



MPhil Classical Indian Religion
Course Handbook
Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies
University of Oxford
Academic Year 2023-24 v.4

FACULTY OF
**ASIAN AND
MIDDLE
EASTERN
STUDIES**



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

Master of Philosophy in Classical Indian Religion

Course Handbook

Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies

Academic Year 2023-24 v.4

Course Director – Prof. [Jim Mallinson](#)

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 Classical Indian Religion, 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
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INTRODUCTION TO MPhil CLASSICAL INDIAN RELIGION

bhadrām no āpi vātaya mānaḥ | (RV 10.20.1a)

Introduction

Welcome to the MPhil course in Classical Indian Religion. We hope that your time in Oxford will be enjoyable and successful for you. This handbook gives an overview of the course; it is intended to supplement other documents that you will receive. The number of students on the course is small, and it is always possible to ask members of staff if you have questions.

The purpose of the course is fourfold: first, to provide an overview of classical Indian religions; second, to give students a solid foundation in Sanskrit; third, to allow students to focus on two religious traditions that they choose from among four options; and fourth, to carry out autonomous research and write a thesis on a topic of interest to them.

1. India has been home to many religious traditions. This course focuses on the study of those Indian religions that have a deep history and whose literature is primarily expressed in Sanskrit and the Middle Indic languages, especially Prakrit and Pali. That is what is meant by 'classical' in the name of the course. As currently taught the course introduces students to the academic study of the Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and Indian Buddhist traditions, as well as the mainstream tradition that derives from the Vedas.
2. The course offers two years of intensive instruction in Sanskrit, starting from the beginning. Aside from its value as a research tool in its own right, the study of Sanskrit is a commonly followed path into the study of the Middle Indic languages. Students who have arrived for the course in the past with a considerable background in Sanskrit in hand have been permitted to attend more advanced classes in Sanskrit from their first term, if they wish, or other language classes offered in our Faculty. There is no formal examination or accreditation for attending these classes; it would be done only for the sake of adding skills. Many students find that the study of Sanskrit is enough to occupy them. Nevertheless it is worth mentioning the riches on offer: subject to the availability of staff there are classes in Pali, Prakrit, Hindi-Urdu, Tibetan, Buddhist Chinese, and Old Iranian, Pahlavi, and Persian, as well as other languages that were used to compose literature in Indian religious traditions less commonly— including Syriac, Hebrew, and Arabic.
3. In the second part of the course students specialize in two of the four religious traditions listed above under purpose 1. This means that they read texts and scholarly studies, and write essays on questions assigned by the instructors.
4. It is possible to elect to write a thesis on a topic of interest, which is submitted for examination at the end of the course. In practice most students choose this option. For those interested in continuing beyond the master's degree, the thesis can serve as the first version of part of a doctoral thesis. More on the thesis below.

The central vision of the course is historical and comparative. The main tools it teaches are linguistic, analytical, and bibliographical. With a judicious balance of language training, prescribed texts, seminar work, tutorial teaching, and a thesis, the degree is intended to provide a solid grounding in Sanskrit, a broad introduction to the region, and a preparation for advancement to doctoral work in Indian studies. The degree can also be an end in itself, or serve as a preparation for non-academic careers.

Preparation for Language Study

We have found that not every student, even those who have studied Sanskrit before, is familiar with the grammatical and linguistic terminology that is used to teach Sanskrit in Oxford. Sanskrit is still taught here with the “grammar and translation” method, which makes use of advances in the disciplines of historical linguistics and philology over the last two centuries. A knowledge of the terminology of these sciences of language is essential to learning Sanskrit as it is taught in Oxford, and proves especially useful in studying the earlier layers of Sanskrit literature, the Vedas.

In some ways this terminology matches that of the traditional Indian grammarians and philologists. Beginning with Franz Bopp in the early nineteenth century, modern linguistics was inspired by the expertise of the śāstrin custodians of Sanskrit-based intellectual traditions. The modern discipline adds a comparative dimension that is enhanced by its international scope. This enables additional understandings, and can sometimes clarify what the traditional analysis overlooks. Ideally a student will master both emic and etic approaches.

For students who have not encountered this terminology before, or the conception of language that lies behind it, mastering it while trying to learn Sanskrit presents an extra burden. Sanskrit has a many inflected forms - a lot of declensions of nouns and adjectives and a lot of conjugations of verbs. The first part of the course is taken up with memorizing them. To have the template into which to fit these inflections can help enormously; it can make the difference between struggling and progressing with confidence.

Thus we recommend that before arriving students review their lessons in grammar – in the grammar of English if no other language is at hand. It will be helpful to remember, for example, what it means that the subject and verb of a sentence agree in number and person; what it means that verbs also have tenses, moods, and voices, and that nouns and adjectives also have case and gender. It will be useful to remember what a participle, a gerund, a pronoun, and a subordinate clause are. And so on. Of course, some students will already be familiar with this terminology, but there is always more to learn. A useful online resource with which you can begin your review is the “Introduction to Traditional Grammar,” sections 1 and 2, available on the [WPWT website](http://www.wpwt.org.uk/) at Southampton University.

Outline

The First Part

In the first part of the course, you will make an intensive study of the essentials of the Sanskrit language. Classes meet three times a week, for a total of four and half hours. The tutors may schedule a fourth class for practice and review. You will have daily homework assignments to complete and will have to spend time memorizing aspects of Sanskrit grammar and vocabulary. The Sanskrit classes are also attended by BA students and students on other MPhil courses. The main textbook is Michael Coulson’s Sanskrit. Students also read selections from C.R. Lanman’s Sanskrit Reader supplemented by other materials, the first five chapters of the story of Nala from the Mahābhārata, the Bhagavad-Gītā, chapters 2, 4, 6, and 11, and portions of the Hitopadeśa.

At the same time you will attend a class on sources and resources in the study of classical Indian culture. This class meets once a week for two hours. Every week each student chooses an example from the genre of scholarly resource that is the topic for the week -

dictionaries, manuscript catalogues, disciplinary bibliographies of secondary work, catalogues of inscriptions, and so on – and makes a brief report to the class. There are visits to the Ashmolean museum and to the manuscripts room of the Bodleian library. You will also attend lectures and seminars, and write several tutorial essays related to general themes in Indian religion.

Preparation time for contact with your teachers will vary by student but may require as much as six hours for every contact hour. It is important that students not fall behind. If you maintain a stable schedule with adequate rest and a steady pace, things should go well.

During the first two terms students should be giving thought to their choice of traditions to study in the second part of the course. This is a decision that they should make by the middle of the second term. They should also begin to consider their possible thesis topic. They should consult with their supervisor in making both of these decisions. The title of the thesis will not need to be submitted for formal approval by the Faculty Board until the week before the Hilary Term in the second year of the course, but by then you should have completed your research and be well into writing a draft.

Qualifying Examination

The Qualifying Examination is a written exam that normally takes place in a building called the Examination Schools after the end of the Trinity Term of the first year of the course. There are two examinations, each lasting three hours. They usually take place on consecutive days. In the first you will demonstrate your ability to translate the texts in Sanskrit you read in class, without the aid of a dictionary. In the second you will be tested on your knowledge of Sanskrit grammar, by being asked to generate Sanskrit inflectional forms, explain features of grammar, and translate passages of English into Sanskrit.

The Second Part

After successfully passing this examination you will enter the second part of the course, which continues to the end of the second year. You will have regular classes in which you will read Sanskrit texts. For these classes you will prepare texts in advance and, along with your classmates, will read and translate them into English. Your classes will cover texts that belong to two Indian religious traditions, which you will have chosen from among five options: Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Śākta, Buddhist, and the mainstream tradition that derives from the Vedas. A list of texts will be determined after consultation with the students in a given year. For the most recent lists, which are likely to be similar to what you will read, consult Appendix B.

You will also be given regular tutorials in these two traditions, for which you will read assigned secondary sources and prepare essays to discuss with your tutors. A list of recently assigned topics is provided in Appendix C. Yours may vary in some particulars. Students are ordinarily expected to write eight essays for each of their chosen traditions, over the course of three terms. Essay questions and the associated reading lists will be distributed to you well in advance of the due date. As a way to spread out the workload, it is advisable to do the assigned readings for the first essays due each term over the break that precedes that term. Your tutors will only read essays and discuss assignments during term time, however.

There are also regularly offered lectures and seminars. All students are encouraged to attend lectures both in the Faculty and elsewhere in the university, as their work permits and their interests dictate.

Thesis

You should begin to think about your thesis topic early in the first year of the course. The thesis should be on some topic related to classical Indian religions. The thesis should be based on extensive research in secondary sources and include a full scholarly apparatus of references and bibliography. Students are encouraged to use sources in Sanskrit where possible. As mentioned above, thesis titles will need to be approved by the Faculty Board in your second year. The application form can be found [here](#). Some students arrive with a topic in mind. For others, ideas for a topic arise out of the readings and classes. Ideally you will do the majority of the research for the thesis, which has a maximum length of 20,000 words, in the summer between your first and second years, and this means assembling the rough outline of the bibliography by the end of the third term of the first year. Students should expect to spend the Easter Vacation of the second year finishing their theses, which must be submitted by the Thursday of the second week of the Trinity Term, the last term in their second year. They may ask their supervisor to read one draft of the thesis, but this draft should be in the supervisor's hands by the end of the Hilary Term of their second year.

Final Examination

The Final Examination takes place after the end of the Trinity Term of the second year of the course, in mid-June, in the Examination Schools. You submit a thesis, and sit three examinations. One is a three-hour written examination based on the textual component of the course. This examination has two halves, one for translation of portions of texts that you have read during the course, and the other for translation from comparable sources in Sanskrit that you have not read before in a class.

These are followed, usually on consecutive days, by two three-hour written examinations on the history of classical Indian religion, with the subject matter divided between the two papers more or less chronologically. In each of these papers you will write essays in response to four questions selected from a list of about fifteen, posed on topics covered by your readings and tutorials. Both of your choices of religious traditions will be represented in the questions for these papers.

The MPhil is intensive. Students should treat the university vacations as integral parts of their work time and take limited holidays. Language study will be time-consuming. Terms are short and essay assignments come quickly.

At different times, you will have to submit documents (e.g., an exam entry form or a thesis title) to the Faculty after consultation with your supervisor. They may be submitted by email; if this is done (often by the supervisor with a copy to the student), it is essential that the student keeps a record.

The Oxford approach is to offer teaching for examination preparation but the expectation is that students are apprentice scholars and should go beyond what is being taught to pursue a research topic of their own choosing. This may mean attending lectures on offer in other Faculties or finding researchers outside their immediate orbit who can advise them on methods, approaches, and ideas. Oxford students are given great freedom to pursue their interests and talents. The M.Phil. degree, with its interdisciplinary and comparative approaches, should appeal to students who seek to develop an intimate knowledge of the region for academic purposes or as preparation for careers in museology, libraries,

journalism, diplomacy, but also international banking, business, law, government service, secondary education, or non-governmental organisations.

Teaching Staff

- Prof. [Diwakar Acharya](#), All Souls, Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics (on sabbatical 2023-24).
- Dr [Victor d'Avella](#), Wolfson College, Departmental Lecturer in Sanskrit.
- Dr [John Lowe](#), Wolfson College, Associate Professor of Sanskrit, teaches Elementary Sanskrit, Ancient Indian linguistics, Sanskrit language and texts, Vedic Sanskrit, Avestan language and texts, Prakrit language and texts.
- Prof. [Jim Mallinson](#) – Balliol College, Boden Professor of Sanskrit

Examination and Assessment Structure

Year 1

You will sit two written examinations on Sanskrit. Students must pass both examinations to continue on the course.

Year 2

You will sit three written examinations and submit a thesis. One examination will be on Sanskrit, and the other two on Classical Indian religion, including students' chosen traditions.

Important dates and deadlines

When			What	
Year 1	Trinity Term		Qualifying examination (Sanskrit I).	Written examination.
Year 1	Trinity Term		Qualifying examination (Sanskrit II).	Written examination.
Year 2	Hilary Term	Week 0, Monday	Approval of thesis title/thesis subject.	Email Exams Administration team .
Year 2	Trinity Term	Week 2, Thursday, 12 noon	*Thesis submission . Word limit: not more than 20,000.	Submission via Inspira.
Year 2	Trinity Term		Final examination (Unprepared translation).	Written examination.
Year 2	Trinity Term		Final examination (History of Indian Religions I).	Written examination.
Year 2	Trinity Term		Final examination (History of Indian Religions II).	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: <https://resources.orinst.ox.ac.uk/forms>

Word Limits

Submissions should not exceed the word limit given in your Examination Regulations and rubrics – 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, Conventions and Rubrics

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 Classical Indian Religion can be found here (<https://examregs.admin.ox.ac.uk/Regulation?code=domopitfoamiddeaststud&srchYear=2023&srchTerm=1&year=2022&term=1>).

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 Inspira. 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 Inspira

Submissions are via the University's online assessment platform, [Inspira](https://inspera.com). 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 Inspira 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'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 AND ACADEMIC APPEALS WITHIN THE FACULTY OF ASIAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES

The University, Humanities Division, and the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies all hope that provision made for students at all stages of their course of study will make the need for complaints (about that provision) or appeals (against the outcomes of any form of assessment) infrequent.

Where such a need arises, an informal discussion with the person immediately responsible for the issue that you wish to complain about (and who may not be one of the individuals identified below) is often the simplest way to achieve a satisfactory resolution.

Many sources of advice are available from colleges, faculties/departments and bodies like the Counselling Service or the Oxford SU Student Advice Service, which have extensive experience in advising students. You may wish to take advice from one of those sources before pursuing your complaint.

General areas of concern about provision affecting students as a whole should be raised through Joint Consultative Committees or via student representation on the faculty/department's committees.

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:

Inner and South Asia Group Equality and Diversity Representative: [Christopher Fleming](#)

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 Najafzade](#) 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.

APPENDIX A – SUGGESTED STUDIES

List of suggested studies to read before arriving in Oxford. We recommend starting with the starred items.

Hinduism

John Brockington, *The Sacred Thread: Hinduism in its Continuity and Diversity* (Edinburgh, 1996). Gavin Flood, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*. (Oxford, 2003).

*Christopher Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India* (2d ed., Princeton, 2004)

Axel Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present* (tr. Barbara Harshav). (Princeton, 2004)

Buddhism

*Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (2d ed., Grove/Atlantic, 2007)

Paul Williams (with Anthony Tribe), *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (Routledge, 2000)

Śaivism

*Richard Davis, *Rituals in an Oscillating Universe: Worshipping Śiva in Medieval India* (Princeton, 1991).

Vaiṣṇavism

Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and other minor religious systems* (Poona, 1913). [Old but still useful]

*Gérard Colas, 'History of Vaiṣṇava Traditions: An Esquisse,' in ed. Gavin Flood *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*. (Oxford, 2003). (see above), pp. 229-270.

Gérard Colas, 'Vaikhānasa' and 'Vaiṣṇava Saṃhitās' *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*. Knut A. Jacobsen (ed.), (Leiden, 2009).

Śāktism

Bose, Mandakranta (Ed) *The Oxford History of Hinduism: The Goddess* (Oxford History of Hinduism), Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018

Kinsley, David, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Slouber, Michael (Ed) *A Garland of Forgotten Goddesses Tales of the Feminine Divine from India and Beyond* 2020.

Jainism

*Paul Dundas, *The Jains*. (London, 1992).

Indian History

Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India* (Routledge, 2016).

Romila Thapar, *Early India: from the origins to AD 1300* (London, 2002).

*Thomas Trautmann, *India: Brief History of a Civilization* (OUP New York, 2011)

Thomas Trautmann, *Elephants and Kings: an Environmental History* (University of Chicago, 2017).

APPENDIX B - READINGS

The following lists enumerate the Sanskrit texts that have been read for each of the traditions in recent years for the MPhil in Classical Indian Religion. Not every year has read all of these texts, and they can be varied according to student interest.

Brahmanism

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad II & III.1-5

Manusmṛti, II

Śābarabhāṣya on Mīmāṃsāsūtras I.1.1-4

Śaṅkara's Brahmasūtrabhāṣya, III.2.22-30 (Prakṛtāitāvattvādhikaraṇa) and

Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣya II.3

Śaivism

Pāsupatasūtra with Kauṇḍinya's commentary: the entire text of the Sūtrapāṭha, and Kauṇḍinya's

Bhāṣya on I.1-9

Kirātāgama, Vidyāpāda, paṭalas 1-6

Sadyojyotiḥ, Tattvatrayanirṇaya, Kārikās 1-5, with the vivṛti of Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭha

Tantrasāra, āhnikā 13, KSTS edition, pp. 133-155

Íśvarapratyabhijñākārikā, Jñānādhikāra (Chapter 1)

Vijñānabhairava Tantra verses 1-100

Vaiṣṇavism

Nārāyaṇīya from the Mahābhārata, first five chapters. XII.321-25

Rāsapañcādhyāyī of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, X.29-33

Sātvatasamhitā w/ commentary of Alaśiṅga, Samayavidhi Chapter 21

Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad, I-II (vss. 1-70) V-VI (vss. 164-269)

Rāmānuja, Śrībhāṣya on Brahmasūtra I.1.1, the small pūrvapakṣa and the small siddhānta

Śāktism

Kramastotra (Hymn to the 12 Kālīs of the Krama)

Kramastotra of Abhinavagupta 1-30,

Śivadr̥ṣṭi 3.1-3.6 ab with Somānanda's commentary

Kṣemarāja, Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya sūtras 1 and 2 with commentary (*iha ye...avasthānam uktam*)

Lakṣmītantra 1.1-61 **OR** Tripurārahasya (jñānakhaṇḍa: text to be decided with discussion with the student) **OR** Vāmakeśvarīmata 1.113-156 **OR** Yoginīhṛdaya Pūjāsamketa 1-51.

Caṇḍīśāntaka of Bāṇabhaṭṭa vv. 1-40

Devīmāhātmya.8.1-62 (origin of Cāmuṇḍā) **OR** Devīpurāṇa 1.1-1.70 **OR** Old Skandapurāṇa 58.1-31 (the origin of Kauśikī-Vindhyaśinī) and 64.1-49 (the rise of the yoginīs)

Bhāskarāya, Guptavatī (commentary) on Devīmāhātmya 1.1 (*ekam eva brahmānādisiddhayā māyayā dharmī dharmāś ceti dvividhabhūtam* etc.)

Buddhism

Vasubandhu, Abhidharmakośabhāṣya pp. 8035-8056;12184-12342

Candrakīrti, Prasannapadā on Mulamādhyaṃakakārikā 17. 2-10 Bodhicaryāvatāra Chapter 2&3

Buddhacarita Cantos 7, 9, & 12

Sādhanaṃālā 251

Hevajrasekaprakriyā

APPENDIX C – ESSAY TOPICS

Students in recent years have written assigned essays on as many as eight of the topics within each of their chosen traditions. Here are some of the topics assigned.

Vaiṣṇavism

1. Ṛgvedic Viṣṇu and his three strides

2. Nārāyaṇa, Vedic Viṣṇu, and Prajāpati
3. Material culture and the worship of Vāsudeva, Kṛṣṇa, and Bhagavān
4. Pradūrbhāva, Vyūha, and Avatāra
5. The language of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa
6. The narration of the Rāsapañcādhyāyī
7. Virahabhakti, the feeling of separation
8. The conduct of Pañcarātra initiates
9. Yāmuna and Śrīvaiṣṇavism
10. Rāmānuja and prapatti or the modes of surrender
11. Rāmānuja, Yāmuna, and making Vaiṣṇavism a form of Vedānta.

Śāktism

1. The roots of the Goddess tradition
2. Esoteric Śāktism, its scriptural branches, their soteriologies
3. Non dualism in Śākta philosophy
4. Local clan goddess worship
5. Relation with Brahmanism, transgression of purity rules and its theological basis
6. Classical Sanskrit and Prakrit hymns to the Goddess
7. The Autumnal Festival of the Nine Nights: liturgy and practice
8. Kingship, state-formation and the worship of the Goddess
9. Ideas of consciousness in the esoteric Goddess traditions
10. The Purāṇic Goddess her mythologies and her cultic appropriations
11. Knowledge and ritual in Śākta worship (Abhinavagupta's view on ritual and gnosis)

Brahmanism

1. Canonical Vedic Literature, its constitution and historical context
2. The embodied Self in the Upaniṣads
3. Brahman and Vedic speech
4. The sources and origins of dharma
5. Vedic hermeneutics: śruti and smṛti
6. The paths of gnosis and action
7. The teaching style of the Upaniṣads
8. Vedic and post-Vedic modes of worship
9. Life and works of Ācārya Śaṅkara
10. Bondage and liberation in Vedānta
11. Religious pluralism in ancient India

Śaivism

1. Vedic Rudra and Tantric / Purāṇic Śiva
2. The evolution of initiatory Śaivism: Atimārga, Mantramārga, and Lay Śaivism
3. Worldviews and soteriological views of the Tantric Śaivas
4. Initiation in Tantric Śaivism, its procedure, purpose, and types
5. The principles / realities of Tantric Śaivism
6. The internal and external modes of Tantric worship
7. Tantric Yoga with six auxiliaries
8. The philosophy of self-recognition

9. Śaiva-Buddhist interactions
10. Tantric Śaivism and Haṭhayoga
11. The Tantric concept of body

Buddhism

1. Buddhist Sanskrit and the shift to Śāstric Sanskrit
2. Poetic way of teaching Buddhism: the Buddhacarita and Saundarananda
3. The Yogācāra denial of the world
4. The Mahāyāna ideal of the Bodhisattva
5. Mahāyāna Ethics & Tantric Antinomianism
6. Parallels and differences between Śaiva and Buddhist Tantra
7. The doctrine of dependent origination and karman
8. The changing notion of emptiness in Buddhism
9. Nāgārjuna and the development of Buddhist doctrines
10. The concept of twofold truth
11. The role and presence of Women in Buddhism