

Old Babylonian I (A006687)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 5.0 **Study time 150 h**

Course offerings in academic year 2026-2027

A (semester 2) Dutch, English Gent

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

De Graef, Katrien LW21 lecturer-in-charge

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027

	crdts	offering
Bachelor of Arts in History	5	A
Micro-credential The Ancient Near East Unravelling	5	A
Micro-credential The Ancient Near East Unveiled	5	A
Exchange Programme History	5	A

Teaching languages

English, Dutch

Keywords

Akkadian, Old Babylonian, Cuneiform Writing

Position of the course

This introductory course provides students with a foundational, scholarly understanding of the Old Babylonian language and cuneiform writing. Old Babylonian, the South Mesopotamian dialect of Akkadian—the earliest attested Semitic language—was spoken and written during the first half of the second millennium BC. The course places special emphasis on the origins, development, and basic principles of cuneiform writing; the linguistic features of Old Babylonian within the broader evolution of Akkadian and the Semitic languages; and the cultural history of Mesopotamia during this period. Students will develop both passive (translation) and active (composition) language skills, alongside the analytical abilities, precision, and motivation essential for the academic study of Old Babylonian.

Contents

In this course, students are introduced to the grammar of Old Babylonian through theoretical lectures (lectures) and guided exercises (seminars), always approached from a scientific perspective. In addition to grammar, students acquire a basic vocabulary of approximately 300 words and a core set of around 200 cuneiform signs. With this foundation, they are able to understand and translate simple sentences and texts, both from Old Babylonian into English and vice versa. During the practical sessions, reading and recognizing cuneiform signs is systematically practiced. The course teaches students how to study a language in an insightful and structured way, with careful attention to underlying basic structures. This approach lays a solid foundation for students to independently expand their knowledge in the future.

Since Old Babylonian belongs to the Semitic language family, students are familiarized from the outset with the characteristic features of this group. Lectures provide the theoretical framework, followed by ample opportunity to actively practice the material (grammar, vocabulary, and cuneiform) during the practical sessions.

Initial competences

- goede kennis van het Engels
- algemeen inzicht in de grammatica (van het Engels)

Final competences

- 1 To have an insight into the structure of Old-Babylonian and to have a basic knowledge of morphology and syntax of Old-Babylonian.
- 2 To have an insight in the origin, evolution and use of the cuneiform writing system.
- 3 To have a grammatical knowledge of Old-Babylonian that has a strong theoretical fundament and can be put to practice.
- 4 To know the basic vocabulary of Old-Babylonian and the basic corpus of cuneiform signs.
- 5 To be able to transliterate, transcribe, analyse grammatically and translate autonomously and without help Old-Babylonian sentences and simple text in cuneiform script.

Conditions for credit contract

This course unit cannot be taken via a credit contract

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Seminar, Lecture, Independent work

Extra information on the teaching methods

- Lecture 15h: theory
- Seminar: interactive 20h: students prepare exercises and texts which are corrected in class
- Guided self-study 5h: students practise cuneiform signs and vocabulary through exercises available on an online platform
- Recordings: in principle, no lesson recordings are made available, unless requested due to exceptional circumstances and after consultation with the docent

Study material

Type: Syllabus

Name: Syllabus: Introduction to Old Babylonian

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Language : English

Available on Ufora : Yes

Type: Slides

Name: Slides: Introduction to Old Babylonian

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Language : English

Available on Ufora : Yes

Type: Reader

Name: Reader: Introduction to Old Babylonian

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Language : English

Available on Ufora : Yes

References

- Huehnergard, J. 2011: A Grammar of Akkadian (= Harvard Semitic Studies 45), Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns (3rd edition).
- von Soden, W. 1995: Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik (= AnOr 33), Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico.
- Labat, R. 2011: Manuel d'épigraphie akkadienne: Signes, Syllabaire, Idéogrammes, Paris: Geuthner.
- Borger, R. 1988: Assyrisch-babylonische Zeichenliste (= AOAT 33/33A), Kevelaer: Verlag Butzon & Bercker.

Course content-related study coaching

By using interactive teaching there is a permanent feedback and possibility to ask questions during class. Tests corrected individually help the students to assess their weaknesses and progress. After the examinations there is feedback.

Assessment moments

end-of-term assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Written assessment with open-ended questions

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Written assessment with open-ended questions

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

not applicable

Extra information on the examination methods

periodic evaluation

written examination with open questions

The written examination comprises questions concerning the basic structures, practical implementations of the grammar, a translation (Old-Babylonian – English; in transcription as well as in cuneiform writing) and a theme (English – Old-Babylonian; in transcription).

Calculation of the examination mark

- Translation and grammatical analysis Old-Babylonian – English in transcription: 50%
- Transliteration, transcription, translation and grammatical analysis Old-Babylonian – English in cuneiform writing: 25%
- Theme English – Old-Babylonian: 25%

Facilities for Working Students

Possible exemption from educational activities requiring student attendance.

Possible rescheduling of the examination to a different time in the same academic year.

Feedback can be given by email or during an appointment.