

Course Information Sheet for entry in 2026-27: MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies



Course facts

Mode of study	Full Time Only
Expected length	21 months

About the course

The MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies is a two-year taught course that explores the transformation of the ancient world. It can be taken as a free-standing degree, or as the first step towards doctoral research.

Late Antiquity (c.250-c.750) was a period of remarkable political change and cultural efflorescence. It witnessed the transformation of the ancient Roman and Iranian empires into their more centralised, more bureaucratic late Roman and Sassanian successors. This was a time of the consolidation of ancient philosophy, Judaism, and Christianity, as well as the emergence of Islam. By the end of the period, the ancient world order had dissolved into a series of Western kingdoms, the Islamic caliphate, and the Byzantine state focused on Constantinople. Over more than a millennium of history, Byzantium (c.330-c.1453) was central to political, economic, and cultural networks across the Eurasian continent, and played a crucial part in the formation of Eastern Christendom, the Crusades, and the Renaissance.

This course introduces you to this rich heritage, while also allowing for a high level of specialisation in various periods, regions, and source types; as well as languages (incl. Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, and Persian) and approaches (incl. History, Archaeology, Visual Culture, Literature, and Religion). Uniquely, the course is taught through a team of scholars based in several different Oxford faculties: History, Classics, Archaeology, Theology and Religion, Oriental Studies, and Modern and Medieval Languages.

Oxford scholars have been vital to the formation of Late Antiquity and Byzantium as modern academic disciplines. As a postgraduate in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies you will join a thriving and active community of over one hundred scholars and students, represented in the [Oxford Centre for Late Antiquity](https://www.ocla.ox.ac.uk/) (<https://www.ocla.ox.ac.uk/>) and the [Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research](https://www.ocbr.ox.ac.uk/) (<https://www.ocbr.ox.ac.uk/>). These centres help to organise a regular programme of seminars and conferences, while the [Oxford University Byzantine Society](https://oxfordbyzantinesociety.wordpress.com/) (<https://oxfordbyzantinesociety.wordpress.com/>) runs an annual postgraduate research trip to different parts of the former late antique and Byzantine worlds, and a conference which gathers postgraduates from across the globe.

Graduates are key participants in the wide range of seminars, workshops and conferences run by the History Faculty.

Further opportunities for exchange are provided by the interdisciplinary communities fostered within individual colleges, which also offer dedicated support for graduates by means of personal advisors. The [Oxford Centre for Research in the Humanities \(TORCH\)](http://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/) (<http://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/>), offers a stimulating range of interdisciplinary activities. You are also encouraged to join the [Oxford History Graduate Network \(OHGN\)](https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/oxford-history-graduate-network) (<https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/oxford-history-graduate-network>), which fosters friendships, conversations and collaboration.

If you wish to apply for the DPhil you will be encouraged to develop your doctoral proposal in consultation with your supervisor during the first few months of your second year, so that you will be well placed to make a doctoral application.

Course structure

An overview of the course structure is provided below. Details of the compulsory and optional elements of the course are provided in the *Course components* section of this page.

Year one

Although the two components of the course, Late Antiquity and Byzantium, have been designed to the same specification and are conjoined in a single course, you are expected to concentrate on **one** of the two fields only.

In the first two terms of year one you take classes in either Late Antique History or Byzantine History. Alongside the choice between Late Antique or Byzantine History, you must also choose between two training pathways (the Language or Skills pathway), dependent on your knowledge of languages or your primary interests in the field. You will also follow a second weekly class (Late Antique and Byzantine Archaeology and Visual Culture (first term) and Late Antique and Byzantine Religion (second term)).

Year two

You will write a thesis on a topic of your choosing, subject to the approval of your supervisor. This will be submitted in the third term.

In the second year you will also choose one other examined element from either a dissertation on a topic of your choosing, one or two auxiliary disciplines or a language paper. Language, Literature, and auxiliary disciplines are taught throughout the year, and will normally be examined by unseen examinations at the end of the third term.

Attendance

The course is full-time and requires attendance in Oxford. Full-time students are subject to the [University's Residence requirements](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/after-you-apply/accommodation/residence-requirements). (<https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/after-you-apply/accommodation/residence-requirements>)

Resources to support your study

As a graduate student, you will have access to the University's wide range of resources including libraries, museums, galleries, digital resources and IT services.

The Bodleian Libraries is the largest library system in the UK. It includes the main Bodleian Library and libraries across Oxford, including major research libraries and faculty, department and institute libraries. Together, the Libraries hold more than 13 million printed items, provide access to e-journals, and contain outstanding special collections including rare books and manuscripts, classical papyri, maps, music, art and printed ephemera.

The University's IT Services is available to all students to support with core university IT systems and tools, as well as many other services and facilities. IT Services also offers a range of IT learning courses for students to support with learning and research, as well as [guidance on what technology to bring with you as a new student](https://www.it.ox.ac.uk/what-to-bring) (<https://www.it.ox.ac.uk/what-to-bring>) at Oxford.

Further libraries

The Bodleian Libraries' Special Collections Department attracts scholars from all over the world. Further strengths include the countless databases and digital resources currently offered by the Bodleian and being developed through Oxford's Digital Humanities programme.

You are also able to draw on the specialist resources offered by the Bodleian History Faculty Library which provides dedicated support and training courses for all graduates. You will also have access to the many college libraries and to college archives which can house significant collections of personal papers as well as institutional records dating back to the middle ages.

Supervision

The allocation of graduate supervision for this course is the responsibility of the Faculty of History and it is not always possible to accommodate the preferences of incoming graduate students to work with a particular member of staff. Under exceptional circumstances a supervisor outside the Faculty of History may be nominated.

An Oxford academic's pre-application indication of willingness to supervise an enquiring applicant is not a guarantee that the applicant will be offered a place, or that the supervisor in question has capacity in that particular year.

Assessment

Year one

Examination comprises several parts depending on the chosen pathway:

All students submit two essays on a topic of your choosing, subject to the approval of your supervisor. The first is submitted in the second term; the second in the third term. You can find examples of previous essay titles on the faculty's website.

If you select the language pathway, you will take a language paper; and a literature paper in the same language.

If you select the skills pathway, you will take a paper or papers in the chosen auxiliary disciplines; and a dissertation on a topic of your choosing, subject to the approval of your supervisor, and submitted in the third term.

Year two

In the second year you will write a thesis on a topic of your choosing, subject to the approval of your supervisor. This is submitted in the third term.

You will also be examined on one other element of your choosing, either:

- a dissertation on a topic of your choosing, subject to the approval of your supervisor, and submitted in the third term; or
- one or two auxiliary disciplines (from a list of subject areas - see [Dissertation, Auxiliary Discipline\(s\), or Language Paper \(#disciplines\)](#) for examples); or
- a language paper (from a list of subject areas - see [Dissertation, Auxiliary Discipline\(s\), or Language Paper \(#disciplines\)](#) for examples).

Language, Literature, and auxiliary disciplines are taught throughout the year, and will normally be examined by unseen examinations at the end of the third term.

Course components

Compulsory study

Late Antique and Byzantine Archaeology and Visual Culture (year one, first term)

The course consists of eight three-hour long sessions in the first term. Through a combination of brief lectures, class-based discussions, class-presentations, and museum visits, it introduces you to the main methods of Late antique and Byzantine archaeology and visual culture, and explores current research themes. It is foremost intended to make students familiar with the specificity of the source material, teach you how to look at, analyse and describe material and visual culture as well as explore diverse ways in which you can make use of this evidence for your own research papers. Methodological insights are applied to various topics, including:

- Urbanism
- Reuse of building materials
- Architecture and power
- Light and lighting in Byzantium
- Late antique and Byzantine capital cities
- Byzantine perceptions of neighbouring societies
- Cappadocia
- Pilgrimage
- The origin and workings of icons.

Late Antique and Byzantine (year one, second term)

Taught in the second term through student-led presentations and group discussion, this course of eight classes introduces you to prominent aspects of theology and religion within the late antique and Byzantine worlds. Organised thematically so as to encompass the various regional and chronological specialisms of attendees, the classes range across the diverse religious traditions of the period (incl. polytheism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism), while introducing you to the various sources and methodologies available to students of theology and religion. Recent class topics have included:

- Apocalyptic
- Asceticism
- Conversion
- Councils
- Dualism
- Hagiography
- Heresy
- Holy women
- Iconoclasm
- Liturgy
- Mysticism
- Relics
- Religious art.

Thesis (year two)

In the second year you will write a thesis on a topic of your choosing, subject to the approval of your supervisor. This will be submitted in the third term. Examples of MPhil thesis titles can be found on the [History Faculty website](https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/mst-mphil-late-antique-and-byzantine-studies) (<https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/mst-mphil-late-antique-and-byzantine-studies>).

Pathway selection

You must also choose between two training pathways in year one, dependent on your knowledge of languages or your primary interests in the field.

Language training pathway

The language training pathway offers intensive training in any one of the following ancient and medieval languages and, normally, their associated literatures:

- Greek
- Latin
- Old Church Slavonic

- Armenian
- Syriac
- Coptic
- Arabic
- Middle Persian
- Hebrew.

Skills pathway

The skills pathway is designed for those who already have considerable competence in their chosen language(s) and are able to read primary sources in the original. You will receive instruction in one or two of a range of specialist auxiliary disciplines:

- papyrology;
- epigraphy;
- palaeography;
- numismatics;
- sigillography; or
- artefact studies.

Please note that not every subject listed may be on offer every year, depending in part on levels of student demand.

Options

In the first two terms of year one you take classes in either Late Antique History or Byzantine History. In year two you will choose one other examined element.

Late Antique History (year one)

This course, which comprises sixteen classes over the first two terms, encompasses the whole chronological and geographical span of the Late Roman Empire and beyond. Taught through a mix of student- and teacher-led sessions, it aims to explore facets of the late antique world against wider themes such as religious, cultural, and political change, while also familiarising you with different source types and methodologies. Examples of topics covered in recent years include: Urbanism, Successor Kingdoms, Monasticism, Elite housing and art, Late Roman empresses, Splinter empires and usurpers, Poetry, Magical and philosophical texts, Sassanid Persia, Law, Military handbooks, Goths, Natural disasters and narratives, Travel, and Papyrus documents.

Byzantine History (year one)

Taught each week over the first two terms, this sixteen-class course introduces you to the world of medieval Byzantium and its neighbours. Operating with a generous definition of the horizons of Byzantine history, it normally progresses chronologically from the reign of Justinian to the fall of Constantinople (depending on students' interests), and focuses on critical debates within Byzantine and wider medieval studies. Through a combination of short lectures, student presentations, and group debate, it exposes you to a range of methodological approaches to, sources for, and scholarship on the medieval East. Recent classes have included: Justinian and political dissent, the Justinian plague and environmental history, the Rise of Islam, Church councils and the papacy, Byzantine law, Iconoclasm, Cultural exchange with the caliphate, Arab geographers on Byzantium, Slavery, Byzantium and Rus', the Eleventh-century 'crisis', Komnenian historiography, the Seljuks, the Crusades and 1204, the Empire of Nicaea, and the Zealots.

Dissertation, Auxiliary Discipline(s), or Language Paper (year two)

In the second year you will also choose one other examined element. Either:

- a dissertation on a topic of your choosing, subject to the approval of your supervisor, and submitted in the third term; or
- one or two auxiliary disciplines (from papyrology, epigraphy, palaeography, numismatics, sigillography or artefact studies); or
- a language paper (from Greek, Latin, Old Church Slavonic, Armenian, Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, Middle Persian, and Hebrew).

Please note that not every every subject area listed may be on offer every year, depending in part on levels of student demand.

Changes to this course

The University will seek to deliver this course in accordance with the description set out in this course page. However, there may be situations in which it is desirable or necessary for the University to make changes in course provision, either before or after registration. The safety of students, staff and visitors is paramount and major changes to delivery or services may have to be made if a pandemic, epidemic or local health emergency occurs. In addition, in certain circumstances, for example due to visa difficulties or because the health needs of students cannot be met, it may be necessary to make adjustments to course requirements for international study.

Where possible your academic supervisor will not change for the duration of your course. However, it may be necessary to assign a new academic supervisor during the course of study or before registration for reasons which might include illness, sabbatical leave, parental leave or change in employment.

For further information please see our page on [changes to courses](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/courses/changes-to-courses) (<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/courses/changes-to-courses>) and the [provisions of the student contract](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/after-you-apply/your-offer-and-contract) (<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/after-you-apply/your-offer-and-contract>) regarding changes to courses.

Costs

Annual course fees

The fees for this course are charged on an annual basis.

Fees for the 2026-27 academic year at the University of Oxford

Fee status	Annual Course fees
Home	£17,910
Overseas	£43,730

What do course fees cover?

Course fees cover your teaching as well as other academic services and facilities provided to support your studies. Unless specified in the additional information section below, course fees do not cover your accommodation, residential costs or other living costs. They also don't cover any additional costs and charges that are outlined in the additional costs information below.

How long do I need to pay course fees?

Course fees are payable each year, for the duration of your fee liability (your fee liability is the length of time for which you are required to pay course fees). For courses lasting longer than one year fees will usually increase annually, as explained in the University's [Terms and Conditions \(//www.ox.ac.uk/students/new/contract\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/new/contract).

Our [fees and other charges \(//www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges) pages provide further information, including details about:

- [course fees and fee liability \(//www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/courses-fees-and-liability\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/courses-fees-and-liability);
- [how your fee status is determined \(//www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/fee-status\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/fee-status); and
- [changes to fees and other charges \(//www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/changes-to-fees-and-charges\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/changes-to-fees-and-charges).

Information about how much fees and other costs will usually increase each academic year is set out in the University's [Terms and Conditions \(//www.ox.ac.uk/students/new/contract\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/new/contract).

Additional costs

There are no compulsory elements of this course that entail additional costs beyond fees and living costs. However, as part of the course requirements, students may need to choose a dissertation, a project or a thesis topic. Please note that, depending on the choice of topic and the research required to complete it, there may be additional expenses, such as travel expenses, research expenses, and field trips. Students will need to meet these additional costs, although they may be able to apply for small grants from their faculty to help cover some of these expenses.

Living costs

In addition to your course fees and any additional course-specific costs, you will need to ensure that you have adequate funds to support your living costs for the duration of your course.

Living costs for full-time study

For the 2026-27 academic year, the range of likely living costs for a single, full-time student is between £1,405 and £2,105 for each month spent in Oxford. We provide the cost per month so you can multiply up by the number of months you expect to live in Oxford. Depending on your circumstances, you may also need to budget for the [costs of a student visa and immigration health surcharge \(//www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/living-costs\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/living-costs) and/or [living costs for family members or other dependants \(//www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/living-costs#field_listing_content_content-item--2\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/living-costs#field_listing_content_content-item--2), that you plan to bring with you to Oxford (if [dependant visa eligibility criteria \(//www.ox.ac.uk/students/visa/before/family\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/visa/before/family) are met).

Further information about living costs

The current economic climate and periods of high national inflation in recent years make it harder to estimate potential changes to the cost of living over the next few years. For study in Oxford beyond the 2026-27 academic year, it is suggested that you budget for potential increases in living expenses of around 4% each year – although this rate may vary depending on the national economic situation.

A breakdown of likely living costs for one month during the 2026-27 academic year are shown below. These costs are based on a single, full-time graduate student, with no dependants, living in Oxford.

Likely living costs for one month in Oxford during the 2026-27 academic year

	Lower range	Upper range
Food	£315	£545
Accommodation	£825	£990
Personal items	£160	£310
Social activities	£50	£130
Study costs	£35	£90
Other	£20	£40
Total	£1,405	£2,105

For information about how these figures have been calculated as well as tables showing the likely living costs for nine and twelve months, please refer to the [living costs \(//www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/living-costs\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/living-costs) page of our website.

Document accessibility

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