



Bachelor of Arts in Jewish Studies

Course Handbook

Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies

Academic Year 2025-26

Course Co-ordinator - Dr Yoav Ronel

This handbook applies to students who, in Michaelmas 2025, are starting their course (for information relating to the FPE), or are entering the Final Honour School (for information relating to the FHS). The information in this handbook may be different for students starting in other years.

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](#).

The information in this handbook is accurate as at Michaelmas Term 2025; 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.

General faculty-wide information can be found in the [General Undergraduate Handbook](#).

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

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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.

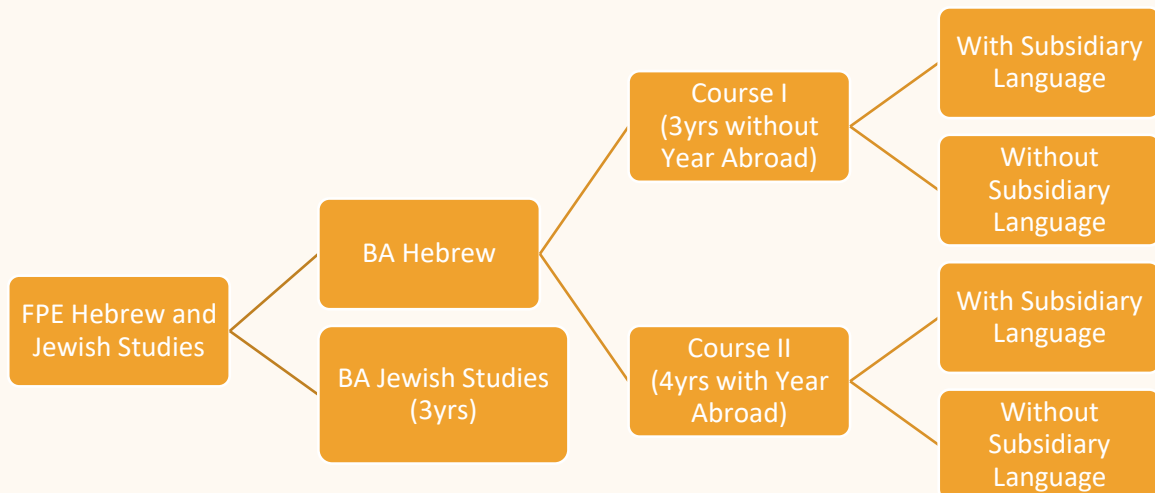
In their study of Modern Hebrew literature, which spans from the late nineteenth century to the present day, students encounter texts that are increasingly attentive to gender, sexuality, class, race and their intersection. The current curriculum focuses on poetry and short fiction and includes works 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.

Course Outline

Students taking the course must decide at the end of Year 1 whether to focus on Jewish Studies or Hebrew (see separate course handbook).

The decisions which students taking the FPE in Hebrew and Jewish Studies can take (subject to availability) may be represented in the following flowchart:



Year 1 (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.

You must pass Prelims in order to proceed to Finals. In the unlikely event of failure, it is possible to resit the paper(s) in question later on.

Candidates who perform exceptionally well in Biblical Hebrew in Prelims are eligible for the Junior Pusey and Ellerton Prize.

All examinations are held at the end of Trinity Term.

Years 2 and 3 (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.

Students in the BA Jewish studies course will take the following papers at FHS:

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

For the language paper Jewish Studies students will choose one period of Hebrew:

- Biblical Hebrew, or
- Rabbinic and Medieval Hebrew, or
- Modern Hebrew.

For more information, students should refer to the papers for Hebrew as a subsidiary language 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.

Descriptions of each of the papers can be found in the Papers for FHS section below.

Papers for Prelims

All papers for Prelims are compulsory.

Hebrew Texts I: Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew and

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: Dr Benjamin Williams; Dr Peter Bergamin; Prof. Zoe Waxman, Prof. 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.

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.

Available Jewish Studies options in 2024-25

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 Narrative

- Section II
 - Second Temple Judaism
 - Second Temple 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

- Section V
 - Biblical Religion
 - Modern Jewish Thought
 - Modern Jewish History
 - Modern Judaism
 - Jewish Mysticism

Recommended Patterns of Teaching (RPT)

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

FPE – Year 1

In the first year, teaching for the BA Jewish Studies and the BA Hebrew is combined. Students offer the same four papers. Over the year, they receive:

- Language instruction: 182 hours
- Lectures/Classes: 67 hours
- Tutorials: 12 hours

Paper	Term	Faculty		College		Comments
		Lectures	Classes	Tutorials	Classes	<i>Figures in this table are in hours unless otherwise stated.</i>
[1.] Hebrew Texts I: Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew	MT					
	HT					
	TT					
	Year Total					
[2.] Grammar and translation into Hebrew	MT					
	HT					
	TT					
	Year Total					
[3.] General Paper	MT					
	HT					
	TT					
	Year total					

FHS (Final Honour School)

Paper	Term	Year 1 of FHS			Year 2 of FHS			Comments
		Faculty		College	Faculty		College	
		Lectures/Classes	Lang. Classes	Tutorials	Lectures/Classes	Lang. Classes	Tutorials	
								<i>Figures in this table are in hours unless otherwise stated.</i>
[1.] Language: Biblical and Rabbinic OR [1.] Language: Medieval Hebrew OR [1.] Language: Modern Hebrew OR [1.] Language: Yiddish	MT		8-24			8-24		Language papers are taught in classes, and the number of hours depends on the option chosen.
	HT		8-24			8-24		
	TT		8-24			6-18		
	Year Total		24-72			22-66		
[2.] History, Culture and Society	MT						2	
	HT						2	
	TT						2	
	Year Total						6	
[3.] Option Paper I	MT	8		8				Tutorial-based options are normally covered in 8-12 contact hours over a term; or 8 lectures and 8 tutorials, Depending on the option selected.
	HT							
	TT							
	Year Total	8		8				
[4.] Option Paper II	MT							Terms of teaching may vary according to the option chosen.
	HT	8		8				
	TT							
	Year Total	8		8				
[5.] Option Paper III	MT							
	HT							
	TT	8		8				
	Year Total	8		8				
[6.] Option Paper IV	MT				8		8	
	HT							
	TT							
	Year Total				8		8	

Paper	Term	Year 1 of FHS			Year 2 of FHS			Comments
		Faculty		College	Faculty		College	
		Lectures/Classes	Lang. Classes	Tutorials	Lectures/Classes	Lang. Classes	Tutorials	
								Figures in this table are in hours unless otherwise stated.
[7.] Option Paper V	MT							
	HT				8		8	
	TT							
	Year Total				8		8	
[8.] Dissertation	MT						2	
	HT						2	
	TT			2				
	Year Total			2			4	
Notes: The number of contact hours for optional papers is approximate. The exact number of hours may vary according to the size of the class, and the background knowledge and needs of students taking them. The hours will be set by the tutors teaching a given option. Tutorial-based options may require substantially more hours of independent study in order to prepare essays.								

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) on leave 2024-25
- 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 [Meron Piotrkowski](#), Associate Professor of Jewish History (Antiquity) (Wolfson College)
- Dr Yoav Ronel, Lecturer in Modern Hebrew Literature
- Professor [Alison Salvesen](#), Professor of Early Judaism and Christianity (Mansfield College), Polonsky Fellow of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies
- Professor [David Taylor](#), Professor of Aramaic and Syriac (Wolfson College)
- Professor [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
- Ms Esther Yadgar, Lecturer in Modern Hebrew Language
- Mr [Gil Zahavi](#), Lecturer in Modern Hebrew Language
- Dr Yoav Ronel, Lecturer in Modern Hebrew

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.

Examinations and Assessment

Please refer to the [Examination Regulations for Prelims and FHS in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies](#).

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.

In Trinity Term of Year 3, students will take 9 written and/or take-home examinations. Students will also submit their dissertations.

For details on the assessment of individual AMES papers, please refer to the [exam rubrics and conventions](#) available on the Student Hub.

Deadlines

Date	Year of Course	Event	How
Monday 9 th Week Trinity Term	1	Provisional start date of the First Public Examinations.	
Friday 4 th Week Michaelmas Term	3	Deadline for exam entry.	Via Student Self Service
12 noon Monday 0 th Week Hilary Term	3	Deadline for applications for approval for AMES dissertation titles.	Online Thesis Title Approval Form available through the Intranet Approval Forms page
12 noon Friday 10 th Week Hilary Term	3	Deadline for submission of AMES dissertation.	Via Inspira
10am Monday 2 nd Week Trinity Term	3	Release of essays titles for Papers in Section V (refer to Examination Regulations)	TBC
12 noon 3 rd Week Trinity Term	3	Deadline for submission of papers in Section V.	Via Inspira
Monday 7 th Week Trinity Term	3	Provisional start date of the Final Honour School examinations.	

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.

General Background Reading

- 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>.

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:

Hebrew, Jewish and Eastern Christian Studies Group Equality and Diversity

Representative: [Zoe Waxman](#)

Faculty Equality and Diversity Officer: [Dominic Brookshaw](#)

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: [Laurence Mann](#) and [Leyla Najafzada](#)

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.