ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD

RESEARCH ASSOCIATE: ARABIC BOOKS AND ASTRONOMY

Further particulars

St John's College, Oxford, invites applications for a full-time postdoctoral Research Associate to participate in "Arabic Books and Astronomy in Seventeenth-Century Oxford", a research project awarded to Professor Julia Bray (A.S. AlBabtain-Laudian Professor of Arabic) that will run until 31 December 2020. The appointment is available to start as soon as possible, and will be made at the University's Grade 7, with a range from £32,817 - £40,322 p.a.

St John's College

Established in 1555 as a constituent college of the University of Oxford, St John's College fosters excellence in education and research. It is one of the largest among Oxford Colleges and nearly every subject studied at the University has its representation. Today, St John's is home to approximately 390 undergraduates, 250 graduate students, 100 fellows and 25 College lecturers. A vibrant international community, it fosters intellectual rigour, creativity, and independence in its students, teachers, and researchers. The College supports a range of research activities including discussions, seminars, workshops, public lectures and visiting scholar schemes, as well as the Research Centre, which particularly emphasizes interdisciplinary approaches. While scholarly publication is naturally at the heart of our research endeavours, the fellowship is also committed to informing policy and public debate, and to teaching that is informed by research findings.

The St John's College Research Centre was set up by the Governing Body of St John's College in 2001. Its aim is to provide focus and support for the College's intellectual and academic life as it already exists and to support new research, particularly of an interdisciplinary nature which might otherwise be unfunded; and to enhance the College's role in promoting first-class innovative research in the University of Oxford and the academic community at large. It supports a balanced mixture of research in science and humanities.

For further information about the College and the Research Centre, please visit our web-site: https://www.sjc.ox.ac.uk/.

The project

The importance of seventeenth-century "Arabick learning" to the European humanities is increasingly well understood. Its role in the development of the sciences is less known. This project is a case study, centred on Oxford, in the role played by Arabic books in seventeenth-century European astronomy. Seventeenth-century Oxford was a centre of both Arabic learning and astronomy (the Laudian Chair of Arabic was established in 1636, the Savilian Chair of Astronomy in 1619), and a number of Oxford astronomers learned Arabic in order to further their scientific studies. The aim of the research is to begin to identify what Arabic texts they used and how, using the evidence of the Arabic manuscript and printed books on astrononomy and related subjects owned and annotated by seventeenth-century Oxford astronomers that remain in Oxford libraries, specifically St John's College library and the Bodleian. The annotations, in English, Latin and Arabic, have not yet been studied systematically. Because of their language and subject-matter, they can be made fully accessible only through teamwork.

The project straddles the fields of manuscript and book studies (Arabic and European) and of intellectual history and the history of science (European and Islamic). By tracing Arabic books known to have been owned or used by a group of Oxford Arabist astronomers, it will refine understanding of the European acquisition and dissemination of Arabic texts. By assembling an analytical corpus of annotations, it will show how they were used as intellectual tools. The annotations will be transcribed, translated, provided with commentaries and catalogued, making them accessible to scholars across disciplines. A photographic field record will be kept, and high-quality images of selected annotations will be archived.

Archbishop Laud founded the Oxford chair of Arabic in 1636. The first appointee, Edward Pococke (1604-91), an influential humanist, was also connected to John Greaves (1602-52) and Edward Bernard (1638-97), who both became Savilian Professors of astronomy. Greaves accompanied Pococke to the Levant to buy Arabic manuscripts for Laud, and Bernard studied with Pococke. Conversely the linguist Thomas Hyde (1636-1703), librarian of Bodley, a Cambridge-trained Arabist and Eastern Interpreter to the royal court, also contributed to the sciences by publishing in 1665 a translation of the fifteenth-century Ulugh Beg's Tables of the latitudes and longitudes of the fixed stars. Greaves, Bernard and Hyde belonged to English and European intellectual networks, and were polymaths rather than being exclusively scientists or linguists. In the first phase of the project (March/April 2020), the Research Associate will locate as many as possible of the Arabic mathematical and astronomical MSS and printed books belonging to or annotated in Latin, English and Arabic by Greaves, Bernard and Hyde that are now in St John's college library and the Bodleian, and with the PI will select from them a study corpus consisting of the most richly annotated items. The RA will then work with a Latinist and Arabist, who will transcribe, transliterate and translate the Latin and Arabic annotations, on contextualising and interpreting the annotations. The RA will prepare a catalogue and index of the annotations. All of them will be recorded photographically, and a proportion will be digitised for eventual hosting by Digital.Bodleian.

The project will participate informally in existing Oxford knowledge networks, drawing on the expertise not only of Oxford librarians and book historians, but equally on that of Oxford historians of science and mathematics, in particular the curators of the 2018 Weston Library "Seeing Euclid" display, members of the St Cross Centre for the History and Philosophy of Physics (HAPP), and staff of the History of Science Museum. Members of these networks will be invited to take part in a workshop at the start of the last phase of the project, so that their critical input can inform the final formatting of the catalogue and the survey articles which will form the published report on the project (a jointly-authored survey article for a manuscript and book history journal, a survey article by the RA for a history of science journal, and a contribution to The Bodleian Library Record).

Duties

Firstly, the Research Associate will work with the PI and Oxford library staff on locating Arabic MSS and books in St John's College Library and the Bodleian Library annotated by John Greaves, Edward Bernard and Thomas Hyde, and together with the PI will select a number of them to form the corpus of the study. This will require the ability to recognise topics of importance in the history of mathematics and astronomy and more particularly in the development of Early Modern European mathematics and astronomy. Secondly, the RA will work, together with the part-time Arabic and Latin paleographers, who will also make a photographic field record of the corpus, on relating the annotations to the passages of text that they comment on, and ensuring that they are translated accurately. This will require the ability to organise teamwork. Thirdly, the RA, with the PI and advice from library staff, will develop appropriate formats and ontologies for the descriptive cataloguing of the annotations, and will choose items of especial interest for digitised archiving. This will call for the possession of or development of appropriate IT and editorial skills. Fourthly, the RA will compile the catalogue, and will be responsible for the overall evaluation and description of the significance of the project to the history of astronomy and to the uses made of Arabic books in seventeenth-century Oxford. This will require the possession of disciplinary and historical skills and the ability to communicate scholarly findings in academic English accessible both to disciplinary specialists and to intellectual historians more generally.

Principal responsibilities

1. To work with the PI on selecting the corpus, and with the PI, paleographers and library staff to develop the format of the catalogue and catalogue entries.
2. With the PI, to supervise the paleographers and ensure the accuracy of their work.
3. To interpret the corpus in its immediate textual context, and to situate it in the history of mathematics and astronomy.
4. To compile the catalogue and the digitised archive.

Further responsibilities

1. With the PI, to organise a workshop of Oxford experts to discuss the project's findings.
2. To finalise the objectives and format of the catalogue in the light of comments received at the workshop, and produce a final draft of the catalogue.
3. To write a survey article on the project for a history of science journal.
4. To co-author with the PI, or advise the PI on, a survey article on the project for a journal of book and manuscript studies.
5. With the PI, after the conclusion of the project, to correct the proofs of the catalogue.
6. In the course of the project, to be willing to deliver talks and other forms of educational outreach connected with it to College, University or school audiences in Oxford.

Selection criteria

Candidates will be assessed in relation to the following selection criteria:

ESSENTIAL

1. A doctoral degree (or be close to completion), in a relevant area of the history of Islamic mathematics and astronomy, preferably with a command of Arabic script.
2. Enthusiasm for, and commitment to, research in Arabic Book Studies and the history of European reception of Islamic Astronomy
3. Ability to situate the questions and problems addressed in seventeenth-century annotations to Arabic works on astronomy and mathematics within the general history of the disciplines.
4. Ability to work accurately and independently in the framework of the research project, and proven ability to meet targets within a timetable.
5. Ability to organise and work with a team and to organise events.
6. Excellent English communication skills, in both writing and speaking.
7. Ability to communicate academic research to a broader audience and interest in building bridges between disciplines.

DESIRABLE

1. A working knowledge of Arabic as used in historical scientific and mathematical writings.
2. English/other European-language scholarly publications.
3. Previous experience of codicology.
4. Previous experience of scholarly cataloguing, and associated IT skills.

Terms and Conditions of Employment

Salary: Appointment will be at Grade 7 of the University's salary scale, £32,817 - £40,322 per annum. The appointment will be made on the scale according to experience.

Hours of work: This is a full-time post at 35 hours per week. Normal hours of work are 8:30am – 4:30pm, with one unpaid hour for lunch. Some flexibility will be required according hours of access to Bodleian Special Collections and availability of other collaborators on the project.

Holidays: Annual leave entitlement is 30 days, to include 5 fixed days to be taken at Christmas, plus 8 public holidays. The holiday year begins on 1 January and ends on 31 December. All leave must be approved in advance.

Meals: The post holder is entitled to free meals in Hall on days they are working at the College site (except when the kitchens are closed).

Probationary and notice periods: The appointment is subject to satisfactory completion of a three-month probationary period, during which the notice period will be one month on either side.

Application procedure

There is no application form. Candidates should email the following documents **as a single pdf** to academic.vacancies@sjc.ox.ac.uk:

1. A covering letter of no more that 1-2 pages;
2. a CV with details of qualifications and experience;
3. a statement of current research interests and publications;

Candidates must also provide the names of two academic referees who should be asked to email their references to the same address. Both applications and references should reach the College no later than noon on [date]. Late applications will not be accepted.

Candidates are encouraged to include a completed equal opportunities monitoring form with their application. Your information will not form part of the selection process and will not be disclosed to the selection panel. Please send this electronically as a separate document to academic.vacancies@sjc.ox.ac.uk.

Right to work in the UK

The appointment will be subject to the provision of proof of the right to work in the UK. Applicants who would need a work visa if appointed to the post are asked to note

that under the UK's points-based migration system they will need to demonstrate that they have sufficient points, and in particular that:

(i) they have sufficient English language skills (evidenced by having passed a Secure English Language Test, or coming from a majority English-speaking country, or having taken a degree taught in English)

and

(ii) that they have sufficient funds to maintain themselves and any dependants until they receive their first salary payment.

Further information is available at: https://www.gov.uk/browse/visas-immigration/work-visas

Data protection

All data supplied by applicants will be used only for the purposes of determining their suitability for the post, and will be held in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998, General Data Protection regulations, and the College's Data Protection Policy and recruitment monitoring process.

Equal Opportunities

St John's College is committed to providing equality of opportunity and avoiding unlawful discrimination. The policy and practice of the College require that all staff are afforded equal opportunities within employment and that entry into employment with the College and progression within employment will be determined only by personal merit and the application of criteria which are related to the duties of each particular post and the relevant salary structure. In all cases the ability to perform the job will be the primary consideration. Subject to statutory provisions, no applicant or member of staff will be treated less favourably than another because of their sex, marital status, sexual orientation, racial group, age or disability.