

Old Norse language and literature

ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE AND CELTIC TRIPOS, PRELIM and PART I, PAPER 6

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Course description

The aim of this course is for students to acquire knowledge of the Old Norse/Old Icelandic language of the thirteenth century, the period in which many of the classic texts of Old Norse literature were preserved, and to become acquainted with the literature of the period. Knowledge of the language is developed through the study of a selection of literary and historical texts – including examples of sagas and poetry – and extended through enquiry into the origin and development of the language. The broad cultural context of the emergence of medieval Icelandic literary genres is an important focus of the course.

Set texts are studied in the original and students are encouraged to broaden their knowledge of the subject through wide reading in the critical literature and in the recommended translations. No previous knowledge of Old Icelandic is required.

Mode of teaching

In the first year, elementary instruction in the language is given in all three terms – two series of eight text classes in Michaelmas and Lent terms, and four small-group revision supervisions in the Easter term. During this time, three short prose texts are studied: extracts from *Hrólfs saga kraka* (a legendary saga), *Skáldskaparmál* (one of the parts of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, a treatise on mythology and poetics) and *Íslendinga saga* (a contemporary political saga). All the texts are studied in the edited versions in *A New Introduction to Old Norse* (volume II: Reader, excerpts I, II, III and VIII), copies of which will be available for sale at the beginning of term. In the second year, also in three series of classes (8+8 text classes plus 4 small-group supervisions), the study of prose genres is extended by close readings of embedded poetry in extracts from the *Prologue* and *Gylfaginning* (further parts of Snorri's *Edda*), *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (Reader excerpts VIIA and B), *Kormaks saga* (excerpt IV) and *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa* (excerpt V).

In both years, language classes are supplemented by two series of weekly lectures on Old Norse literature, given over a two-year cycle, on Eddic Poetry, *Snorra Edda*, The Icelandic Sagas and Skaldic Poetry. Reading lists for each series will be distributed at the beginning of term. Supervisions for Part I Paper 6 will be arranged by your College Director of Studies.

Supervision essays will cover the four segments of the course; a high standard of accuracy is expected in the quotation, translation and analysis of texts in Old Norse.

In addition to the formal lectures and classes in Old Norse, a course in Modern Icelandic is provided by the Department during term time and all students are encouraged to attend it.

Assessment

The course is examined in Preliminary Assessment Tests and Preliminary and Tripos examinations, the question-papers for which contain compulsory seen and unseen translations, commentary questions and a choice of essay topics. Further details will be provided during the course of the year. Formative feedback will be given throughout the course by in-class translation and grammar work and through the evaluation of practice essays in supervisions.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course, students should have acquired a good reading knowledge of Old Icelandic prose and be able to read and interpret selected examples of eddic and skaldic poetry. They should also have an understanding of the literary, cultural and historical context of the literature and be able to contextualise their readings of particular texts within the interpretive framework they have acquired. They should also have an elementary knowledge of Old Norse philology.