ and ‘account for’. Select one relief from your group investigation. Write a response to identify and account for the perspective of this source.

**Teacher note:** The King and Kingship in Archaemenid Art. [Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire](https://www.academia.edu/21201942/The_King_and_Kingship_in_Achaemenid_Art_Essays_on_the_Creation_of_an_Iconography_of_Empire) can be accessed as a free download. Teachers may want to choose a different extract than the one that follows. The length and structure of the written response could be adapted based on context, with students supported by relevant [writing scaffolds](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/625?clearCache=436ea834-fc82-4b99-359b-c1453692f7). Examine the difference between an ‘interpretation’ and a ‘perspective’ as defined by the syllabus.

* Read the following interpretation and discuss as a class. Create a [Jamboard](https://edu.google.com/teacher-center/products/jamboard/?modal_active=none&clearCache=c4b4bac3-e6ab-8efa-4664-6e315b06a8a) to record ideas and related evidence from Persepolis.

‘Perhaps we shall never be able to determine absolutely whether the Achaemenid reliefs should be read as a pure metaphor of royal power or as a metaphorical description of an actual ceremonial display of imperial might. But…the motif of the king carried by anonymous representatives of the subject peoples of the empire…was certainly designed to convey in its role as art a political message of calculated significance…a new vision of hierarchical order and kingship on earth…’

– Margaret Cool Root, [The King and Kinship in Achaemenid Art,](https://www.academia.edu/21201942/The_King_and_Kingship_in_Achaemenid_Art_Essays_on_the_Creation_of_an_Iconography_of_Empire) 1979, accessed 24 August 2022.

* Using specific evidence, write a two-paragraph response to the following question. To what extent is Margaret Cool Root’s interpretation of Achaemenid reliefs accurate?
* Using the resources provided, investigate the clay tablets found at Persepolis. Create a table to analyse the limitations and value of each set of tablets when investigating the role of Persepolis as a centre of Persian power.

Table 3 – clay analysis

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Source | Value | Limitations |
| Fortification tablets |  |  |
| Treasury tablets |  |  |

Resources:

* [Persepolis Fortification Tablets](https://www.livius.org/sources/about/persepolis-fortification-tablets/)
* [Persepolis Treasury Tablets](https://www.livius.org/sources/about/persepolis-treasury-tablets/)
* [Image Archive of Persepolis Tablets](http://www.achemenet.com/en/tree/?/textual-sources/texts-by-regions/fars/the-persepolis-fortification-archive/persepolis-fortifications-tablets#set)
* [Parse or Persepolis](https://www.iranchamber.com/history/persepolis/persepolis2.php) an online search.

**Teacher note: there are a number of planning techniques that can be modelled or provided as suited to context, such as** [the Scaffolding Drill](https://www.matrix.edu.au/how-to-do-essay-scaffolding-drills-and-boost-your-essay-marks/)**, to support students to complete the following essay task.** [The University of Adelaide Writing Centre](https://www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/resources/writing-resources) **provides essay planning templates including mind maps and tables. The university also shares guides about concise writing, paragraph structure, and editing your own work. Alternative planning templates can be accessed through the** [State Library of Victoria](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/student-templates-essay-writing) **or the** [Australian National University](https://www.anu.edu.au/students/academic-skills/writing-assessment/essay-writing)**.**

**Students could also be guided about how to provide peer feedback by creating a ‘what are we looking for?’** [brainstorm](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/542?clearCache=76538fcc-678-9586-c099-c2857c1dbac0) **on the board. You may find it useful to consult** [Teaching Kids to Give and Receive Quality Peer Feedback](https://www.edutopia.org/article/teaching-kids-give-and-receive-quality-peer-feedback) as part of your lesson preparation. The [SPARK](https://www.edutopia.org/article/teaching-students-give-peer-feedback) method of feedback may also be helpful for students, as it outlines peer feedback as being specific, prescriptive, actionable, referenced, and kind.

* Essay question: What does evidence reveal about the role of Persepolis in the Persian Empire?
* In class, plan a response to this question. Swap your plan with a partner to give and receive peer feedback, using the [SPARK](https://www.edutopia.org/article/teaching-students-give-peer-feedback) method to guide you.

**Teacher note:** before moving on to the next step, where students write their essay as homework, return as a group to discuss the task. Create a success criteria rubric in collaboration with students. There should be a strong focus on the importance of making comprehensive, logical, and sustained arguments.

* Using feedback to plan any improvements, write a response to the essay question as homework, completing your work within a 45-minute time limit.

## Learning sequence 4 – contestability, causation, and Alexander the Great

Students investigate:

* debate over the role of Alexander the Great in the destruction of Persepolis

**Teacher note:** refer to the [glossary](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/hsie/ancient-history-2017) beginning on page 95 of the syllabus. Lead a discussion about the concepts of causation and contestability. Draw on prior student knowledge to explore the meaning of these terms in ancient history, including how the 2 ideas can have an overlapping relationship. The first task uses a Visible Thinking Routine, [3-2-1 Bridge](https://thinkingpathwayz.weebly.com/321bridge.html#:~:text=%E2%80%8BThe%203%202%201,their%20own%20learning%20and%20development).

* Complete the first 2 steps of [3-2-1 Bridge](https://thinkingpathwayz.weebly.com/321bridge.html#:~:text=%E2%80%8BThe%203%202%201,their%20own%20learning%20and%20development) using the following idea as your topic: The Destruction of Persepolis by Alexander the Great. As a class, discuss the analogies generated and justify your thinking.
* Read [Alexander the not so Great: History through Persian eyes](https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-18803290). Complete the rest of the 3-2-1 Bridge. In the ‘bridge’ section, identify how your thinking has shifted or remained similar from your first thoughts about the topic.
* Complete the following table to investigate relevant ancient writers. Consider their context and purpose. How might these impact their perspective of this event?

Table 4 – ancient writers investigation

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Ancient writer | Context | Purpose | Impact on perspective |
| Diodorus |  |  |  |
| Plutarch |  |  |  |
| Quintus Rufus |  |  |  |
| Arrian |  |  |  |

* Read and annotate Source 1. Add brief notes and titles for each section.

Source 1 – an [extract](https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Diodorus_Siculus/17D%2A.html) from World History by Diodorus of Siciliy. Book 12, 69–72 brought against people in London in the Middle Ages.

‘Now he set out on the road to Persepolis, and while he was on the road received a letter from the governor of the city, whose name was Tiridates. It is stated that if he arrived ahead of those who planned to defend the city for Dareius, he would become master of it, for Tiridates would betray it to him. Accordingly Alexander led his army on by forced marches; he bridged the Araxes River and so brought his men to the other bank.

At this point in his advance the king was confronted by a strange and dreadful sight, one to provoke indignation against the perpetrators and sympathetic pity for the unfortunate victims. He was met by Greeks bearing branches of supplication. They had been carried away from their homes by previous kings of Persia and were about eight hundred in number, most of them elderly. All had been mutilated, some lacking hands, some feet, and some ears and noses. They were persons who had acquired skills or crafts and made good progress in their instruction; then their other extremities had been amputated and they were left only those which were vital to their profession. All the soldiers, seeing their venerable years and the losses which their bodies had suffered, pitied the lot of the wretches. Alexander most of all was affected by them and unable to restrain his tears.

They all cried with one voice and besought Alexander to help them in their misfortunes. The king called their leaders to come forward and, greeting them with a respect in keeping with his own greatness of spirit, promised to make it a matter of utmost concern that they should be restored to their homes. They gathered to debate the matter, and decided that it would be better for them to remain where they were rather than to return home. If they were brought back safely, they would be scattered in small groups, and would find their abuse at the hands of Fortune an object of reproach as they lived on in their cities. If, however, they continued living together, as companions in misfortune, they would find a solace for their mutilation in the similar mutilation of the others. So they again appeared before the king, told them of their decision, and asked him to give them help appropriate to this proposal. Alexander applauded their decision and gave each of them three thousand drachmae, five men's robes and the same number for women, two yoke of oxen, fifty sheep, and fifty bushels of wheat. He made them also exempt from all royal taxes and charged his administrative officials to see that they were harmed in no way.

Thus Alexander mitigated the lot of these unfortunate persons by such benefactions in keeping with his natural kindness.

Persepolis was the capital of the Persian kingdom. Alexander described it to the Macedonians as the most hateful of the cities of Asia, and gave it over to his soldiers to plunder, all but the palaces. It was the richest city under the sun and the private houses had been furnished with every sort of wealth over the years. The Macedonians raced into it slaughtering all the men whom they met and plundering the residences; many of the houses belonged to the common people and were abundantly supplied with furniture and wearing apparel of every kind. Here much silver was carried off and no little gold, and many rich dresses gay with sea purple or with gold embroidery became the prize of the victors. The enormous palaces, famed throughout the whole civilized world, fell victim to insult and utter destruction.

The Macedonians gave themselves up to this orgy of plunder for a whole day and still could not satisfy their boundless greed for more. Such was their exceeding lust for loot withal that they fought with each other and killed many of their fellows who had appropriated a greater portion of it. The richest of the finds some cut through with their swords so that each might have his own part. Some cut off the hands of those who were grasping at disputed property, being driven mad by their passions. They dragged off women, clothes and all, converting their captivity into slavery.

As Persepolis had exceeded all other cities in prosperity, so in the same measure it now exceeded all others in misery.

Alexander ascended to the citadel terrace and took possession of the treasure there. This had been accumulated from the state revenues, beginning with Cyrus, the first king of the Persians, down to that time, and the vaults were packed full of silver and gold. The total was found to be one hundred and twenty thousand talents, when the gold was estimated in terms of silver. Alexander wanted to take some money with him to meet the costs of the war, and to deposit the rest in Susa and keep it under guard in that city. Accordingly, he sent for a vast number of mules from Babylon and Mesopotamia, as well as from Susa itself, both pack and harness animals as well as three thousand pack camels. By these means Alexander transported everything to the desired places. He felt bitter enmity to the inhabitants. He did not trust them, and he meant to destroy Persepolis utterly.

I think that it is not inappropriate to speak briefly about the palace area of the city because of the richness of its buildings. The citadel is a noteworthy one and is surrounded by a triple wall. The first part of this is built over an elaborate foundation. It is sixteen cubits in height and is topped by battlements. The second wall is in all other respects like the first but of twice the height. The third circuit is rectangular in plan, and is sixty cubits in height, built of a stone hard and naturally durable. Each of the sides contains a gate with bronze doors, beside each of which stand bronze poles twenty cubits high; these were intended to catch the eye of the beholder, but the gates were for security.

At the eastern side of the terrace at a distance of four plethra is the so‑called royal hill in which were the graves of the kings. This was a smooth rock hollowed out into many chambers in which were the sepulchres of the dead kings. These have no other access but receive the sarcophagi of the dead which are lifted by certain mechanical hoists. Scattered about the royal terrace were residences of the kings and members of the royal family as well as quarters for the great nobles, all luxuriously furnished, and buildings suitably made for guarding the royal treasure.

Alexander held games in honour of his victories. He performed costly sacrifices to the gods and entertained his friends bountifully. While they were feasting and the drinking was far advanced, as they began to be drunken a madness took possession of the minds of the intoxicated guests. At this point one of the women present, Thaïs by name and Attic by origin, said that for Alexander it would be the finest of all his feats in Asia if he joined them in a triumphal procession, set fire to the palaces, and permitted women's hands in a minute to extinguish the famed accomplishments of the Persians. This was said to men who were still young and giddy with wine, and so, as would be expected, someone shouted out ….to light torches, and urged all to take vengeance for the destruction of the Greek temples. Others took up the cry and said that this was a deed worthy of Alexander alone. When the king had caught fire at their words, all leaped up from their couches and passed the word along to form a victory procession in honour of Dionysus.

Promptly many torches were gathered. Female musicians were present at the banquet, so the king led them all out for the comus to the sound of voices and flutes and pipes, Thaïs the courtesan leading the whole performance. She was the first, after the king, to hurl her blazing torch into the palace. As the others all did the same, immediately the entire palace area was consumed, so great was the conflagration. It was most remarkable that the impious act of Xerxes, king of the Persians, against the acropolis of at Athens should have been repaid in kind after many years by one woman, a citizen of the land which had suffered it, and in sport…’

* Complete the following questions. What does Source 1 suggest about:
* the character and personality of Alexander the Great?
* Greek and Macedonian attitudes towards the Persians?
* the city of Persepolis itself?
* Alexander’s reasons for burning the city?
* Read and annotate Source 2. Add brief notes and titles for each section.

Source 2 – an [extract](https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Alexander%2A/home.html) from Parallel Lives by Plutarch, ‘Life of Alexander’. 36–38.

On making himself master of Susa, Alexander came into possession of forty thousand talents of coined money in the palace, and of untold furniture and wealth besides. Among this they say was found five thousand talents' weight of purple from Hermione, which, although it had been stored there for a hundred and ninety years, still kept its colours fresh and lively. The reason for this, they say, is that honey was used in the purple dyes, and white olive oil in the white dyes; for these substances, after the like space of time, are seen to have a brilliancy that is pure and lustrous. Moreover, Deinon says that the Persian kings had water also brought from the Nile and the Danube and stored up among their treasures, as a sort of confirmation of the greatness of their empire and the universality of their sway.

Persis was difficult of access, owing to the roughness of the country, and was guarded by the noblest of the Persians (for Dareius had taken to flight); but Alexander found a guide to conduct him thither by a circuit of no great extent. The man spoke two languages, since his father was a Lycian and his mother a Persian; and it was he, they say, whom the Pythian priestess had in mind when she prophesied, Alexander being yet a boy, that a "lycus," or wolf, would be Alexander's guide on his march against the Persians. In this country, then, as it turned out, there was a great slaughter of the prisoners taken; for Alexander himself writes that he gave orders to have the inhabitants butchered, thinking that this would be to his advantage; and they say that as much coined money was found there as at Susa, and that it took ten thousand pairs of mules and five thousand camels to carry away the other furniture and wealth there.

On beholding a great statue of Xerxes which had been carelessly overthrown by a throng that forced its way into the palace, Alexander stopped before it, and accosting it as if it had been alive, said: "Shall I pass on and leave thee lying there, because of thine expedition against the Hellenes, or, because of thy magnanimity and virtue in other ways, shall I set thee up again?" But finally, after communing with himself a long time in silence, he passed on. Wishing to refresh his soldiers (for it was winter time), he spent four months in that place (Persepolis). And it is said that when he took his seat for the first time under the golden canopy on the royal throne, Demaratus the Corinthian, a well-meaning man and a friend of Alexander's, as he had been of Alexander's father, burst into tears, as old men will, and declared that those Hellenes were deprived of great pleasure who had died before seeing Alexander seated on the throne of Dareius.

… it chanced that he consented to take part in a merry drinking bout of his companions, at which women also came to meet their lovers and shared in their wine and revelry. The most famous among these women was Thaïs, an Athenian, the mistress of Ptolemy, who was afterwards king. She, partly in graceful praise of Alexander, and partly to make sport for him, as the drinking went on, was moved to utter a speech which befitted the character of her native country, but was too lofty for one of her kind. She said, namely, that for all her hardships in wandering over Asia she was being requited that day by thus revelling luxuriously in the splendid palace of the Persians; but it would be a still greater pleasure to go in revel rout and set fire to the house of the Xerxes who burned Athens, she herself kindling the fire under the eyes of Alexander, in order that a tradition might prevail among men that the women in the train of Alexander inflicted a greater punishment upon the Persians in behalf of Hellas than all her famous commanders by sea and land. As soon as she had thus spoken, tumultuous applause arose, and the companions of the king eagerly urged him on, so that he yielded to their desires, and leaping to his feet, with a garland on his head and a torch in his hand, led them the way. The company followed with shouts and revelry and surrounded the palace, while the rest of the Macedonians who learned about it ran thither with torches and were full of joy. For they hoped that the burning and destruction of the palace was the act of one who had fixed his thoughts on home and did not intend to dwell among Barbarians. This is the way the deed was done, according to some writers; but others say it was premeditated. However, it is agreed that Alexander speedily repented and gave

* Complete the following questions. What does Source 2 suggest about:
* the wealth of Persian kings and their empire?
* Alexander’s behaviour towards the Persians?
* the circumstances surrounding the burning of the city? Consider both motivation and method.
* Alexander’s feelings about the destruction of Persepolis?
* As a class, read and discuss Source 3 and Source 4.

Source 3 – an [extract](https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/curtius/home.html) from Quintus Rufus, History of Alexander. Book 7, 1–12.

…he (Alexander) took part in prolonged banquets at which women were present. One of these, Thais by name, herself also drunken, declared that the King would win most favour among all the Greeks if he should order the palace of the Persians to be set on fire; that this was expected by those whose cities the barbarians had destroyed…the king too, more greedy for wine than able to carry it, cried: “Why do we not, then, avenge Greece and apply torches to the city?”

…The king was the first to throw a firebrand upon the palace, then the guests and the servants and courtesans. The palace had been built largely of cedar, which quickly caught fire and spread the conflagration widely… Such was the end of the capital of the entire Orient, from which so many nations previously sought jurisdiction, the birthplace of so many kings, once the special terror of Greece, a city that built a fleet of a thousand ships… It is certain that Alexander himself, as soon as sleep had restored his senses after he had been overcome by drunkenness, regretted what he had done…

Source 4 – an [extract](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Anabasis_of_Alexander) from Arrian, The Campaigns of Alexander. Book 3.

…even the most trustworthy writers, men who were actually with Alexander at the time, have given conflicting accounts of notorious events with which they must have been perfectly familiar…Ptolemy and Aristobulus are the most trustworthy writers on Alexander's conquests, because the latter shared Alexander's campaigns, and the former -Ptolemy- in addition to this advantage, was himself a king, and it is more disgraceful for a king to tell lies than for anybody else… Alexander burnt up the palace at Persepolis to avenge the Greeks because the Persians had destroyed both temples and cities of the Greeks by fire and sword.

* What does Source 3 suggest about:
* the reasons for burning the city?
* Alexander’s feelings about the destruction of the city?
* What does Source 4 suggest about:
* written accounts of the city’s destruction?
* Alexander’s motivation for burning Persepolis?
* On what key points do the 4 sources agree or disagree?
* Which account do you find most reliable? Justify your choice.
* Focus question: assess the value of Source 1 to an historian investigating the destruction of Persepolis. Annotate a model response to identify key areas of discussion, strengths, and weaknesses.

A model response to the focus question

Source 1, an extract from Diodorus’ ‘World History’, offers a moderately valuable insight into the destruction of Persepolis by Alexander the Great. Written in the 1st Century BCE, Diodorus’ work represents the oldest surviving written source about this event. Diodorus makes it clear that Alexander despised the Persians and, by extension, Persepolis, “the most hated of the cities of Asia.” He highlights the harsh treatment of the Persians by Alexander’s army, as he gave Persepolis “over to his soldiers to plunder”, resulting in chaotic looting and unmitigated slaughtering of the inhabitants. Alexander, according to Diodorus, held nothing back in Persepolis, as he “felt bitter enmity to the inhabitants” and “meant to destroy Persepolis”. Given these attitudes, it comes as no surprise that Alexander was convinced by a drunken courtesan, Thais, to form a “triumphal procession and set fire to the palace.” This source suggests that the destruction of Persepolis was both an act of power and one driven by drunken excitement, with no mention of remorse. Though Diodorus is our oldest written source, he was not present at the events he describes. He draws upon accounts now lost to us, helping to build a thematic picture of the ways in which Europe, the Middle East and Asia became increasingly connected over time. Diodorus is a storyteller, focusing on great deeds and moments that he sees as significant in his greater narrative about international contact. He writes in summary form, leaving out minute details and failing to explore perspectives beyond the Greek or Roman. As such, the source gives us a plausible version of events, but is somewhat limited in terms of the perspective and details it offers.

* Write a short response to assess the value of Source 2 to a historian investigating the destruction of Persepolis.

## 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

* the range of sources, including:
* archaeological finds, architectural features and wall reliefs at the site, eg the Apadana, the terrace, the palaces, gatehouse, Hall of the Hundred Columns (Throne Hall), Tripylon staircase, Harem and treasury buildings, stone carving, glazed brick panels, Bisitun (Behistan), inscription of Darius I.
* the history of Persepolis as revealed through the sources, including:
* the layout of the city of Persepolis, the features of the city and their role in everyday life
* design and ornamentation of the Achaemenid period
* the role of Persepolis as a centre of Persian power.

### Task

**Part A**

* Create a source portfolio that examines the role of Persepolis as a centre of Persian power. Include a total of 6 sources of your choosing, with 2 sources for each of the following themes:
* Persepolis as a royal residence
* Persepolis as an administrative centre
* Persepolis as a ceremonial centre.
* For each of these themes, write an annotation between 150–200 words to explain the meaning and value of your chosen sources.

**Part B**

* What does evidence reveal about the role of Persepolis as a centre of Persian power? Write a 500-word response to this question.
* Support your argument with sources from Part A.

### Marking criteria

Table 5 – Part A marking criteria

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Mark | Criteria – Part A |
| A | * Effectively identifies and presents evidence relevant to the role of Persepolis as a centre of Persian power
* Sophisticated and detailed explanation of the meaning and value of sources for an historical inquiry
 |
| B | * Identifies and presents evidence and relevant to the role of Persepolis
* Detailed explanation of the meaning and value of sources for an historical inquiry
 |
| C | * Attempts to present evidence relevant to the role of Persepolis
* Some explanation of the meaning and value of sources
 |
| D | * Presents some evidence relevant to the city of Persepolis
* Limited explanation of the meaning and/or value of sources
 |
| E | * Describes Persepolis or the Persian Empire
 |

Table 6 – Part B marking criteria

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Mark | Criteria – Part B |
| A | * Sophisticated examination of the role of Persepolis as a centre of Persian power
* Sophisticated use of different types of sources for evidence to support an historical argument
* Communicates comprehensive historical understanding logically and cohesively, using historical knowledge, concepts and terms
 |
| B | * Clear examination of the role of Persepolis as a centre of Persian power
* Clear use of different types of sources for evidence to support an historical argument
* Communicates clear historical understanding logically and cohesively, using historical knowledge, concepts and terms
 |
| C | * Attempts to examine the role of Persepolis as a centre of Persian power
* Attempts to use different types of sources for evidence to support an historical argument
* Communicates some historical understanding, using some using historical knowledge, concepts and/or terms
 |
| D | * Describes the role of Persepolis in the Persian Empire
* Limited use of sources for evidence
* Communicates limited historical understanding, making limited use of historical knowledge, concepts and/or terms
 |
| E | * Describes Persepolis or the Persian Empire
* Does not make use of historical evidence
* Communication of historical understanding is disjointed or very brief
 |

# References

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