

In memoriam

Frank Metlar “Mike” Clover



Frank. M. Clover, or “Mike” as he always was known, died in Madison, Wisconsin, on Saturday July 13, 2019, after a very brief illness. He was born on May 5, 1940, in Denver, Colorado. He received his BA from the University of Wisconsin in 1962, his MA from the University of Chicago in 1964, and a PhD in Classics, also from Chicago, in 1966, where he wrote a dissertation entitled “Geiseric the Statesman: A Study of Vandal Foreign Policy” under the direction of Stewart Oost. Immediately afterward he was hired to teach Roman history at the University of Wisconsin as the colleague of Charles Edson; two years later in 1968, he also received a joint appointment in Classics. He was promoted to Associate Professor in 1971 and Full Professor in 1978, from which position he retired in 2000.

Along with the de rigueur big undergraduate lectures on “The Ancient Near East and Greece” and “Ancient Rome,” Mike particularly enjoyed teaching a class of his own design, “The Rise of Barbarian Europe,” which manifested his personal interest in the barbarian successors of the Roman Empire. Mike was a true believer in audience participation. I particularly recall the time when he had his undergrads put on a performance of Aristophanes’ comedy “The Congresswomen.” Let’s just say that the costumes were a hoot and it was a truly wonderful learning experience.

For many of us, however, Mike was at his best as a graduate instructor. The 1970s were the glory years for Mike’s Late Antiquity program, with a gaggle of PhD students in the history department including Tom Barcz, Doug Burgess, Mohammed Jerary, Stuart Karren, Ralph Mathisen, Gerry Max, and Ron Weber, along with Classics students such as Jeff Buller, Kathy Grogan, Joel Relihan, Avery and Carl Springer, and Susan Stevens. On Wednesday afternoons we would assemble in Mr. Edson’s study for one of Mike’s

seminars, on topics ranging from hagiography, to Ammianus, to the *Historia Augusta*, to prosopography. Mike supervised many PhD's, several of whom went on to hold university positions, including Hal Drake (1970) (UCSB), Gerry Max (1975), David Barry (1976), Mohammed Jerary (1976) (Libyan Cultural Center), Stewart Karren (1978), Ralph Mathisen (1979) (Univ. of Illinois), Ron Weber (1983) (UTEP), Doug Burgess (1985) (ETSU), Gary Reger (1987) (Trinity College), Jeffrey Lerner (1993) (Wake Forest), Vincent Burns (1994), and John Shean (1998) (CUNY), not to mention Bob Cromey (1973) (VCU) and Clifford "C.J." Dull (1975), who had Mr. Edson as their dissertation adviser but did much of their work with Mike. Meanwhile, in 1976, Mr. Edson was succeeded as historian of ancient Greece by Ken Sacks, who had just received a PhD from Berkeley and fit right in to the Wisconsin regime; he remained a close colleague of Mike's until he departed for Brown University in 1995.

Mike's main book publication, which remains the standard work on the topic, was *Flavius Merobaudes: A Translation and Historical Commentary* (1971), dealing with a Frankish barbarian who participated fully in Roman literary culture. Throughout his career, Mike continued working on his beloved Vandals book project. But stuff kept getting in the way. Mike never saw an interesting topic that he didn't want to pursue. So the book project was a constant presence in the background while he pursued a multitude of other topics, many of them related to the whole can of worms involving the *Historia Augusta*, with studies on Commodus the poet, Olympiodorus of Thebes, an *epithalamium* on the emperor Gallienus, and the *Latin Anthology*. At the same time, he continued to churn out smaller, more discrete, studies on the Vandals, which in 1993 coalesced into an edited volume, *The Late Roman West and the Vandals*. Mike already had edited another volume, *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, in 1989.

Following his retirement, Mike continued his scholarly endeavors. Every year, we could expect to receive from him a survey of all the latest Late Antiquity bibliography, and he never was too busy to referee submissions to the *Journal of Late Antiquity*. In sum, with 52 entries in "Regesta imperii," the standard Literature Database for the Middle Ages, and 27 in *L'année philologique*, the standard Classical Bibliography, Mike bridged the gap between the ancient and Medieval worlds, and was one of the prime movers in the development of an entirely new period of history, "Late Antiquity."

Mike was a regular participant at conferences and research centers. Not many academics are able to give effective extemporaneous presentations, but Mike was the exception. His conference papers were a marvel to behold, always extemporaneous and usually based on a small selection of texts or images that were impeccably described and analyzed. His off-campus appointments saw him as a Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton (1973-1974), a Fellow at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington (1982-1983), a Fellow at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Society (1991 and 1994), and a Visiting Scholar at the Univ. of Arizona (1999). His other awards included an ACLS Fellowship (1973-1974). In professional organizations, Mike served as Chair of the Committee on Ancient History of the American Philological Association (1995-1996), but his most stellar activity involved the Byzantine Studies Conference. After helping to get it off the ground in 1975, he served as Vice President and then had two terms as President (1983-1985), an

office in which he was followed by his students Susan Stevens (1995-1996) and Ralph Mathisen (1997-1998), creating quite a late antique dynasty. Later in life, Mike became a bit reluctant to travel, often as a result of health concerns. But occasionally, persistent colleagues and friends were able to prevail upon him to go off on an excursion, as when, seen here, he was lured to the University of Illinois in 2010 by a Late Antiquity symposium in his honor.



On a personal level, Mike always went by the moniker “Mike,” never by that other name. Based on his middle initial “M,” I’m sure most of us thought that his middle name must be “Michael.” Wrong. It was Metlar. Where the “Mike” came from, I have no idea. He had several favorite locutions. His standard greeting to his grad students was, “Hiya, tiger!” His typical response after receiving a dissertation chapter or draft of an article was “Full steam ahead!” When

confronted by disappointment, he would blurt out, “Nuts!” And one might want to ask Hal Drake why, for 50 years, he signed his letters and emails, “Enchiladas forever!”

Mike’s sweet demeanor left a broad circle of those whose lives he touched, and he was one of the most tolerant, obliging, and understanding individuals one could ever get to know. In the fall of 1968, soon after he’d begun teaching at Wisconsin, Mike got a baptism by fire in the first meeting of his Survey of Roman History class. A group of anti-war protestors tried to hijack the class and turn it into a discussion of the war. Mike, always tolerant and accommodating, was prepared to discuss the matter, but the students were having none of it. Shouting out “keep it the way it is!”, the class took a vote. And yes, the vast majority of students preferred to “keep it the way it is.”

Mike made everyone feel welcome and valued. For some reason, he attracted grad students who stuttered – I can think of several, present company included. We sensed in him a kindred spirit and felt right at home. And he and his wife Dottie were greatly valued for welcoming the spouses of his grad students into the fold. Mike’s wry folksy humor was legendary. He was a wonderful raconteur, especially if there was beer on tap. On one occasion when a grad student asked for advice about how to write a travel grant, he replied that once when he wanted to visit North Africa, “All I wanted to do was look around. So I said I wanted to make a topographical survey.” And it worked.

Working with Mike, one never felt any pressure to produce. That dissertation could take as long as it needed! Mike was not going to bug you about it. At the same time, though, Mike implicitly believed in his students, and had faith that they would do well. I was a bit daunted when he suggested that I, a callow grad student barely in his third year, submit an abstract for the first Byzantine Studies Conference. My initial response was “no way.” But his gentle encouragement overcame my doubts, and I trust I didn’t disappoint.

Anyone who knew Mike was aware of his great devotion to his family, as attested by his lengthy Christmas updates – which usually arrived the following July, and were full of family activities and achievements of which he was inordinately proud. In 1965 Mike married Dorothy Helen Wagner, who died in 1992. He is survived by two sons of this union, Charles, born in 1968, and his wife Rachel, and Walter, born in 1972, and his wife Belita; also by his grandchildren Jaya Clover, Helena Clover Santos, and Cameron Clover Santos; by his sister and brother-in-law Judy and Tom Bullington; and by his partner Eileen Cumming and her daughter Heather Cumming and husband Topher, and their children Griffin and Isabel.

His family requests that memorial donations be directed to the University of Wisconsin Foundation and marked for the History Department at UW Madison in the name of Dorothy Wagner Clover, or to the First Congregational Church in Madison. A Memorial Service will be held at 6 p.m. on Monday, July 22nd in the Chapel at the First Congregational Church, 1609 University Avenue.

Macte virtute Mike, parens karissime atque amantissime!

Ralph Mathisen, with contributions from the family and friends of Mike