Emphasis Path: Hebrew and Akkadian/Egyptian

FAMES’ four-year Middle Eastern Studies Hebrew tripos allows for the combination of Hebrew and another Ancient Near Eastern language, either Akkadian (Babylonian and Assyrian) or Egyptian. With no presumed background in the target languages, a student takes courses in Classical (Biblical) Hebrew, Modern Hebrew language, Modern Hebrew literature, and his/her chosen Ancient Near Eastern Language. The combination of Northwest Semitic Hebrew and East Semitic Akkadian gives the student a formidable foundation in Semitic languages as well as access to both the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (and related material) and to the vast wealth of cuneiform literature in their original languages. The knowledge of Egyptian, like Hebrew part of the Afroasiatic language family, gives the student acquaintance not only with a distantly related language, but one which had influence on Hebrew during the classical biblical period. Familiarity with Modern Israeli Hebrew, which is taught ulpan-style, i.e., immersively in Hebrew, reinforces and gives added vitality to the learning of ancient Hebrew, since they share so much grammar and vocabulary. Beginning in their second year, students also enjoy broad latitude in choosing courses focusing on pre-modern and modern Hebrew language, pre-modern and modern Hebrew literature, Middle Eastern culture, Middle Eastern politics, linguistics, religion, and even cinema. During their third year, students spend eight months in Israel, gaining fluency in Hebrew, conducting research for their undergraduate dissertation, and, should they wish, continuing study of Akkadian or Egyptian at an Israeli institution of higher learning. The ‘Hebrew + Ancient Near Eastern language’ combination track offers excellent preparation for studying for more advanced degrees in fields related to Hebrew and the Ancient Near East (including, but by no means limited to, Bible, Religious Studies, Theology, Hebrew literature, Assyriology/Egyptology, history, and archaeology). Beyond this, the analytical and critical skills, intellectual flexibility, multi-cultural sensitivity, and international outlook developed through the study of these subjects are widely sought by employers in many fields. 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)

and either

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

or

Contemporary Middle East (MES.7): 1 hour per week + 1 supervision per term

Additional courses (students must choose one additional paper):
Introductory Akkadian (X.1 Archaeology)
or

Introductory Egyptian (X.2 Archaeology)

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

either

Akkadian Language II (X.6 Archaeology)

or

Egyptian Language II (X.7 Archaeology)

and any three of the following

Elementary Arabic Language (MES.1); Elementary Persian Language (MES.3); Special Topics in Hebrew Literature (MES.16); Formation of Islam (MES.17); Topics in Hebrew Studies (MES.18); The Formation of the Modern Middle East (MES.19); Structures and Meanings (X.3 Linguistics); Life, Thought and Worship of Modern Judaism (X.4 Divinity); 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)

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