

## Ancient History (V110): Selected Module Descriptions Y2-3

### Second year

Our Ancient History core module develops your analytical skills and introduces you to advanced historical theory and methodology. You will engage in-depth with key periods and problems in ancient history, and examine the process of writing history itself.

A special feature of the second year is the Study Tour module which is a unique opportunity to visit the regions you are studying in the Easter vacation. With financial support from the University you plan a research project and travel with fellow students to a country relevant to your studies such as Italy, Greece, Turkey, Israel, France or Spain.

Reading texts in the original is a great advantage and you have the opportunity, if you wish, to learn one of the ancient languages – Sumerian, Egyptian, Greek or Latin. You can also choose from our unique range of options.

### Understanding Ancient Societies

This module examines the four core regions of our Ancient History programme: Egypt; the Near East; Greece; Rome. It uses literary and non-'literary' texts to understand ancient societies beyond the carefully constructed outputs of canonical elite writers. It will consider approaches to a range of writing types potentially including: epigraphy of all types; numismatics; seals; clay tablets; ostraca and papyri. It will look at the relatively un-mediated presentations of emperors, pharaohs, kings on monumental inscriptions, coins and political documents. It will look at state organisation through inscribed laws and organisational texts. It will consider non-elites through such texts as funerary stele, altars and devotional objects. It will look at everyday writing on material culture and in the street – vases, paintings and graffiti and in doing so will consider literacy and who could read these texts.

### Study Tour

The Study Tour gives students the opportunity to plan and undertake travel to various parts of the world (usually Italy, Greece, or Turkey) to visit sites, monuments and museums of particular interest to their degree programmes. Group work is key to the module: students plan, travel and present work as a group of (normally 2-6 students in a group).

Semester 1 is the tour preparation section. In groups, students decide where they are going to visit, choose individual research topics, plan a detailed and annotated itinerary including two weeks of Study Tour activity, prepare a preliminary bibliography (academic and practical) and present these as an illustrated report. In addition they prepare a preliminary version of the university Risk Assessment form. In the course of the teaching period of Semester 2, students will liaise with their academic supervisor on two to four occasions to optimise their academic understanding of what is to be visited before setting out.

In the Easter Vacation each group will undertake a 14-day Study Tour as outlined in their first illustrated report.

Some of our many optional modules include

### Option – From Mummification to Burial

For the ancient Egyptians the most crucial part of life was their posthumous travel to the beyond without dying a second death. Each dead individual had to pass several stages before s/he could become an Osiris and lead his/her life as a circumpolar star in the beyond, "sitting and standing up with the gods". In this option course we will be looking into the mechanics necessary to guarantee a positive outcome of this rite of passage in order to successfully socialise the deceased into the world of the dead. Textual as well as archaeological sources will help to unfold a detailed picture of the various processes and concepts involved. Among many other topics, we will look into several cemeteries in detail, discuss child burials, listen to recitations performed by priests in the embalming chambers and learn to understand how the Book of the Dead worked. The focus of this option course will be on funerary belief offering a complete picture of how a burial procession leading from the embalming chamber to the tomb was organised, including all rituals and personnel involved. It will enable you to understand ancient Egyptian funerary rituals and religion and will give you an integral picture of the complexity of ancient Egyptian ritual practice.

### Option – Pompeii and Campania

The focus of this module will be on the Italian cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, destroyed during the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79, and their region. It will examine the society, culture and religion of the cities through a range of literary, inscription and archaeological evidence. Students will be introduced to the problems that each of these types of material poses for the historian. The module will address many different aspects of life within the cities including public and private display; the demonstration of loyalty to the emperor and empire; elite patronage; religious cult; work at the cities; public entertainment including gladiators and public deviance; elections and governance. Additionally the module will consider the heritage management of the material remains at the sites and will address perceptions of Pompeii in popular culture (including for instance painting, film and TV, and popular novels). Comparisons will be drawn between the cities and their importance as examples of Roman urbanism more generally will be analysed. Relevant comparisons to other Italian cities will also be made. Finally, the module will consider what the cities can teach us about urban change during the Roman empire.

### Option – Imperial Egypt

The New Kingdom (Eighteenth to Twentieth Dynasties, c. 1550-1070 BC) saw the transformation of Egypt from an impoverished country ruled by the foreign 'Hyksos' to an empire stretching from the Euphrates in Syria to the fifth cataract on the Nile in modern Sudan. It was thus an era of warrior pharaohs but also of Hatshepsut, Akhenaten and Tutankhamun. International trade and diplomacy figure prominently, as do enormous religious building projects, extensively decorated tombs such as that of Nebamun, the Book of the Dead, personal religion and the village of Deir el-Medina. It's also the period of Amenhotep, son of Hapu, later deified, and Khaemwese, the 'first Egyptologist'.

The New Kingdom has left an extensive archaeological and historical record, richer in many respects than any other period of Egyptian history. This module addresses a range of different topics and themes in a broadly chronological framework and consistently emphasises primary sources. If you're intrigued by Egyptian temples and gods, by what they believed about an afterlife, by famous pharaohs, by relief carving, painting and sculpture, diplomatic correspondence and private letters, or interconnections with Africa, the Near East and the Mediterranean, there is something here for you. Much of what you read about ancient Egypt is interpretation rather than 'fact', and this module will enable you to understand the evidence on which such discussion is based.

### Option – Imperial Rome

This module will examine Roman society in the first to third centuries AD – the time when the empire was at its height, when huge building projects expressed the wealth and confidence and when one could travel from northern Britain to Iraq without leaving Roman control. There are three main strands to the module. One will examine the power structures of the empire: the state under Augustus; imperial rule – Caligula, Nero, and Hadrian; imperial women; imperialism and conquest; and imperial cult. The second will look at our writers – Pliny the Younger, Tacitus and Suetonius and will consider how far our 'Rome' is a product of their agendas. The third will look at wider society: 'muted' groups such as the poor, women and slaves; Rome's relationship with its eastern territories including the Greeks and the Jews; religion under Rome; Rome, the non-Roman and resistance; death and disease.

### Option – Sumerian Language and Culture

"Almost everything that's been invented was already invented by the Sumerians." "A Sumerologist is someone who knows the mostest about the leastest." Both of these truisms tell us something about the study of the ancient Sumerians, their language and their culture. More than twenty centuries before the first Olympiad or the founding of Rome the Sumerians created an advanced civilisation with elaborate architecture, city planning, technology, science and writing. The range and sophistication of what was written in Sumerian allows us to gain an insight into the minds of men and women five thousand years ago, or to put it differently, about half way back to the

beginnings of the Neolithic. This option will investigate what the achievements of the Sumerians were, and how they were passed on to later civilisations, sometimes even surviving in their original Sumerian form, as for example in the case of our divisions of time and the circle. Perhaps most important of all are the texts that reveal to us the rich world of thought of the Sumerians, their mythology, legends, songs, courtship rites, stories and proverbs; all of these genres will be studied and debated in this module. But the module will also cover historical texts as well as the letters which the Sumerians wrote to each other – and sometimes also to their gods – and mundane matters from ancient admin to brewing.

### Option – Thinking Athenian

Classical Athenians saw themselves as special. Descended from kings born from the earth itself, championed by the goddess Athena (who had to fight Poseidon for the honour!), inventors of democracy, victors at Marathon and Salamis, inventors of the dramatic arts, home to the best minds in the world, the list goes on and on. This module will look at Athenian attitudes to a variety of issues including: bravery, leisure, sexuality, politics, religion, warfare, money, and imperialism. It will also focus closely on the Athenian tendency towards the “othering” of non-elite male groups such as women, slaves, and foreigners, and even the poor. Ultimately we will be aiming to answer the question of whether the Athenians were peculiar in how they thought about the world

## Year 3

By now you are ready to make your own choice. In your final year you choose a seminar and two options. Once again, you will have the opportunity to study an ancient language, either starting from scratch or taking your skills to a higher level. The highlight of the final year is your dissertation: working one-on-one with your supervisor you will complete a substantial research project on a subject of special interest to you.

Some of our many optional modules include

### Option – Sparta

Spartan society is the enigma of the ancient Greek world. The peculiarity of Sparta excited the imagination of contemporaries from other Greek states and has continued to serve as both a positive and a negative social and political model up until the present day. This module will attempt to get behind the so-called ‘Spartan mirage’ through detailed study of the ancient evidence and a wide-ranging examination of its society and institutions. It will consider Sparta’s military ethos, the role of the Spartan education system (*agōgē*), the relationship between the Spartans and the helots, the roles of women in Spartan society, and the image of Sparta in modern culture. Students will also examine the varied ways in which Sparta has been appropriated by ancient and modern writers, and the impact this has had upon academic study of the Spartans in order to evaluate just how far we can assume an understanding of their unique society.

### Option – Egypt in the First Millennium

This module will present an overview of the history of Egypt from the end of the New Kingdom to the creation of a Macedonian Greek dynasty in Egypt after Alexander’s conquest of the country. This is a fascinating era and one that has only really begun to be explored in recent decades. It’s a period that saw the settlement of Libyans, invasions of Nubians, Assyrians and Persians, as well as the arrival of Greeks as traders and soldiers. In some respects, Egyptian culture may appear resolutely immutable, with its temples as bastions of cultural continuity. In reality it was constantly responding to new stimuli, and the archaeological and textual record shows both a strong interest in the country’s own past and a pragmatic engagement with the Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds. Many of the issues are encapsulated in Herodotus’ enthralling - and problematic - account of Egypt and its history.

### Option – Late Antiquity

This module covers the late third to the fifth centuries AD, the period known as Late Antiquity. Late Antiquity is a crucial period in the Roman World encompassing the destruction of the Empire in the West and its survival in the East. The module deals with the transformation of the ancient into the medieval world. The module will address the social and political history of the period through literature, archaeology and material culture including analysis of key emperors such as the reformer Diocletian who is alleged to have created a more autocratic imperial model, Constantine, the first Christian emperor, and Julian who abandoned his Christian heritage to return to paganism. The module will cover the relationship between Christianity and paganism including conversion, the creation of new holy space and religious violence; imperial capitals such as Rome and Constantinople; the evolution of the imperial court; Rome and barbarians; the Persian Empire; family and gender structures including eunuchs and the effect of Christianity on these structures.

### Option- Egyptian Mysteries

If you ever wondered how three of the main cultures of the ancient world Egypt, Greece and Rome were connected with each other through religion and culture, this option course is for you. You will not only learn how the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis was transformed into a Hellenistic goddess who was even welcome in Rome - you will also understand how mystery cults worked, who joined them and how secret rituals were performed at night, in dimly lit temples and what it was that Apuleius described as off-limits when talking to others. As secondary sources in English are limited, you will learn to work closely with primary sources such as archaeological evidence and texts written by ancient authors (English translations provided).

## Years 2 and 3

In your second and third years you choose a seminar. Just some of our many optional seminars include

### Seminar – Egyptian Literature and Society (100 things you didn’t know about Ancient Egypt)

Did you ever want to know which sacred spells were spoken during the mummification process and how they worked? Did you know that an Egyptian prince battled the Amazons before falling in love with their leader or that Egyptian magicians fought duels using fire, storm and transformation long before Hollywood?

This module consists of two parts. In the first term you will be investigating funerary literature and recitation texts to understand the different genres of texts and how to read the Book of the Dead. We will also discuss how religion, myth and ritual influenced non-funerary literature (*belles lettres*). During the second term, you will explore life in ancient Egypt as reflected in the fascinating legacy preserved in stone inscriptions and on papyri, from temple and tomb texts, to wisdom literature, funny stories and travel tales, love poetry, autobiographies and letters, including sometimes undiplomatic ‘diplomatic correspondence’. We shall draw on translated texts from the whole time-span of the pharaonic period from the Old Kingdom to Roman times, providing ample scope for individual students to pursue their own particular interests within this very wide field.

### Seminar – Greeks vs. Barbarians

The stunning victory of the Athenians over the Persians at Marathon and the equally dramatic desperate last stand of Leonidas and his 300 Spartans at Thermopylae were defining moments in Greek history. In many ways Greek identity was forged in these and other battles against the Persians. This course will consider what the Greeks thought of foreigners and their religions, cultures and politics, and what these beliefs and opinions reveal about the Greeks themselves. Often disdainful or dismissive of foreigners or ‘Barbarians’, the Greeks tended to regard non-Greeks as at best inferior, and at worst as candidates for conquest and enslavement.

This course will focus on the defining encounters between Greeks and non-Greeks, e.g. the Trojan War, the mythical encounters between Greeks and Amazons, the Persian Wars, the wars between the Greeks in Sicily and the Carthaginians, and Alexander the Great’s conquest of Asia. The key primary sources that will feature will be Homer’s *Iliad*, Herodotus’ *Histories*, Aeschylus’ *Persians*, Xenophon’s *March of the Ten Thousand* and the *Education of Cyrus*, the various accounts of Alexander the Great’s Persian campaign, along with a wide array of visual material.

### Seminar – King of the World: The neo-Assyrian Empire

For much of the earlier half of the first millennium BC the Assyrian Empire was the dominant power in the eastern Mediterranean region reaching out of its heartland in northern Mesopotamia into Anatolia, controlling much of the Levant and at times even parts of Egypt. This seminar will adopt a multidisciplinary approach to the phenomenon that was Assyria and has a firm basis in the international State Archives of Assyria Project of which AL was one of the original contributing members. A key

information and data source for the seminar will be the online and published resources of the Project which includes almost forty volumes of state of the art translations and studies of key Assyrian texts and cultural areas. In the context of the seminar this material will empower students to investigate and research subject areas of their choice over a wide range covering almost every area from the ruthless and bloodthirsty military through to zany love poetry. The seminar will focus on the key areas of Assyrian civilisation including subjects such as science, pseudoscience, economy, law, religion, mythology, politics, propaganda and much else. In terms of approach the emphasis will be on ancient written sources but material culture will also play a role. Students will learn how to brew Assyrian beer, prepare Assyrian blood soup as well as how to predict the future, for example by pouring oil on water or observing animal behaviour.

### Seminar – The Roman Army as a Community

This seminar looks at the 'real life' experience of being a soldier in the Roman army in the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. and also the experience of other members of the wider military community such as servants, slaves, women, children, traders. It lays emphasis on using the direct, physical evidence produced by the Roman army. Sometimes this is in the form of the forts and buildings of the army, sometimes objects used by different members of the community, and often it is written evidence produced by the Roman army including inscriptions or administrative documents (such as the Vindolanda tablets from northern Britain). All this evidence will be available in English, whether it comes from Britain or elsewhere, even if it was originally in Latin.

Questions that will be addressed will include:

- How did the Roman army turn a spotty 18-year-old into a Roman soldier?
- How did the Roman military community mark itself out as different and special through such things as dress, speech, law?
- What was the career path of a Roman soldier from enlistment to retirement?
- What informal social and power structures existed within the army alongside the formal command hierarchy?
- What is the evidence for women and children (especially in view of the 'ban' on marriage for serving soldiers) and for others such as traders and the native population?
- Were Roman forts really the isolated, all-male world of traditional scholarship?
- How did soldiers relate to the wider world in the provinces in which they served?

The overall aim is therefore to try to understand the 'reality' of the day-to-day life of the Roman military community when there was no fighting (i.e. most of the time) and to appreciate the wide range of evidence we have for Roman soldiers and the Roman army other than 'emperors and battles' histories.

### Seminar – Egyptian Blue

The Myers Collection, Eton College is one of the most renowned collections of minor ancient Egyptian art in the world, its stunning blue faience objects are of unmatched quality. In 2010, the University of Birmingham received a substantial part of this collection as a loan for teaching and research purposes, now being part of the Department of Classics, Ancient History and Archaeology. This unique collection stands now open to research students and undergraduate seminar students who wish to further their knowledge of ancient Egyptian art and archaeology and have an interest in Museum Studies. The seminar "Egyptian Blue" which will be held in the Orchard Learning Resource Centre at Selly Oak Campus, offers 2nd and 3rd year students the opportunity to work with real artefacts from ancient Egypt: apart from many other skills, students will learn to handle ancient art works and how to use collection management software for mostly unpublished objects. While the first term focuses on Nubia and Egypt and is also likely to include practical experience, we will concentrate on the design of exhibitions in the second term and students will set up their own mini exhibitions making use of ancient artefacts in the collection.

### Seminar – Carthage and Rome: North Africa in Antiquity

This module will examine Phoenician, Carthaginian, native and Roman societies, cultures, art, and religions within the context of North Africa (modern Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya). It will look at the region from the creation of Phoenician colonies in the early first millennium BC to the rule of the Severan dynasty at Rome in the early third century AD. It will consider for instance:

- Phoenician and Roman colonisation and conquest;
- Hannibal in context;
- what empires wanted from the native populations;
- whether the relationship between conquerors and conquered was one of oppression and resistance;
- whether human sacrifice occurred (and whether the Romans stopped it);
- the creation of monumental cities such as Roman Carthage, Iol Caesarea and Lepcis Magna
- how and why a Punic speaker from Lepcis came to rule the Roman world
- the relationship between nomads and Roman power

In order to explore these issues we will use a wide variety of written sources, inscriptions and archaeology.

