

Course Information Sheet for entry in 2025-26: MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies



Course facts

Mode of study	Full Time Only
Expected length	21 months

About the course

This two-year course can be taken as a free-standing degree, or as the first step towards doctoral research.

Late Antiquity (c.250-c.750) was a period of remarkable political change and cultural efflorescence. It witnessed the transformation of the ancient Roman and Iranian empires into their more centralised, more bureaucratic late Roman and Sassanian successors. This was a time of the consolidation of ancient philosophy, Judaism, and Christianity, as well as the emergence of Islam. By the end of the period, the ancient world order had dissolved into a series of Western kingdoms, the Islamic caliphate, and the Byzantine state focused on Constantinople. Over more than a millennium of history, Byzantium (c.330-c.1453) was central to political, economic, and cultural networks across the Eurasian continent, and played a crucial part in the formation of Eastern Christendom, the Crusades, and the Renaissance.

This course introduces you to this rich heritage, while also allowing for a high level of specialisation in various periods, regions, and source types; as well as languages (incl. Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, and Persian) and approaches (incl. History, Archaeology, Visual Culture, Literature, and Religion). Uniquely, the course is taught through a team of scholars based in several different Oxford faculties: History, Classics, Archaeology, Theology and Religion, Oriental Studies, and Modern and Medieval Languages.

Oxford scholars have been vital to the formation of Late Antiquity and Byzantium as modern academic disciplines. As a postgraduate in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies you will join a thriving and active community of over one hundred scholars and students, represented in the Oxford Centre for Late Antiquity and the Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research. These centres help to organise a regular programme of seminars and conferences, while the Oxford University Byzantine Society runs an annual postgraduate research trip to different parts of the former late antique and Byzantine worlds, and a conference which gathers postgraduates from across the globe.

Graduates are key participants in the wide range of seminars, workshops and conferences run by the History Faculty.

Further opportunities for exchange are provided by the interdisciplinary communities fostered within individual colleges, which also offer dedicated support for graduates by means of personal advisors. The Oxford Centre for Research in the Humanities (TORCH) offers a stimulating range of interdisciplinary activities. You are also encouraged to join the Oxford History Graduate Network (OHGN), which fosters friendships, conversations and collaboration.

If you wish to apply for the DPhil you will be encouraged to develop your doctoral proposal in consultation with your supervisor during the first few months of your second year, so that you will be well placed to make a doctoral application.

Year one - core courses

Although the two components of the course, Late Antiquity and Byzantium, have been designed to the same specification and are conjoined in a single course, you are expected to concentrate on **one** of the two fields only.

In the first two terms you take classes in either:

- Late Antique History; or
- Byzantine History

Alongside this you will follow a second weekly class

- Late Antique and Byzantine Archaeology and Visual Culture (first term); and
- Late Antique and Byzantine Religion (second term)

Late Antique History

This course, which comprises sixteen classes over the first two terms, encompasses the whole chronological and geographical span of the Late Roman Empire and beyond. Taught through a mix of student- and teacher-led sessions, it aims to explore facets of the late antique world against wider themes such as religious, cultural, and political change, while also familiarising you with different source types and methodologies. Examples of topics covered in recent years include: Urbanism, Successor Kingdoms, Monasticism, Elite housing and art, Late Roman empresses, Splinter empires and usurpers,

Poetry, Magical and philosophical texts, Sassanid Persia, Law, Military handbooks, Goths, Natural disasters and narratives, Travel, and Papyrus documents.

Byzantine History

Taught each week over the first two terms, this sixteen-class course introduces you to the world of medieval Byzantium and its neighbours. Operating with a generous definition of the horizons of Byzantine history, it normally progresses chronologically from the reign of Justinian to the fall of Constantinople (depending on students' interests), and focuses on critical debates within Byzantine and wider medieval studies. Through a combination of short lectures, student presentations, and group debate, it exposes you to a range of methodological approaches to, sources for, and scholarship on the medieval East. Recent classes have included: Justinian and political dissent, the Justinian plague and environmental history, the Rise of Islam, Church councils and the papacy, Byzantine law, Iconoclasm, Cultural exchange with the caliphate, Arab geographers on Byzantium, Slavery, Byzantium and Rus', the Eleventh-century 'crisis', Komnenian historiography, the Seljuks, the Crusades and 1204, the Empire of Nicaea, and the Zealots.

Late Antique and Byzantine Archaeology and Visual Culture

The course consists of eight three-hour long sessions in the first term. Through a combination of brief lectures, class-based discussions, class-presentations, and museum visits, it introduces you to the main methods of Late antique and Byzantine archaeology and visual culture, and explores current research themes. It is foremost intended to make students familiar with the specificity of the source material, teach you how to look at, analyse and describe material and visual culture as well as explore diverse ways in which you can make use of this evidence for your own research papers. Methodological insights are applied to various topics, including Urbanism, Reuse of building materials, Architecture and power, Light and lighting in Byzantium, Late antique and Byzantine capital cities, Byzantine perceptions of neighbouring societies, Cappadocia, Pilgrimage, The origin and workings of icons.

Late Antique and Byzantine

Taught in the second term through student-led presentations and group discussion, this course of eight classes introduces you to prominent aspects of theology and religion within the late antique and Byzantine worlds. Organised thematically so as to encompass the various regional and chronological specialisms of attendees, the classes range across the diverse religious traditions of the period (incl. polytheism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism), while introducing you to the various sources and methodologies available to students of theology and religion. Recent class topics have included Apocalyptic, Asceticism, Conversion, Councils, Dualism, Hagiography, Heresy, Holy women, Iconoclasm, Liturgy, Mysticism, Relics, and Religious art.

Year one - training pathways

Alongside the choice between Late Antique or Byzantine History, you must also choose between two training pathways, dependent on your knowledge of languages or your primary interests in the field.

You must also choose *one* of the following training pathways:

1. Language pathway

The language training pathway offers intensive training in any one of the following ancient and medieval languages and, normally, their associated literatures: Greek, Latin, Old Church Slavonic, Armenian, Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, Middle Persian, and Hebrew. Please note that not every subject listed may be on offer every year, depending in part on levels of student demand.

2. Skills pathway

The skills pathway is designed for those who already have considerable competence in their chosen language(s) and are able to read primary sources in the original. You will receive instruction in one or two of a range of specialist auxiliary disciplines: papyrology, epigraphy, palaeography, numismatics, sigillography or artefact studies. Please note that not every subject listed may be on offer every year, depending in part on levels of student demand. You will also write a dissertation on a subject of your choosing.

Year two

Thesis

In the second year you will write a thesis on a topic of your choosing, subject to the approval of your supervisor. This will be submitted in the third term. Examples of MPhil thesis titles can be found on the History Faculty website.

Dissertation, Auxiliary Discipline(s), or Language Paper

In the second year you will also choose one other examined element. Either:

- a dissertation on a topic of your choosing, subject to the approval of your supervisor, and submitted in the third term; or

- one or two auxiliary disciplines (from papyrology, epigraphy, palaeography, numismatics, sigillography or artefact studies); or
- a language paper (from Greek, Latin, Old Church Slavonic, Armenian, Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, Middle Persian, and Hebrew).

Language, Literature, and auxiliary disciplines are taught throughout the year, and will normally be examined by unseen examinations at the end of the third term.

Please note that not every every subject area listed may be on offer every year, depending in part on levels of student demand.

Attendance

The course is full-time and requires attendance in Oxford. Full-time students are subject to the University's Residence requirements.

Resources to support your study

As a graduate student, you will have access to the University's wide range of world-class resources including libraries, museums, galleries, digital resources and IT services.

The Bodleian Libraries is the largest library system in the UK. It includes the main Bodleian Library and libraries across Oxford, including major research libraries and faculty, department and institute libraries. Together, the Libraries hold more than 13 million printed items, provide access to e-journals, and contain outstanding special collections including rare books and manuscripts, classical papyri, maps, music, art and printed ephemera.

The University's IT Services is available to all students to support with core university IT systems and tools, as well as many other services and facilities. IT Services also offers a range of IT learning courses for students, to support with learning and research.

The Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities

You will be based in the Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities, a brand-new building at the University of Oxford expected to open in 2025, which will accommodate seven faculties, two institutes, a new library, a large number of well-equipped teaching and seminar rooms, and performance and arts venues. Each faculty will have its own centre and social hub within a building which will also facilitate interdisciplinary and collaborative work. At the heart of the building will be a large atrium – called the Great Hall – which will be a beautiful space, bringing light into the building, and serving as a space for informal work, relaxation, meeting with friends, taking breaks, having refreshments – and much more.

The library, part of the Bodleian Libraries, will be open to all students, and will house lending collections for English, Film Studies, History of Medicine, Internet Studies, Music, Philosophy and Theology. There will be 340 general reader seats, and around 80 graduate study seats – with a further 320 formal and informal study seats throughout the building outside the library.

Open-shelf lending collections will be complemented by access to electronic resources, scan on demand, and material requested from the Bodleian's Collections Storage Facility. As well as the Library's extensive staffed hours, there will be a 24/7 study space, including smart lockers for self-collect of borrowable items out of hours. Subject support is provided by a team of subject librarians.

The building will enable the recently-established Cultural Programme to flourish, with a 500-seat world class concert hall, a theatre, experimental performance venue, 100-seat cinema, and exhibition hall. Many of these venues will support academic and student-led activities, as well as performances and creative works by professional artists. The cultural programme will enrich the lives of students, and will also provide opportunities to get involved.

Further libraries

The Bodleian Libraries' Special Collections Department attracts scholars from all over the world. Further strengths include the countless databases and digital resources currently offered by the Bodleian and being developed through Oxford's Digital Humanities programme.

You are also able to draw on the specialist resources offered by the Bodleian History Faculty Library which provides dedicated support and training courses for all graduates. You will also have access to the many college libraries and to college archives which can house significant collections of personal papers as well as institutional records dating back to the middle ages.

Supervision

The allocation of graduate supervision for this course is the responsibility of the Faculty of History and it is not always possible to accommodate the preferences of incoming graduate students to work with a particular member of staff. Under exceptional circumstances a supervisor outside the Faculty of History may be nominated.

An Oxford academic's pre-application indication of willingness to supervise an enquiring applicant is not a guarantee that the applicant will be offered a place, or that the supervisor in question has capacity in that particular year.

Assessment

Year one

Examination comprises several parts depending on the chosen pathway:

All students submit two essays on a topic of your choosing, subject to the approval of your supervisor. The first is submitted in the second term; the second in the third term. You can find examples of previous essay titles on the faculty's website.

If you select the language pathway, you will take a language paper; and a literature paper in the same language.

If you select the skills pathway, you will take a paper or papers in the chosen auxiliary disciplines; and a dissertation on a topic of your choosing, subject to the approval of your supervisor, and submitted in the third term.

Year two

In the second year you will write a thesis on a topic of your choosing, subject to the approval of your supervisor. This is submitted in the third term.

You will also be examined on one other element of your choosing, either:

- a dissertation on a topic of your choosing, subject to the approval of your supervisor, and submitted in the third term; or
- one or two auxiliary disciplines (from a list of subject areas - see *Dissertation, Auxiliary Discipline(s), or Language Paper* for examples);
or
- a language paper (from a list of subject areas - see *Dissertation, Auxiliary Discipline(s), or Language Paper* for examples).

Language, Literature, and auxiliary disciplines are taught throughout the year, and will normally be examined by unseen examinations at the end of the third term.

Changes to this course

The University will seek to deliver this course in accordance with the description set out above. However, there may be situations in which it is desirable or necessary for the University to make changes in course provision, either before or after you commence your course. These might include significant changes made necessary by any pandemic, epidemic or local health emergency. For further information, please see the University's Terms and Conditions (<http://www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/terms>) and our page on changes to courses (<http://www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/coursechanges>).

Costs

Annual fees for entry in 2025-26

Fee status	Annual Course fees
Home	£16,900
Overseas	£41,250

Information about course fees

Course fees are payable each year, for the duration of your fee liability (your fee liability is the length of time for which you are required to pay course fees). For courses lasting longer than one year, please be aware that fees will usually increase annually. Information about how much fees and other costs may increase is set out in the University's Terms and Conditions (<http://www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/terms>).

Course fees cover your teaching as well as other academic services and facilities provided to support your studies. Unless specified in the additional cost information (below), course fees do not cover your accommodation, residential costs or other living costs. They also don't cover any additional costs and charges that are outlined in the additional cost information.

Additional cost information

There are no compulsory elements of this course that entail additional costs beyond fees and living costs. However, as part of your course requirements, you may need to choose a dissertation, a project or a thesis topic. Please note that, depending on your choice of topic and the research required to complete it, you may incur additional expenses, such as travel expenses, research expenses, and field trips. You will need to meet these additional costs, although you may be able to apply for small grants from your department and/or college to help you cover some of these expenses.

Living costs

In addition to your course fees and any additional course-specific costs, you will need to ensure that you have adequate funds to support your living costs for the duration of your course.

The likely living costs for the 2025-26 academic year are published below. These costs are based on a single, full-time graduate student, with no dependants, living in Oxford. We provide the cost per month so you can multiply up by the number of months you expect to live in Oxford.

Likely living costs for one month

	Lower range	Upper range
Food	£330	£515
Accommodation	£790	£955
Personal items	£200	£335
Social activities	£45	£100
Study costs	£40	£90
Other	£20	£40
Total	£1,425	£2,035

Likely living costs for nine months

	Lower range	Upper range
Food	£2,970	£4,635
Accommodation	£7,110	£8,595
Personal items	£1,800	£3,015
Social activities	£405	£900
Study costs	£360	£810
Other	£180	£360
Total	£12,825	£18,315

Likely living costs for twelve months

	Lower range	Upper range
Food	£3,960	£6,180
Accommodation	£9,480	£11,460
Personal items	£2,400	£4,020
Social activities	£540	£1,200
Study costs	£480	£1,080
Other	£240	£480
Total	£17,100	£24,420

When planning your finances for any future years of study at Oxford beyond the 2025-26 academic year, it is suggested that you allow for potential increases in living expenses of 4% each year – although this rate may vary depending on the national economic situation.

More information about how these figures have been calculated is available at www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/livingcosts.

Document accessibility

If you require a more accessible version of this document please contact Graduate Admissions and Recruitment by email (graduate.admissions@admin.ox.ac.uk) or via the online form (<http://www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/ask/form>).