Changes in the regulations governing the Master of Philosophy (x) Islamic Studies and History: communication from the Board of the Faculty of Oriental Studies

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Approved on behalf of the Divisional Board on 1 July 2012.

Humanities Divisional Board

MPhil Oriental Studies (x) Islamic Studies and History

Brief note about nature of the changes

The changes (i) replace a prepared texts paper with a second optional paper and thus give students greater freedom to pursue individual interests; and (ii) include miscellaneous corrections.

With effect from 2012 (for first examination in 2013)

1. In Examination Regulations, 2011, p. 561, l. 12, delete ‘four’ and substitute ‘three’.
2. Ibid., delete ‘4’ and substitute ‘3’.
3. Ibid., delete ll. 14-18 and renumber subsequent papers.
4. Ibid., l. 19, after ‘research materials’ insert ‘which must not exceed 4,000 words’.
5. Ibid., l. 21, after ‘Islamic’ insert ‘studies and’.
6. Ibid., l. 23, delete ‘One’ and substitute ‘Two’.
7. Ibid., after ‘5.22)’ insert ‘, at least one of which must involve translation into English of excerpts from a set text, or from a selection of set texts’
8. Ibid., l. 37, delete ‘Moghul’ and substitute ‘Mughul’.
9. Ibid., l. 39, delete ‘The Safavids’ and substitute ‘Safavid History’.
10. Ibid., l. 41, delete ‘and qur’anic commentary’.
11. Ibid., p. 562, l. 2, delete ‘of the periods covered by papers 5.1 to 5.11’ and substitute ‘period prior to 1500’.
12. Ibid., l. 4, delete ‘A paper chosen from the M.Phil in Medieval Arabic Thought’ and substitute ‘Topics in Arabic philosophy’.
13. Ibid., p. 562, l. 9, delete ‘3’ and substitute ‘2’.

cont.
Explanatory notes

I. On the individual changes

(1-6) In the second year of the MPhil in Islamic Studies and History, candidates currently study for a prepared texts paper and also choose a specialized paper from a list of ca. twenty options (they also continue language classes and write a thesis). Changes (1)–(6) replace the prepared texts paper with a second option to be chosen from 5.1 – 5.22.

(7) This ensures that the replacement of the prepared texts paper by a second option does not result in a dilution of the strong focus on primary sources which currently characterizes the MPhil in Islamic Studies and History.

(8-10) (8) corrects the orthography of “Mughul” in accordance with standard scholarly practice; (9) clarifies the historical nature of the relevant paper; and (10) allows for greater flexibility in tailoring this paper to the interests of individual students, insofar as it permits either a focus on the Qur’an in its original historical context, or its later Islamic reception history.

(11) This change remedies the fact that, under the previous wording, the 10th century, which constitutes the formative period of classical Persian literature, would by accident not have fallen into the historical scope of this paper.

(12) The MPhil in Medieval Arabic Thought, which focused on the history of philosophy in the medieval Islamic world, has now been abolished. The replacement paper is designed to offer students an option from the field of Islamic philosophy.

(13) This change is required by changes (1)–(6).

II General note on the above changes

These changes will streamline teaching and examining for the second year of the MPhil in Islamic Studies and History. The prepared texts paper that is currently prescribed for second year MPhil students has for the last few years effectively been handled as an optional paper, insofar as the set texts were chosen in accordance with the interests of the individual student. The changes proposed above would codify this practice. This is desirable not only because it makes the structure of the degree more transparent, but also because it removes the need to compile up to six different prepared texts into one hybrid paper called “Arabic prepared texts”, which often needs to be marked by different people depending on which of the different texts included in it were chosen by a student.

Since the list of options remains virtually identical – except for (12) above – no new teaching will be required. A course identical with (12) has already been taught by Dr. N. Sinai in Michaelmas Term 2011 and could easily be offered on a regular basis.

Since the objective of changes (1)–(7) and (13) is to codify a greater freedom of individual choice than is required by the current wording of the Examination Regulations, no student can conceivably profit from retaining the current version. Nevertheless, all of the students currently on course for the MPhil in Islamic Studies and History have given their written consent to the changes.

All of the other changes are either minor corrections that do not affect the substance of the respective paper (8–10), remedy a mistake that has so far gone unnoticed (11) or adapt the Examination Regulations for the MPhil in Islamic Studies and History to the abolishment of the MPhil in Medieval Arabic Thought.