

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL
DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS
MA IN CLASSICS: GUIDELINES FOR EXAMINATIONS

Preparation

The exams are based on the following reading lists:

Works in the Original Languages

Recommended Commentaries

Works in Translation

Recommended Surveys of Greek and Latin Literature

Note that all the recommended commentaries and surveys are available in the Ullman Library.

We have compiled these reading lists with three primary aims in mind.

First, the purpose of these lists is for you to consolidate your knowledge of a variety of periods, genres, and authors in Greek and Latin literature. Some of the texts are canonical and may be familiar to you already, in whole or in part. Others will be new and are there to encourage you to expand your literary horizons. The lists of works in the original and in English provide fair coverage of time periods and genres, and you should be thinking about how the texts relate to one another in terms of literary history, thematic concerns, generic expectations, and style. The list of recommended surveys in Greek and Latin literature are to help you make these connections and locate the specific texts, authors, and genres in their larger historical and cultural contexts. In working with these lists, you should also keep in mind the various ways that you can apply in practice the knowledge that you are acquiring. The MA literature exam has a fixed format (although the specific questions will vary), which we have devised to encourage you to think about the different uses to which you can put your knowledge.

A second purpose of these lists is for you to develop your skills and competence in reading substantial amounts of Greek and Latin poetry and prose independently, using commentaries, reference works, and secondary literature to solve problems, explore questions, and fill out the context for your reading of the primary texts. The lists of recommended commentaries and surveys are intended as starting points for further exploration.

Remember that you are not alone in this process. The third purpose of these lists, and the associated exams, is to encourage you to engage in conversation with department faculty about texts and topics that are close to their research and teaching interests. You should plan to consult with individual faculty at various stages in your reading – perhaps arrange a close-reading session, bring questions you have about a text or a genre, or plan to discuss an article or chapter in secondary scholarship. Conversation is an important – and fun – part of the scholarly process. We expect you to take the initiative in this. Get in touch, stay in touch, and tell us what you are reading!

We encourage you to begin thinking about the MA reading lists from your first semester of graduate studies. Plan to do some reading related to the list in each of your first two terms at UNC, and a substantial amount over the summer after your first year. The reading and work you put in will bear the most fruit if you spread it out, thinking of this as a process, instead of focusing simply on the exam itself. There will surely be some cross-fertilization between the classes and seminars you are taking and your self-directed work on the reading list.

Together, the MA reading lists and the PhD reading lists (an expansion of the MA lists) should provide ongoing structure for your independent study over the first four years of your graduate work. By the end of this process, you will have an understanding of Greek and Latin literary history in the ancient world; in-depth knowledge of the major periods, genres, and authors; an understanding of some of the methodologies of literary criticism; and much experience of reading Greek and Latin of various dialects, periods, and styles – all crucial for professional research and teaching in Classics.

Format

There are two written exams, a translation exam and a literature exam. These are taken on successive days of a weekend, normally in January of your fourth semester. You will take the exams on ‘clean’ departmental laptops with Freedom software installed and running. You are encouraged to try out the equipment in advance by using them for a practice exam. You may also petition the Director of Graduate Studies for permission to write them instead by hand. You may take the exam in any room in Murphey Hall over which the Department has control, except graduate student offices. The Student Services manager will contact you in advance about your preferences for type of computer and room. Please be aware that the noise level on the first floor of Murphey may be higher than on the second and third floors, since we have no way of knowing what events other departments might schedule in the rooms that they control.

1. Translation exam. A four-hour written exam in the same format as the diagnostic exam: four passages, one each in Greek prose, Greek poetry, Latin prose, and Latin poetry, taken from the works on the MA list of works in the original language.
2. Literature exam. A four-hour written exam consisting of three questions in the following format.

Part I: Application of Knowledge

The two questions in this part are meant to test your ability to apply your knowledge of Greek and Latin literature in specific scholarly (A) and pedagogical (B) formats. One section will focus on Greek literature and one on Latin; that is, all the options in A will deal with one language and all the options in B will deal with the other. In your responses, however, you are free to bring in the other language as relevant.

- A. Write a commentary on a passage of a text in the original language, taken from the list of works to be read in the original language. You should address the range of relevant philological, literary, stylistic and historical issues. Your commentary should attend closely to the details of the text at hand. You may also make connections with your wider reading, as appropriate. You will have a choice of two passages.
- B. Formulate and provide a model answer for an essay question on the final exam of an advanced undergraduate course on a particular author or genre. You will have a choice of three course subjects, taken from the following list. Since many of the course topics are deliberately broad, you should feel free to come up with a more specific focus and title for your course.

Homer
Hesiod and Homeric Hymns
Herodotus
5th century Greek Literature
Greek Tragedy
Greek Comedy, Old and New
Plato
Greek Oratory
Imperial Greek Literature
Greek Novel

Catullus
Catiline: Cicero and/or Sallust
Caesar
Horace
Vergil
Latin Love Poetry
Latin Literature in the Age of Augustus
Latin Literature in the Age of Nero
Roman Satire
Latin Epistolography
Latin Novel

Part II: Synthesis of Knowledge

This part is meant to test your ability to synthesize your knowledge by sketching the development and cultural significance of a genre across Greek and Latin literature as a whole. Your response will need to include substantial reference to literature in both languages. You will write a brief introduction and overview of a major genre of Greek and Latin literature, taken from the following list, and discuss its impact on our understanding of the ancient world. You will have a choice of two genres.

Epic
Lyric
Elegy
Tragedy
Comedy

Historiography
Oratory
Biography