

THE FACULTY OF ORIENTAL STUDIES

M.PHIL. IN CUNEIFORM STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been prepared on behalf of the Board of the Faculty of Oriental Studies. It has been designed both as a source of information in its own right and as a guide to other sources of information. It is hoped that it will be particularly useful to students when they first arrive in Oxford, but it is designed to be helpful throughout the course. It includes the text of the official regulations relating to the degree, as well as an explanation of these in less formal language. Please read the booklet carefully.

Comments and criticism of the handbook are always welcome; they should be sent to the Director of Graduate Studies, Oriental Institute, Pusey Lane, Oxford.

ORIENTAL STUDIES AT OXFORD

Among studies in the humanities, Oriental Studies is unique in introducing students to civilizations that are radically different from the Western ones that form the basis of the curriculum in most schools. The field embraces the study of Oriental cultures from prehistoric times to the present. People in the West are becoming increasingly aware of these civilizations through travel, publications, and rising general interest. The faculty's courses offer the opportunity to learn in depth about the ancient and modern traditions of these cultures. Many students are able to apply methods acquired in the study of European languages, history, and literature to challenging new subjects. Other enter Oriental Studies from quite different backgrounds, including music, science, and law.

The courses present both the major traditions of the regions studied and, where appropriate, their modern development. All courses include language, literature, history, and culture, and there is a wide range of options in such fields as art and archaeology, history, literature, philosophy, religion, and modern social studies.

Through its long-standing traditions and more recent gifts, Oxford has unique resources for Oriental Studies. The Bodleian Library has a magnificent collection of Oriental books and manuscripts built up since the seventeenth century. The Oriental Institute, opened in 1961, is the centre where most teaching is done, acting as a focus for everyone working and studying in the field; it has a lending library of some 80,000 books. There are also institutions for the Modern Middle East, for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, for Modern Japanese Studies, and for Chinese Studies. Adjacent to the Oriental Institute is the Ashmolean Museum, which houses superb collections of objects used in the teaching of most branches of Oriental Art and Archaeology and also has very fine libraries devoted to these subjects. The Griffith Institute (originally opened in 1939 and housed in the Museum; now transferred to a new building in the Sackler Library complex), has unique resources for Egyptology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies. Most of the teaching and research in these subjects is carried out in the Griffith Institute.

CUNEIFORM STUDIES AT OXFORD

The ancient written cultures of Mesopotamia (approximately corresponding to modern Iraq) are preserved in cuneiform script, which first emerged about 3350 BC and died out in the first century AD. Assyriology, the study of these cultures, began at Oxford with the appointment of Archibald Henry Sayce as Professor of Assyriology in 1891. Subsequent post holders with the title of Professor have been Stephen Langdon, Oliver Gurney, and Marc Van De Mieroop. Other post holders in the field have included Reginald Campbell Thompson as Reader, and C. J. Ball and Peter Hulin as Lecturers. Two key posts were established in 1987, a University Lecturership in Akkadian, filled by Jeremy Black (1987-2004), and a Shillito Fellowship in Assyriology, filled by Stephanie Dalley (1987-2007). Frances Reynolds was appointed to the long-term Shillito Fellowship in Assyriology in 2006, after holding a Departmental Lecturership. The most recent appointment in Assyriology is that of Jacob Dahl, who took up the University Lecturership in Assyriology in October 2008.

THE M.PHIL. IN CUNEIFORM STUDIES

The M.Phil. in Cuneiform Studies is a two-year graduate degree course that provides a satisfying and advanced study of the languages, culture, and history of ancient Mesopotamia. While it can function as a self-contained course in its own right, it is also intended to take students to the point where they can consider embarking on doctoral research in cuneiform studies (in Akkadian and/or Sumerian).

As indicated by the title of the course, the academic focus is on studying the two principal languages of ancient Mesopotamia and the surrounding regions: Akkadian and Sumerian. Considerable emphasis is also placed on knowledge of the literature, cultural and political history, and archaeology of this area. Detailed familiarity with primary sources, studied in the original languages and scripts, lies at the heart of all stages of the course. A major objective is for students to engage with a range of historiographical and literary-critical methods used to understand these sources.

The technical objectives of the course are that the student should acquire a reliable knowledge of both Sumerian and Akkadian grammar, vocabulary, and cuneiform script and that they should develop their ability to tackle unedited published cuneiform texts in both languages. The student should become familiar with various dialects of Sumerian and Akkadian and learn how to work independently with other dialects. He or she should acquire a good knowledge of the secondary literature, including the various aids to study (dictionaries, sign lists, bibliographical indices etc.), and how to use them effectively. Some training in handling, reading, and copying original cuneiform tablets will also be available.

LIBRARIES, TEACHERS, AND RESEARCHERS

Oxford has excellent library resources for Ancient Near Eastern literature, history, and archaeology in the Sackler Library, covering Akkadian, Sumerian, Hittite, Elamite, Old Persian, Hurrian, Ugaritic, and some other fields. The Sackler Library integrates collections for the entire ancient Near East and Mediterranean. The library of Wolfson College also holds a large number of books in cuneiform studies and there is a fledgling library at St Benet's Hall. Other resources are listed below.

Those who currently teach, and/or research at postdoctoral level, in Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Oxford include the following:

- Dr C. Bachhuber, Member of the School of Archaeology
- Dr J. Dahl, University Lecturer in Assyriology; Fellow of Wolfson College
- Dr S.M. Dalley, Member of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Assyriology
- Dr C. Draycott, Katherine and Leonard Woolley Junior Research Fellow; Somerville College
- Dr S. Ferrara, Junior Research Fellow in Archaeology; St John's College
- Dr J. Green, Project Curator for the Ancient Near East, Ashmolean Museum
- Dr L. Hulin, Wainwright Research Fellow in Near Eastern Archaeology
- Dr F.S. Reynolds, Shillito Fellow in Assyriology; Fellow of St Benet's Hall
- Dr E. Robson, Fellow of All Souls College
- Dr E. Tucker, Jill Hart Research Fellow in Indo-Iranian Philology
- Dr M. Weeden, Associate Member of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Assyriology

The Lecturer in Assyriology and the Shillito Fellow in Assyriology provide most of the teaching for the M.Phil. in Cuneiform Studies.

GENERAL REGULATIONS

A reading knowledge of French and German is required for the M.Phil. in Cuneiform Studies. Much of the secondary literature on the subject is written in these languages and a reading knowledge is essential for the standard of work expected at graduate level. A 'reading knowledge' means the ability to read in the language with the aid of a dictionary. The Oxford University Language Centre offers courses and self-study options that may be helpful during the first year of the course, including the summer vacation.

Each candidate is required, unless exempted by the Oriental Studies Board, to pass a Qualifying Examination not later than the end of the third term after starting the course, in order to continue to the second year of the course. The Qualifying Examination consists of two three-hour written papers on Sumerian and Akkadian, based on the first year's work. It is normally held in the Week 8 or 9 of Trinity Term of the first year of the course. The student's general progress in the subject by the end of their first year should be sufficient to enable him or her to pass without difficulty.

THE COURSE AND SYLLABUS

Because students take the course with different levels of experience and interests, the course is designed to be flexible. All students take five papers in the Final Examination:

1. Prepared translations of Sumerian texts (1 paper)
2. Prepared translations of Akkadian texts (1 paper)

The list of set texts in the Sumerian and Akkadian languages may change annually to accommodate the student's previous work in cuneiform studies and academic priorities. The texts will include a number of the set texts also read by undergraduate students. After the student has passed the Qualifying Examination, the list of selected set texts will be available in Michaelmas Term of the second year from the Faculty Office, Oriental Institute.

3. Unprepared translations of Akkadian

The use of *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* and R. Labat, *Manuel d'épigraphie akkadienne* will be permitted for this paper.

4. History and Culture of ancient Mesopotamia (1 paper):

Candidates should be able to demonstrate knowledge of the outlines of all aspects of Mesopotamian history, including political, social, economic, and cultural developments. They will be required to submit two essays, each of not more than 5,000 words in length, which display knowledge of more than just a narrow range of the topic.

Each candidate is required to agree the subject of the essays with his or her supervisor. This must be done in the second year of the course by Friday of Week 1 of Michaelmas Term for the first essay and by Friday of Week 1 of Hilary Term for the second essay. The essays must be submitted to the Faculty Office, Oriental Institute, by Friday of Week 8 of Michaelmas Term and Hilary Term respectively. Each essay should be accompanied by a completed declaration that it is the candidate's own work. The form is available from the Faculty Office, Oriental Institute or at:

http://www.orinst.ox.ac.uk/pdf/exams/work_declaration.pdf

5. The Cuneiform World in Context:

(a) Candidates must be able to integrate the study of the cuneiform world into the wider context of the Near East (one half paper). A specialisation within one of three approaches may be pursued:

- (1) the cuneiform world and the ancient Near East, i.e., the Hittite, Egyptian, and Biblical world.
- (2) the cuneiform world and the ancient Mediterranean, i.e., Graeco-Roman antiquity.
- (3) the cuneiform world and the later Near East, i.e., late antique or Medieval periods.

Candidates must specify which of these approaches they will pursue not later than the end of the third term after that in which their name has been placed on the register. In order to fulfill the requirements of their chosen specialisation, students may be

required to attend lectures in other programmes at the University of Oxford or elsewhere. Not all options may be available every year.

(b) Approaches to the study of Assyriology (one half paper):

Questions will be set on method, theory, bibliography, and the history of Assyriology. Candidates will be expected to be able to demonstrate knowledge of how to research any subject relating to cuneiform studies, and how to evaluate critically the contributions of disciplines, such as anthropology, archaeology, art history, history, and literary criticism, to the study of the cuneiform world.

Thesis

Students are also expected to present a thesis of not more than 20,000 words. This must be presented in a lucid and scholarly manner, and must include a substantial cuneiform-based element. The thesis need not be original research. The supervisor provides assistance, primarily in choosing a topic for the thesis and with bibliography, but essentially the thesis is expected to be the student's own independent work.

MPhil candidates must obtain the approval of the Faculty Board for proposed thesis titles. The form for completion by the candidate and the supervisor is available from the Faculty Office, Oriental Institute or at:

http://www.orinst.ox.ac.uk/pdf/exams/MPhil_Exams_Application_for_Approval_form.pdf

The completed form must be returned to the Examinations Administrator, Room 314, Oriental Institute, by Monday of Week 6 of Trinity Term in the year preceding the final examination (i.e. in normal circumstances Trinity Term of the first year).

The thesis should be presented by noon on the Friday of Week 2 of Trinity Term in which the examination is taken (i.e. in normal circumstances Trinity Term of the second year).

Candidates **must** consult the current Examination Regulations ('Grey Book') and follow the regulations for theses set out there.

TEACHING OF THE COURSE

From the beginning of the course, students should expect to be engaged in academic work for a minimum of thirty-five hours a week during Full Term and to need to do a considerable amount of work during the vacations. The course is taught through a mixture of classes, lectures, and seminars, with some tutorials. Tutorials normally consist of a one-to-one discussion with a tutor based on a written work produced by the student.

The syllabus is flexible and designed to meet the needs and interests both of those new to the field and of those who have studied cuneiform at undergraduate level. Language classes in Akkadian or in Akkadian and Sumerian are usually held between four and six hours per week, accompanied by about four hours of lectures and seminars on historical and cultural topics. However, the teaching structure varies depending on the syllabus followed.

Unless Akkadian has already been studied at an appropriate undergraduate level, all students take intensive introductory classes in Akkadian grammar and cuneiform script in the first

term of the first year for four hours each week and are usually taught together with undergraduates. These classes are followed in the first year by introductory set text classes, reading selected Laws of Hammurabi, the Descent of Ishtar to the Netherworld, Assyrian royal Annals, and the Flood Story in the Epic of Gilgamesh. The more advanced Akkadian set texts are mainly read in classes during the rest of the course, in the first and second years for those with appropriate Akkadian experience at undergraduate level and in the second year for all other students. The choice of texts varies but options have included the Babylonian Epic of Creation Tablets I and IV, letters from Mari, Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions, Neo-Babylonian documents, and the Prologue and Epilogue of the Laws of Hammurabi. In the second and third terms of the second year students take Akkadian unseen classes to develop their skills in unprepared translation.

Unless Sumerian has already been studied at an appropriate undergraduate level, all students take intensive classes in Sumerian grammar and introductory set texts usually in the third term of the first year. More advanced Sumerian set texts are mainly read in classes during the rest of the course, in the first and second years for those with appropriate Sumerian experience at undergraduate level and in the second year for all other students. The choice of texts varies but options have included inscriptions of Gudea, legal texts, and Sumerian literature.

All text-reading classes require extensive preparation in advance by the student, using the set editions and other study aids, such as dictionaries and sign lists, copies of which are held by the library. In general, the amount of class work and preparation is considerable and students should expect to be working intensively throughout the two-year course.

The syllabus includes lectures and seminars throughout the course on a wide range of cultural, literary, and historical subjects. These include a broad survey course on Mesopotamian history and culture in the first year for those new to the field. Every other year in Michaelmas and Hilary Terms classes are held in the Ashmolean Museum and, while not a syllabus requirement, students are particularly encouraged to attend these, because they give an opportunity to work with original artefacts, including cuneiform tablets. Students are also encouraged to attend lectures in related subjects, e.g. Egyptology and archaeology, although this must be commensurate with their workload. Each term seminars are arranged in Ancient Near Eastern Studies and Egyptology, when local and visiting speakers present papers for discussion. These are usually followed by tea and informal discussion in the Oriental Institute Common Room.

For Paper 5a on the Cuneiform World in Context students choose an option from one of the following three approaches: either the Hittite, Egyptian, or Biblical worlds; or Graeco-Roman antiquity; or the Near East in the late antique and Medieval periods. Not all options may be available every year. Students must specify which of these approaches they are going to pursue not later than the end of the third term of the first year, so that the necessary teaching can be arranged.

Work on the thesis should have begun by the summer term of the first year and a considerable amount of work should be undertaken during the Long Vacation between the first and second years. Completing the bulk of the work on the thesis during this vacation is strongly recommended to reduce the workload in the second, final, year.

THE FINAL EXAMINATION

Students sit the Final Examination for the M.Phil. degree at the end of the third term of the final year of the course. The components of the Final Examination are: Papers 1-5, a thesis of no more than 20,000 words, and, if required, a *viva voce* (oral) examination. Candidates must pass all five papers and the thesis. The pass mark is 60 and there is no classification. The examiners will award a distinction for excellence in the whole examination for a final overall mark of 70 or above. The final overall mark is arrived at as the numerical mean of the marks on the individual papers and thesis.

Paper 4 consists of two take-home essays in the broad field of Mesopotamian history, including political, social, economic, and cultural developments. Both essays must be submitted in the final year, the first by Week 8 of Michaelmas Term and the second by Week 8 of Hilary Term.

The thesis must be presented by noon on the Friday of Week 2 of Trinity Term of the final year.

Papers 1-3 and 5 are three-hour written examination papers in Trinity Term of the final year (usually held in June). Papers 1 and 2 are on prepared texts: Paper 1 on Sumerian and Paper 2 on Akkadian. Paper 3 covers Akkadian unprepared translation. Paper 5 on the cuneiform world in context consists of two half papers: one on the cuneiform world in the wider context of the Near East and the other on approaches to the study of Assyriology.

Every candidate is also examined *viva voce* in the subjects of the course unless he or she is individually excused by the examiners. The *viva voce* examination, if held, will contribute to the overall examination result.

MESOPOTAMIAN AND ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN RESOURCES IN OXFORD

Sackler Library

The [Sackler Library](#) has excellent library resources for Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East, including language, literature, history, and archaeology. The areas covered include Akkadian, Sumerian, Hittite, Elamite, Old Persian, Hurrian, and Ugaritic. The Sackler Library has a wide scope and integrates collections for the entire ancient Near East, including Egypt, and the ancient Mediterranean.

Oxford Editions Of Cuneiform Texts

This series, published by Oxford University Press under the editorship of Dr Stephanie Dalley, is intended eventually to present cuneiform copies of the entire collections of tablets in the Ashmolean Museum and Bodleian Library, and to publish cuneiform texts edited by Assyriologists in Oxford. So far fifteen volumes have been published since 1923.

The Griffith Institute

The [Griffith Institute](#) is located within the Sackler Library building and contains the offices of the main teachers of Mesopotamian studies and Egyptology. The Griffith Institute archives

hold Egyptological and Assyriological papers. The Topographical Bibliography of Egyptian Sites (under the editorship of Dr Jaromir Malek) is also edited there.

Egyptology

Egyptology is well resourced at Oxford and a range of lecture courses and classes are offered, from elements of the introductory course on the History and Civilizations of the Ancient Near East to more specialized topics. Egyptology at Oxford focuses on textual study, with emphasis on social and cultural issues, including art, literature, and social theory. Periods covered range from the Early Dynastic to the Roman, and there is a particular strength in papyrology and Graeco-Roman Egypt. Teachers include Professors J.R. Baines (Professor of Egyptology) and M.J. Smith (Professor in Egyptology and Coptic), and Dr E. Frood (University Lecturer in Egyptology).

The Ashmolean Museum

The [Ashmolean Museum](#) has an extensive and notable collection of Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptological antiquities, including the most important collection of cuneiform tablets in the U.K. after the British Museum. Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the collections and to learn how to read and copy from original clay tablets. The wide range of other Mesopotamian artefacts in the Museum includes finds from excavations at Kish, currently being studied by the [Kish Project](#) at the Field Museum, Chicago.

The Ashmolean Museum is undergoing a £61 million redevelopment, including a new gallery on the ancient Near East, and is scheduled to reopen in the autumn of 2009. Until then most of the ancient Near Eastern material is in storage, although key pieces and the cuneiform tablet collection will remain accessible to students taking degrees in the ancient Near East.

Oxford University Press

The [Oxford University Press](#) has a strong tradition of publishing books on the ancient Near East written by scholars associated with the University. Current titles include:

J.A. Black *et al.*, *The literature of ancient Sumer*

T. Bryce, *The kingdom of the Hittites* and *Life and Society in the Hittite World*.

S.M. Dalley, *Old Babylonian Texts in the Ashmolean Museum Mainly from Larsa, Sippar, Kish and Lagaba*

S.M. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*

S.M. Dalley *et al.*, *The legacy of Mesopotamia*.

A.R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*

E. Robson, *Mesopotamian mathematics, 2100-1600 B.C.: technical constants in bureaucracy and education*.

E. Robson *et al.*, *The History of Mathematical Tables: From Sumer to Spreadsheets*

M. Van De Mieroop, *The ancient Mesopotamian city*

M.L. West, *The east face of Helicon: West Asiatic elements in Greek poetry and myth*.

EXTRACT FROM THE *EXAMINATION REGULATIONS*

This extract reproduces the regulations for the M.Phil. course as set out in the *Examination Regulations*.

Cuneiform Studies

(A) To pass a qualifying examination:

Each candidate will be required, unless exempted by the Oriental Studies Board, to pass a qualifying examination in the Akkadian and Sumerian languages not later than the end of the third term after that in which his or her name has been placed on the register.

(B) Final examination

Candidates will be required to offer the following papers:

1. Prepared translations of Sumerian texts (1 paper)
2. Prepared translations of Akkadian texts (1 paper)

A list of prepared texts in the Sumerian and Akkadian languages will be provided to the candidate after he or she has successfully passed the qualifying examination.

3. Unprepared translations of Akkadian

The use of *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* and R. Labat, *Manuel d'épigraphie akkadienne* will be permitted for this paper.

4. History and Culture of ancient Mesopotamia (1 paper):

Candidates must demonstrate knowledge of the outlines of all aspects of Mesopotamian history, including political, social, economic, and cultural developments. They will be required to submit two essays, each of not more than 5,000 words in length, which display knowledge of more than just a narrow range of the topic.

Candidates are required to agree the subject of the essays with their teachers by the end of week 1 of Michaelmas Term of the second year of the course for the first essay, by the end of week 1 of Hilary Term of the second year of the course for the second essay. The essays need to be submitted by weeks 8 of Michaelmas Term and Hilary Term respectively.

5. The Cuneiform World in Context:

(a) Candidates must be able to integrate the study of the cuneiform world into the wider context of the Near East (one half paper). Three approaches may be pursued:

- (1) the cuneiform world and the ancient Near East, i.e., the Hittite, Egyptian, and Biblical worlds.
- (2) the cuneiform world and the ancient Mediterranean, i.e., Graeco-Roman antiquity.

(3) the cuneiform world and the later Near East, i.e., late antique and Medieval periods.

Candidates must specify which of these approaches they will pursue not later than the end of the third term after that in which their name has been placed on the register. Not all options may be available every year.

(b) Approaches to the study of Assyriology (one half paper):

Questions will be set on method, theory, bibliography, and the history of Assyriology. Candidates will be expected to demonstrate knowledge of how to research any subject relating to cuneiform studies, and how to evaluate critically the contributions of disciplines, such as anthropology, archaeology, art history, history, and literary criticism, to the study of the cuneiform world.

(C) To present a thesis of no more than 20,000 words on a subject approved by the board. The thesis needs to include a substantial cuneiform element. The thesis should be presented not later than noon on the Friday of the second week of Trinity Term in which the examination is taken.*

*See regulations for theses on p. 515 and p. 586-587 of *Examination Regulations, 2007*

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY REGULATIONS

Your attention is drawn to University regulations concerning the use of Information Technology facilities available at: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/it/rules/>

26 August 2008