

Course Information Sheet for entry in 2025-26: MPhil in Cuneiform Studies



Course facts

Mode of study	Full Time Only
Expected length	21 months

About the course

This MPhil in Cuneiform Studies is designed to function as a self-contained course in its own right that will provide a satisfying and advanced study of the languages, culture and history of ancient Mesopotamia. It is also intended to take you to the point where you can consider embarking on doctoral research in cuneiform studies (in Akkadian and/or Sumerian).

The range of options available makes the MPhil Cuneiform Studies suitable both for graduates who have already studied Cuneiform, and for those with no previous experience in the field.

If you have a Cuneiform background, you will be able to build on your previous studies and gain specialised expertise. If you have graduated in another discipline, you will be able to convert to Cuneiform studies through a course that offers a progression from beginning the Akkadian and Sumerian languages to individual research. The course will provide the opportunity to develop a research area of your choice and elements of the course will be tailored to your individual interests.

The study of Akkadian and Sumerian, the two principal ancient languages of Mesopotamia, lies at the heart of the course. The principal focus throughout is on detailed familiarity with the primary sources, studied in the original languages and scripts. The course is designed to equip you with a sound knowledge of Akkadian and Sumerian grammar, vocabulary, and cuneiform script, as well as developing your ability to tackle published, but unedited Cuneiform texts.

Familiarity with the secondary literature and study aids such as dictionaries and sign lists, as well as historiographical and literary-critical approaches, are integral to the course. In addition to this textual focus, the cultures, history, and archaeology of Mesopotamia and neighbouring areas are fundamental course components. You will have the opportunity to develop your skills working with ancient Near Eastern artefacts, including cuneiform tablets, in the Ashmolean Museum.

The Cuneiform world is also studied in a wider context. You will choose one option from modules that include the Egyptian, Biblical, and Classical worlds, as well as the later Near East. The MPhil thesis will provide you with the opportunity to identify and design a cuneiform-related research project and to develop advanced research skills.

From the beginning of the course, you should expect to be engaged in academic work for a minimum of thirty-five hours a week during full term and you will need to do a considerable amount of work during the vacations. The course is taught through a mixture of classes (mainly language classes), lectures, and seminars, with some tutorials. Tutorials normally consist of a one-to-one discussion with a tutor based on 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.

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 Bodleian Art, Archaeology and Ancient World 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 Griffith Institute is located within the Bodleian Art, Archaeology and Ancient

World 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 is also edited there.

As well as the Bodleian Art, Archaeology and Ancient World Library and Griffith Institute, you are able to use the Nizami Ganjavi Library at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. You will have access to the University's centrally provided electronic resources and the faculty IT Officer. There is a computing room for the use of graduate students in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, as well as a common room where tea and coffee are available and staff and students can meet.

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 UK after the British Museum. You are encouraged to familiarise yourself with the collection and to learn how to read and copy from original clay tablets.

Two projects may also be of use or interest to you for the MPhil Cuneiform Studies, namely the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI) (<https://www.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cuneiform-digital-library-initiative-cdli>) and the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>) (ETCSL).

The CDLI represents the efforts of an international group of Assyriologists, museum curators and historians of science to make available through the internet the form and content of Cuneiform tablets dating from the beginning of writing, ca. 3350 BC, until the end of the pre-Christian era.

The ETCSL comprises a selection of nearly 400 literary compositions recorded on sources which come from ancient Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) and date to the late third and early second millennia BCE. The corpus contains Sumerian texts in transliteration, English prose translations and bibliographical information for each composition. The transliterations and the translations can be searched, browsed and read online using the tools of the website.

Work on both projects is ongoing at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies in Oxford and students may be able to gain experience in methods and approaches to Digital Humanities, by contributing data to one of these projects.

Supervision

The allocation of graduate supervision for this course is the responsibility of the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies 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 may be found outside the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies.

Assessment

You will have a qualifying examination at the end of your first year, and a final examination at the end of the second.

In order to progress to the second year of the course, you will also need to demonstrate a reading knowledge of French and German as much of the secondary literature on the subject is written in these languages. You will have the opportunity to undertake the necessary training at the University's Language Centre in your first year if required.

Further information on the course, and the examination process, can be found in the course handbook via the course webpage on the faculty's website.

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	£17,250
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>).