

Princeton University

HONORS FACULTY MEMBERS
RECEIVING EMERITUS STATUS



May 2017

The biographical sketches were written by staff and colleagues in the departments of those honored.

CONTENTS

Faculty Members Receiving Emeritus Status 2017

Dilip J. Abreu	3
Anne Catherine Case	6
Esther da Costa Meyer	9
Benjamin A. Elman	11
Joan Stern Girgus	13
Jan T. Gross	17
Barry Leonard Jacobs	20
Robert Owen Keohane	22
Yannis George Kevrekidis	26
Daniel N. Osherson	29
Samuel George H. Philander	33
Jean-Herve Prévost	36
Mark David Rose	39
Lawrence Rosen	42
William Bailey Russel	45
George W. Scherer	48
Brent Donald Shaw	50
Arthur John Stewart Smith	54
Edwin S. Williams	57

BRENT DONALD SHAW



In 2012, Brent Shaw's book *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine*, the consummation of over thirty years' research on this region and time, won the Wallace K. Ferguson prize of the Canadian Historical Association. When congratulated on the honor, Brent replied that what made it especially gratifying was the attention it conferred on a period, late antiquity, which in the course of his scholarly lifetime had emerged from its marginal relationship to ancient history to become one of the most vibrantly studied epochs in human culture. Beyond the endemic modesty of his native Canadian prairie, his comment also hints at why Brent himself has been such a distinctive and important figure in this rediscovery. His eyes remain fixed at once on those messy particularities of the topic that make history hard to write—witness the thirty years' gestation of his magnum opus—and on the widest possible intellectual horizons, themes, problems, and epistemological challenges that matter to all historians. Brent's achievement is not only to have brought this broad and rigorous vision to the study of Roman social history, but also to have modeled an engagement with the past that always challenges readers to ask fundamentally what the study of history can accomplish.

Canada was the scene of much of Brent's academic development. He received his B.A. and M.A. from the University of Alberta and from 1977 to 1989 rose from assistant to full professor at the University of Lethbridge. The inspiration of that place makes itself felt in his other monograph *Bringing in the Sheaves*. This meditation on the harvest draws on demographics, economic history, and iconography and literature, both ancient and modern, to describe an experience that is at once vividly particular and uniquely transcendent. Its particularity comes through in the work's initial focus on the subject of a Latin inscription from North Africa, the Maktar Harvester, whose epitaph recounts his remarkable rise from agricultural labor to prosperity and public office. Its universality, though, is driven home by its final page, a photograph of Brent's mother looking up from the harvest on her brother's Alberta farm in 1939.

That fusion of the universal and the specific finds its image in Brent's own intellectual biography. For in addition to the deep spirit of locality that links his life and his work, Brent's understanding of ancient history was profoundly shaped by his graduate education at The University of Cambridge in the 1970s. There his twin mentors were appropriately Joyce Reynolds, the distinguished interpreter of Roman inscriptions (still working at 98) and Sir Moses Finley, whose applications of the methods of economic and social history transformed the study of classical antiquity. Their influence emblemizes the two poles of Brent's own approach, on the one hand his mastery of technical detail and his fascination with the real traces of the past, and on the other an insistence that the historian's inquiry must go beyond what the evidence can tell us. This is especially crucial in the the study of classical antiquity where the opportunity to leave any representation of one's life was denied to so many classes, slaves, and the poor above all, and diminished for women almost irrespective of their status. Indeed what made the project on violence in North African society so difficult was precisely Brent's awareness that those narratives that organized and made sense of violence were themselves the legacy of the forces that had prevailed by violence.

During the long production of that book, Brent made his reputation through a series of brilliant articles illuminating especially the misrepresented and underrepresented: "Bandits in the Roman Empire" (1984) revealed the alternative structures of power and violence at work off the grid of imperial authority. "The Passion of Saint Perpetua" (1993) used a late Roman martyrdom narrative to understand what Christianity meant to a teenage girl in North Africa and how her story had been systematically manipulated to serve revisionist narratives of Christian history. Brent's range of methods matches his range of subjects: a path-breaking study of Roman funerary inscriptions ("Tombstones and Roman Family Relations in the Principate: Civilians, Soldiers, and Slaves," [1984], coauthored with Richard Saller) demonstrated how demography could be combined with epigraphy to provide a vastly broader set of data for understanding the Roman family, and his topographical studies of North Africa and Asia Minor made climate and landscape much more than the stage set for the activities of bandits, nomads, and laborers. Alongside these astonishing reconstructions of new historical actors, Brent's total command of literary evidence allowed him to dismantle

some of the most cherished myths of Roman history, such as the Roman father's "power of life and death," and, most recently (and still controversially), Nero's persecution of the Christians.

The simple number of Brent's publications, totaling over one hundred articles, chapters, and reviews, provides another measure of the scope of his scholarly achievement. His book reviews often equaled the very books they treated in richness of insight and lasting importance. The prize-winning monograph that weaves together his varied interests in the North African world and the historiographies of violence reaches over 900 pages. To quote the citation from the Canadian Historical Association, "Through his masterful analysis of ancient sources, Brent reconstructs the mechanisms used by groups to delineate themselves from others, to structure their enmities, to maintain hatreds through collective memory, to ritualize violence, to control and to repress. . . . As it reconstructs colorfully and bloodily the world of early African Christians, it also considers the meaning of hatred, violence, and identity and relates them to institutionalized political structures. *Sacred Violence* is not only smart history, it is a beautifully written and well-structured text."

Brent first tested the waters of Princeton with two-year stints as a visitor in 1989 and 1995. After the second, he moved from Lethbridge to the University of Pennsylvania before returning to Princeton in 2004 as The Andrew Fleming West Professor of Classics. Beyond the milestone publication of *Sacred Violence*, during his years at Princeton, Brent has provided leadership for the Program in the Ancient World and the Center for the Study of Late Antiquity. As a graduate adviser, he has been a model of conscientiousness and dedication to the extent that, even after some very lean years on the job market for classicists, he retires with every one of his Princeton graduate advisees holding tenure-track appointments.

Herodotus, the first historian of classical antiquity, places the perpetuation of wonder at the center of his enterprise, and it may be that Brent's capacity for wonder lies at the root of his own extraordinary gifts as a historian. The range of his learning and curiosity is on display in the variety of books burdening his desk on any given day, books on peasant revolts, for instance, from Calabria to Kathmandu. Even to walk into his office is to be educated about the scope of history as a discipline. And astonishment at some new trace of the ancient past, or an anecdote about a scholar who inspires him,

can make Brent literally stop in his tracks or sit rapt on an NJ Transit train five stops beyond his destination. This perpetual fascination with the world is above all what makes Brent himself such a wonder, and a joy, to his students, friends, and colleagues.