

Peter Brown

Philip and Beulah Rollins Professor of History at Princeton University

2011 Balzan Prize for Ancient History (The Graeco-Roman World)

For his exceptional contributions to the historical interpretation of late antiquity through highly original studies of strong impact and extraordinary influence, with works on the cult of the saints, the body and sexuality, the emergence of Christianity, and poverty and power.

Institution Administering Research Funds: Princeton University

Adviser for the Balzan General Prize Committee: Paolo Matthiae

Figures in a Landscape: Topography and Hagiography in the World of Syriac Christianity

Recent developments in the study of late antiquity has led to the inclusion of research on the great Sasanian Empire of Persia and the cultural powerhouse of a largely Syriac-speaking Christianity which stretched east of Antioch as far as the Iranian plateau, as far north as the Caucasus and as far south as Ethiopia. Syriac is the final, classical version of the Aramaic spoken by Jesus of Nazareth and a language that was spoken throughout that vital zone between the Mediterranean and Asia. The vibrant Syriac-speaking Christianity of late antiquity was represented by communities of saints and poets and the subject of a rich hagiographical tradition.

With the second half of his Balzan Prize, Peter Brown will direct an intensive study of the topography and literature of the Syriac-speaking world in late antiquity and the early middle ages, tracing its vivid figures and setting them in their own distinctive landscape.

The aim of the research project is two-fold:

1. To produce a data-base cartography of the monasteries, the centers of learning, the location of the production of manuscripts, the activities of holy persons and the cult-sites associated with their memory in the Syriac world from ancient into early modern times.
2. To encourage the publication and translation of newly-discovered or little noticed lives of the saints of the Syriac world, both in Syriac and in Christian Arabic. Such sources are of interest in their own right; but they are also invaluable sources for the topography of the regions in which they were produced.

Peter Brown will direct his research project acting with an advisory council of American and European scholars from Duke University, Beth Mardutho Syriac Institute, Piscataway, St. John's School of Theology at Collegeville, Minnesota, New York University and Georgetown University as well as from the University of Oxford and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), Paris.

The executive director will be David Michelson, University of Alabama. The research project will last approximately three years.