The Full Hebrew Path

Beyond the fact that it is offered in one of the oldest and most renown universities in the world, one of the distinctive characteristics of FAMES’ four-year Middle Eastern Studies Hebrew degree is the opportunity it affords students to study—ab initio—the full range of the language’s historical phases—from Classical (Biblical), through Rabbinic and Medieval, all the way up to that of the early modern period and contemporary Israeli Hebrew. The various pre-modern strata are studied on the basis of primary sources with an emphasis on close reading and grammar. This provides a solid linguistic foundation for the acquisition of Modern Israeli Hebrew, which is taught ulpan-style, i.e., immersively in Hebrew, and which, in turn, reinforces and gives added vitality to the learning of the more ancient forms of the language, since they share so much grammar and vocabulary. While the course includes a substantial literary component focusing on the pre-modern and modern period, it can be tailored either to focus primarily on language or with a greater emphasis on literature. There are also classes dealing with culture and politics. Virtually unique to Cambridge, students who so desire also enjoy the possibility of working with genuine medieval Hebrew manuscripts under the personal tutelage of staff within the University Library’s Genizah Research Unit. During their third year, students spend eight months in Israel, gaining fluency in Hebrew and conducting research for their undergraduate dissertation. The ‘full Hebrew’ track is, of course, excellent preparation for studying for more advanced degrees in Hebrew and Hebrew-related subjects (such as Bible, Religious Studies, Theology, Hebrew literature, history, and Middle Eastern Studies), but as the language of a modern and thriving democracy of the Near East, it is also immensely useful as preparation for jobs in foreign relations, diplomacy, development, translation, and journalism, as well as for work in non-profit and non-governmental organizations, experience which employers in all fields find attractive in prospective employees. Relative to the graduates of other universities and of other departments within the University of Cambridge, FAMES graduates consistently rank high in finding suitable employment in a variety of fields and/or being accepted into advanced degree courses after graduation.

Sample Course of Study

Year 1 (I)

Required

Elementary Hebrew Language A (Classical) (MES.4)
Elementary Hebrew Language B (Modern Hebrew Language and Literature) (MES.5)

and any two of the following provided that one of them is either MES.6 or MES.7

Introduction to the History and Culture of Middle East (MES.6)
Contemporary Middle East (MES.7)

Akkadian Language I (X.1)

Egyptian Language I (X.2)

Year 2 (II)

Required
Classical (Biblical) Hebrew Language and Literature (MES.13)

*and/or*

Modern Hebrew Language (MES.13)

**Additional courses (students must choose four additional papers), for example**

Special Topics in Hebrew Literature (MES.16)

Topics in Hebrew Studies (MES.18): any two of:
- Pre-modern Hebrew Literature (DSS, Rabbinic, Medieval)
- Modern Hebrew Literature (literary-film-history)
- Aramaic

The Formation of the Modern Middle East (MES.19)—The Arab provinces in the Ottoman Empire, Iran, and Israel

Life, Thought and Worship of Modern Judaism (X.4 Divinity)

*or any combination of four of the above and/or the following:*

Elementary Arabic Language (MES.1); Elementary Persian Language (MES.3); Formation of Islam (MES.17); Structures and Meanings (X.3 Linguistics); Introduction to Islam (X.5 Divinity); Sounds and Words (X.8 Linguistics); Language, brain and society (X.13 Linguistics); The Jewish presence in medieval society (X.14); Cinema East (AMES.1).

**Year 3: Year Abroad**

Minimum 8 months in Israel doing language learning and dissertation research.

**Year 4 (II)**

**Required**

Classical Hebrew Language (MES.33)

*and/or*

Modern Hebrew Language (MES.33)

**Additional courses (students must choose three additional papers), for example**

Advanced Hebrew Literature/History of Hebrew (MES.36): students choose **one** of the following:
- Modern Hebrew Literature
- Pre-Modern Hebrew Literature
- History of Hebrew

Special Subject in the Contemporary Middle East
  - **either** MES.40A - Islamist Thought in the 20th-century Arab World
  - **or** MES.40B - The Invention of Israel

Comparative Semitics and/or Hebrew Vocalisation Traditions (MES.41)
or any combination of three of the above and/or the following:

Intermediate Arabic Language (MES.11); Intermediate Persian Language (MES.12); History of the pre-modern Middle East: Iran under the Safavids (MES.37); History of the Modern Middle East: Language, National Identity, and Conflict (MES.38); Special Subject in the Pre-modern Middle East: Image and Text in Islamic Manuscripts (MES.39); Elementary Sanskrit (MES.42); Elementary Hindi Language (MES.43); Judaism II (X.9 Divinity); Islam II (X.10 Divinity); Judaism and Philosophy (X.11 Divinity); The Jewish Presence in Medieval Society (X.14 Divinity)

AND

Undergraduate dissertation