

# Bachelor of Arts in Jewish Studies

## Course Handbook

**Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies**

Academic Year 2023-24 (VERSION 1)

**Course Co-ordinator** - Prof [Alison Salvesen](#)

The Examination Regulations relating to this course are available here ([Exam Regulations](#)).

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 ([edmund.howard@ames.ox.ac.uk](mailto:edmund.howard@ames.ox.ac.uk)).

The information in this handbook is accurate as at Michaelmas Term 2023; however, it may be necessary for changes to be made in certain circumstances, as explained at [www.ox.ac.uk/coursechanges](http://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.

## THIS HANDBOOK

The handbook sets out the basic framework for the BA in Jewish Studies. 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 Undergraduate handbook;
- 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.**

Comments and criticism of the handbook are always welcome; they should be sent to the [Director of Undergraduate Studies](#) or the Senior Academic Administrator, [Edmund Howard](#).

### Version history

1	October 2023	Original publication
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## Introduction and History

Oxford has been an important centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies since the sixteenth century. Outstanding scholars have held a number of different positions in Hebrew and Jewish Studies in the University and students from all over the world come to Oxford for both undergraduate and graduate studies. We boast unrivalled collections of Hebrew manuscripts and printed books in the Bodleian Library. The Leopold Muller Memorial Library of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, housed in the Clarendon Institute Building, also contains invaluable Hebraic and Judaica collections. Additionally, the archaeology and material culture of the land of Israel are strongly represented in the Ashmolean Museum.

Over the centuries the study of Hebrew and Jewish Studies has evolved to take account of new developments, most obviously the growth of literature in Modern Hebrew and major discoveries such as the Dead Sea Scrolls. Our courses therefore cover all the main phases in the long history of the Hebrew language in its historical, literary and cultural contexts. (It is also possible to study for a separate BA in Jewish Studies.) As the disciplines of Hebrew and Jewish Studies have developed, different approaches and fields of study have evolved, from the study of classical Hebrew and the Hebrew Bible to all other aspects of medieval and modern Jewish culture and society. The University's posts in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies reflect that diversity, with expertise ranging from the study of Classical Hebrew, the Hebrew Bible, Second Temple and early Rabbinic periods, through rabbinical literature and medieval to early modern history and literature, to modern Hebrew and other Jewish literatures and modern Jewish history.

### **Equality and Diversity**

A key part of our course involves texts from the Hebrew Bible. Notoriously, Judaeo-Christian scriptures have been used to preserve gender, social, and racial hierarchies over many centuries. However, studying texts in the original languages of Hebrew and Aramaic helps us get behind the inevitably distorting veils of translations into modern European languages. A close reading of those texts in the original languages better reveals how they were produced over many centuries by a very small nation surrounded, and even conquered, by more powerful kingdoms and empires. More subversive messages emerge from the Hebrew Bible than is apparent from mainstream religious readings of the texts, which contain many key protagonists who are female, non-Israelite, or enslaved. Hebrew prophetic literature is particularly keenly focused on issues of social justice and the correct use of power.

Later, until 1948 and the founding of the State of Israel, the Jewish people lived in scattered communities as an often persecuted ethnic and religious minority. Texts written over the course of these two millennia show how the religious authorities for those communities set about providing cohesion through religious law and the maintenance of tradition, while medieval poetry from Spain reflects the longing for a lost homeland. Medieval legal documents and letters from Cairo provide an astonishing window into the lives of women and enslaved persons.

In their study of Modern Hebrew literature, which spans from the late nineteenth century to the present day, students encounter texts that are increasingly attentive to gender, sexuality, class, race and their intersection. The current curriculum focuses on poetry and short fiction and includes works by non-native writers of Hebrew, Palestinian Hebrew authors, as well as Mizrahi and diasporic Hebrew writing.

Our syllabus and course options for both Hebrew and Jewish Studies cover many of these texts and themes, and we encourage students to explore them further, particularly in their undergraduate dissertations.

## Outline

### First year (First Public Examination)

For those taking Hebrew or Jewish Studies, the first three terms of the course comprise intensive class instruction in the Hebrew language in all its main periods (Classical/Biblical; Rabbinic and Medieval; Modern). The aim is to cover basic grammar in the first term and to consolidate this information in the second and third terms, when simple texts in each form of the language are also taught. This demanding objective is essential in order to achieve a level of reading proficiency that will stand you in good stead for the rest of the course. There are three class hours a week in both Classical (Biblical) and Modern Hebrew. Readings in Rabbinic, Medieval and Modern Hebrew texts are introduced in the second and third terms.

Students also prepare for a general paper which provides an introductory framework for the rest of the course. Outline surveys are given in lectures through the year, but the main form of teaching is in tutorials, for which there is recommended reading and an essay to be written.

Four papers are set for Prelims, taken at the end of the third term.

1. Hebrew Texts I: Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew.
2. Hebrew Texts II: Medieval and Modern Hebrew.
3. Grammar and Translation into Hebrew.
4. General Paper.

Candidates who perform exceptionally well in Biblical Hebrew in Prelims are eligible for the Junior Pusey and Ellerton Prize. In the unlikely event of failure, it is possible to resit the paper(s) in question later on. You must pass Prelims in order to proceed to Finals. All examinations are held at the end of Trinity Term.

## Final Honour School

Upon completing your Prelims, it is necessary to make a final choice about whether you wish to study Hebrew or Jewish Studies. If you are still unsure about which choice to make, any member of the teaching staff will be happy to provide guidance.

## Years 2 and 3

Students will study one period of Hebrew out of Biblical, Rabbinic and Medieval Hebrew, or Modern Hebrew. - . Students should refer to the papers for Hebrew - as subsidiary languages in the conventions for FHS examinations. **Students should note that teaching for some language options may not be available every year.**

Students will take the same core essay paper, History, Culture, and Society, as those taking the BA in Hebrew. They will also select 5 options from the [Jewish Studies options](#). At least 3 must be chosen from papers that require a study of set texts in the original language, at least 1 paper from each of Sections I, II, and III, and not more than 1 paper may be chosen from Section V.

### [Jewish Studies options in 2023-24](#)

*(Students should note that they may not take more than 1 option from Section V.*

*Please note that not all options may be available in a given year, and some options require adequate knowledge of the relevant language):*

- Section I
  - Biblical History
  - -
  - Biblical Narrative
  - -
- Section II
  - Second Temple Judaism
  - Second Temple History
  - -
  - Medieval Jewish History
  - Jewish Aramaic Literature
- Section III
  - Israel: History, Politics, and Society
  - Modern Hebrew Literature
  - -
- Section IV
  - History of Jewish-Christian Relations
  - -
  - History of Jewish Bible Interpretation
  - Orthodox Judaisms
- Section V
  - Biblical Religion
  - Modern Jewish Thought
  - Modern Jewish History
  - Modern Judaism
  - Jewish Mysticism
  - Modern Jewish Philosophy
  - Medieval Jewish Thought

## Papers for Prelims

### Compulsory Papers

#### **Hebrew Texts I: Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew**

#### **Hebrew Texts II: Medieval and Modern Hebrew**

For both these papers there will be passages for translation from the specified texts (all of which will have been taught in classes). There may also be some questions that ask for comment on or explanation of aspects of the language and related matters arising from the texts.

The list of set texts approved for examination in the following academic year will be published by Friday of 3rd week, Hilary term.

#### **Grammar and Translation into Hebrew**

In this paper, in which all questions must be attempted, there will be:

- (i) Five questions on specific grammatical topics in Biblical Hebrew
- (ii) One passage for translation from English into pointed Biblical Hebrew
- (iii) One passage for translation from Modern Hebrew into English

#### **General Paper**

This will be an essay paper on Israelite and Jewish history and other related topics. You will be required to answer questions on different historical periods, though there will be a wide choice within each section.

## Papers for FHS

### Compulsory Papers

#### **Language paper**

One paper on one of the following periods of the Hebrew language: Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew; or Medieval Hebrew; or Modern Hebrew. These papers are the same papers for Hebrew language subsidiary. Regular classes for composition and reading will be given throughout the two years of the FHS course.

i) Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew: consisting of prose composition and unprepared translation

ii) Medieval Hebrew: consisting of unprepared translation

iii) Modern Hebrew: consisting of prose composition and unprepared translation

#### **History, Culture and Society**

Lecturers: Prof. Judith Olszowy-Schlanger; Dr Benjamin Williams; Prof. Adriana X. Jacobs; Dr Peter Bergamin; Dr Zoe Waxman, Dr Meron Piotrkowski

The aim of this paper is to draw together the whole course in Hebrew studies, giving you the chance to relate one aspect of the subject to another and/or to reflect on wider issues arising from the detailed study of the particular periods which interest you most.

The paper is currently in four sections (ancient, medieval, modern, and a final section which cuts across all periods), with about six questions in each section. You are required to answer four questions, selecting questions from at least two sections.

***Dissertation***

The subject of your dissertation must be submitted for approval very early at the start of your third year, so that in practice it is sensible to discuss it with your teachers from the middle of the second year. Some tutorial guidance is available, but you should research and write up a topic that you find to be of particular interest; you are required to sign a statement indicating that it is your own work. The detailed regulations about how and where to do this are included in the Examination Regulations. Remember to write your candidate number and not your name on the dissertation. Also refer to the dissertation section in the General Handbook.

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***An Optional Special Subject***

You may offer an optional 3-hour paper on a special subject. The subject must be approved at the start of your final year. Provided your choice of subject falls within the broad range of Hebrew and Jewish studies, no reasonable proposal is likely to be refused. If you are considering this, please discuss it with your teachers during the previous year. They will also make suggestions as to how you can use the summer vacation to do some of the necessary reading and research. Tutorial teaching will be made available to help you prepare.



## Recommended Patterns of Teaching (RPT)

Below is an indication of the type and number of teaching hours on this course.

### **BA in Jewish Studies**

Summary:

Each student receives to FHS:

Language instruction: 278 hours (maximum)

University lectures/classes: 67 hours (minimum)

Tutorials: 52 (maximum)

Dissertation supervision: 6 hours

Over 3 years this is an average of 134 hours teaching per year, or c. 5.60 hours per week.

### **BA Hebrew/Jewish Studies (Year 1 is combined)**

YEAR 1: FPE 4 Papers

- (i) Hebrew Texts I: Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew
- (ii) Hebrew Texts II: Medieval and Modern Hebrew
- (iii) Grammar and Translation into Hebrew
- (iv) General Paper

Teaching arrangements for the year per Student:

Language instruction: 182 hours

Lectures/Classes: 67 hours

Tutorials: 12 hours

### **BA Jewish Studies: Years 2 and 3 FHS:**

7 Papers (includes a. language paper; b. paper on History, Culture and Society; c. five optional papers) plus dissertation

Papers:

1. Language paper
2. History, Culture and Society
3. Optional paper 1
4. Optional paper 2
5. Optional paper 3
6. Optional paper 4
7. Optional paper 5
8. Dissertation

Each optional paper: 8 hours of tutorials

Paper on History, Culture and Society: 4 tutorials

Dissertation: 6 hours of supervision

Language paper: 96 hours of language instruction (2 hours per week for 6 terms)

Teaching arrangements for FHS per student:

Language instruction: 96 hours

Lectures/classes: may be provided for optional papers with set texts

Tutorials: 40 hours

Dissertation supervision: 6 hours

Paper	Language Instruction		Lectures/Classes		Tutorials		Supervision	
	Year 2	Year 3	Year 2	Year 3_	Year 2	Year 3	Year 2	Year 3
1	48	48						
2						4		
3					8			
4					8			
5					8			
6						8		
7						8		
8							2	4

## Teaching Staff

- Dr [Miri Freud-Kandel](#), Lecturer in Modern Judaism (Wolfson College)
- Professor [Adriana X. Jacobs](#), Associate Professor of Modern Hebrew Literature (St. Cross College)
- Dr Dorota Molin, Instructor in Classical Hebrew (Wadham College)
- Professor [Judith Olszowy-Schlanger](#), Director of the Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, President of OCHJS (Corpus Christi College)
- Professor [Alison Salvesen](#), Professor of Early Judaism and Christianity (Mansfield College)
- Dr Harald Samuel, Departmental Lecturer in Classical Hebrew (Mansfield College)
- Professor [David Taylor](#), Associate Professor in Aramaic and Syriac (Wolfson College) (on leave in 2023-24)
- Dr [Zoe Waxman](#), Departmental Lecturer in Modern Jewish History
- Dr [Benjamin Williams](#), Departmental Lecturer in Jewish Studies; Fellow of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies
- Mr [Gil Zahavi](#), Instructor in Modern Hebrew, and Mrs Esther Yadgar (MT 2023)

## Examinations and Assessment

Please refer to the [Examination Regulations](#).

In Trinity Term of Year 1, students will sit 4 written examinations. Students must pass all papers to proceed into Year 2 of the course.

Please refer to the conventions for Prelims examinations, available on Canvas towards the end of Michaelmas Term.

In Trinity Term of Year 3, students will take 9 written and/or take-home examinations. Students will also submit their dissertations. Please refer to the conventions for FHS examinations for the papers to be taken, available on Canvas towards the end of Michaelmas Term.

## Deadlines

Date	Year of Course	Event	How
Monday 9th Week Trinity Term	1	Provisional start date of the First Public Examinations.	
Friday 4 <sup>th</sup> Week Michaelmas Term	3	Deadline for exam entry.	Via student self-service
Monday 0 <sup>th</sup> Week Hilary Term	3	Deadline for applications for approval of Special Subjects and dissertation titles.	Form to be sent to Academic Administration undergraduate.administrator@ames.ox.ac.uk
12 noon, Friday 10 <sup>th</sup> Week Hilary Term	3	Deadline for submission of dissertation.	Via Inspira
10am, Monday 2 <sup>nd</sup> Week Trinity Term	3	Release of essays titles for Papers in Section V (refer to Examination Regulations)	tbc
12 noon, Monday 3 <sup>rd</sup> Week Trinity Term (term in which final exam is offered)	3	Deadline for submission of Papers in Section V (refer to Examination Regulations)	Via Inspira
Monday 7th Week Trinity Term	3	Provisional start date of the Final Honour School	

## Canvas

Click [here](#) for the BA Jewish Studies Canvas page.

## Examination Regulations

The Examination Regulations relating to this course are available at <https://examregs.admin.ox.ac.uk/> If there is a conflict between information in this handbook and the Examination Regulations then you should follow the Examination Regulations.

## READING LIST FOR HEBREW AND JEWISH STUDIES

**These are intended as general background for the course,**

**More specific reading lists will be given to students as they choose options, but see below for reading for two prepared text courses.**

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John Barton, *A History of the Bible* (2019)

A critical survey of the origins of the books of Hebrew Scripture and of the New Testament, and their reception in both Judaism and Christianity.

Jan Christian Gertz, Angelika Berlejung, Konrad Schmid, and Markus Witte, eds., “Part 1: Sources and Methods,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Literature, Religion and History of the Old Testament* (2012)

Jacqueline Vayntrub, “Hebrew,” in *How Literatures Begin: A Global History*, eds. Joel B. Lande and Denis Feeney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021, pp. 149-166.

Martin Goodman, *A History of Judaism* (2018, Yale UP)

A comprehensive survey of Jewish religious history from biblical times to the present.

For a general introduction to the Hebrew Bible, we also recommend Christine Hayes’s online lecture series *Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible)*, especially episode 1,

“The Parts of the Whole”: <https://youtu.be/mo-YL-lv3RY>

“The Dead Sea Scrolls,” *In Our Time*, BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001ljc0>

Featuring the commentary of George Brooke, Charlotte Hempel, and Sarah Pearce.

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Liora H. Halperin, *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism, and Language Diversity in Palestine, 1920-1948*(2014, Yale UP)

A cultural history of Hebrew vernacularisation in the twentieth century. Highlights the persistent, dynamic multilingualism of the Jewish population in Mandatory Palestine and the State of Israel.

Ammiel Alcalay, *Keys to the Garden: New Israeli Writing* (1996, City Lights)

Groundbreaking multi-genre anthology of twentieth-century Israeli literature, including English translations of works originally written in Arabic.

Orly Castel-Bloom, *Dolly City*, translated by Dalya Bilu (1997, reprinted 2010)

First published in 1992, Castel-Bloom's gruesome and satiric critique of Israeli society became an instant and enduring classic.

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Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, "Rabbinic Literature" in *A Companion to Late Ancient Jews and Judaism*, ed. N. Koltun-Fromm and G. Kessler (Wiley Blackwell: Hoboken, 2020), pp. 87–103.

"The Talmud," *In Our Time*, BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b044j7pd>

This episode features the commentary of Philip Alexander, Norman Solomon and Laliv Clenman.

Peter Cole, translator, *The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain, 950-1492* (2007, Princeton UP)

Acclaimed anthology of medieval Hebrew poetry. The Hebrew originals are available online: <https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691121956/the-dream-of-the-poem>.