

*At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on May 6, 2008, the following tribute to the life and service of the late Herbert Bloch was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.*

## **HERBERT BLOCH**

BORN: August 18, 1911

DIED: September 6, 2006

Herbert Bloch, Pope Professor of the Latin Language and Literature, *Emeritus*, died on September 6, 2006, in Cambridge. Born in Berlin on August 18, 1911, he was the elder son of Ludwig Bloch, director of the Dresdner Bank, and Alice Gutman, the bank owner's daughter, both Jews. Bloch studied ancient history, classical philology, and archaeology at the University of Berlin, which he left for Rome in 1933. His brother Egon remained and died in the Holocaust.

Bloch received his doctorate in 1935 and diploma in 1937 from the University of Rome, where he studied Roman history under Arnaldo Momigliano. Though director of Bloch's thesis, Momigliano professed that he could teach his student nothing: Bloch knew everything already. His thesis on Roman brickstamps (used by brickmakers in some of the most important monuments of Rome such as the Pantheon, and exactly dated by the year of manufacture) was written in perfect Italian, and became the foundation of a new branch of Roman archaeology.

In March 1938 Bloch's aptitudes resulted in a memorable experience. Before Chancellor Hitler paid a state visit to Rome, Mussolini planned as the tour's centerpiece a stop at the reconstructed Ara Pacis, an altar of peace completed in 9 BCE. The organizers, recognizing that their German translation of the catalog was a disaster, asked Bloch to step in. Bloch faced a choice between helping a country that had sheltered him or refusing out of distaste for one that had driven him out. He stayed up two nights running to produce a new version.

The anti-Semitic laws of late 1938 forced Bloch to leave Italy, and in 1939 he emigrated to America. George Hanfmann, the art historian and archaeologist who had been a student with him in Berlin, helped secure him a Harvard connection. Bloch was to be among the first fellows at Dumbarton Oaks, then Harvard's sole center in Washington, but when Carl Newell Jackson, Eliot Professor of Greek Literature, fell ill, John Finley, acting chair of the Department of the Classics, hired Bloch as a substitute.

Paradoxically, the war years initiated unbroken stability in Bloch's life. Naturalized in 1946, he remained deeply grateful to the United States for granting him haven. Equally strong was his resistance to intolerance or persecution. In 1954, he decided against a permanent position at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, partly out of horror that the chairman of the board of trustees testified against J. Robert Oppenheimer. In contrast, Nathan Pusey, recently appointed president of Harvard, stood up to Senator Joseph McCarthy. Fifteen years later, Bloch himself took a stand by speaking in a faculty meeting against the students who had occupied University Hall, whom he regarded as resembling Nazi youths.

Bloch taught at Harvard from 1941 to 1982, as instructor, faculty instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, professor, and Pope Professor. His teaching and research involved Greek and Roman historiography, Latin epigraphy, Roman archaeology (particularly architecture), medieval history, and medieval Latin literature. His courses advanced medieval studies especially, by inspiring students who themselves became eminent.

Bloch was both a classicist and a medievalist. As a classicist he did pioneering work on Greek and Roman historians, and also on Latin epigraphy, the study of inscribed texts that form an essential source for ancient history. As a medievalist, he is known above all for investigations, begun in 1940, on the Benedictine Abbey of Montecassino. His crowning achievement was *Monte Cassino in the Middle Ages*. This massive work, combining evidence from historical texts with insights from artworks, was immediately recognized as a monument in itself. Although uniquely his own, it also bears witness to his second wife, Ellen, who drove him to many out-of-the-way sites and took many of the photographs. Well into his eighties, Bloch also published on Peter the Deacon, who became central in Bloch's investigations into the rise of Montecassino.

In the 1970s and 1980s Bloch sparked a controversy about Montecassino that was anything but medieval, when he criticized as unnecessary and even detrimental to victory the Allied bombing of the monastery in 1944. This study caused him to be denounced in the New Zealand parliament, but he had many defenders elsewhere. His devotion to Montecassino led to an honorary degree from the University of Cassino and endeared him to the monks there.

Committed simultaneously and authoritatively to both ancient and medieval culture and not only to literature but also to history and art, Professor Bloch attained much recognition, as Guggenheim and Fulbright Fellow; member of the Institute for Advanced Study; syndic of Harvard University Press; senior fellow of the Society of Fellows; and trustee of the Loeb Classical Library. He was elected to academies and societies in the United States, Italy, Germany, and Finland. His institutional ties transcended the merely honorific. To cite two examples, Bloch served as president of both the American Philological Association and the

Fellows of the Medieval Academy. He also spent terms as Professor-in-Charge and Resident in Classical Studies at the American Academy in Rome.

This enumeration gives a glimpse of Bloch's achievements and values, but fails to capture his physical presence. Tall and lean, he had an Old World courtliness and courtesy; a captivatingly resonant, deep voice; a modesty and kindness; and a genuine interest in others that made him beloved. Beyond people was nature. During his half century or so in Belmont, he walked daily in conservation land.

Herbert Bloch is survived by his twins, Anne Bloch, of Arlington, and Mary Alice (Nini) Bloch, of Bedford, Massachusetts. They are his daughters by his first wife, Clarissa (née Holland), who died in August 1958. His second wife, Ellen (née Cohen), died in May 1987.

Respectfully submitted,

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Giles Constable  
Christopher P. Jones  
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