Memoirs of Fellows
and Corresponding Fellows of the
Medieval Academy of America

ASTRIK LADISLAS GABRIEL

On May 16, 2005, with the passing of Astrik L. Gabriel at age 97 in Dujarre House at Holy Cross College, Notre Dame, Indiana, medieval studies in North America and Europe lost one of the most prominent and memorable medieval historians.

Professor emeritus of the University of Notre Dame, where he taught from 1948 to 1973, and director of its Medieval Institute from 1953 to 1975, Astrik L. Gabriel was born into a family of French origin on December 10, 1907 at Pécs (Fünfkirchen), Hungary, in the heart of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After graduation from the Széchenyi Real-Gymnasium, summa cum laude, in 1926, he entered the Order of Canons of Prémontré and spent the next three years in its studium theologicum at Jászó, Hungary. In 1929 he matriculated at the University of Budapest, where he took courses in the history of French civilization, linguistics, and medieval history, receiving his doctorate there, summa cum laude, in 1936.

Four of his six years of doctoral study were spent in Paris as a boursier of the École pratique des hautes études (1932–36), attending lectures in Old French literature by Joseph Bédier and Gustave Cohen, in medieval history by Paul Hasard, and in medieval philosophy by Étienne Gilson, who continued to conduct seminars at the École pratique after his election to the Collège de France in 1932. Cohen’s lectures on the miracle of Theophilus may have been responsible for Canon Gabriel’s brief theatrical career with the Théophiliens theater group in which he played Saladin in a 1933 production. Gabriel’s sense of stage presence and timing of lines served him well in his professorial career, as anyone can attest who saw him lecture or enjoyed his vivid repartee at table. While in Paris he also attended seminars with Alain De Bouard in diplomacy and Charles Samaran in palaeography at the École des chartes. Samaran, who died in 1982 at the age of 102, and whose longevity Gabriel admired and aspired to match, became a lifelong friend.

Canon Gabriel began his teaching career in 1938 as the founding director of the Lycée français in the Premonstratensian Gymnasium at Gödöllö, which from 1941 on he combined with an appointment as Privatdozent and later professor at the University of Budapest. The predominant theme of his early publications was the connection of Hungary and western Europe, particularly Franco-Hungarian relations as evidenced through the activities of Hungarian students and masters at the medieval University of Paris. As Eastern Europe, including Hungary, became separated from the West through the political settlement at the end of the Second World War, Gabriel abandoned his homeland in 1947, leaving behind most of his library and research papers. Returning to Paris, he approached Étienne Gilson, through whom he found temporary refuge as a senior fellow for a three-month appointment at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto, which was extended for the academic year. At the time, according to Gilson, Gabriel was planning on embarking on a project to catalogue all the medieval manuscripts in Hungary, which would have been an enormous enterprise made even more difficult by political conditions. His research plans soon shifted. In 1948 Philip S. Moore, C.S.C., founder of the Medieval Institute at the University of Notre Dame, and Gerald B. Phelan, its first director, helped create a professorship in Old French literature and in the history of medieval education for Gabriel. In 1953 he succeeded Phelan as director of the Medieval Institute and in the same year became a naturalized citizen of the United States. His career at Notre Dame coincided
with the remarkable presidency of Theodore M. Hesburgh, whose patronage and friendship he enjoyed until his death.

Although Professor Gabriel retained his love of medieval Latin and French literature throughout life, especially Goliardic verse and the poems of François Villon, medieval universities became the central focus of his teaching and research. The following years saw a series of important articles on students in the English-German nation of the faculty of arts at Paris, as well as studies of Parisian colleges. His Student Life in Ave Maria College appeared in 1955 and was awarded the Thörlet Prize of the Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres in Paris. This was followed in 1960 by the publication of Skara House at the Mediaeval University of Paris, which surveyed as well the other Swedish collegiate foundations at Paris. Many of his articles on the University of Paris and its colleges were collected in two volumes, Garlandia (1969) and The Paris Studium: Robert of Sorbonne and His Legacy (1992). It was his intention to edit the statutes and other documents connected with Parisian colleges that Heinrich Denifle had planned as volume 2, part 2, of the Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis, but which was never realized. Toward that goal Gabriel collected on film and in files much of the documentation and visual evidence on Parisian colleges, which enriched his lectures but still remain unpublished. He did, however, edit the fifteenth-century Liber receptorum of the English-German nation at Paris, which he had begun to work on in 1954 and which appeared as a substantial volume in the Auctarium Chartulari Universitatis Parisiensis series in 1964. It was awarded the Dourlans Prize by the French Academy in the following year. As a by-product of that project, Gabriel assembled file cabinets of biographical information on fifteenth-century Parisian masters, which may eventually aid in the realization of a biographical register for the medieval University of Paris.

Gabriel never abandoned his interest in Franco-Hungarian intellectual contacts and in the broader issue of student migrations and relations between the University of Paris and universities in Hungary and eastern Europe. In addition to articles on foreign students and on migrations between Paris and the Universities of Cologne, Louvain, Kraków, and the country of Hungary, some of which were reprinted in his Paris Studium, he authored The Medieval Universities of Pecs and Pozsony (1969) and The University of Paris and Its Hungarian Students and Masters (1986).

With Joseph N. Garvin in 1953 Gabriel established the series Texts and Studies in the History of Mediaeval Education, in which works by Jerome Taylor, Loren MacKinney, Curt Bühler, and Palémon Glorieux appeared. He was also instrumental in arranging for the photographing of the manuscript collection of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan. That project, which began in 1965, brought to the Medieval Institute at Notre Dame a microfilm collection of 12,500 manuscripts, 15,000 photographs of illuminations and figures, 2,500 colored slides, and 500 Echtchromes that constitute the Frank M. Folsom Ambrosiana Microfilm and Photographic Collection. In 1966, at the request of Pope Paul VI, Gabriel was made honorary doctor of the Ambrosiana Library.

In addition to his directorship of the Medieval Institute, Gabriel spent time as visiting professor at other universities. He was three times a Fulbright Exchange Professor, first at the International University of Comparative Sciences at Luxembourg in the summer of 1958, at the University of Munich for one semester in 1962, and for one semester at the University of Paris in 1967. As a result of his stay at Luxembourg he served a term as regent of that university from 1958 to 1963. At Munich he developed a lifelong friendship with Karl Bosl that often took him to Munich in December for the celebration of their respective birthdays. He was twice a visiting member of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton (1950–51 and for the January–April term in 1980), where he associated with Erwin Panofsky and E. A. Lowe during his first residency and with Marshall Clagett and Kenneth Setton on his second visit. An inscribed photograph of Lowe was among the pictures proudly displayed in his office. He also spent an enjoyable year as the first Chauncy Stillman Professor of Roman Catholic Studies at Harvard Divinity School (1963–64).

Gabriel received many honors during his long career. In 1950 he was decorated with the title of Officier de l’Ordre des Palmes Académiques by the French government, which later made him a Chevalier (1956) and Officier (1975) of the Légion d’Honneur. In 1969 the...
Italian government honored him with the title Commendatore nell’Ordine al Merito, and in 1976 the Holy See awarded him its gold medal “Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice.” His native land, somewhat belatedly, also honored his achievements. He was awarded the George Washington Medal by the American Hungarian Foundation in 1973, and in 1982 the archbishop of Esztergom and primate of Hungary, László Cardinal Lékai, made Canon Gabriel titular provost of the Church of St. Michael the Archangel on Margaret Island in the center of Budapest. In 1992 the Republic of Hungary honored him with the Hungarian Order of Merit, and in 2003 the Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Budapest made him an honorary doctor. He was elected member of the Société de l’Histoire de France in 1956, Fellow of the Royal Historical Society in 1961, Corresponding Fellow of the French Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres in 1962, Fellow of the Medieval Academy in 1966, Corresponding Fellow of the Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften in 1972, and honorary member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1983. In 1973 he served as president of the American Catholic Historical Association.

Among his honors he was especially pleased by the festschrift entitled Studium generale that his former students dedicated to him in 1967. He was a devoted and enthusiastic teacher, and he continued his support throughout the professional careers of his former students. The old saying “progressus discipulorum est gloria magistrorum” was not only a sentiment he was fond of quoting but a maxim he took seriously. He even extended it to many younger scholars with whom he came in contact.

Provost Gabriel was buried on May 24, 2005, at Daylesford Abbey in Paoli, Pennsylvania. In the footsteps of Charles Homer Haskins, Louis John Paetow, Lynn Thorndike, and Gray C. Boyce, Gabriel will be remembered principally as the most devoted North American historian of medieval universities of his generation. He served as vice president of the International Commission for the History of Universities within the International Congress of Historical Studies from 1965 to 1974. When he took over the presidency of the commission in 1974, which he continued to lead until 1985, his energy and vision made it a more active forum for research and a stimulus for the study of universities than it had been in previous decades. One of his most lasting contributions in the area of university history was the creation of a library of books and microfilms on the subject housed at the Medieval Institute, Notre Dame, and now named in his honor. In his will he established an endowment to facilitate the use of this material by visiting scholars. He also bequeathed his personal library, which contained many incunabula and early printed books.

But beyond his many recognitions and his scholarly activity that he continued, under trying physical circumstances, until the last day of his life, he will be remembered for his wit, humor, and for his conversational observations salted with Latin, French, and German epigrams. He was truly someone who enjoyed the company of others over good food, wine, and cognac late into the evening. He understood the wish of the Archpoet: “Meum est propositum in taberna mori, ut sint vina proxima morientis ori.” And although he did not match the span of years granted to his friend Charles Samaran, whom he termed Longae-vissimus verissimus, he came admirably close to that record, both in years and achievements.

Respectfully submitted,
JAMES J. JOHN
JOHN VAN ENGEN
WILLIAM J. COURTENAY, Chair

GAVIN I. LANGMUIR

Gavin I. Langmuir, since 1994 emeritus professor of history at Stanford University, died on July 10, 2005, at the age of eighty-one. He was well known for his wide-ranging work on the legal and institutional history of France in the high Middle Ages and especially for
his pathbreaking studies on Jewish-Christian relations in medieval France and England. He was also a teacher of renown; several of his students, who have themselves made a considerable mark as professional historians, have acknowledged in public memorials their deep appreciation for the kindness their *magister* consistently showed them in graduate school and throughout their careers. And his colleagues at Stanford and in medieval studies in general attest to his encouragement of them and their work and his stimulating intellectual interactions with them over the course of his long and fruitful life.

Langmuir was born in Toronto on April 2, 1924. He served in the Royal Highland Regiment of Canada during World War II and was so badly wounded in France during the closing months of the war that his fellows took him for dead. However, he was subsequently rescued and taken to England to recuperate when their mistake was realized. The severity of the wounds led to a medical discharge and his abandonment of what until then was his desire to pursue a career in the military. This was critical, of course, to his movement toward a career in the academy, but Langmuir’s first scholarly love was diplomacy and modern diplomatic history. He attended the University of Toronto, taking his bachelor’s degree in 1948, and from there went to Harvard, but it was while attending Harvard that his interests began to shift to the Middle Ages. His dissertation, given the focus of Anglo-American research at the time he completed it (1955), dealt with aspects of English constitutional history. But in the course of his career he increasingly explored English institutional development in a comparative context—and France provided him with the fundamental comparison, as it did for so many of the giants of earlier academic generations and his own. After three years as an instructor at Harvard (1955–58), Langmuir moved to Stanford where he spent his entire career. He was elected a Fellow of the Medieval Academy in 2002.

The trenchant and provocative essay was Langmuir’s genre of choice. And especially after he began to tackle the difficult and unsettling problem of medieval anti-Judaism, his words became a clarion call to other researchers. He fundamentally transformed the field, forcing scholars to rethink the legal status of Jews in medieval Christian societies and to reassess the policies and administrative practices that principalities imposed on their Jewish populations in the Middle Ages. His original interest in diplomacy manifested itself in close study of the so-called nonretention treaties that princes negotiated with one another, making promises that they would not retain as their own property Jews fleeing from one jurisdiction to another. Langmuir also became more and more concerned about what he would later deem the irrational aspects of Christian attitudes and behavior with regard to Jews. This led him to investigate ritual murder accusations and other manifestations of Christian hatred of the Jews in medieval Europe. It also made him wonder why he had to be a kind of archaeologist of knowledge about these issues. So silent were some fields on Jewish-Christian relations at the time (constitutional history is a case in point) or so misguided in Langmuir’s view that it made him wonder about how deeply implicated historians themselves were in the production and reproduction of forms of antisemitism (he preferred that spelling to the more conventional “anti-Semitism”).

Many of Langmuir’s essays with his insights on these subjects were collected in a remarkably cogent and coherent volume published by the University of California Press in 1990, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*. Republished in this way, the essays were bound to have a considerable impact, independent of whether Langmuir published anything else. John Van Engen’s words of praise, which adorn the dust jacket of the book, rightly point out that the author’s essays revealed “an accomplished historian who has confronted honestly all the difficult methodological questions most of us silently avoid.” No serious scholar since the publication of the essays in book form has failed to do homage to the gifted and deeply humane insights of Langmuir’s work.

The same year, however, saw the appearance also from the University of California Press of *History, Religion, and Antisemitism*. The moral earnestness was the same as that in some of the historiographically oriented essays in the collected volume, but *History, Religion, and Antisemitism* attempted something more. Langmuir in this book probed the very depths of antisemitism in the Christian tradition. He employed the insights and methods of the anthropologist, social psychologist, and sociologist of religion and melded them with the best that history as a discipline has to offer in order to try to figure out why irrational
hatred of Jews persisted (and still persists) among so many Christians. In this book he ranged from the twelfth century to the twentieth.

History, Religion, and Antisemitism was not customary Langmuir. There was the usual wit, to be sure, but there was a more discursive quality to it that reviewers noted, almost as if he had to adopt a style that adequately reflected the profoundly dishheartening nature of the attitudes he was explicated. Perhaps the best word to describe it is the same one used to categorize medieval theologians’ almost obsessive efforts to extract every morsel of nouriture from the reading of the sacred text, ruminatio. The book is an extended ruminatio on the origins and persistence of antisemitism. Langmuir meant it to disturb his readers and awake them from their complacency, but he also wanted it to challenge them to come up with alternative explanations if they could not accept his. There is sometimes urgency in the prose, and there is always a little sadness that a culture as interesting and vital as the Middle Ages began to produce in an otherwise great and innovative period, the twelfth century, so odious and dangerous a phenomenon. That this phenomenon refused to die was perhaps what disturbed Gavin Langmuir, this champion of reason, most of all. His wise counsels and provocative challenges will long be missed.

Respectfully submitted,
George Hardin Brown
Ruth Mellinkoff
William Chester Jordan, Chair

Richard E. Sullivan

Richard E. Sullivan, professor emeritus of history at Michigan State University, died May 25, 2005. Born on March 27, 1921, in Doniphan, Nebraska, he attended local schools before entering the University of Nebraska, where he was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa and earned the A.B. degree with highest honors in 1942. Following service in the United States Army Air Force (1942–46), he enrolled at the University of Illinois and in three years earned the M.A. (1947) and Ph.D. (1949) degrees in medieval history with a minor in medieval literature. At Illinois he studied primarily with Charles Odegaard; his doctoral dissertation was titled “Carolingian Missionary Activity, 690–814.”

Sullivan began his career in 1949 at Northeast Missouri State College where he taught for five years before going to Michigan State in 1954. He remained there for his entire career, moving rapidly through the ranks and becoming full professor in 1961. In 1965 his university recognized his achievements with its Distinguished Faculty Award, the first time that MSU so honored a scholar in the humanities. A series of key administrative assignments followed, first as chair of the Department of History (1967–69), then as dean of the College of Arts and Letters (1970–79). Subsequently he served as acting chair of the Department of History (1981–82) and twice as acting associate provost (1982–83, 1986–87). During these twenty years of intermittent administrative duties, Sullivan sustained and excelled in his teaching responsibilities, winning the Danforth Foundation’s Harbison Distinguished Teacher Prize in 1968. Also during this period and after his retirement in 1987, he guided more than two dozen dissertations to completion. His teaching extended to audiences far beyond MSU through publications intended for the classroom. With John B. Harrison, a colleague at Michigan State, in 1960 he published A Short History of Western Civilization, which remains in print in its eighth edition (1994) as well as in two Spanish-language editions (1991, 2003). Independently, he wrote two studies intended as aids to teaching: The Coronation of Charlemagne: What Did it Signify? (1959) and the two-volume Critical Issues in History (1967). In these books Sullivan mined themes basic also to his specialist research, a concern for historiography and for the questions that the present asks of the past. Behind these classroom materials lay serious reflection on what was taught and how it was presented, reflections set forth in public lectures on teaching, the meaning of the Middle Ages, and the Western tradition collected and published in Speaking for Clio.
Sullivan’s learning probed the historical significance of the study of history itself and of changing modes of historical study. From the outset he was alert to ways in which modern scholars conceptualize the periods in which they themselves live as well as the periods they study and to how changing modern perceptions alter perceptions of the Middle Ages. He keenly realized that how historians work and the places their societies make for them and their findings are artifacts of particular cultures. This relativism inspired his efforts to test the limits of received ideas about the past’s defining characteristics.

These guiding orientations appear even in Sullivan’s earliest published articles on evangelism in the Carolingian Empire, the subject of his doctoral dissertation, articles eventually collected and published as Christian Missionary Activity in the Early Middle Ages (1994). Two early monographs explored the limits of history as artifact and marked further stages in his powers of conceptualization. His Heirs of the Roman Empire (1960) was one of the first general treatments of early-medieval history to take into account the implications of the Pirenne thesis without being taken in by the thesis itself. For Sullivan, the development of the early Middle Ages could not be considered solely in a European context. Islam and Byzantium were also heirs of Rome, without the scenario of barbarians against the empire, the framework on which Western history was generally constructed. Woven into his narrative descriptions of the three new civilizations was a challenge to traditional interpretations of cultural rupture indicated by such terms as “post-Roman,” “barbarian,” and “dark ages.” Heirs of the Roman Empire set forth the figure of a legacy transmitted, digested, and reshaped in the period from about 400 to 750 as a key to one of the most significant transitions in Mediterranean history. Today, the signature phrase “heirs of the Roman Empire” in chapter titles, subtitles, and the narrative structures of historiographical works at every level offer eloquent testimony to the convincing force of Sullivan’s argument.

With the double encouragement of a Fulbright Award and a Guggenheim Fellowship (1961–62), Sullivan was able to encounter European scholars on their own ground, in Belgium. This experience fed his effort to widen key subjects beyond the limits to which European historiography brought them between World Wars I and II. Perhaps the most dramatic departure toward a new norm came in his article on Khan Boris, a forward-looking essay that challenged the long-regnant westward orientation of Carolingian historians. Another moving of historical boundary stones characterized his next monograph, Aix-la-Chapelle in the Age of Charlemagne (1963). From Sullivan’s perspective, the city became the nodal point for a study of the network of cultures loosely called “Carolingian Europe.” A decisive feature of the landscape from Sullivan’s perspective was a triumph of the mind: a vision fashioned by the political and intellectual leaders at Aix of what society ought to be. Buttressed by enormous and detailed learning, that vision constituted a religious interpretation of human existence that remained part and parcel of European self-consciousness long after the sun set on the court school at Aix.

Richard Sullivan’s years as an emeritus professor (1987–2005) brought an abundant harvest of research, particularly on his great intellectual enthusiasm: monastic history. In 1989 he published the magisterial “The Carolingian Age: Reflections on Its Place in the History of the Middle Ages” (Speculum 64 [1989], 267–306), followed in 1995 by two provocative essays, “Factors Shaping Carolingian Studies” and “The Context of Cultural Activity in the Carolingian Age,” in “The Gentle Voices of Teachers”: Aspects of Learning in the Carolingian Age, a multiauthored volume that he also edited. His defining essay “What Was Carolingian Monasticism? The Plan of St. Gall and the History of Monasticism” (in After Rome’s Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History, 1998) is already a classic. In it Sullivan defined for the first time a new kind of monasticism, constructed in the Carolingian age, which he saw as “the decisive period in the revolutionary transition from autarchic to collectivized, socialized monasticism.”

Until the end of his life, he chiefly devoted himself to a vast work about monasticism that had occupied his attention since 1970. Happily, he was able to complete it. Indeed,
he continued adding bibliographical references even in his last months. *New Colonists in Paradise: In Search of Christian Monasticism* is a very large manuscript, 1,504 pages in all, its erudition quantifiable in 700 pages of notes, nearly half of the entire work. In these pages Sullivan reviews all the major texts of early monasticism, particularly in Egypt between 270 and 350. Through internal criticism informed by literary theory, gender theory, and the theory of intertextuality, Sullivan makes incisive, paradigm-shifting observations about the complex relationships among the fragmentarily preserved sources and strange catenae of translations. In sum, Sullivan concludes that early monasticism forged and institutionalized for the ages a new concept of what constituted the essence of the human experience. Plans are under way to publish this formidable contribution to the study of late antiquity.

It hardly needs saying, for those who knew him, that Richard Sullivan lacked the ascetic and world-rejecting ethos of the monks he studied. He sought out, delighted in, and valued the company of others as a student, a teacher, a colleague, and a friend to several generations of medievalists. A foster father of conviviality, with John Sommerfeldt and a small band of dedicated symposiast scholars, he initiated a tiny one-day conference at Western Michigan University that now has matured into the mega-phenomenon known as “Kalamazoo.” For good measure, he also assisted at the birth in 1962 of the Midwest Medieval History Conference, one of the first regional conferences devoted to the Middle Ages. On every possible occasion Sullivan encouraged the scholarship of others and refreshed his own in the give-and-take of what he never doubted were two cherished and ennobling realities: the humanist tradition and the community of scholars.


A son of the prairie, Richard Sullivan will be remembered by those who knew him for his openhanded friendship and humanity, as well as for profound and original historical works that will remain for generations to come. His family was the bright center of his life. He and his wife, Vivian, were married sixty-two years. She and a daughter died in April 2006. Two daughters survive.

Respectfully submitted,
KARL F. MORRISON
THOMAS F. X. NOBLE
JOHN J. CONTRENI, Chair

Vittore Branca

Vittore Branca was a prodigy of nature. After having taken on the United States when he was by no stretch of the imagination a young man, his visits here were marked by an iron discipline and indefatigable energy. He would start his morning calls at 7 A.M., rousing us from our slumbers for the tasks at hand; then after his appointed rounds of giving lectures or taking meetings with provosts or presidents whose institutions required his guidance, always punctuated by commotion-provoking visits to the Frick or the Morgan or other excursions that were part of an active and unceasing scholarly existence, in the evening he would outlast younger friends and colleagues in conversation and social intercourse. The balance between a genuinely outgoing and interested nature and a fierce sense of self-direction that could seem to preclude hearing others—ah, those sidewalk conver-
Vittore Branca was born on July 9, 1913, in Savona, a seaport in the northwestern Italian region of Liguria, up the coast and around the corner from Genoa. He died on May 28, 2004, in Venice, the other great historical seaport on the other coast, in which he lived most of his nearly ninety-one years. His connection to Venice was cemented by his long tenure at the cultural institution founded by Vittorio Cini in 1951 on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice: Branca was the first secretary-general of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, serving in that capacity from 1953 to 1988, as vice president from 1972 to 1995, and as president from 1995 to 1996. It is the work at the Fondazione Cini that distinguishes Branca from other great scholars. Carried on at the same time as his academic and scholarly career, his career at the Fondazione afforded Branca an outlet for his ambassadorial energies on behalf of Italian culture around the world. Vittore Branca was globalized—and actively pursued a globalized Italian culture—before the word existed.

Vittore Branca attended the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, graduating in 1935 with honors “e pubblicazione”: that is, with the right to publication of his thesis, which became his first book, Il cantare trecentesco e il Boccaccio del “Filostratto” e del “Teseida” (Florence, 1936). At the Scuola Normale he studied German with Paul Oskar Kristeller, a refugee from Germany, who became his lifelong friend and eventually a signatory of his nomination for election as a Corresponding Fellow of the Medieval Academy, an honor bestowed upon him in 1972. (Kristeller in turn was inducted into the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, founded in 1603, in 1977.) Branca’s many other honors include (and the word “include” here is not a form of exaggeration but to be taken at its most literal) the Medaglia d’Oro dei Benemeriti della Cultura, Cavaliere di Gran Croce dell’Ordine al Merito della Repubblica, Officier de la Légion d’Honneur, Fellow of the Accademia dei Lincei, and honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Branca was doctor honoris causa of the University of Budapest, New York University, the University of Bergamo, the University of Paris–Sorbonne, McGill University, and the University of Cologne.

After stints at the Universities of Florence, Rome, and Catania, Vittore Branca “was called” to the University of Padua in 1953, the same year in which he took on the duties of secretary-general of the Cini Foundation. Padua was his academic home until his retirement; he was nominated emeritus professor of the university in 1987.

Branca’s immense bibliography—itself published as a little book on the occasion of his eightieth birthday (Bibliografia degli scritti di Vittore Branca, Florence, 1994)—encompassed many authors beyond his lodestone Boccaccio. A true generalista in the old Italian style, he reviewed the works of contemporary poets (including Antonio Barolini, the father of one of the undersigned, in 1935 and 1946) and had something to say about all the classics of Italian literature. The authors and fields he held most dear, however, those that reappear throughout his bibliography from beginning to end, are St. Francis and Franciscanism, Boccaccio, Poliziano and humanist philology, the merchant writers of the Renaissance, and Alferi. The tradition of Aesopic tales and Venetian literary culture are also recurring themes. To read through Branca’s bibliography—the testament to his “grafomania” as he wrote in a personal dedication—is to stand before the opus of a man who harbored no crippling desire for perfection. We witness not a drive toward perfection (with its etymological corollary of endings and finitude) but an engine in pursuit of the accumulation of knowledge: a drive that knows no completion, because it is always focused on the continuing work, the ongoing chase.

Branca’s bibliography is less a monument made of perfectly pristine and distinct polished marble blocks than a bosky park in which over the years one can trace the growth of
various saplings into great trees. The greatest is the albero Boccaccio, but others, too—the Alfieri tree, the Cantico di Frate Sole tree—achieved marvelous girth and height. We can see Branca’s expansive sensibility reflected throughout his bibliography, but let us take as prime example the author with whom Branca is most closely intertwined, tracing only the major contributions he made to Boccaccio studies. We saw that his first book from 1936 was a Boccaccian publication; in 1939 we find Linee di una storia della critica del “Decameron” (which had appeared in a first version in 1936), which in turn led to his first edition of the Decameron (Florence, 1950–51). At the same time, 1939 was also the year in which Branca published his first editions of Boccaccio’s Rime, Amorosa Visione, and Caccia di Diana; he would publish subsequent editions of the Rime in 1958, 1980, and 1992, of the Amorosa Visione in 1944 and 1974, and of the Caccia di Diana in 1958 and 1967. A new edition of the Decameron would see the light in 1960, followed in 1976 by the “Edizione critica secondo l’autografo hamiltoniano” published by the Accademia della Crusca; the text of this edition was reproduced in Branca’s Mondadori edition of the same year, his Einaudi edition of 1980, his Mondadori edition of 1985, and his Einaudi edition of 1992.

 Literary and historical studies depend on the citation of an authoritative text and the commentary that accompanies it. Vittore Branca was one of the last of an age of heroic philologists who were able to put their imprints on major authors; we cannot access Giovanni Boccaccio without passing through the turnstile of VB. Alongside the editions are the works of erudition and interpretation that buttress the editions: the collection of essays that became Boccaccio medievale (Florence, 1956), amplified and reprinted many times and in many languages, and the Profilo biografico di Giovanni Boccaccio (Milan, 1967), with a new edition as Giovanni Boccaccio: Profilo biografico (Florence, 1977). The work never stood still: Branca was a restless man, always moving and thinking, and we can see the great Boccaccio tree put out a new shoot late in his life with the first installment of the Boccaccio visualizzato project in 1985. This international team effort was led by Branca to the eventual outcome of a mighty set of three tomes published by Einaudi in 1999 with the title Boccaccio visualizzato: Narrare per parole e per immagini fra medioevo e Rinascimento.

 Once his scholarly reputation was established, Branca allowed his outreach-oriented nature more scope on the scholarly side of his ledger. Long before Boccaccio visualizzato, he demonstrated his leadership in founding the journal Studi sul Boccaccio in 1963 and in creating the Mondadori series Tutte le Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio (Milan, 1964–98). Branca liked collaborating with his friends, and his bibliography bears witness to his friendship with two of the three signers of this document: Victoria Kirkham was a key collaborator in Boccaccio visualizzato, dating back to the first installment of the project in Studi sul Boccaccio 1985, and Robert Hollander spearheaded a translation of the Amorosa Visione with an introduction by Branca (Hanover, N.H., 1986).

 In 1987 Branca published a memoir of his youth in the anti-Fascist resistance movement, while he was based in Florence, Ponte Santa Trinita: Per amore di libertà, per amore di verità (Venice, 1987). To read this remarkable testament of an activist scholar during the war years is to be constantly reminded of the practical and public dimensions of scholarship for Vittore Branca. In his telling of the story of the birth of the cultural and political journal Il Ponte, of which he was a founder, in the winter of 1944–45, we discern the lineaments of a scholar’s activism. The journal was intended to redeem Italy from the cultural rubble that surrounded Italians like the material detritus left by the war, and literary culture was a primary means of redemption. The journal’s publisher, Le Monnier, assumed responsibility in part to redeem itself from some Fascist connections (“presso l’editore Le Monnier che, anche per redimersi da trascorsi fascisti, aveva assunto l’impresa” [Ponte Santa Trinita, p. 48]), and philology became a tool both heuristic and redemptive. Thus Branca wrote of the literary criticism published in Il Ponte that it is “rivendicazione della storia letteraria come storia di una civiltà spirituale e della filologia come riscatto dalle varie critiche di vetro” (Ponte Santa Trinita, p. 51). We get an insight into Branca’s lifelong cultivation of Alfieri, whom he mentioned as one of the Italian authors who stands for liberty and speaks
to conscience: "Le storie di Fra Michele e di Pietro Paolo Boscoli e delle loro morti per la libertà, i testi di Alfieri, Beccaria, Mazzini e anche quelli antichi di Luciano e Svetonio (presentati da Bianchi Bandinelli e da Marchesi) parlavano con voce chiara alle coscienze" (Ponte Santa Trinita, p. 46).

The subtitle of Ponte Santa Trinita: Per amore di libertà, per amore di verità speaks to the driving passions of Branca’s life, passions given precise focus in the brief author’s biography on the book’s back cover, which notes that Branca’s historical and philological labors culminated in the “identificazione dell’ultima e fino allora sconosciuta opera del Poliziano e dell’autografo del Decameron.” The chase for something new, never before discovered—the “novum aliquid atque intentatum” of De vulgari eloquentia 2.13.13—

was the great motivator, as Branca himself tells us in the conclusion to Ponte Santa Trinita, entitled “Un sogno,” where he dreams that he discovered the greatest of missing autographs—an autograph in Dante’s hand: “Quel Graal non mai raggiunto, sempre sfuggito alle inchieste più accanite, è sotto i miei occhi. Mi trovo di fronte al massimo autografo della nostra letteratura” (p. 199).

Vittore Branca dreamed big dreams, and he lived a big life. He was always on the lookout for something new and interesting, and he himself was consistently interested in the best of whatever was to be found, whatever its origins. In his quest for excellence he was not in the least bit deterred by accidents like gender or nationality. While (as late as the 1980s) other Italian scholars were still responding to female American Italianists dismissively, Branca was generous in his support. He was, as editor-in-chief of Studi sul Boccaccio and then also of Lettere Italiane, determined to get his hands on what he thought was the highest-quality work. By the same token, although he was a great barone and power broker, he was motivated, in the words of his memoir’s subtitle, by a true scholar’s “love of the truth.” One of his last editorial decisions was to accept for Lettere Italiane an article by one of the undersigned that challenges the edition of Dante’s lyrics of Branca’s old friend Domenico De Robertis. In a letter of February 3, 2004, he speaks of his esteem and friendship for his old friend but never wavers on the question of publication.

In that same letter Branca wrote, “Noi ‘ti diamo avanti’ con fatica da novantunenne” as he moved into his concluding salutations. But then, after the signature, comes his true signature move: a P.S. that signals that the weariness of ninety-some years has not diminished his eagerness in the pursuit of knowledge and dialogue, which is ongoing. Another great verse from Inferno 26—“per seguir virtute e cansocenza” (line 120)—comes to mind as one reads the postscriptum. He poses a question, turning the reader from confidante into interlocutor and researcher: “Hai visto se in America, a parte Houston su Speculum, altri ha parlato dei volumi sulla doppia redazione del Decameron?”

A routine check into this query during the composition of this memoir produced startling confirmation of Branca’s interconnectedness with the world around him. Speculum’s editors at first had trouble finding the review by Jason M. Houston of Branca’s Il capolavoro del Boccaccio e due diverse redazioni because they confined their search to volumes that appeared in Branca’s lifetime, while Houston’s review ran in the October 2004 issue (which did appear in October 2004), long after Branca’s death in May of that year (and even longer after he penned the query in February of 2004). However, the typescript was received by July 2003, so it would have been possible for Branca to have known about it, and indeed Professor Houston has confirmed that he was in communication with Branca in May 2003 and that he mentioned the review at that time. The providential set of circumstances that allowed for the reconstruction of this little history has resulted in a gift, a precious posthumous glimpse of the quintessential Vittore Branca: always in the know, always one step ahead. Of course, he would know about a review before it had even gone to the typesetter!

This is Vittore Branca as we have loved him, and as we shall always remember him.

Respectfully submitted,
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Raymond Klibansky, Corresponding Fellow of the Medieval Academy (1980), professor of philosophy at McGill University (1946–75), and Fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford (1976–2005), died in Montreal on August 9, 2005, just short of his hundredth birthday. An internationally acclaimed authority on the Platonic tradition in the medieval West, he was the last of a cadre of European scholars who, fleeing Fascism and Nazism, did so much to enrich medieval studies in Britain and North America in the twentieth century. Klibansky’s scholarship displayed profound originality as well as erudition from his earliest years. Educated in a setting in which sharp lines were drawn between historical periods, disciplines, and schools of national philosophy, he was, from the beginning of his career, a proponent of interdisciplinary study, historical continuities, and the transtemporal and transnational character of philosophy. These early convictions were reinforced by the historical vicissitudes of his times and of his own life. They informed the distinctive and influential reading of the Platonic tradition that medievalists hail as his most signal scholarly contribution.

Born in Paris on October 15, 1905, Klibansky spent his first nine years there owing to his father’s profession as agent for a family firm of Frankfurt wine merchants. At the outbreak of World War I in 1914 the family returned to Frankfurt, and Klibansky first attended its Goethe-Gymnasium. In 1920 he persuaded his parents to enroll him in the progressive Odenwald School near Heidelberg. Unusual for its time and place, Odenwald was coeducational, taught modern as well as classical languages, and stressed participatory governance and the self-motivation of students. Klibansky later attributed his solid command of Greek and Latin to the Goethe-Gymnasium and his lifelong dedication to democracy, individual rights, and personal responsibility to Odenwald.

In 1921 Klibansky began his pursuit of higher education at the University of Heidelberg. The professor there whom he found the most inspiring for his critique of Neo-Kantianism based on the insights of psychology and nascent existentialism was Karl Jaspers, although Klibansky earned his doctorate in philosophy (1928) under Ernst Hoffmann, completing his Habilitation and becoming a Privatdozent at Heidelberg in 1931. Circumstances prevented the publication of Klibansky’s Habilitationsschrift. But parts of his doctoral dissertation, on Charrtrain Platonism, later appeared as “Standing on the Shoulders of Giants,” Isis 26 (1936) and “The School of Charrtrain,” in Twelfth-Century Europe and the Foundations of Modern Europe, ed. Marshall Clagett et al. (1966). As did many German students, Klibansky spent time at other universities before completing his degree. He studied for six months in 1924 with the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies at Kiel. Much more important was his acceptance of Ernst Cassirer’s invitation to Hamburg in 1926. While Klibansky was not a supporter of Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms, his first publication, on Charles de Bovelles’s De sapiente, was included as an appendix in the first edition of Cassirer’s Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance (1927). Cassirer also introduced him to Aby Warburg and Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, art historians attached to the famed Warburg Library. Klibansky read Panofsky and Saxl’s study of the iconography of Dürer’s Melencolia (1923) and criticized its authors forthrightly for their underestimation of the importance, and diversity, of the philosophical, theological, and medical traditions on melancholy. Impressed by the young scholar’s learning, Panofsky and Saxl invited Klibansky to collaborate with them on a revised edition. Much delayed owing to Panofsky’s move to the United States, the emigration of Saxl and Klibansky to England, and Saxl’s death in 1948, Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Religion, Art, and Natural Philosophy did not see the light until 1964. Translated into French, German, Italian, Spanish, Romanian, and Japanese, this book is still in print in more than one of those languages and remains one of the most widely read and influential of Klibansky’s scholarly publications.

While still working on his doctorate, Klibansky produced another study that was to make him the catalyst of one of the twentieth century’s most important editorial projects in the history of medieval thought. In 1927 he discovered an unknown Latin version of...
Proclus’s commentary on Plato’s Parmenides, publishing it in the Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften (1929). On the strength of this momentous find and his thesis on Charrain Platonism, he persuaded the Akademie der Wissenschaften to undertake a complete edition of the works of Nicholas of Cusa. Klibansky also edited Cusa’s sermons (1929) and, with Ernst Hoffman, the De docta ignorantia (1932) in this series, later contributing, with Hildebrand Bascour, O.S.B, the De pace fidei (1956; 2nd ed. 1970; reprint 1977). As the moving spirit behind this major enterprise, Klibansky had the satisfaction of seeing it brought to a successful conclusion almost eighty years later; on February 11–12, 2005, the Akademie der Wissenschaften held a symposium celebrating the publication of the final volume of the Cusa edition.

Another late-medieval thinker influenced by Platonism in whom Klibansky took an early interest was Meister Eckhart. At the time, Eckhart was intriguing to scholars seeking the roots of a German national philosophy. At first, Klibansky shared that concern, viewing medieval Platonists as possible forerunners of Hegel. He published two volumes in an edition of Eckhart’s Latin works projected by the Dominicans of Santa Sabina, Super oratione dominica (1934) and, with Antoine Dondaine, O.P., the Quaestiones Parisenses (1936). In studying the latter work, Klibansky recognized that Eckhart had belonged to an international scholastic milieu and that his philosophy was not reducible to a specifically German outlook. A rival Eckhart publication series was initiated concurrently by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. In Klibansky’s view, its editors sought to hijack the enterprise, equating “German” with “National Socialist.” Political barriers now obstructed Klibansky’s access to manuscript collections and effectively terminated his association with this project.

Since Klibansky was Jewish, the rise of the Nazis to power in 1933 also terminated the German chapter of his career. Before making his own escape to England by way of the Netherlands, Klibansky went to Hamburg, where he persuaded the Warburg family and Saxl, now director of the Warburg Library, to transfer it to England. Klibansky was instrumental in this relocation, and in the establishment of the Warburg Institute at the University of London, where it has had a significant impact on intellectual history and the history of art that continues to this day. In 1934 Klibansky became an honorary lecturer at King’s College London; a member of the Warburg Institute; and a lecturer in philosophy at Oriel College, Oxford. In 1938 he became a British citizen. When World War II broke out, he was recruited to British military intelligence with the rank of colonel, working in the German and later Italian divisions of intelligence. Despite his pressing military duties, Klibansky was able to maintain a remarkable amount of scholarly activity during the war years. As general editor, he launched the Corpus Platonicum Medii Aevi, published by the Warburg Institute under the auspices of the British Academy. This series published four volumes of the Plato Latinus (1940, 1950, 1953, 1962 [2nd ed. of the last volume 1973]) and three of the Plato Arabus (1943, 1952, 1961). For the series Klibansky also edited with Carlotta Labowsky a full version of the Proclus commentary on the Parmenides first discovered in 1927. With Richard W. Hunt he coedited the journal Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies (1941–56). And, on the eve of the war, he published The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition (1939, revised ed. 1956, 1981, 1982), one of his most important and enduring studies, mapping the field he had prospected to date and indicating paths for other researchers. Demobilized in 1946, he returned to his position at Oriel College, but not for long. He was offered the directorship of the Warburg Institute, declining it to accept instead a call to Canada, a country he had never visited, but where he was to spend most of the rest of his working life and to acquire a new citizenship in 1954.

From the start of his career Klibansky had been drawn to the Platonic tradition. Over the years, his approach to that tradition reflected both continuities and discontinuities. Originally, he had three main goals, one of which he later abandoned. First, he sought to show that Platonism had really existed in the Latin Middle Ages; Europe had not had to wait until the Renaissance for its revival. Second, he argued, medieval Platonism had had a real history. In contrast to the Quellenforschung of classicists or the topos research of an Ernst Robert Curtius, he emphasized the importance of the historical contexts and historical uses of Platonism as a far from monolithic tradition. With increasingly well sub-
stated reasons, Klibansky retained these scholarly objectives throughout his career. At the same time, he dropped the quest for the origins of a specifically German philosophy in ancient and medieval Platonism. Other motives suggested the study of these thinkers, beyond the clarification of the historical record. Klibansky found in medieval Platonism a mode of thought that could recognize the limits of reason while also enabling human minds to verify extramental realities, including suprarational objects of knowledge. While Klibansky’s own research showed that the Platonic tradition undergirded enterprises as diverse as mysticism and the commitment to a scientific understanding of the cosmos, the Platonicizing figures on whom he lavished his particular scholarly care held these additional attractions for him.

This fact may raise a question in the minds of observers concerning a major new direction taken by Klibansky’s work following his move in 1946 to Montreal to teach at McGill University and, from 1947, the Université de Montréal and its Institut des études médiévales. Although he had already begun to make this move with an edition of the letters of Leibniz (1941), from 1954 onward Klibansky published numerous editions, translations, and studies of Spinoza, Hume, and especially Locke. In Klibansky’s view, what links these early-modern philosophers to each other and to Platonism is their common concern for toleration, individual rights, and intellectual freedom. As the ideologies and persecutions of the mid-century dictators gave way to those of the Cold War era, these values, for Klibansky, continued to require a robust rationale and defense. Also, in the face of those despairing of a meaningful intellectual life in the post-Holocaust and post-Hiroshima world, he saw in all of these philosophers grounds for hope in the human capacity for good and in the possibility of transcending vicious passions and the libido dominandi. He held that it is the noblest task of philosophy to inform and to energize these innate human potentialities. Klibansky argued for these values widely and tirelessly in his teaching, his scholarship, and his leadership in numerous professional organizations seeking cooperation within the scholarly community. These include but are by no means limited to the Canadian Society for the History and Philosophy of Science, the Société internationale pour l'étude de philosophie médiévale, and the Institut internationale de philosophie over which he presided, working energetically for the free and rational exchange of ideas across national and ideological boundaries. In one of his most recent works, La philosophie en Europe (1993), Klibansky argues the case for philosophy in the late twentieth century as a means of transcending frontiers of all kinds; in effect, it is the intellectual correlative of the emerging European Union.

The many honors recognizing Klibansky’s scholarly distinction have likewise been international. Twice the recipient of fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, he held medals from the Universities of Louvain and Liège and honorary degrees from Ottawa and Bologna. Aside from our own Academy, he was elected a fellow of eight other such bodies ranging from Canada to Athens to Genoa to Heidelberg to London to Paris to Rome and to Tehran. In Italy he received the Nonnino Prize and in Germany the Lessing Prize, as well as the Grand Cross of the Order of German Merit, the highest honor accorded to a civilian by the German Federal Republic. No fewer than seven festschriften or commemorative volumes of essays were dedicated to him between 1975 and 2000. These well-earned honors eloquently bespeak the rich and enduring legacy of Raymond Klibansky and his pathbreaking and deeply humane contributions to our understanding of medieval Platonism and to the wider intellectual life of his times.

A full bibliography of Klibansky’s publications and works about him can be found in Martin Thurner, “Raymond Klibansky,” American Cusanus Society Newsletter 21/2 (December 2004). An appreciation of Klibansky as scholar and citizen can be found in Stéphane Baillargeon, “Mort d’un géant,” Le devoir, August 9, 2005.

Respectfully submitted,

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