

Student Profiles



While I was travelling extensively through the Middle East I became really interested in ancient civilisations—this is the main reason that I chose to study Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Oxford. The cuneiform script is complicated and compared to learning other Asian languages the process is slightly slower. However, it is rewarding because, after learning the grammar, we then moved onto reading and at the moment we are studying the Epic of Gilgamesh. One of the best things about the course is how we are able to get close to these great civilisations of the past, through studying primary texts.”



Federico Zangani



One thing that attracted me to the course in Assyriology is the language involved, Akkadian. It is an ancient language and it is not studied that widely, so in order to pursue it I was naturally drawn to Oxford. We initially spent a few weeks learning the basic cuneiform signs, vocabulary, and grammar, then moved onto the texts. We started on historical texts, studying the history and the literary style of the period. Learning the language is an ongoing process and we keep on learning throughout the course whilst studying other subjects alongside. The best thing for me is the balance between the study of history and civilisations and the study of the language. By mastering the cuneiform signs, which form the basic elements of the script, you can gain access to the original texts.”



Marcus Lee

For more information please visit the Faculty of Oriental Studies website at: www.orinst.ox.ac.uk

For the latest University prospectus and information on fees and scholarships please contact: Undergraduate Admissions Office, University Offices, Wellington Square, Oxford, OX1 2JD.
Tel. 01865 288000.

Email: undergraduate.admissions@admin.ox.ac.uk,
or visit www.admissions.ox.ac.uk

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Ancient Near Eastern Studies

at Undergraduate Level

Faculty of Oriental Studies

Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Oxford

The three-year B.A. course in Egyptology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies offers a route of study concentrating on Ancient Near Eastern Studies and the Akkadian language of Babylonia and Assyria. Students focus on Mesopotamia, ancient Iraq, from prehistory to the first century AD, an area of study called Assyriology. The course explores the great civilisations of Sumer, Babylonia, and Assyria and the last phases of Babylonian culture under the Persians, Greeks, and Parthians.

Ancient Mesopotamia's legacy transformed the Middle East and the West. Akkadian, written in cuneiform script, is related to Hebrew and Arabic, especially Iraqi Arabic today. Mesopotamia was one of the places where civilization originated and was a major power for about 3,000 years with remarkable achievements in fields such as art, technology, science, and literature. The ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia and Egypt are foundations of the modern world.

Understanding these unique cultures presents a rewarding intellectual challenge. Deciphering original sources in the ancient languages and writing systems is integrated with studying history and civilisations. The Ancient Near Eastern Studies route in the BA in Egyptology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies is both wide-ranging and flexible. While the core of the teaching is in language and texts, the objective is to use written sources as a point of departure for studying phenomena such as history, religion, law, economy, and archaeology. Students also choose a second language or subject from a wide range of options, including Sumerian or Archaeology and Anthropology.

Oxford's Sackler Library has unrivalled resources for the Ancient Near East and Egypt. Outstanding collections of books on ancient Mesopotamia are available for students to use. The Ashmolean Museum holds an important collection of Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian antiquities, and is a key resource for research and teaching. The Pitt Rivers Museum also has ancient Near Eastern artefacts and photographs of Iraq by the explorer Wilfred Thesiger. The Griffith Institute (opened in 1939 and now housed in the Sackler Library complex) holds Egyptological and Assyriological papers and records.

Ancient Near Eastern Studies attracts students who have a deep desire to explore historical material that is vastly different from that in the West, and who have a real curiosity about the human past and the ancient world.

Why study Ancient Near Eastern Studies?

Oxford offers a degree in Egyptology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies (EANES). The degree has two tracks, so when students start their course, they pick a main language, either Akkadian, the language of ancient Iraq written in cuneiform script, or Ancient Egyptian. In the first year they study that language alongside the history and civilisations of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. A wonderful range of students apply for EANES and interest is often sparked through studying other languages, museums, or connections with the Middle East. Students start off learning elementary Akkadian, as no previous knowledge at all is needed. They tackle the twin challenges of understanding the language and learning to read a very different script. From the first term students are reading cuneiform texts, such as the Gilgamesh Epic. Most of the people that study Akkadian are intrigued by puzzles and love decoding things! In their second year students choose

a second subject or language, for example Egyptian (or vice versa, Akkadian), Sumerian, Arabic, Hebrew, or Greek. For the second and third years students continue reading texts, study aspects of history and culture in depth, and work with ancient artefacts in the Ashmolean Museum. Students also research and write a dissertation on something they are really curious about investigating."

Dr Fran Reynolds
Shillito Fellow in Assyriology



Student handling replica cuneiform tablet



Top: Babylonian royal stela. Below: Assyrian royal seal. Images reproduced with kind permission of the Ashmolean Museum.

