Anglo-Saxon, 
Norse & Celtic

Part I Paper 5

Old English 
Language and 
Literature
This course explores English language and literature from the earliest records to the eleventh century. After two years, students should have acquired the ability to read and translate accurately a range of texts in their original language. They should also have gained a detailed knowledge and appreciation of the wide variety of Old English literature, both poetry and prose, and become familiar with issues relevant to its context and critical interpretation. No previous experience of the subject is assumed or expected.

Organisation of teaching

University teaching for the course is provided through classes and lectures. There are twenty language and translation classes in each of the two years (eight in both Michaelmas and Lent Terms, four in Easter Term); the two series are specified in the Lecture List as for ‘First-Year Students’ and ‘Second-Year Students’ respectively. These classes aim to provide students with a good grounding in the grammar of Old English and to introduce them to the set texts, which will be translated week by week. Students are expected to prepare for these classes in advance. The recommended accompanying textbook is Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, A Guide to Old English (Oxford: Blackwell, eighth edition 2012), which contains most of the set texts (see below); the remainder of the texts will be provided in class as and when required.
The language and translation classes are complemented by weekly lectures in the Michaelmas and Lent terms (twelve lectures each year), which introduce the major topics for the study of Old English literature and deal with specific authors/texts or groups of texts, and/or with important themes. Some of these lectures are introductory and are aimed particularly at First Years, some are more advanced and are intended for Second Years, with the remainder (the majority) designed for both cohorts together. The lectures aimed at both year-goups together operate on a two-year cycle: prose and Beowulf in one year, the remaining poetry in the other. The lectures are accompanied by handouts, which provide bibliographies, illustrative excerpts from the texts under discussion, and other relevant material (e.g. manuscript facsimiles); and by digital slides, which will be mounted on the Student Intranet section of the ASNC website after each lecture.

Students taking this paper will need to devote a certain number of hours each week to digesting and revising the essentials of Old English grammar, and to preparing texts for the translation classes. They are also encouraged to spend time in private study, gaining wider knowledge of the literature by reading works cited in the bibliographies distributed at lectures, and through the judicious use of recommended translations.

This course can also be taken in one year by students reading for Part II of the Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic Tripos, as well as by students from certain other Triposes (e.g. Part II of the English Tripos). In these cases, attendance at both sets of language and translation classes is vital; where possible, students in this position are also strongly advised to begin preparation in their second year, which will enable them to attend both parts of the two-year lecture cycle.

**Supervisions**

University teaching is supplemented by a set of supervisions, normally eight in total, which are organized through students’ colleges (by Directors of Studies). For these, students will be expected to prepare essays on selected detailed topics falling within the course.

**Examinations**

The course is examined by a Preliminary paper (which can be taken at the end of the first year) and by a Part I paper (which will be taken at the end of the second year). In each case the papers will consist of a section containing passages for translation and
grammatical commentary and another comprising essay questions, and these two sections carry equal weight. In the first section of both papers, there are three passages from the set texts for translation/comment, and one unseen passage for translation (prose in Prelim, verse in Part I), all of which are compulsory. Candidates then choose two further (essay) questions to answer, out of a total of about ten options.

The Set Texts

Description

The surviving corpus of Old English literature is extensive, covering a wide variety of texts and genres, in both verse and prose. Whilst they can do no more than present a small sample of the extant material, the set texts chosen for this paper attempt to reflect some of this variety, as also to introduce students to some of the best-known and most highly regarded authors and works of the period. The prose selected includes diverse pieces by King Alfred (no. 3), Ælfric (nos. 1 and 10, a biblical translation and a saint’s life) and Wulfstan (no. 13, a famous homily), as well as examples of ecclesiastical history (no. 4) and chronicle narrative (no. 2). The poetry includes some of the best-known shorter pieces (nos. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14), as well as excerpts from longer works including two extracts from Beowulf (no. 15); the texts chosen represent narrative, both religious (e.g. nos. 6, 12) and secular (nos. 5, 14, 15), alongside elegiac verse (nos. 7, 8, 9) and a selection of Riddles (no. 11).

In the first year of the course, students will translate a selection of the texts listed under the first section below (set texts for the Preliminary Examination). In their second year, they will go on to some of those in the second list (set texts for Part I), which have been reserved for the second year owing to their slightly more demanding nature. Only those texts studied in the first year will be eligible to appear on the Preliminary Examination at the end of that year; in the Part I examination held at the end of the second year, however, texts for translation may be chosen from amongst all those that have been read in class.
Set texts for the Preliminary Examination for Part I of the Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic Tripos

1. Ælfric’s Translation of *Genesis*: The Fall of Man
2. *Cynewulf and Cyneheard*
3. Alfred the Great’s Preface to his Translation of Gregory’s *Pastoral Care*
4. Bede’s Account of the Poet Cædmon
5. *The Battle of Maldon*
6. *The Dream of the Rood*
7. *The Wanderer*
8. *The Wife’s Lament*
9. *Wulf and Eadwacer*

Set texts for Part I of the Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic Tripos

All of the above, plus:

10. Ælfric, *Life of St Edmund*
11. Fifteen Riddles
12. *Judith*
13. Wulfstan, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*
14. *The Finnsburh Fragment*
15. Two extracts from *Beowulf*: (a) lines 1063-1159 (the Finnsburh Episode) (b) lines 1492-1590 (Beowulf and Grendel’s mother)

Old English Literature Lectures, Michaelmas Term 2014

Dr R. W. Dance

NB that lectures marked with a * (lectures 1, 2 and 6) are introductory and intended for First Years only (though Second Years are welcome if they want revision of the basics); other lectures are intended for both First and Second Years. Lectures take place on Fridays at 4 p.m. in Weeks 2–7 (venue tbc).

INTRODUCTIONS

1. 17 OCTOBER
   *Hwæt! Introducing Literature in Old English*
   [Getting to know the basics: who’s who and what’s what]

2. 24 OCTOBER
   *Introduction to Old English Poetry*
   [Introducing Old English poetic form, style and themes]

OLD ENGLISH POETRY

3. 31 OCTOBER
   *Heroic Poetry: The Battle of Maldon*

4. 7 NOVEMBER
   *Religious Poetry: The Dream of the Rood*

5. 14 NOVEMBER
   *Elegies I: The Wanderer and The Seafarer*

INTRODUCTIONS (cont.)

6. 21 NOVEMBER
   *A Short History of the Old English Language*
Old English Literature Lectures, Lent Term 2015

Dr M. Cavell and others

NB that the lecture marked with a ** (lecture 6) is advanced and intended for Second Years only; other lectures are intended for both First and Second Years. Lectures take place on Fridays at 4 p.m. in Weeks 1–6 (venue tbc).

1. 16 JANUARY
   The Old English Riddles
   DR M. CAVEILL

2. 23 JANUARY
   Elegies II: The Wife’s Lament, The Husband’s Message and Wulf and Eadwacer
   J. BOLOTINA

3. 30 JANUARY
   Poetry of the Old Testament: Genesis and Exodus
   D. CALLANDER

4. 6 FEBRUARY
   Saints and Sinners: Devilish Dealings in Old English Poetry
   [Andreas, Guthlac, Christ & Satan, etc.]
   DR S. HARRIS

5. 13 FEBRUARY
   Old English Wisdom Literature
   [Maxims I and II, The Durham Proverbs, The Rune Poem, and others]
   R. MERKELBACH

6. 20 FEBRUARY
   Swutol Sang Scopes: Further Readings in Old English Poetic Theme and Style **
   DR B. SCHORN