

## **Art Story: *Queen Zenobia Addressing Her Soldiers* by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo**

Read by Julie Carmean

You are looking at a high resolution digital reproduction of a painting made by the Venetian artist Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, made probably between 1725 and 1730, titled *Queen Zenobia Addressing Her Soldiers*.

### **Do you know the story of Queen Zenobia?**

You may have heard of Cleopatra, but in some parts of the world, Zenobia is even more famous! Zenobia was queen of Palmyra, in Syria, in the third century CE. Palmyra had long been an oasis for caravans traveling between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea. By this time, it had become an important economic and military power in the Near East.

After her husband Odenathus (aw-den-á-thus) was assassinated in 267 CE, Zenobia took power over Palmyra. She ruled as regent for her infant son. A skilled diplomat and military strategist, she challenged the authority of the Roman Empire in the East. She took an unusual role for a woman in the ancient world and led her troops to victories in Egypt and Asia Minor, winning their admiration and respect. In just five years, Queen Zenobia became a threat to Rome. Then, the Roman Emperor Aurelian brought the Roman army to lay siege to Palmyra.

In Tiepolo's painting, Zenobia is addressing her soldiers just before the final battle. A warrior queen, she's wearing armor, and her shield rests at her feet. A servant keeps her robes from touching the ground. Zenobia's soldiers, carrying standards and the flag of Palmyra with its crossed palms, look up at her as she speaks to them from a raised platform or dais. Her pose recalls how Roman emperors were depicted in ancient sculpture and coins. Her gesture—an outstretched arm, making a circle with her thumb and index finger—might have been intended to call everyone to order.

Sadly, Zenobia was defeated by the Emperor Aurelian, and this was the beginning of the end for Palmyra. Zenobia herself was taken prisoner and brought to Rome, where she was paraded through the streets in golden chains.