



# Department of Arabic and Near Eastern Studies

Education

National

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Times of Malta

Professor Anthony J. Frendo, Head of the Department of Arabic and Near Eastern Studies, and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Arts, writes:

When Malta joins the European Union on May 1, 2004, it becomes its southernmost state. In this sense it will have one very important function, namely to act as a bridge (physically, economically, and culturally) between the EU and the Near East and North Africa.

Now to live up to such a vocation, it is clear that our nation will have to try and understand the languages and cultures of our near eastern and southern neighbours. It will be most beneficial to our country to train people in the languages and civilisations of the near east

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if we really want to communicate with the millions of people around us who speak a Semitic language and have a Semitic culture.

The Department of Arabic and Near Eastern Studies at the Faculty of Arts caters precisely for such a need. It is becoming ever clearer to many that Malta needs people well trained in Arabic and in other Semitic languages, such as Hebrew, which have had such a world-wide influence through their literature.

The department offers degrees in both Arabic and Near Eastern Studies. In this latter programme the course is based on a core component of Arabic and North-West Semitic (for example, Classical Hebrew and Phoenician-Punic), together with archaeology and general cultural study-units dealing with history, religion and literature on the Near East (mainly the Ancient Near East, which throws much light on why the contemporary Near East is what it is) and the Islamic world.

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The language courses in these degree programmes are shared mainly between Arabic and Hebrew: the former is largely Modern Standard Arabic, whereas the latter is mainly Classical Hebrew (thanks to which the student could pass on in a smoother manner to the study of Modern Hebrew).

The department offers under-graduate degrees, but it also accepts students to undertake postgraduate research both in Arabic and in Near Eastern Studies leading to the degrees of

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MA, M.Phil. and Ph.D. in the areas of expertise of the department's staff.

Arabic and Near Eastern Studies are offered in the Faculty of Arts, and thus it is clear that as such they are not job-oriented courses. However, this does not mean that one cannot apply a degree in Arabic or Near Eastern Studies to various fields and careers. Indeed, the degree programmes offered by the department would be most useful for future careers in the academic, diplomatic, and business spheres, as well as in the promising field of translation and interpretation.

I would also like to point out one practical matter. The recent national glaring mistake we made with respect to the foul translation of advisory bodies as *igsmat tal-pariri* shows beyond any reasonable doubt why solid training in the humanities is still a must. We need to start afresh and drill our young men and women in the art of writing correct and precise Maltese and English.

Moreover, the aforementioned error also indicates that students reading Maltese should be trained in Arabic - at least as far as the basic elements are concerned. The Department of Arabic and Near Eastern Studies offers strict philological training which allows the students to read the great literary heritage of Judaism and Islam in the original sources. It trains them to understand from within the Semitic world-view, and thus it also contributes to bring the Orient and the Occident a bit closer to each other.

Besides these benefits which students can receive by studying Arabic and Near Eastern Studies, there are some useful by-products. Thus, for example, a rigorous training in Semitic philology will impart to them a frame of mind which will be marked with a great attention to detail and precision - qualities which can be applied to any career or field, not least among which diplomacy and business.

It is highly probable that when we join the EU, we will be asked to make our contribution to the relationship between the Union and the Near East and North Africa. Why not prepare ourselves by training students in Arabic and Near Eastern Studies? They could help to bridge the current unfortunate divide between the Orient and the Occident, which can lead to a clash of civilisations.

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