

Introduction
Patterns and Paradigms in the Ancient Mediterranean
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Who are you? The question had been at the center of the crisis in African Christianity, as bishops and priests, deacons and lay persons, landowners and tenants, fishermen and money-changers, craftsmen and civil servants, and itinerant gangs of young men and women mobilized the full panoply of memory, knowledge, and emotion that guided their actions as Christians.

Brent Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine*, 771

Perhaps it is only in new Christian values emerging on the sill of Late Antiquity that we might see some of the first tentative steps toward a quality and structure of the future which most Romans of earlier ages apparently did not share.

Brent Shaw, *Did the Romans Have a Future?*, 22–23

The present volume took its inspiration from an academic conference held at Princeton University in May 2017 to mark the retirement of Professor Brent D. Shaw from the Department of Classics after a long and distinguished career as a Roman historian both in Canada and in the US. The conference, entitled *Subjects of Empire: Political and Cultural Exchange in Imperial Rome*, was very well attended by many from the East Coast and beyond. Over a day and a half colleagues, friends, and former students delivered papers and reminisced about the scholarly inspiration and personal encouragement they had received from Brent Shaw over an academic career that spanned more than forty years. Warm memories and fine tributes made for a very festive occasion, one that aimed to showcase the honoree's extensive web of international connections and his exceptionally broad range of academic interests. Brent Shaw's intellectual generosity to colleagues across the generations was much celebrated in this venue. Few scholars of antiquity have worked in so many areas or have continued to expand their intellectual horizons in the ways that Brent Shaw has done

and continues to do. Beyond the individual contributions of his many, strikingly original publications lies a pattern of consistent inquiry into new fields, fresh bodies of evidence, and novel methodologies. This pattern serves as an exemplary paradigm, especially for those just embarking on an academic career.

At the end of this volume, a bibliography of Brent Shaw's publications up to the end of 2020 illustrates his scholarly range and the development of his personal journey within a chronological framework. One may particularly note the following academic interests: ancient demography and what tools we can use to analyze it; the life cycle patterns of both men and women from various social classes; marriage as a legal, economic, and social institution; the collection, analysis, and deployment of statistical data about antiquity; the agricultural year and rhythms of traditional life on the land; brigands, bandits, rebels, and others on the margins of society; the manifold changes in religious life in late antiquity; the way violence shaped and defined religious and civil communities; an appreciation for local culture and indigenous languages in context; North Africa under the Romans; slavery and slave revolts in the ancient Mediterranean world. Brent Shaw's deep interest in the history of scholarship underpins much that he has researched and written. One may especially note his invaluable historical introduction to the revised edition of Moses Finley's *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (Princeton, 1998). Similarly, a deep appreciation for scholarship from Eastern Europe resulted in his review article "Under Russian Eyes" (*Journal of Roman Studies* 82 (1992), 216–228).

With this formidable range of interests in mind, it is salutary to note that Brent Shaw was already studying climate change and the interplay of environmental factors with human history as a graduate student in the 1970s, decades before the recent (re)discovery of this field of inquiry in ancient history. He studied maps and used them to understand the movement of peoples and of ideas. At the same time, he has explored the physical boundaries of the local and the larger world beyond the relatively circumscribed but much more densely populated urban centers of the ancient Mediterranean. His mastery of the interface between the local and the imperial across the sweep of antiquity is nowhere better on display than in his comprehensive review discussion of Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford, 2000) in the *Journal of Roman Archaeology* (2001). Brent Shaw showed a way to move beyond microecologies to include a sophisticated consideration of such key factors as the interplay of social structures within

the community and the role of religion in negotiating risk, reward, and reputation.

Perhaps most striking of all is the way in which Shaw has come up with topics to explore that no one had ever addressed in any detail before. In other words, his is truly an original mind. One need only consider a very recent article, the opening piece in the *Journal of Roman Studies* for 2019, that asks whether the Romans had a concept of future time in anything like the form in which it exists in the modern age. This fascinating question and the nuanced answer presented in the discussion are typical of Brent Shaw's oeuvre. Meanwhile, his work is cumulative even as it circles back to pick up earlier insights and approaches; in other words, it adds up to much more than the sum of its parts. As a complement to the bibliography of his publications (so far) at the end of this volume, his colleague and longtime friend Peter Brown (Philip and Beulah Rollins Professor of History Emeritus at Princeton University) has written a vivid and enthusiastic appreciation of Brent Shaw's scholarly contributions. Above all, Brown shows how the originality and rigor of Shaw's scholarship has made him an interlocutor for so many others in a wide-ranging international conversation that has shaped how we study Roman history in late antiquity and throughout the earlier imperial period.

Brent Shaw continues to challenge himself and others to recover the real-life, everyday experiences of a broad section of people from antiquity, both those inside the Roman empire and the many who lived on the margins of that society, whether in geographical or in social terms. Consequently, his view of what history should be and of how we can study the ancient world is truly inclusive and dynamic, always on the move and consistently questioning received ideas, approaches, and assumptions. In each of these instances, Brent Shaw has redefined the study of antiquity, in ways that go beyond the individual paradigm shift to a reframing of the subject itself and of the kinds of questions that can and should be asked by researchers.

The cover image for this volume was chosen as a single, vivid illustration of the types of cultural, linguistic, social, and religious themes in late antiquity that have been of central interest to Brent Shaw. It shows a famous mosaic baptismal font discovered in the early 1950s at Demna, about 7 km north of modern Kelibia (Roman Clupea, a colony founded on the site of a Carthaginian settlement that dated back to the fifth century BCE), located on the Cap Bon peninsula in northern Tunisia.¹ The font

¹ See Courtois 1956 for the original publication and Duval 1958 for further analysis. See EDCS-13500222 for photographs from different angles (www.manfredclaus.de).

now enjoys pride of place in the National Bardo Museum (Tunis), as part of the world's largest collection of Roman mosaics. This “font” is actually a pool (over 2 m in diameter) in which catechumens would be completely immersed during the baptismal rite, a ritual that took place in a dedicated, separate room that was so richly adorned with mosaics. The remarkable quality of its elaborate imagery and workmanship attests the wealth and taste of the donors and of their local community. Clupea was the seat of a bishop already in the time of Augustine. The room containing the baptismal pool is associated with the Church of St. Felix, a North African martyr who had been bishop of Thibaris. The threshold on the side of the bay over which catechumens stepped to enter the baptismal space was inscribed with the Latin words *pax*, *fides*, and *caritas*.

The pool seems to date from the late sixth century AD, the period of the Vandal kingdom in North Africa, Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica. It is remarkable both for its Latin inscription and complex iconography, each of which is strikingly well preserved. The mosaics seem to be arranged in order to shape (and hence to recall) the stages of the ritual that catechumens underwent during baptism, perhaps with the bishop as presider. Many themes traditional in Mediterranean art over the centuries have been included. Here we see fish, bees, birds, trees (fig, olive, palm, pomegranate), and bunches of grapes, in addition to a range of decorative elements. At the same time, the iconography of Christianity appears to be well developed, as is revealed by the use of the chi-rho in the shape of a cross and the alpha and omega. The four directions of the pool are marked by special panels that show a dove with an olive branch, Noah's ark, a chalice (of baptism?), and a ciborium. Themes of water and initiation appear in a specifically Christian context, but one that also references Noah as a vital ancestor in faith. The Latin inscription is also divided into four, carefully placed sections that read:

s(an)c(t)o beatissimo + Cypriano
 episcopo + antiste
 cum s(an)c(t)o Adelfio + presbitero
 huiusce + unitatis
 Aquinius et + Iuliana (uxor) eius cum
 Villa et Deog + ratias prolibus
 tessellu(m) aequo + ri peren
 ni posu + erunt

For [in honor of?] holy, most blessed Cyprian, bishop [and] overseer [or leading bishop, i.e. bishop of Carthage], with holy Adelfius, priest of this unity, Aquinius and Iuliana his [wife] with (their) children, Villa and Deogratias, placed [this] mosaic for eternal water.

The text memorializes a particularly Christian benefaction by a nuclear, family group, but one that also fits in with a long tradition of civic and religious euergetism in the Mediterranean world. Locally prominent patrons, who are not otherwise known to us, have selected the words and images carefully, even as they connect their specifically African milieu with a wider world and a long tradition of both Greek and Roman iconography and craftsmanship in mosaic art. The elaborately rounded shapes used in the pool were themselves much more challenging to create than the more usual cruciform basin.

The inscription is striking in honoring two members of the clergy, a bishop and a parish priest. The “holy and most blessed” Cyprian might be the well-attested and much celebrated martyr of Carthage, who was executed in the mid-third century. Alternatively, he may be the bishop of Clupea at the time of the dedication, since Cyprian was a common name among Christians in North Africa. Whoever he may be, he shares pride of place with “holy” Adelfius, who is presumably a friend of the family. Either Cyprian is a patron martyr memorialized in connection with this local priest and his community or the baptistry is dedicated in honor of current church leaders, who provide this ritual setting with a chronological and social context. The description of Adelfius as “priest of this unity” seems to go beyond a simple reference to the local church by invoking a “unity” that should be interpreted as Catholic rather than Arian. In other words, this appears to be a specifically Catholic and Nicene affirmation within the dominant Arian discourse of Vandal North Africa. The brilliant and beautiful baptismal pool engages our attention for so many reasons, not least in its combination of the local with the intercultural and of the familial with a broader conversation about how Christianity could and should be defined and practiced.

This collection of essays attempts to offer more than a snapshot or memento of a stimulating conference held at a particular time and in a familiar, academic context. It does not belong to the traditional genre of the *Festschrift*. Rather it aims to showcase original contributions to (at least some of) the principal areas of research in which Brent Shaw himself made pioneering interventions. Taken together, the essays map the broader contours of Shaw’s engagement across fields and disciplines, thus suggesting an intellectual landscape that stretches beyond what many ancient historians consider to be their area of expertise. The papers can also, of course, be read individually, as each has its own separate bibliography.

Beyond their distinctly individual formats and topics, these chapters illustrate three principal themes, which will be outlined briefly for

convenience in this introduction (each listed together with the most relevant chapters):

- Boundaries and networks as tools to map the human experience. This subject includes special consideration of local ecology, culture, and of life beyond the cities that our literary sources tend to focus on. (Ando, Bowersock, Conybeare, Gruen, Harper, Huebner, Noreña, Rapp, Rebillard, Vessey)
- Religious innovation inside and outside the Mediterranean world (Ando, Bowersock, Conybeare, Gruen, Harper, Huebner, Rapp, Rebillard, Vessey)
- Violence, both sanctioned and random, especially in relation to political, religious, and social change (Ando, Bowersock, Gruen, Harper)

The potentially opposing concepts of **boundaries (that divide) and networks (that connect)** speak to the ways in which the Roman world can be understood – as fragmented and local, but also, and at the same time, as an intricate web of connections, formed by shipping routes and roads, official boundaries marked by walls or designated natural features in the landscape, and political or economic interdependence.

The Roman imperial project created vast opportunities for human mobility, both forced and voluntary, accompanied by the trade goods and ideas that people carried with them along the way. Needless to say, travel and communication could be legal or illicit, official or subversive, from the center or from the periphery, or none of these. The role of the Roman army stands in the background of much of this story. Any study of Roman life, regardless of its particular focus, should ideally position itself consciously and carefully at the intersection of the micro and the macro, between the specific experience of (attested, or even imagined) individuals, who lived in a defined geographical space and at a particular historical time period, and the larger patterns created by environment, climate, and disease that shaped human societies over the long term. The lives of the vast majority of the population who lived outside the urban centers remains to be explored in much greater detail. Meanwhile, the edges of empire in themselves flourished through complex interactions across and along the various borders, only some of which were ever either static or impermeable.

Religious change, the second overarching category that unifies this volume, is an essential subject in any consideration of late antique society. The emergence of Christianity in its many forms is closely related to the way ideas and ideologies could travel freely within this peculiarly Roman

space. Religious competition in a sophisticated marketplace for different practices and beliefs operated under its own momentum and within the specific ecosystem created by local conditions. Political initiatives might try to harness these forces but were as often shaped by them as vice versa. Yet individual patterns often confound what we thought we perceived to be the case on a more general level.

The evidence for Christian practice in a papyrus letter of a member of the educated local elite from Egypt dating to the third century (*P. Bas.* 2.43, discussed by Huebner in Chapter 5) raises as many questions as it answers, about how this particular family both adopted a new faith and also practiced it locally in a community in the countryside, while continuing to participate in the traditional culture of local elites. Similarly, an understanding of the Prophet Muḥammad as teaching and preaching in an Arabian peninsula full of competing religious experts and other prophets, whether with sharply different or distinctly similar messages, opens new vistas on our understanding of religious choices and the shaping of powerful movements that changed the political landscape after the Roman empire had fallen.

Thirdly, **violence** was a constant in the ancient world, between and within communities. This volume looks beyond the formalized and sanctioned political violence of warfare waged by the state to the types of competition that employed violence in many contexts. Religious violence was common and inevitably both a cause and a result of major societal change. Economic disparities and shifts inevitably also created situations in which force became a preferred option. At the same time, more mundane, low-level violence was endemic in the countryside and along the borders in many parts of the empire. The violence resulting from poverty and disease, whether in the form of chronic illness or of particular epidemics, shaped this interconnected world and the cultural practices it produced.

Each chapter naturally intersects with several others, as this brief outline suggests. For example, Kyle Harper's discussion of the effects of pandemic disease traces a complex interdependence between the environment, evolving pathogens, and the distinctive human networks that operated within this well-developed Roman imperial ecosystem. He demonstrates how new scientific data can be combined with ancient sources to give a much fuller picture of the conditions of life in the Roman empire. His reconstruction of pathogens spreading within the particular networks created by the empire parallels the ways in which novel religious ideas (especially Christianity) traveled and found new environments in which to flourish (Éric Rebillard and Catherine Conybeare). Similarly, the violence of

provincial revolt (Erich Gruen) or of religious ferment that accompanied an emerging monotheism (Glen Bowersock) was a characteristic agent of change that shaped ancient culture, community identity, and political history. A consideration of literary sources (Mark Vessey and Catherine Conybeare) adds a vital dimension that is often lacking in conversations that focus more specifically either on the data sets used in environmental history or on the more traditional narrative of power politics. Ancient literary texts simultaneously reflected and shaped the environment and society in which they were produced, even as they gave voice to individual identities in a dynamically changing world. Similarly, the distinctly religious themes that run through most of the chapters indicate the many functions of religious authority, discourse, and innovation, which were themselves a product of the Roman Mediterranean. A particular strength of the present volume is its discussion of all three major monotheistic systems – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – against a background that still maintained deep roots in a complex polytheistic past that was not really past in many places and social contexts.

Meanwhile, early Christianity is clearly a central focus of this collection of essays. The variety of religious experiences in late antique Christianity is here traced by examining a wide range of ancient voices including a Christian family sending each other letters in Egypt, the poet and orator Ausonius in Gaul, and the spread of new religious ideas through travelers and the pious practices of laity and religious in a wide variety of communal contexts. The ways in which Augustine used his own experience of travel in the Roman world, of moving between his North African home and the empire's cultural center in Italy, provide another powerful way of analyzing networks and boundaries against the background of his own dramatic conversion to Christianity. These contributions also elucidate the nature of the sources available to us, from a striking new reading of a papyrus to a fresh analysis of the many kinds of smaller, organic communities Christians formed with each other, as they searched, together but in creative competition, for a godly way of life. At the same time, Christianity's intimate connection to Judaism was recalled and reinforced by its close relationships with the Jewish diaspora and with venerable texts like the Psalms, which were at the heart of early Christian worship, both in public and in domestic settings.

In conclusion, it is hoped that readers will use this volume to explore beyond the chapter that first caught their interest or the one that fits most closely with their existing research program. Making connections across cultures in time and space within the larger Mediterranean world produces

a kaleidoscopic picture that integrates the more specifically Roman experience with the varied life paths of so many others beyond their urban communities. The result is a dynamic and flexible interdisciplinary view of the ways in which historical time, geographical space, and (inter)disciplinary method interact to shape how research is conducted and what outcomes can be gained. I hope that the various approaches pioneered by Brent Shaw himself and by the contributors to this volume will inspire scholars to think boldly and creatively about how the history of the ancient Mediterranean can be written in the future.

Bibliography

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