

# Princeton University

Honors Faculty Members  
Receiving Emeritus Status



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

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# Contents



## *Faculty Members Receiving Emeritus Status*

James Alexander Boon	3
Garry Leslie Brown	7
Peter Robert Brown	10
Ronald Crosby Davidson	13
James Edward Gunn	16
Lincoln Steffens Hollister	20
Henry Stanken Horn	24
Simon Bernard Kochen	26
Burton Gordon Malkiel	29
Ricardo Emilio Piglia	32
Kenneth Steiglitz	35
Lynn Townsend White III	37

## Peter Robert Brown



Peter Brown ranks among the giants in humanistic scholarship. He is known best and will always be remembered as the creator of a field of study, late antiquity, which understands this era in its own terms, not merely as a transitional period between the classical world and the early middle ages. The character and quality of this achievement alone would set him apart from most historians, but his contributions to scholarship, as an outline of his career will show, have been far wider.

Upon receiving his B.A. in 1956 from New College, the University of Oxford, with first-class honors in modern history, he became a prize fellow and, subsequently, a research fellow at All Souls College, Oxford, a position he occupied until 1972. For the next three years he served as university reader in late Roman and Byzantine studies, also at All Souls. During this early period of his career he published his classic study of the life of Saint Augustine, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (1967), as well as a collection of articles on *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (1971). The latter appeared the same year as the epochal *World of Late Antiquity*, which did so much to inaugurate the new field of late antique studies.

It was in 1975 that Brown made his first foray into teaching in the United States, with a short visiting stint at the University of California-Berkeley. Berkeley clearly had charms. Nevertheless, in 1975 he accepted the professorship of modern history at Royal Holloway College, University of London, while also becoming head of the department. He remained at Royal Holloway from 1975 to 1977, before returning to Berkeley as a professor of history and classics in 1978, a post that he occupied formally until 1986. In 1983 he began to visit Princeton, accepting a permanent position in the fall of 1986 as the Philip and Beulah Rollins Professor of History, which he has occupied until the present.

His years at Royal Holloway College and Berkeley were marked both by the continuation of his seminal work in late antiquity, such as *The*

*Making of Late Antiquity* (1978), and the first of a number of arresting thematic studies dealing with the period between the years A.D. 200 and 1000. These included a spectacularly original investigation of *The Cult of the Saints* (1982) and a collection of articles on *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (1983).

The brilliant thematic studies continued at Princeton: *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (1988); *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (1992); *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman World* (1995); *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000* (1996; second edition, 2003); and *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (2002).

Peter Brown, the man, is more than his books and articles, of course. He has been a teacher of rare influence, supervising dissertations on ancient and medieval topics that stretch geographically from the Bay of Biscay to the Iranian highlands. His gift for languages and his capacity to inspire his students in this respect have contributed to the creation of a cadre of towering young scholars who will shape classical, late antique and medieval history for generations to come. Brown, an awe-inspiring lecturer, has brought the worlds he studies alive to countless other professional scholars, to general audiences, and to undergraduates (one thinks, with regard to the last, of his now legendary course on the “Civilization of the Early Middle Ages,” offered to hundreds of undergraduates at Princeton).

The whole list of acknowledgments of the achievement of this deeply learned and humane man are too numerous to list in a short biographical notice, but they include his election to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1978), receipt of a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellowship (1982–1987), award of the Heineken Prize (1994), and the bestowal of the Mellon Fellowship for Distinguished Achievement in the Humanities (2001). In 2008 Brown was further graced with one of the nation’s greatest honors, the Kluge Prize for Lifetime Achievement in the Study of Humanity.

Princeton University, Peter’s intellectual home for the last quarter century, has benefited enormously from his presence. Although a historian

by training and temperament, he has been among the most profound contributors to scholarly life across the campus: Hellenic studies, classics, religion, Near Eastern studies, the Program in the Ancient World, and the ongoing seminar that bears his most immediate imprint, the Group for the Study of Late Antiquity. The Department of History and the University in general, like humanistic scholarship itself, have been transformed by the presence and work of Peter Robert Lamont Brown.