Baron Thyssen PhD Studentship in Ancient Material Religion: Further Particulars

We are delighted to invite applications for a Baron Thyssen PhD Studentship in Ancient Material Religion.

The Baron Thyssen Centre for the Study of Ancient Material Religion aims to support the systematic study of how ancient Greek, Etruscan and Roman religion happened in and through material things, bringing this ancient evidence into productive dialogue with the debates and scholarship on material religions in later historical periods, right up to the present day.

The holder of the Baron Thyssen PhD Studentship in Ancient Material Religion will work under the auspices of this new research centre, as part of an interdisciplinary team dedicated to an exploration of the following questions:

- What are the unique forms and traditions of Greek, Etruscan and Roman material religion (including lived experience and embodied practices as well as material ‘things’)?
- How and why do these forms and traditions change as they move across time and space? How are they differently experienced by people with different cultural, social, gendered and embodied perspectives?
- How are our perspectives on ancient material religion shaped by later views of material culture and the sacred?
- What is the ‘legacy’ of ancient material religion? For example, how has classical antiquity impacted on later religions? And how do the sacred objects, bodies and rituals of classical antiquity permeate the cultural imagination today?

Further information about the Centre can be found at www.openmaterialreligion.org. If you would like to discuss your application and proposal informally, please do not hesitate to contact Dr Jessica Hughes (jessica.hughes@open.ac.uk).

This is a full-time, three-year studentship, beginning in October 2019 and based in Milton Keynes. This studentship has been made possible through the generosity of Baron Lorne Thyssen-Bornemisza. It will provide for the full fees of a three-year full-time PhD studentship at the Open University as well as a maintenance grant of £20,000 a year.

The successful candidate will pursue their own research under the supervision of members of the Baron Thyssen Centre for the Study of Ancient Material Religion, which is based in the Department of Classical Studies at The Open University. During the period of the studentship the holder will be expected to live within reasonable travelling distance of Milton Keynes and will be encouraged to participate in graduate student research activities at the OU.
Applicants should have a good Honours degree in a relevant subject and should have, or expect to gain shortly, a Master’s degree or have equivalent research experience.

**How to apply:** Application forms are available from [http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply/mphil-and-phd-application-process](http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply/mphil-and-phd-application-process).

Completed applications should be sent to FASS-PhD-Applications@open.ac.uk.

You are reminded that you must sign the form and should give the names and addresses of two academic referees who are willing to comment on your academic achievements to date and on your potential for undertaking research. (Please check that your referees will be available to be contacted during the application period.)

Please send with your application form a short proposal for the topic you wish to research (maximum 2,000 words). In your proposal, you should include:

- a provisional title for your topic;
- brief information about how the topic relates to existing research in the fields of ancient and/or material religion, together with a statement of how you think your work will make an original contribution;
- a summary of the evidence, ancient sources and modern scholarship you will use;
- the research methods you intend to apply.

You should also include information about the research skills or experience you have already gained (e.g. preparation of relevant dissertation at undergraduate or Master’s level, knowledge of ancient and modern languages, ICT literacy etc.).

Applicants are invited to propose a research project which relates to any area of ancient Greek, Etruscan or Roman material religion and its reception, but preference will be given to those working on topics that can be supervised by a team from the Baron Thyssen Centre for the Study of Ancient Material Religion. You can find a summary of our research interests on the website at [https://www.openmaterialreligion.org/committee](https://www.openmaterialreligion.org/committee).

Possible areas of supervision might include (but are not restricted to):

- The material culture of death, mourning and funerary commemoration
- Votive offerings
- Magic practice/magical objects
- Oracles
- Cult statues
- Temples, sanctuaries and other types of sacred space/place
- Pilgrimage
- Imperial Cult
- Household religion
- The intersection of religion and clothing/fabric production
- The reception of ancient material religion in later periods
Closing Date: 11th January 2019
The interview date range will be advertised shortly. Interviews will take place in Milton Keynes.

Useful Bibliography

**Material Religion: The Journal of Objects Art and Beliefs**: Since its foundation in 2006, this major international journal ‘seeks to explore how religion happens in material culture - images, devotional and liturgical objects, architecture and sacred space, works of arts and mass-produced artifacts.’ It bridges the world of scholarship and museum practice, and supports all those seeking, at whatever level, to understand and explain the relationships between objects, art and belief.

**Key Terms in Material Religion**: This volume edited by S. Brent Plate gives an accessible, critical entry into the theory and vocabulary of Material Religion. In the introduction to this book, Plate offers the following working definition of material religion: “Material religion refers to (1) an investigation of the interactions between human bodies and physical objects, both natural and human-made; (2) with much of the interaction taking place through sense perception; (3) in special and specified places and times; (4) in order to orient, and sometimes disorient, communities and individuals; (5) toward the formal strictures and structures of religious traditions.”

A selection of relevant publications by members of the Baron Thyssen Centre for the Study of Ancient Material Religion are listed on the website: https://www.openmaterialreligion.org/publications/

Classical Studies Research at the Open University:

The discipline area of Classical Studies at the Open University is based in the School of Arts and Cultures, within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The department currently has fourteen full-time members of academic staff. Classical Studies is a popular area of study and attracts over 2,500 students each year (Open University students are part-time and based all over the UK and in continental Europe). In addition to undergraduate courses in the cultural history and languages of Greek and Roman antiquity, there is a taught MA which last year attracted over 100 students. The department also contributes classical strands to Faculty interdisciplinary courses.

All members of Classical Studies staff are engaged in research that aims to embed historical texts, literature and archaeological evidence in their appropriate cultural contexts in order to study them as elements crucial for the shaping of the societies, economies, identities and cultures of ancient Europe and the Mediterranean. Current themes uniting the research of the department include: material religion, the senses, death, burial and identity; memory and commemoration; the body in sickness and in health; the reception of text and art in modern popular culture and film; theoretical approaches to cultural interaction; and the ancient life-course. The department has regular work-in-progress research days at which graduate students are encouraged to give papers. There are currently 5 full-time and 7 part-time research students in the department.
Doctoral Studies at The Open University

The Open University has an extensive doctoral studies programme, with over 1,000 current postgraduate research students (c.570 studying full-time, the rest studying part-time and combining research degrees with work). The University has therefore developed a rigorous yet flexible portfolio of skills training for postgraduate research students. The programme has a clear focus on transferable skills. There are currently c.180 Arts & Humanities postgraduate research students, registered either for a PhD or for an MPhil prior to doctoral study. Of these about a quarter are registered for full-time study and the rest are part-time.

The Open University Research School provides an induction programme for new research students and a training programme for students. Students receive training in (for example): bibliographical databases and other IT skills and in managing a research project through its different stages. The Faculty then provides additional study skills training days focussed on the particular needs of arts students. Students will also get access to the Open University’s world-class library with particular strength in online resources.

For further information about research degrees at The Open University, visit [http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees](http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees).