

Course Handbook: M.St. in Syriac Studies

Faculty of Oriental Studies

Academic Year 2017-18

This handbook applies to students starting the course in Michaelmas Term 2017. The information in this handbook may be different for students starting in other years.

NOTE: The Examination Regulations relating to all Oriental Studies courses are available at <https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/examregs/>. If there is a conflict between information in this handbook and the Examination Regulations, you should always follow the Examination Regulations. If you have any concerns please contact academic.administrator@orinst.ox.ac.uk.

The information in this handbook is accurate as of 1st October 2017. However, it may be necessary for changes to be made in certain circumstances, as explained at www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/coursechanges. If such changes are made the department will publish a new version of this handbook together with a list of the changes. Students will also be informed.

THE FACULTY OF ORIENTAL STUDIES

M.ST. IN SYRIAC STUDIES

Course Director: Dr David G.K. Taylor

Aim

The M.St. in Syriac Studies is a one-year taught degree which has been designed to give students experience in reading and interpreting a wide range of Syriac texts, from a choice of genres and in all the major scripts, as well as a broad knowledge of Syriac literature and history, and an ability to use key research tools. It is can thus be either a stand-alone qualification or a solid foundation in the subject for those intending to go on to do doctoral research.

Requirements

The standard requirement is a First Class or good Second Class Honours Degree (or equivalent qualification) and at least a basic reading knowledge of the Syriac language.

Introduction: Syriac in Oxford

Syriac—the local Aramaic dialect of Edessa (modern Urfa, SE Turkey) which became the literary language of Aramaic-speaking Christians in the eastern Roman Empire and the Persian Empire, and spread with them from the Caucasus to Arabia and India, and from Syria to China, and is still spoken in classical and modern forms today—has been studied and taught in Oxford since the 1570s. The Oxford University Press published many of the great eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century editions of Syriac texts, and the two-volume *Thesaurus Syriacus* of Robert Payne Smith and his daughter Jessie Payne Smith, as well as her *Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, remain the standard lexica for most scholars and students of Syriac. In the late twentieth-century, through the innumerable and ground-breaking publications of Sebastian Brock, the names Syriac and Oxford became synonymous.

Oxford remains a major world centre of Syriac studies, with a great deal to offer all potential students in any of the academic disciplines associated with this language. Current Oriental Faculty lecturers who teach Syriac are Dr David Taylor and Dr Alison Salvesen. Dr Sebastian Brock has retired from teaching but remains an active researcher in Oxford.

As a result of the 440 year tradition of teaching Syriac the University of Oxford has one of the world's greatest library collections of printed Syriac books, and related materials, as well as an important collection of Syriac manuscripts. The Bodleian Library is the main research collection, but the Oriental Faculty also has a major collection of Syriac books. Other relevant collections are housed in the Sackler Library (Archaeology, Classical Languages, Ancient Near East) and the Theology Faculty Library.

In addition to doctoral research and the M.St. in Syriac Studies, Syriac is also studied in Oxford as part of the following degrees: the undergraduate BA in Oriental Studies (as a subsidiary language, with Aramaic); the new joint BA in Oriental Studies and Theology; the M.Phil. in Eastern Christian Studies (a two-year research degree with the option to include a large Syriac element); the M.St. in Bible Interpretation; and as language options in the M.St. and M.Phil. in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies, and in the M.St. in Greek and Roman

History. As a consequence Oxford usually has a surprisingly large community of students with an interest in Syriac language, history, and culture.

Close links are maintained between the Oriental Faculty's professors and students in Syriac and those teaching Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, Greek, Persian, ancient Assyrian and Hebrew, as well as with colleagues in Byzantine Studies, Classics, History, Theology, Islamic Studies, Jewish Studies, and Archaeology.

The M.St. in Syriac Studies

Content and Teaching

Students prepare for FOUR papers, Paper I and three others.

Paper I, core course on the history, literature, and culture of the Syriac Churches.

An introductory lecture series on the background of Syriac literature, and key research tools for major literary genres, will be provided, 1 hour per week, in the first term. In addition students are expected to produce oral or written presentations on specified topics each week (for a tutorial or seminar lasting 1 and a half hours per week).

Papers II-IV, core courses on key Syriac literary genres. Students must choose to study texts in THREE of the following subjects:

- (1) Biblical versions;
- (2) Exegetical literature;
- (3) Early poetry;
- (4) Liturgy;
- (5) Historical literature;
- (6) Secular literature;
- (7) Monastic literature;
- (8) Hagiography;
- (9) Translations of Greek patristic texts;
- (10) Theological texts;
- (11) Any other subject approved by the Faculty Board.

No more than three of these subjects are usually taught in any one year, and so the choice of subjects is decided by consultation between teacher and students in the first week of Michaelmas Term. *It is thus possible that teaching for some options may not be available every year.*

Teaching takes the form of (a) text-classes (usually 5 hours per week), for which students are expected to prepare; (b) seminars (usually one and a half hours per week): students are expected to prepare oral or written presentations on specified topics; and (c) lectures on the general background of Syriac literature (normally one hour per week in Michaelmas term). Other optional lecture courses on related subjects may be offered from time to time. Students are also encouraged to attend seminars in relevant areas: there are regular series in Patristic Studies, Late Antique and Byzantine Studies, Armenian Studies, Jewish Studies in the Greco-Roman Period, Old Testament, and New Testament, Ancient Near Eastern studies.

Set Texts

A final list of set texts will be published in this course handbook, not later than Friday of 8th week, Michaelmas term, if there are candidates for the final examination.

Examinations and Assessments

The latest information on the assessments and submission details can be found in the *Examination Regulations*: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/examregs/>

The Exam Regulations are revised and re-issued each year, and you must always consult the issue in force at the time of your admission. For example, if you matriculate your studies in Michaelmas Term 2017, you should refer to the Examination Regulations for 2017 -2018 for the whole duration of your course.

Year of Matriculation	MSt and MPhil Qualifying Exams	MPhil Final Exams
MT 2017	Exam Regs for 2017-18	Exam Regs for 2017-18

Papers II-IV Set Texts Papers

Each paper will have an obligatory Question 1, containing 4 passages from the set texts for translation into English and for comment ('on any points you consider of interest'). All four passages must be attempted. Questions 2-6 will be essay questions, which will mostly have a connection of a general nature with the subject matter of the set texts. Question 7 will be an optional unseen passage of Syriac for translation into English. Candidates are required to answer 2 questions from questions 2-7. Question 1 will be worth 60% of the total marks available for this paper, and each answer to the two questions chosen from question 2-7 will be worth 20% of the total marks available.

The use of Syriac dictionaries will not be permitted during these examinations.

Past papers are available for Oxford students online at OXAM.

Every candidate will be examined viva voce unless s/he shall have been individually excused by the examiners.

Financial Aid

Applicants for this degree are encouraged to read the section on 'Funding in Oriental Studies' on the Faculty of Oriental studies website, as well as the appropriate pages of the University website.

The Dolabani Fund can make small grants to students of Syriac, but these are at present insufficient to cover either fees or living costs.

Michaelmas Term 2107