Medicine and Law: The Confluence of Art and Science in the Middle Ages

Wendy J. Turner and Sara M. Butler

In the thirteenth-century, the faculties of Law and of Medicine at the University of Bologna became rivals, but rivals with an unusual relationship. The Law faculty had its own college, while the Medicine faculty belonged to the College of Arts. When the School of Law settled in its own discrete area of town away from the Arts’ faculties, the topography of the medieval city defined and propagated this division. By 1319, both Medicine and Law faculties had their own set of institutional rules governing all aspects of their lives, including training and salaries, teaching and curriculum, textbooks and teaching methodologies, research and intellectual scholarship, and examinations. Regulations of this genre were typical in the highly structured and hierarchical institutions that medieval universities had become. The Medicine faculty’s rising social status, along with their rules of conduct quite distinct from other Arts’ faculties, propelled them into a surprisingly congenial alliance with the Law faculty over the course of the next century.

A study of the lives of the faculty members of Law and Medicine was to be Shona Kelly Wray’s next project.1 She was working on an analysis of

---

the evolving relationship between these two groups of professionals in fourteenth-century Bologna as an essay for this volume. Wray was in Italy on a Villa I Tatti fellowship from the Harvard University Center for Renaissance Studies when she collapsed from an aneurism and went into cardiac arrest. Her work on law and medicine in medieval Bologna remains unfinished. Yet, even the remnants of her notes and thoughts embody what we intended for this volume: a closer examination of the interaction between the disciplines and professions of law and medicine in both theory and practice. Wray's career in history exemplifies the aims of this book. Her unending curiosity and bold disregard for traditional historical boundaries prompted new ways of looking at historical questions. As Eric Dursteler remarks in his Renaissance Quarterly review of Across the Religious Divide: Women, Property, and Law in the Wider Mediterranean ca. 1300–1800 (co-edited with Jutta Sperling), Wray shone the spotlight on subjects typically overlooked by others in her field. Describing it as an "important book," Dursteler writes, "While probably no topic has attracted greater attention from scholars in the past four decades, the study of gender in the Mediterranean has lagged conspicuously, particularly in comparison to the rich literature on the Atlantic world." Across the Religious Divide has garnered much praise for breaking new ground methodologically: "until quite recently, most studies have focused either on the Braudelian question of the unity of the Mediterranean and its viability as a category of analysis, or on some localized sliver with little reference to the wider whole." Across the Religious Divide instead "attempts to bridge these two modes... by focusing on numerous local cases, but placing them in an expansive regional context." Wray's eagerness to champion history heretofore neglected, and to explore new historical territory is what this book hopes to achieve in examining intersections of law and medicine.


2 For a summary of her career and achievements, see Roisin Coisar, "In Memoriam: Shona Kelly Wray," in The Medieval Review 12.06.22: https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/handle/2022/3631.


4 Dursteler, review, 1325.