

EGYPTOLOGY

Egyptology is the study of the language, society, culture and history of ancient Egypt. We study the emergence, development and transformation of one of the world's first literate societies through archaeology and material culture, while texts and art offer unparalleled insight into the social structures, politics, beliefs and priorities of the people of the northern Nile Valley and their neighbours from the early third millennium BCE.

In the Egyptology track at Cambridge, we emphasise the importance of integrating information from all available sources—textual and archaeological—when seeking to understand the past. We encourage our students to develop their own interests within the field and to emerge as independent thinkers through project work and the third year dissertation. Cambridge has excellent libraries and both the Fitzwilliam Museum and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology have important collections of ancient Egyptian material which are used for teaching.

Egyptian Language

The ancient Egyptian language is known and studied through surviving texts. As a written language, Egyptian flourished for over four thousand years, and survives to this day as the liturgical language of the Coptic Christian Church. Despite common assumptions, Egyptian was not exclusively written in hieroglyphs: a cursive script, now called Hieratic, was usually written in ink and developed alongside the more formal incised or carved hieroglyphs. Sometime over the course of the seventh century BCE, a shorthand documentary script known as Demotic appears. The final stage of the language became known as Coptic and was written using Greek letters (with a few extra signs from Demotic) and was reserved mostly for religious texts from the Christian era. We teach all phases of the Egyptian language at Cambridge, although Demotic is taught only at graduate level.

First year students study Middle Egyptian, often viewed as the 'classical' phase of the language. Classes focus on acquiring the grammatical knowledge and vocabulary necessary to read the language. By the end of the first year, students will be able to read texts such as the Shipwrecked Sailor, Senwosret III's Semna Stela and various religious 'hymns'.

Fieldwork

Students in Egyptology gain basic archaeological skills in a training excavation organised by the Department. In the summer following second year, students choose a further programme of practical activity. Some students take part in excavations in the UK or other parts of the world (it is currently very difficult to arrange excavation experience in Egypt); some undertake museum internships or summer language courses; and others take study tours of museums or archaeological sites. Departmental subsidies are available for these.



STRUCTURE

Modules are two terms long with language teaching continuing into the third term. In each year you choose four modules:

Year 1

- Egyptian Language
- Introduction to the Cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia
- Archaeology in Action
- Babylonian Language
- World Archaeology
- Humans in Biological Perspective
- A module in another department including Social Anthropology or Psychology

Year 2

Compulsory modules:

- Egyptian language or Middle Egyptian texts
- Archaeology in action or Archaeological Theory and Practice 1
- Ancient Egypt in context: an archaeology of foreign relations (offered in alternate years)
or
Settlement and society in Ancient Egypt (offered in alternate years)
- The archaeology of religion in Ancient Egypt I (offered in alternate years)
or
The archaeology of death and burial in Ancient Egypt (offered in alternate years)

Year 3

Compulsory modules

- Middle Egyptian Texts or Old and Late Egyptian Texts
- Dissertation

Optional modules:

- Ancient Egypt in context: an archaeology of foreign relations (offered in alternate years)
or
Settlement and society in ancient Egypt (offered in alternate years)
- The archaeology of religion in Ancient Egypt I (offered in alternate years)
or
The archaeology of death and burial in Ancient Egypt (offered in alternate years)
- Coptic

