

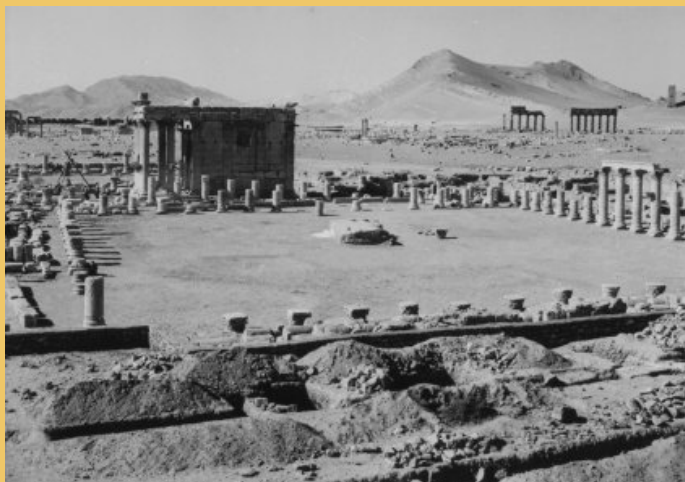
# Immersive Experience: the Sanctuary of Baalshamîn

North of the ancient city of Palmyra lies the sanctuary of the god Baalshamîn, whose temple was dynamited in 2015.

This god was an agrarian deity of West Semitic origin. His sanctuary was built around the 1st and 2nd centuries AD; it was constantly reoccupied, enlarged and modified during the Byzantine and Islamic periods. It thus bears witness to the rich history of Palmyra throughout the ages.

What if it were possible to visit this sanctuary not only through texts and images, but also to follow its evolution through time and space to discover its secrets in total immersion?

This virtual reality experience allows you to discover eight centuries of history and evolution of the sanctuary as if you were there.



© Fonds Collart, Tiresias, ASA for the University of Lausanne

Thanks to a menu offering various options and a 3D model, you can freely navigate through time and space via six interactive models, each representing the site at a period that is representative of its evolution.

A selection of archaeological objects and translated inscriptions from various periods are available to document the monument.

Finally, you can view archive photographs positioned at key locations. Enjoy your visit!

## The history of the monument

Palmyra was a city with an exceptional destiny. This oasis in the Syrian steppe saw the birth and growth of a rich caravan trade during the first three centuries of our era. The city was incorporated into the Roman Empire in the early decades of our era.

The wealth of the city's inhabitants greatly contributed to its embellishment in a multicultural context. The Temple of Baalshamîn, which blends Roman and Eastern traditions, is a fine example of this.

In the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE, the site contained a brick burial vault. Construction of the sanctuary began at the start of our era and continued gradually until the inauguration of the temple we know today, whose construction was financed by a notable figure, perhaps for Emperor Hadrian's visit to Palmyra in 130.



© Fonds Collart, Tiresias, ASA for the University of Lausanne

Despite the vicissitudes of history, the end of paganism, the beginnings of Christianity and then Islam, the sanctuary was not abandoned but reclaimed and remodelled.

The stones were reused in successive constructions. The temple was reused by Christians (around 450), and the temple courtyards served as a setting for dwellings during the Islamic period (around 750).

Now lost, this priceless heritage can be revived through this experience, which invites you to contemplate and discover the temple.

## The virtual reality experience

The project to digitise the Temple of Baalshamin in Palmyra began in 2017 following its destruction.

Using scientific and photographic archives compiled by Paul Collart, a former professor at the University of Lausanne, it was possible to produce a 3D model of the temple. The entire sanctuary was then modelled to evoke the elevation of the walls and the layout of the space around the temple. While the model of the temple is particularly accurate, the other structures are less so. This difference is due to the quality and number of documents available for the different parts of the sanctuary.

With the aim of offering the public the most complete view of the history of this sanctuary, the experience offers the opportunity to travel through time from the end of the Hellenistic period in the 2nd century BCE to the Islamic period around 750 CE. In this way, the monument is revealed through multiple memories. Finally, visitors can move around the space and discover the different components of the sanctuary through time: the tombs from the Hellenistic period, the temple from the 2nd century CE, and the remains of dwellings from the Islamic period. To enhance the visit, documents have been placed throughout to help visitors better understand the monuments and discover the objects that have been unearthed.



View of the temple in the virtual reality experience

A chronological visualisation of the sanctuary is also available online at: <https://interactive-baalshamin.unil.ch/>, which hosts the PoTree viewer.



Aerial view of the site restored as a cloudpoints

*The immersive experience was created from a 3D model of the temple initially produced in collaboration between ICONEM and UNIL, with generous financial support from FUNIL, Loterie Romande and the ALIPH Foundation. The scale model was then reworked by Archéovision.*

## User's Guide (2025)

### Start of the tour

Before positioning the headset correctly (by placing it horizontally at eye level), please read the instructions carefully to navigate the following pages. This experience was designed to be used in the presence of a scientific mediator, but once you have mastered the basic operations, it is not difficult to explore it on your own.

The experience begins in front of the temple in 130 AD. To start, we recommend playing the audio introduction prepared by the students, which is designed to guide the visit. It lasts 2 minutes and cannot be interrupted, but you can move around during this time. The recording will stop automatically.

The volume can be adjusted using the two buttons located under the front of the headphones. It is advisable to locate them before putting on the headphones.



Entry point in the virtual reality experience

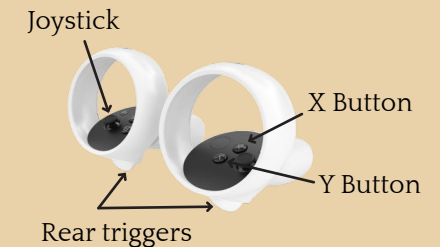
### Using the controllers

Rear trigger: confirms selections (press with your index finger)

Joystick: allows you to move around the site (move forward or turn the joystick, then release)

X button: press to move to the next image (when prompted on screen)

Y button: press to return to the previous image (when prompted on screen)



### To trigger the audio introduction:

1. turn your head to the left so that you can see the speaker icon
2. point the left joystick pointer at the icon, which changes colour when selected
3. press the button on the back of the controller with your index finger (= rear trigger)





Users can explore the temple and its surroundings geographically and chronologically. They can also view it immersively (default setting) or in 3D map mode, similar to a relief map.

The features of the experience can be accessed via the controllers:

### Right Controller

The joystick allows teleportation (by pushing and then releasing it) in the direction indicated by the laser.

By pushing the joystick to the left, you can turn around 45°.



### Left Controller

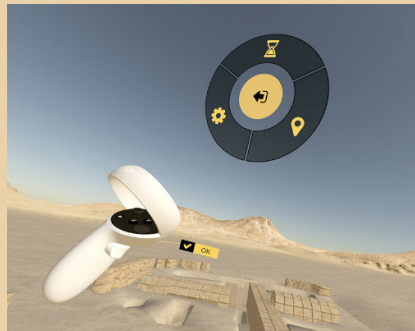
The radial menu displays a real-time map orienting the user, related to the North and the active date.



The joystick allows you to display and navigate the main menu. Selections are confirmed by pressing the rear trigger.

Releasing the joystick selects the central button, which acts as a 'Back' button.

- top: chronological menu
- right: switch to model or immersive mode with timeline
- left: settings menu



### Access the scale model:

- select the icon shaped like a geographical marker
- press the button on the back of the controller with your index finger (= rear trigger)



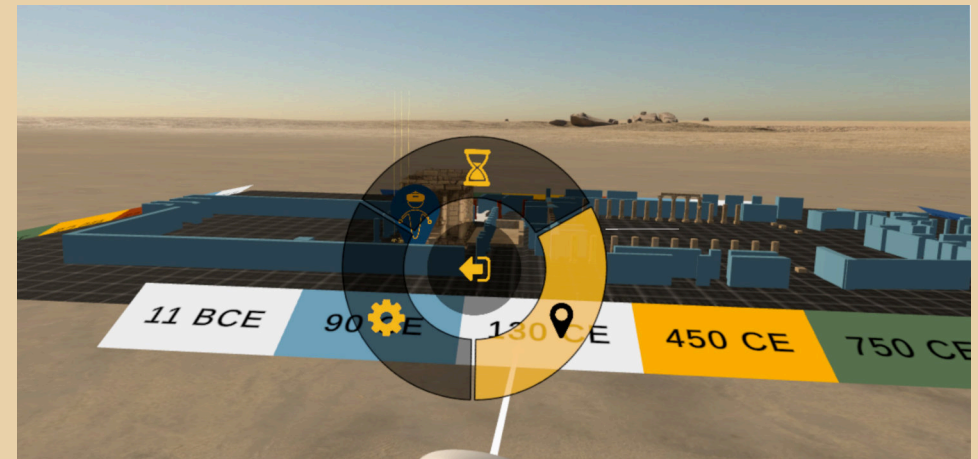
### To change the time period:

- use the left joystick to point to the desired period (which turns white)
- press the rear trigger -> the model changes
- select the geographical marker again
- press the rear trigger.

It is possible to rotate around the model or with the right joystick.

### To exit the scale model or return to the tour:

- press the pin icon again
- press the rear trigger



Please note that selecting the central icon will bring up the bird's-eye view map again, but will not allow you to return to the tour. This is an error that will be corrected in a future version of the experience.

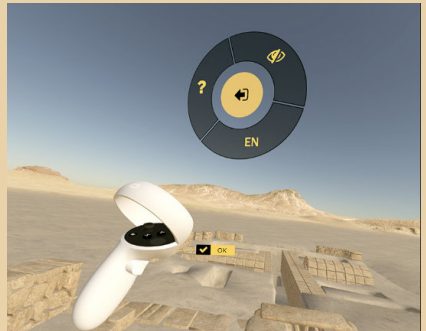
It is also possible to change the time period from the chronological menu.

In both cases, the selection is confirmed by pressing the rear trigger.



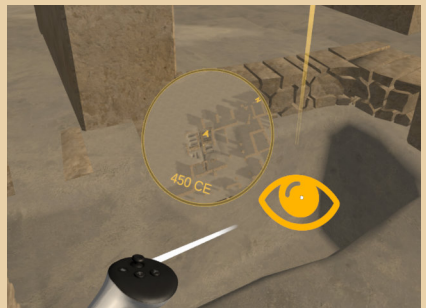
The settings menu offers three options:

- display of dots
- change of language
- display of the Info/Credits panel on the right controller



The information contained in the icons can also be accessed using the left joystick, by pointing the laser.

The selection is confirmed by pressing the rear trigger.



The image is displayed on the wrist. To close the image, press and release the joystick.

When several images are available in a tab, use the X and Y buttons to switch between them.

