Emphasis Path: Hebrew and Middle Eastern Studies

The Middle East has long been at the centre of world affairs and—as our media testify—this continues to be the case, not least because of Israel’s unique status there. Because FAMES’ Middle Eastern Studies Hebrew degree is offered in a department dedicated to the broader study of the Middle East, students are afforded a unique opportunity to pursue a degree in Hebrew language, literature, and culture, supplemented by substantial coursework on the wider history, culture, and politics of the Near East, including the possibility of taking up another modern Middle Eastern language, i.e., Arabic or Persian. The four-year course of study gives students the opportunity to study—ab initio—the full range of the Hebrew’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. From their second year, students may elect to focus on Modern Hebrew language and literature, contemporary Israel, and the development and current situation of today’s Middle East. During their third year, students spend eight months in Israel, gaining fluency in Hebrew and conducting research for their undergraduate dissertation. Israel is very much a multi-cultural society, giving students the chance to live the daily personal reality of what they hear or read about in the media. The ‘Hebrew and Middle Eastern Studies emphasis’ track is, of course, excellent preparation for studying for more advanced degrees in Hebrew and Hebrew-related subjects as well as in Middle Eastern Studies. As the language of a modern and thriving Middle Eastern democracy, however, knowledge of it and of Israel’s place in Middle Eastern history and current events are also immensely useful as preparation for jobs in foreign relations, conflict resolution, 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 (IA)

Required
Elementary Hebrew Language A (Classical) (MES.4)

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

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

Contemporary Middle East (MES.7)

Year 2 (IB)

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**

Formation of Islam (MES.17)

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)

Introduction to Islam (X.5 Divinity)

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

Elementary Arabic Language (MES.1); Elementary Persian Language (MES.3); Special Topics in Hebrew Literature (MES.16); Topics in Hebrew Studies (MES.18); The Formation of the Modern Middle East (MES.19); Structures and Meanings (X.3 Linguistics); 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**

History of the Modern Middle East: Language, National Identity, and Conflict (MES.38)

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

Islam II (X.10 Divinity)

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

Intermediate Arabic Language (MES.11); Intermediate Persian Language (MES.12); Advanced Hebrew Literature/History of Hebrew (MES.36); History of the pre-modern Middle East: Iran under the Safavids (MES.37); Special Subject in the Pre-modern Middle East: Image and Text in Islamic Manuscripts (MES.39); Comparative Semitics and/or Hebrew Vocalisation Traditions (MES.41);
Elementary Sanskrit (MES.42); Elementary Hindi Language (MES.43); Judaism II (X.9 Divinity); Judaism and Philosophy (X.11 Divinity); The Jewish Presence in Medieval Society (X.14 Divinity)

AND

Undergraduate dissertation