MPhil Islamic Studies & History
Course Handbook
Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies
University of Oxford
Academic Year 2023-24

FACULTY OF
ASIAN AND
MIDDLE
EASTERN
STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

Master of Philosophy in Islamic Studies & History

Course Handbook

Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies

Academic Year 2023-24 v.4

Course Director – Dr Christian Sahner

THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook applies to students starting the course in Michaelmas Term 2023. The information in this handbook may be different for students starting in other years.

The information in this handbook is accurate as at Hilary Term 2024; however, it may be necessary for changes to be made in certain circumstances, as explained at www.ox.ac.uk/coursechanges. If such changes are made the faculty will publish a new version of this handbook together with a list of the changes and students will be informed.

The handbook sets out the basic framework for the MPhil Islamic Studies & History, and what to do should you encounter delays, setbacks, or need to make changes. It provides basic advice about writing your thesis and submitting it for examination.

The Examination Regulations relating to this course are available here: 2023-24, Degrees of Master of Philosophy in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (ox.ac.uk)

You should consult the current edition of the Examination Regulations for information regarding your course. The information in this handbook should be read in conjunction with:

- the Faculty's general Masters handbook;
- the Examination Conventions and Rubrics;
- the Examination Regulations;
- the University Student Handbook
- your college handbook.

If there is a conflict between information in this handbook and the Examination Regulations then you should follow the Examination Regulations. If you have any concerns please contact the Senior Academic Administrator, Edmund Howard.

Comments and criticism of the handbook are always welcome; they should be sent to the Director of Graduate Studies (Margaret Hillenbrand) or the Senior Academic Administrator.

Version history

1	September 2023	Original publication
2	February 2024	Updates to formatting, web links and student support information
3	October 2024	Updated location of examiners' reports and previous exam papers.

4	June 2025	General Guidelines for Thesis Writers link updated

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO MPHIL ISLAMIC STUDIES AND HISTORY

Introduction

The course is intended primarily for students who desire an intensive introduction to Islamic history and thought in the pre-modern and early modern periods. It presumes no background in Islamic history or languages. The course focuses on the political, social, and intellectual history of the central Islamic lands (Egypt, the Fertile Crescent, the Arabian Peninsula, Iran, Central Asia, and Anatolia) up until ca. 1800. It differs from analogous MPhil courses at other universities in the significance it places on language instruction in classical Arabic, Persian, Turkish, or some other language, and the study of primary sources. Instruction and supervision are carried out by several members of the Faculty's teaching staff. Each student is assigned a supervisor who is responsible for offering academic guidance throughout the course. Formally, this is the course organiser, but students are encouraged to solicit input from other faculty members, as well. DPhil students in Oxford normally start immediately with their research project. Applicants are therefore rarely admitted directly to a DPhil course. This MPhil course in Islamic Studies and History is an excellent preparation for subsequent doctoral study.

Outline

Students will study Arabic, Persian, or Turkish throughout the course. Students already capable of carrying out research in one of these languages will be strongly encouraged to take up a second. This competence will be examined at the start of Year 1.

Year 1

Year 1 is devoted to intensive language instruction throughout the year (at least 6 hours per week), a twelve-week seminar in Islamic History, and a subsequent twelve-week seminar in Islamic Studies. Students are also expected to attend the companion lectures to these seminars, which are also attended by third-year undergraduates. (Note that due to the mixed audience, there may be some divergence between the topics covered in the seminars and in the lectures.)

Schedule

Michaelmas Term	Hilary Term	Trinity Term
Language instruction Islamic History seminar Islamic History lectures	Language instruction *Weeks 1-4* Islamic History seminar Islamic History lectures *Weeks 5-8* Islamic Studies lectures Islamic Studies seminars	Language instruction Islamic Studies seminar Islamic Studies lectures

Year 2

Students will now have begun to read original texts in their chosen language. Students may choose two optional papers from the list below. Note that not all options will be offered every year, and that students should consult with potential instructors at the end of Year 1 to determine availability. All candidates must obtain the approval of the Faculty of Asian and

Middle Eastern Studies for the papers they wish to take. In Hilary Term, students will present and discuss their thesis projects. Students will prepare for two options out of the following list, depending on teaching availability. Options marked below with an asterisk will be assessed by a written examination at the end of Trinity Term of the second year. All other options will be examined by essay submissions:

1. Hadith - *Dr Fitzroy Morrissey (tbc)*
2. Introduction to Islamic Art *(from MPhil Islamic Art & Architecture – can be taken either in MT or HT, depending on whether students want to cover the period 650-1000 CE or 1000-1400 CE*)
3. Islamic Law – *Dr Fitzroy Morrissey*
4. Persian Literature in Any Period prior to 1500 (*assessed by written examination) - *Prof. Dominic Brookshaw*
5. Persian: Documents from Pre-Mongol Iran and Afghanistan – *Dr Arezou Azad (tbc)*
6. Philosophy and Theology in the Islamic World – *Dr Daniel D. De Haan (tbc)*
7. Pre-Islamic Poetry – *Prof. Tahera Qutbuddin*
8. Qur'an – *Dr Nora K. Schmid*
9. Sufism – *Dr Fitzroy Morrissey (tbc)*
10. Topics in Medieval Middle Eastern and Islamic History – *Dr Christian Sahner*
11. Persian: Documents from Pre-Mongol Iran and Afghanistan – *Dr Arezou Azad (tbc)*
12. Another subject approved by the Board of the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies

Options will be subject to the availability of teaching each year.

Schedule

Michaelmas Term	Hilary Term	Trinity Term
Language instruction	Language instruction	Language instruction
Optional paper 1	Optional paper 2	Conclusion of thesis
	Thesis seminar	Revision for examinations

Students will study one option in Michaelmas Term and one option in Hilary Term. Students must apply for approval by Monday of Week 8 of Trinity Term of their first year. Students may apply to study options from the MPhil Islamic Art & Architecture (queries can be directed to the KRC Administrator).

Students may also propose options not listed in this handbook, pending the availability of an instructor and the approval of the Faculty Board. Students wishing to explore such alternatives are strongly encouraged to speak to the course organiser and potential instructors near the end of Year 1, as such options may require additional planning.

Students are strongly encouraged to take part in seminars, lectures, and other intellectual activities outside their formal studies.

- Dr Arezou Azad – Senior Research Fellow
- Prof. Dominic Brookshaw – Associate Professor of Persian Literature; Wadham College
- Dr Fitzroy Morrissey – Associate Professor of Islamic Studies and Law; Pembroke College
- Prof. Tahera Qutbuddin – Abdulaziz Saud AlBabtain Laudian Professor of Arabic; St John's College
- Dr Christian Sahner – Associate Professor of Islamic History; New College
- Dr Nora K. Schmid– Departmental Lecturer in Islamic Studies; Wolfson College

Examination and Assessment Structure

Year 1

In Trinity Term of Year 1, students will sit one written paper in their chosen language. Passing this qualifying examination is a requirement for continuing on to the second year of the degree.

Year 2

In Year 2, you will complete a take-home assessment in Islamic Studies and History at the beginning of Michaelmas Term.

You will also take an optional paper in Michaelmas Term and in Hilary Term. If assessed by submission, topics are released in Week 8 and submissions due in Week 9 of each term.

In Trinity Term, you will sit a written language examination; if you have taken any optional papers not assessed by submission, you will sit additional examinations. You will also submit your thesis.

Important dates and deadlines

When			What	
Year 1	Trinity Term		Qualifying examination (language).	Written examination.
Year 1	Trinity Term	Week 8, Monday	Selection and approval of optional papers	Email Exams Administration team You must also enter for these approved options as part of the examination entry process.

Year 2	Michaelmas Term	Week 0, Monday, 12 noon.	Islamic Studies and History: essay topics published.	Via Inspera.
Year 2	Michaelmas Term	Week 1, Monday, 12 noon.	Islamic Studies and History: essays submitted. Word limit: 2,500 each.	Submission via Inspera.
Year 2	Michaelmas Term	Week 8, Friday, 12 noon	Michaelmas optional papers: essay topics published.	Submission via Inspera.
Year 2	Michaelmas Term	Week 9, Friday, 12 noon	Michaelmas optional papers: essay submitted. Word limit: 5,000	Submission via Inspera.
Year 2	Hilary Term	Week 0, Monday	Approval of the thesis subject/thesis title.	Email Exams Administration team
Year 2	Hilary Term	Week 8, Friday, 12 noon	Hilary optional papers: essay topics published.	Via Inspera.
Year 2	Hilary Term	Week 9, Friday, 12 noon	Hilary optional papers: essay submitted. Word limit: 5,000	Submission via Inspera.
Year 2	Trinity Term	Week 6, Thursday, 12 noon	Thesis submission Word limit: 25,000	Submission via Inspera.
Year 2	Trinity Term		Final examination (language).	Written examination.
Year 2	Trinity Term		Michaelmas or Hilary optional papers examinations.	Written examination.

Thesis

Approval of Thesis Subject/Title

Departure from approved titles or subject matter will be penalised. The penalty applied will increase the greater the departure from the approved title or subject matter is. After your thesis subject/title is approved there may need to be changes made before submitting. These should be done in consultation with your supervisor and a request to change your thesis title should be emailed to Exams Administration team, with your supervisor copied in for approval. **Changes cannot be made once your thesis is submitted.**

Examination-related forms, including thesis approval forms, are available on the Faculty webpage here.

Word Limits
Word Limit: 25,000.

Your thesis should not exceed the word limit given in your Examination Regulations – including text and footnotes/endnotes but excluding appendices and bibliography.

General Guidelines for Thesis Writers
Further guidance and more information about formatting can be found in the General Guidelines for Thesis Writers. Examples of MPhil and MSt/MSc theses are available on the 'Exams and Assessment Information' site on Canvas or from the Weston Library and can be searched on SOLO (Search Oxford Libraries Online). Some theses awarded a distinction are eligible to be deposited to the Bodleian Library. Should your thesis be eligible, you will be contacted regarding the procedure after your results are released.

EXAMINATIONS AND ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE

Examination Regulations
Examination Regulations are the immutable framework of study and assessment of University degrees to which students must adhere. The regulations for the MPhil Islamic Studies and History can be found here.

Examination Conventions and Rubrics
These are the formal record and explanation of the specific assessment standards for the course or courses to which they apply. They set out how your examined work will be marked and how the resulting marks will be used to arrive at a final result and classification of an award. They are approved and published by the Faculty each year and include information on:

Conventions
- Marking conventions and scaling
- Verification and reconciliation of marks
- Qualitative marking criteria for different types of assessment
- Penalties for late or non-submission; for over-length work and departure from approved title/subject matter; for poor academic practice; for non-attendance
- Progression rules and classification conventions
- Use of viva voce examinations
- Re-sits
- Consideration of mitigating circumstances
- Details of examiners and rules on communicating with examiners

Rubrics
- type and structure of examination (e.g., in-person or online examination)
- submission instructions
- weightings of paper

- time allowed
- instructions on the use of dictionaries and other materials
- instructions on the use of different scripts
- instructions on word limits
- instructions on handwriting

The conventions and rubrics will be published on the 'Exams and Assessment Guidance' page on the Student Hub not less than one whole term before your examination takes place or, where assessment takes place in the first term of a course, at the beginning of that term.

You should take careful note of the dates for submission of essays and theses laid down in the Examination Regulations, course handbook, setting conventions, or rubrics. It is the candidate's responsibility to comply with these dates. The University Proctors, who have overall control of examinations, will not give leave for work to be submitted late except for cases of exceptional circumstances.

If there is any discrepancy in information, you should always follow the Examination Regulations and please contact the Exams Administration team.

Examination Entry, In-person and Online Examinations

You will enter for examinations through your College. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are entered for the correct number of papers and correct options, but you can speak to your College's academic office or the Exams Administration team if you are unsure about what these are. Your timetable will be available approximately five weeks before your first exam. Please refer to the Oxford Students website for full examination entry and alternative examination arrangements (www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/exams). Formal University examinations are normally sat in the Examination Schools or other approved locations.

In-person Examinations

Practical information and support for sitting in-person exams is provided on the Oxford students website (www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/exams/guidance).

Online Examinations

Online exams are taken in Inspera. You must familiarise yourself with the system prior to taking an online exam. There are a wide range of resources to help you on the Oxford Students website, including expectations regarding standards of behaviour and good academic practice for online open-book exams (www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/exams/online-exams). Online exams require you to adhere to the University's Honour Code (www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/exams/open-book/honour-code) and you should read this in advance of any online exams.

Candidate number

Your candidate number will be provided by your college you can also locate it on the Examination and Assessment Information page in Student Self Service or by looking on the top of your individual timetable. **Your candidate number is not your student number.**

Submissions via Inspera

Submissions are via the University's online assessment platform, Inspera. Ensure you are familiar with the online submission process in advance of any deadline. Full information is provided on the Oxford students website (www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/exams/submission).

An Inspera link and information will be sent by the Exams Administration team prior to the submission deadline.

Problems Completing Your Examinations and Assessments

There are a number of University processes in place to help you if you find that illness or other personal circumstances are affecting your assessments or if you experience technical difficulties with an online exam or submission. Full information is available on the Oxford student website (www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/exams/problems-completing-your-assessment).

If you experience unexpected circumstances that may affect your performance, you must discuss your circumstances with your College first as any application to the Proctors will come from them. They can advise on the best course of action for your circumstances.

Mitigating circumstances notices to examiners (MCE)

The form is designed so that you can make the Board of Examiners aware of any problems that occurred before or during your exams, or in relation to your submitted coursework, that seriously affected your performance. For further information about mitigating circumstances, please refer to the rubrics and to the Oxford students website.

Vivas and Resits

You may be required to attend a viva voce examination after you have completed your written examinations. This is to enable your examiners to clarify any matters in your answers, and it gives you the opportunity to improve upon your performance, should that be necessary.

Information about when resits take place can be found in your Examination Conventions and you enter for resits in the same way as the first attempt. Please contact your College with any questions about your resits.

When making any travel arrangements for the post-exam period, it is your responsibility to bear in mind attendance at the viva and when resits may take place.

Infringements for Examinations and Submitted Assessments

Please refer to the examination conventions for penalties for infringements of word limit, late submission, plagiarism and non-adherence to rubrics.

Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies students should note that interpretation of the electronic word count is at the discretion of the Examiners, in view of the fact that most languages taught in the Faculty are not written in alphabetic scripts and the electronic word count may not be as accurate when taking these scripts into account.

Feedback on Learning and Assessment

Informal (Formative) Assessment

Informal assessment, also known as formative assessment, is provided by tutorial feedback and interaction with the Supervisor and/or tutor, by the discussion of prepared class-work or the results of class tests (especially for language classes), and by the Supervisor's termly report, which is discussed with the student in the Faculty and separately in the College.

Formal (Summative) Assessment

Formal assessment, also known as summative assessment, is provided by qualifying examinations in the first year and by one or more of written examinations, submitted essays, portfolio, and a thesis or dissertation at the end of the course.

Examiners' Reports and Previous Exam Papers (OXAM)

Examiners' reports from past exams are normally available from Hilary Term and will be uploaded to the 'Graduate (Taught) Examinations and Assessment' page on the Student Hub. These reports give you an idea of how the exams were conducted and the performance of the cohort. Due to small class sizes for some degrees, it is not always possible to provide Examiners' reports for them. In these cases, please consult with your Course Director for some feedback.

Previous examination papers can be viewed on Search Oxford Libraries Online (SOLO), the online catalogue platform provided by the Bodleian Libraries.

GOOD ACADEMIC PRACTICE AND AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism

The University's definition of plagiarism is:

Plagiarism is presenting someone else's work or ideas as your own, with or without their consent, by incorporating it into your work without full acknowledgement. All published and unpublished material, whether in manuscript, printed or electronic form, is covered under this definition. Plagiarism may be intentional or reckless, or unintentional. Under the regulations for examinations, intentional or reckless plagiarism is a disciplinary offence.

It is important that you take time to look at the University University's guidance on plagiarism here: http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism.

You should refer to the University's guidance on referencing (https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/referencing). If, after having done so, you are still unsure how to reference your work properly, you should contact your supervisor for guidance.

The University employs software applications to monitor and detect plagiarism in submitted examination work, both in terms of copying and collusion. It regularly monitors online essay banks, essay-writing services, and other potential sources of material.

Complaints

If your concern or complaint relates to teaching or other provision made by the faculty/department, then you should raise it with the Director of Graduate Studies (Margaret Hillenbrand) as appropriate.

Complaints about departmental facilities should be made to the Departmental administrator (Trudi Pinkerton). If you feel unable to approach one of those individuals, you may contact the Head of Administrator (Thomas Hall) or the Faculty Board Chair (David Rechter). The officer concerned will attempt to resolve your concern/complaint informally.

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome, you may take your concern further by making a formal complaint to the Proctors under the University Student Complaints Procedure (https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/complaints).

If your concern or complaint relates to teaching or other provision made by your college, you should raise it either with your tutor or with one of the college officers, Senior Tutor, Tutor for Graduates (as appropriate). Your college will also be able to explain how to take your complaint further if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of its consideration.

Academic appeals

An academic appeal is an appeal against the decision of an academic body (e.g. boards of examiners, transfer and confirmation decisions etc.), on grounds such as procedural error or evidence of bias. There is no right of appeal against academic judgement.

If you have any concerns about your assessment process or outcome it is advisable to discuss these first informally with your subject or college tutor, Senior Tutor, course director, director of studies, supervisor or college or departmental administrator as appropriate. They will be able to explain the assessment process that was undertaken and may be able to address your concerns. Queries must not be raised directly with the examiners.

If you still have concerns you can make a formal appeal to the Proctors who will consider appeals under the University Academic Appeals Procedure (https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/complaints).

PROGRAMME AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR MPHIL COURSES OF STUDY AT ASIAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES

The MPhil is a degree awarded on the successful completion of a course of directed study leading to an examination, which is normally taken after two years; as part of their coursework students normally also submit a thesis, the regulations for which are specified under individual subject headings in the Examination Regulations.

In addition to this the Asian and Middle Eastern Studies Board is jointly responsible for the MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies (with options in Arabic, Armenian and Syriac) and for the MPhil in Judaism and Christianity in the Graeco-Roman World. The MPhil is at the FHEQ level 7.

Students enter for the MPhil Qualifying and Final examinations through their College. Students who wish to defer taking the examination beyond the two years must apply for permission to the Asian and Middle Eastern Studies Board.

The MPhil is available in the following subjects:

- Buddhist Studies

- Classical Indian Religion
- Cuneiform Studies
- Eastern Christian Studies
- Egyptology
- Islamic Art and Architecture
- Islamic Studies and History
- Jewish Studies
- Jewish Studies in the Graeco-Roman Period
- Modern Middle Eastern Studies
- Tibetan and Himalayan Studies
- Traditional East Asia

Educational Aims of the Programme

The programme aims to enable its students to:

- Develop the practice of analytical enquiry;
- Achieve a high level of competence in a relevant language where a study of language is part of the course;
- Achieve a good level of competence in the textual and historical analysis of texts in the relevant language;
- Gain a wide-ranging critical knowledge of relevant secondary literature and of current developments in the field;
- Reflect on relevant issues of method;
- Develop skills in written and oral communication, including sustained argument, independent thought and lucid structure and content;
- Develop the ability to identify, understand and apply key concepts and principles
- Where appropriate, prepare students for further research in the field.

Assessment

Formative assessment is provided by tutorial feedback and interaction with the Supervisor and/or tutor, by the discussion of prepared class-work, and by the Supervisor's termly report, which is discussed with the student in the Faculty and separately in the College

Summative assessment is provided at the end of the course by written examinations, submitted essays, portfolio, a thesis and *viva voce*, depending on the course.

Programme Outcomes

A. Knowledge and understanding

On completion of the course students will have:

- Acquired relevant linguistic and textual knowledge;
- Acquired some specialist knowledge of relevant primary and secondary literature;
- Gained enhanced understanding of how primary evidence is employed in philological, textual, historical and literary analysis and argument.

Related Teaching/Learning Methods and Strategies

The main learning strategy is that a student should practise the relevant skills under close supervision, receive constant feedback, and have the chance to see the same skills practised by acknowledged experts in a manner which can be emulated. The methods used to achieve this aim include:

- Language and/or text-reading classes, for which students are expected to prepare
- Lectures
- Seminars with peers and senior academics
- Tutorials (individual) for which students prepare a substantial piece of written work for discussion with their tutor(s)
- Museum classes (small-group), held in the Ashmolean Museum and designed around object handling – for Egyptology

B. Skills and other attributes

1. Intellectual Skills

The ability to:

- Exercise critical judgement and undertake sophisticated analysis
- Argue clearly, relevantly and persuasively
- Approach problems with creativity and imagination
- Develop the exercise of independence of mind, and a readiness to challenge and criticize accepted opinion

Teaching/Learning Methods and Strategies

As above.

Assessment

As above.

2. Practical Skills

All practical skills acquired are also transferable skills; see below.

3. Transferable Skills

The ability to:

- Find information, organise and deploy it;
- Use such information critically and analytically;
- Consider and solve complex problems with sensitivity to alternative traditions;
- Work well independently, with a strong sense of self-direction, but also with the ability to work constructively in co-operation with others;
- Effectively structure and communicate ideas in a variety of written and oral formats;
- Plan and organise the use of time effectively, and be able to work under pressure to deadlines;
- Make appropriate use of language skills;
- handwrite in non-Roman script.

Teaching/Learning Methods and Strategies/Assessment

Since all these skills are essential elements of the course, they are taught and assessed in the same ways as at A above.

STUDENT INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Student Hub

The Student Hub is an ongoing project to provide a live online version of the handbook, together with more detailed course information and further resources such as forms and exam conventions, as well as archived documents from previous years. You can also access the Student Hub through the top bar of the Faculty Website, through the '**NEW Faculty Intranet**' button. You will need to log in using your SSO.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

In accordance with our **Statement of Values**, the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies is committed to creating a teaching, learning, and research environment in which every member of our community – at every academic level from undergraduate to senior academic, and among library and administrative staff – can achieve their full professional potential without discrimination on the basis of age, disability, gender, marriage or civil partnership, nationality, pregnancy or parenthood, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

We welcome suggestions for making our courses more diverse and inclusive. In general, you are encouraged to tell us if you see any ways in which the courses or this handbook might be improved. Staff and students are welcome to contact the Equality and Diversity team with any suggestions or concerns:

Arabic, Persian and Turkish Group Equality and Diversity Representative: Nora Schmid

Faculty Equality and Diversity Officer: Richard Parkinson

Welfare and Support

Our community aims to encourage and support all students. The student experience at Oxford offers lots of opportunities for you to thrive, grow, and look after your own wellbeing, but we know that sometimes there can be stresses and challenges too.

We want to give you the agency to navigate welfare support, and to make your own decisions. This includes by:

- Keeping in touch with your College and Department, and letting them know if you need help
- Seeking support when needed
- Supporting your fellow students
- Registering with Disability Advisory Service for structured support if you have a disability

Should you have any concerns, or for guidance and support, please do not hesitate to contact the following people:

Disability Coordinators: Thomas Hall and **Edmund Howard**

Welfare Contact: Edmund Howard

Harassment Officers: Leyla Najafzada and **Zeynep Yürekli**

Details of the range of sources of support available in the University are available from the **Oxford Students** website, including in relation to mental and physical health and disability.

More information about the support and resources available can be found in the general Undergraduate Handbook and on the Faculty and University websites.