
General Examination Procedures and Guidelines

Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity (RMA)

The general examination for students in the ancient Mediterranean subfield consists of five components. The scope of these components depends on the student's broad specialization, as explained below. Each component of the exam is designed to elicit evidence of broad knowledge of the relevant primary sources and the ability to relate those sources to important issues and themes in the study of religion in Mediterranean Antiquity. Reading lists often draw on survey seminars taught by subfield faculty, but students are asked to coordinate the specifics of their exam with the faculty member in charge, as listed below.

(1) Second Temple Literature and History

For students specializing in ancient Judaism, the exam consists of three questions. One question concerns texts from Judea/Palestine. A second question treats texts from the diaspora, primarily Egypt. The third question is developed in consultation with the student, sometimes on a topic relevant to the dissertation; it is narrower in scope than the first two questions. For students specializing in ancient Christianity, the exam typically consists of the first two questions only.

The syllabus for REL 513, Introduction to Judaism in the Greco-Roman World, provides a basic reading list for the exam.

(2) New Testament and Christian Origins (AnneMarie Luijendijk)

For students specializing in ancient Christianity, the New Testament general exam is a six-hour exam that consists of three parts: 1: A translation and exegesis of a New Testament passage, 2: An essay on the main developments in New Testament scholarship since the mid-20th century and how they impacted or changed the field. 3. A special topic, selected in consultation with the examiner. This often involves a topic of relevance for the student's prospective dissertation. The essays should engage both primary and secondary sources. Exam preparation involves selecting topics and compiling bibliographies in conversation with the examiner.

For students specializing in ancient Judaism, the New Testament exam lasts three hours and forms half of an exam; with the other half in Early Christian Literature. In conversation with the examiner,



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students select twelve broad topics in New Testament studies. Topics may include, for example, development of the New Testament canon, feminist biblical interpretation, the Gospel of Mark, the historical Jesus, Old and New perspective on Paul, the synoptic problem, textual criticism, etc. For each topic, students prepare a brief bibliography, and reflect on the state of the question in current scholarly literature and its general importance to the field, engaging with primary and secondary sources. The exam features three of the twelve topics.

(3) Early Christian Literature

The General Examination in Early Christianity consists of essays on the origins of the Christian movement, from the end of the first century through the fourth (c. 100 CE to 450 CE) in the context of central issues involved in scholarly discussion.

Since the four centuries that the exam covers include a wide range of issues, the topics for each student's exam are developed in discussion between the student and the examiner. The student prepares five to twelve specific topics that involve the history and literature of early Christianity. Most often several of these focus on issues related to the student's prospective dissertation. When preparing for the exam, the student, in conversation with the examiner, creates a bibliography of primary sources and major scholarly articles related to each topic. Proficiency in Greek and Latin is expected.

The exam consists of three to five of those topics; if more than three, the student may select three on which to write. Students specializing in the history of early Christianity take a six-hour exam; those specializing in early history of Judaism take a three-hour exam.

(4) Rabbinic Literature and Late Ancient Jewish History (Moulie Vidas)

This exam consists of essays on rabbinic literature and late ancient Jewish history, as well as an exegesis assignment for some students. The specific topics of these essays are drawn up in conversations between the student and the examiner, so students receive a list of topics in advance from which a small selection will appear on the exam itself. Questions on literature address the structure, composition, redaction, transmission, and manuscripts of the rabbinic corpus of the first millennium; questions on history normally pertain to the socio-political history of Jews in Palestine and Babylonia and connections between Jewish and non-Jewish culture in antiquity. Students are expected to provide a detailed analysis of at least two primary texts in each essay.

For students who specialize in Jewish sources, this is a six-hour exam with two essays, one on literature and one in history. Those students who do not have prior extensive experience with rabbinic sources will also be asked to provide an exegesis of a passage, drawn from a list of



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passages agreed upon by the student and the examiner. Students are expected to analyze the sources in Hebrew and Aramaic.

For students who specialize in Christian sources, this is a three-hour exam with three shorter essays, one on literature, one on history, and one on a special topic pertaining to the student's research interest to be agreed upon by the examiner and the students. Topics in the past included the material culture of Jews in late antiquity, magical texts, and sexual norms in rabbinic sources. Students are expected to have knowledge of Hebrew, but not Aramaic, for this exam.

A reading course or a series of meetings with the examiner is normally used to prepare students for the exam.

(5) External exam (faculty from Art and Archeology, Classics, History, Near Eastern Studies, other subfields in Religion – or elsewhere)

This component is intended to complete the exam by representing fields that are important for the student's teaching and research interests, but which are not represented by subfield faculty. They may pertain to any relevant aspect of the Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds (e.g., material culture, Roman political history, Sasanian texts). Students develop these exams in consultation with subfield faculty as well as the examiner, who is a faculty member from outside the subfield (and occasionally outside Princeton as needed).