Introduction

Women, Gender, Law, and Remembering Shona Kelly Wray

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In the last 30 years the focus of medieval scholars has turned increasingly to nontraditional subjects, especially to women, children, and marginalized others in medieval society. I am proud to say that this journal has contributed to these new debates and explorations, notably in special issues in 2004 and 2016.¹ In examining formerly invisible “Others,” medievalists have changed the discourse of the past to one that is both more inclusive and more equivocal: no longer can the certainties that shaped, for example, the nineteenth century’s view of the past as populated by public males and private females, and energized by the confident triumphalism of Western Christianity, be maintained. Organizations such as the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship and the Gender and Medieval Studies (GMS) Group have been at the forefront of promoting discourses of difference in the medievalist community. Indeed, the annual conferences sponsored by GSM have served as meeting places for junior and senior scholars from all over the world to engage in conversation, encouragement, and advocacy for continuing to challenge traditional and male-dominated perspectives of the past. Publications coming out of the GSM conferences, including the special issue of *HR/RH* in spring 2016, which features articles developed from papers presented at the University of Winchester in January 2014, have brought the presentations and discussions of the group into wider focus.²

This special issue combines articles derived from the same GSM conference held at Winchester in January 2014—this time focusing on issues of women, gender, and law—and articles derived from a meeting of the Mid-America Medieval Association (MAMA) held at the University of Missouri–Kansas City (UMKC) in April 2013, which was dedicated to the memory of the late Shona Kelly Wray, associate professor of history at UMKC, whose untimely and tragic death had occurred in the previous May. This combined special issue encapsulates both the tremendous range of topics, sources, and methodologies now being developed by medieval scholars who focus on

gender and also the tremendous range of scholarly interests embodied by Shona herself.

Shona died during her year as a Robert Lehman Fellow at Harvard University's Villa I Tatti in Florence. She was working on a project about the households of professors at the University of Bologna in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with particular attention to the women, children, and servants who populated them. Shona's work focused on a variety of different themes, but all coalesced in late medieval Bologna: she looked at women and families in the city during the Black Death, at the effects of plague on the city's composition, and at the legal texts and study of law that made its university famous.³ She had joined the editorial board of *HR/RH* in 2010, and she and I were planning on collaborating on a special issue once she had completed her year's leave in Florence. Her death precluded our collaboration, but I like to think that the collection of articles in this issue would have been the kinds of scholarship she would have welcomed in a special issue to which she had contributed.

The articles in this issue are organized in roughly chronological order as well as thematically. Although only one, by Stanley Chojnacki, who was the plenary speaker at MAMA in 2013, focuses on Italy, the Mediterranean world is well-represented by articles about the Byzantine Empire by Ecatarina Lung and Niki Megalommati, the kingdom of Portugal by Miriam Shadis, and the county of Barcelona by Mireia Comas-Via. Articles focusing on law—a significant component of Shona's own research—include those by Megalommati, Teresa Phipps, and Comas-Via. Intensive research in archives, which factored into Shona's methodologies, is a feature of articles by Amy Livingstone, Phipps, Shadis, and Chojnacki. Livingstone and Nina Verbanaz both explore the relationship between women and the church as patrons and participants, an issue that certainly informed Shona's work on medieval Bologna. Verbanaz also won the Jim Falls Prize for best graduate student paper at the 2013 MAMA conference.

Thus, the articles in this collection, even if written by scholars most of whom were not closely associated with Shona Kelly Wray, all embody the values, issues, and interests of Shona as a historian and as a teacher of history. They also speak to the vibrant and stimulating range of current scholarship on gender and women in medieval studies today and to the discursive nature of the field: the historians included in this issue do not limit their conversations to colleagues with similar geographical or methodological interests. Indeed, conferences focusing on women and gender often operate as passages between regions that had previously been isolated or siloed because the issues surrounding medieval women's experiences and agency can be discussed across the medieval world in ways that traditional historians have often eschewed. We all have benefited from conversations that reveal the consistencies in women's experiences while at the same time demonstrating that differences in time, location, and social status could affect their lives just as profoundly. I believe that Shona would have found the discourse among

the articles in this special issue particularly intriguing, and I am glad that I can honor her memory with such a fine collection of scholarship on subjects she loved and valued.

Notes

1. Linda E. Mitchell, ed., “Historical Guineveres and Literary Eleanors: ‘Narrativizing’ Medieval Women’s Lives,” special issue, *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 30, no. 1 (2004); Katherine Weikert and Elena Woodacre, eds., “Gender and Status in the Medieval World,” special issue, *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 42, no. 1 (2016).
2. Other publications that have come out of GMS conferences include: Elizabeth Coz, Liz Herbery McAvoy, and Roberta Magnani, eds., *Reconsidering Gender, Time and Memory in Medieval Culture* (Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2015); Cordelia Beattie and Kirsten A. Fenton, eds., *Intersections of Religion, Gender and Ethnicity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Emma Campbell and Robert Mills, eds., *Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality and Sight in Medieval Text and Image* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); and Diane Watt, ed., *Medieval Women in their Communities* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997).
3. Shona’s publications include *Communities and Crisis: Bologna During the Black Death* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), and Jutta Sperling and Shona Kelly Wray, eds., *Across the Religious Divide: Women, Property, and Law in the Wider Mediterranean, ca. 1300–1800* (New York: Routledge, 2011).