

For Love of the Past and Present

University Professor Herbert Mason celebrated voices of the ancient and modern worlds | BY JESSICA ULLIAN

of a Purple Heart, he was a combat correspondent for the marines. After the war, he was the Latin America bureau chief for what would become *U.S. News & World Report*, and later was transferred to Paris, according to the *New York Times*.

In the early 1950s, Redmont was subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee to testify in one of the trials of William Remington, a Commerce Department official accused of being a Communist. After his refusal to name Remington a Communist cost him his job at *U.S. News*, he remained on the McCarthy-era blacklist for a full decade, and no American news outlet would hire him.

Claude Erbsen, a retired Associated Press vice president and director of world services, describes Redmont as “a man of absolute and unflinching integrity, which cost him dearly in the McCarthy era.”

Redmont worked for Agence France-Press, the Canadian Broadcasting Company, and as Paris bureau chief for Westinghouse Broadcasting Company (Group W). It was there that he broke the story that the North Vietnamese were willing to hold peace talks with the United States. He later received an Overseas Press Club Award for Best Radio Reporting from Abroad. He also worked at CBS News in Moscow and Paris before joining the BU faculty.

He was born Bernard Sidney Rothenberg. He earned an undergraduate degree from the City College of New York and a master's degree from Columbia University's school of journalism.

Those who knew Herbert Mason by reputation saw his retelling of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in verse narrative, a finalist for a National Book Award in 1972, as evidence of his interest in ancient religion. His students and friends knew there was more to his appreciation of the ancient Mesopotamian narrative: its enduring celebration of friendship.

Mason, the William Goodwin Aurelio Professor of History and Religious Thought, a University Professor emeritus of history and religion, and a College of Arts & Sciences professor of history and religion, died on January 1, 2017, at age 84. Over decades at Boston University, he taught courses on subjects ranging from Sufism to Irish history, infusing his scholarly expertise with anecdotes and wisdom he'd gleaned from long relationships with collaborators and mentors. Such connections shaped his life and career and formed his abiding belief that the voices of the past were instrumental in understanding it.

“He believed history needed to be taught with the stories of the people who lived at that time,” says his wife, Jeanine Young-Mason (SON'74, SED'82). “It is the person's voice that's the real history.”

Mason's early life was largely shaped at age seven by his father's sudden death—a loss that forever linked him with the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a narrative that



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centers on a quest to conquer death in the name of love. After reading in English and French literatures, history, and philosophy as an undergraduate at Harvard, he moved to France, where an acquaintance introduced him to the great scholar of Islam Louis Massignon. Mason recounted their first meeting in his 1988 book about their relationship, *Memoir of a Friend*:

“He was standing upon my entering his study, but he

then sat down at his desk, on which there was a small typewriter and sheets of paper scattered about along with a book open on which he had been making notes with a pen still held in his left hand. ‘Yvonne tells me you are interested in Gilgamesh,’ he said in English.

‘Yes,’ I said shyly.

‘He went on a long journey in search of the secret of immortality to bring his friend Enkidu back to life.’

I said nothing but stared at him and waited for him to say more.

‘Eternal love is to be wrung from our inmost heart. I learned that fifty-one years ago when I lost a friend to death.’

I sat still staring at his parched lined face and sad eyes as he pointed slowly with his now empty left hand toward the window or to some place beyond.”

Mason left France determined to translate into English Massignon's best-known work, a four-volume history of the 10th-century Muslim martyr Mansur al-Hallaj. He returned to Harvard to pursue a master's in Middle East studies and a doctorate in Near Eastern languages and literatures, and began a translation process that would last 13 years.

The friendship between the two scholars proved formative; just as Mason had sat, rapt, with Massignon, listening to his mentor expound on the life of al-Hallaj, countless students found themselves seeking out Mason after class to hear him talk about Massignon and the rare texts Mason had studied for the translation, published in 1982 as *The Passion of al-Hallaj*.

"He was a fantastic storyteller," says Christian Krokus, a University of Scranton associate professor of theology and religious studies, who was a PhD student at Boston College when he chose to write his dissertation under Mason's supervision at the University. "Just a font of a rich context for the academic texts. I'd say, 'Have you ever read this,' and inevitably, he'd not only read it, but knew the author personally."

His work was constantly enriched by people he met by chance—from the Italian artist Dino Cavallari, who became a close friend and collaborator on an illustrated version of *Gilgamesh*, to his wife, whom he met during her graduate studies at BU's School of Education. He listened as often as he spoke and enjoyed celebrating the expertise of his students and colleagues.

Betty Anderson, a CAS associate professor of history and director of the Institute for the Study of Muslim Societies & Civilizations at BU's Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies (Mason was founder and director of the institute), recalls that he was unflinching in his support of her and other scholars of Islam across the University and dogged in his efforts to bring them together for interdisciplinary studies. In his seminars, he remained quiet while urging his undergraduate students to debate the material.

"It was an awakening for me to discover how to justify my beliefs, and I took that skill with me to law school," says criminal defense attorney Sarah Peerwani (CAS'08). "He got me ready for the real world."

Mason wrote every day, producing five translations, four volumes of poetry, two memoirs, and eight works of fiction, two of them set for posthumous publication. In recent years, he switched from keeping bound journals to writing a blog on his website, www.herbertwmason.com, where he posted short biographical and creative sketches. In a 2016 entry, he considered Massignon's theory of *Badaliya*, or exchange, as represented in the way individuals form connections that are strong, unselfish, and enduring:

"One is given a self, one is driven to create a second self, and finally one is called to exchange oneself with another who is suffering physically, spiritually. For the third self one takes on the other's suffering self. The first self is given by nature, the second by will and creativeness, the third by love."

ENG's Carlo De Luca Was a "World-Leading Innovator"

CARLO J. DE LUCA, 72, a College of Engineering professor emeritus of biomedical engineering and of electrical and computer engineering, died on July 20, 2016.

Before he joined the BU faculty in 1984, De Luca had been a faculty member at MIT, Harvard Medical School, and Queen's University. He was also a School of Medicine research professor of neurology and a Sargent College of Health & Rehabilitation Sciences professor of physical therapy. De Luca, who earned a doctorate from Queen's University, served as ENG dean ad interim from 1986 to 1989. He played a leading role in ENG's early development as a research institution.

Kenneth Lutchen, dean of ENG, points to De Luca's impact on the college's early efforts to establish a research portfolio. "Carlo was the director of the NeuroMuscular Research Center and was probably the first real star research faculty recruited to the College of Engineering," he says. "His reputation helped attract some of the leading faculty thereafter. Our standards of excellence as a research college perhaps started with Carlo."

De Luca is known for introducing engineering principles to the field of electromyography, a diagnostic procedure that records electrical activity in muscle tissue. He founded Delsys, Inc., in 1993, a company that produces wearable sensors for movement technology. He was its president and CEO until his death.

"Carlo De Luca was a world-leading innovator in using engineering methods to study human motor function," says John White, an ENG professor and chair of biomedical engineering. "Many of the text-



Carlo J. De Luca