

# ARCHAEOLOGY ADMISSIONS ASSESSMENT CONTENT SPECIFICATION 2019

The Archaeology Admissions Assessment will involve reading one passage of text of around 500 words (selected from two options) and answering two related questions (chosen from a list of four questions).

You will have one hour to complete this task; you might wish to spend around a quarter of your time reading and planning and the remainder writing. The task is designed to assess comprehension and the ability to read closely, deploy arguments effectively, and write clearly –all skills which archaeologists will need to use continuously throughout their undergraduate studies.

We will be looking in answers for

- the ability to think analytically
- the ability to produce a coherent argument
- the ability to select and use evidence appropriately
- the ability to address the question directly and clearly
- precision, clarity and facility of writing under time pressure

Not all answers will demonstrate these qualities equally but the best answers will show signs of all, or nearly all, of them.

The assessment does not presume that you have encountered this material or these topics before; it is simply a self-contained exercise in reading comprehension, thinking and writing. It will be set in a way equally accessible to candidates interested in any of the various streams within the Archaeology Tripos.

## Sample Admissions Assessment, Archaeology

About 5,300 years ago, a middle-aged man traveling in the Alps finally succumbed to his injuries and died on a high mountain slope far from his village.

About 2,300 years ago, a forty-year-old woman met with a violent end, and her body was tossed into a peat bog in Denmark.

About 600 years ago in western Canada, a young man from the coastal region trekked to a high mountain pass but died before he could finish his journey.

We know about each of these individuals because their bodies were preserved through accidental means. They were not accompanied by any history, as famous leaders might have been, nor were they formally buried by others who might have added or removed bodily adornments. Instead, the stories that we can tell about these individuals are generated through the analysis of their physical remains and the objects that they had with them. They were ordinary people caught unawares, providing us with an opportunity to analyze their actions and environments through archaeological remains.

Scientists have named the first individual Ötzi and treated him as a time traveler from the Neolithic era. Along with an avuncular name and intriguing tool kit, Ötzi's continued popularity is ensured by his custom-built museum facility and a cottage industry of medical investigations that seem to produce new autopsies every few years speculating about his death from exposure, injury, or violence. Ötzi's personal history can be read at several time scales, from the structure of his bones and skin that show the accumulated aches and pains of a long hard life in the mountains, to his last few hours in which his stomach and intestines show the ingestion of several different meals.

Ötzi's New World counterpart is Kwäday Dän Ts'inchí, a frozen body found in a Canadian glacier. Graced with a name that links him to a nearby descent community, the young man's body has been studied to learn about his environment and his life. The mineral signatures of his bones and hair show that he had grown up in the coastal regions eating seafood, but in the year or so before he died, he had moved about eighty kilometers inland, where his diet had slowly changed. Still, he retained some habits from his childhood, as migrating people often do---he had two pieces of fish with him, and the hat found with his body was a style popular on the coast.

Exceptional conditions of preservation likewise have enabled us to interact with the dead woman as if on a first-name basis. We call her the Huldremose Woman, a title that reminds us of other individuals found in peat bogs, such as Tollund Man, Lindow Man, and the Windeby Girl. In those bogs, the formation of soil has preserved bodies and hairstyles as well as clothing, ornaments, and the flesh itself. The Huldremose Woman was wearing several items of clothing, including a check-pattern skirt and scarf and two skin capes, with another wool garment found nearby as well. Analyses show that the clothing was made of fibers that were not locally available and that the woman herself might have been a foreigner to the area.

In this book, I want to examine the life processes of those whose bodies have not been so fortunately preserved. The goal is to write a prehistory of ordinary people whose lives are usually traced only in the collective. The archaeological record is the result of millions of individual actions, a factor that compels us to recognize the impact of the everyday decisions made by ancient people. They were as conscious of life and death as we are, and their activities over the course of a lifetime produced the material remains that archaeologists see

today as "cultures." In their deliberate actions generated by both creativity and habituation, our most ancient ancestors embodied a history of cognitive autonomy that was the basis upon which cities, states, and empires were eventually made possible.

Monica L Smith, *A Prehistory of Ordinary People*, University of Arizona Press (2010)

Answer TWO of the following questions:

1. Why might it be important for archaeologists to tell the stories of ordinary people in the past?
2. What can archaeologists learn from exceptional finds such as Ötzi, Kwäday Dän Ts'inchí, and the Huldremose Woman?
3. In your view, does it make sense to discuss 'culture' in terms of material remains and activities from the past? Why or why not?
4. After reading this passage, what do you think should be the priorities of archaeologists who wish to communicate knowledge of the past to the general public?