

# BACK THEN, WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT?

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**T**he fierce constraints placed by the round table format governing the time allotted each speaker means that I will have to move in an extremely superficial fashion over the very significant body of scholarship produced by Susan Mosher Stuard through the decades. A rather jejune summation and appreciation of her important contributions on medieval Ragusa, on slavery in the late medieval Mediterranean, and on fashion in late medieval and Renaissance Italy is far less than the tribute she deserves, especially as this work was done while she was simultaneously devoting so much time and energy to her other professional career as an evangelist of women's history and of women as historians—the aspects of her career that I know best and will primarily focus on in these comments. But let me say, as someone who does not work on the Mediterranean and who knows it in considerable part from reading what Professor Stuard herself has written, I think of her contributions as mediating some middle ground from which she conducts (as concert master) the various melodies of R. S. Lopez, Fernand Braudel, David Herlihy, and Norbert Elias (among others), and all successfully handled with the aid of someone like Eileen Power or Natalie Zemon Davis providing harmony in the background. For me at least, Sue Stuard has brought the east coast of the Adriatic into the historiography of medieval Italy—and always with an eye for dissimilarities and variations as well as for the obvious parallels and analogies. No mean feat, in a crowded field, and even more so given the other agenda whose call she heeded from the early days of her career.

As best I can recall, I first met Susan Mosher Stuard when Helen Lemay and I ran a one-day conference at Stony Brook in the late 1970s. Sue arrived with a box of her still-hot-off-the-press *Women in Medieval Society* (1976). “Wow,” I thought, “this blows my mind,” to revert to the elegant language we are apt to

use to indicate serious enthusiasm. I know of no earlier collection of papers on women's history, and that fact that many of them (seven of the nine authors, counting Suzanne Wemple and Jo Ann McNamara as one joint author) were by women was even more impressive. This collection caught the first wave of an exciting and just-emerging field; except for David Herlihy's 1962 paper on "Land, Family, and Women in Continental Europe, 701-1200," they were all from the 1970s; five of them appeared now as very fresh reprints, the other four as *de novo* publications, written for the occasion. Clearly, they were not just old classics, or long-forgotten papers, or even first-rate papers written on all sorts of topics by authors who happened to be women. They were very much the real McCoy and the new McCoy.

In so far as we can talk of a collection of miscellaneous papers as a classic, we have one here; still in print, still, no doubt, helping Sue and her family to stave off the wolf at the door. The success and acclaim of this book must have inspired its editor to devote herself to what I think of as her dual role—like Luke writing his version of a gospel and then stepping back to write *Acts of the Apostles*—"doing" women's history as a scholar and simultaneously preaching the good news about (other) women who were writing women's history. We can see this endeavor in a whole series of publications, what I think of as SMS Enterprises, Inc. The best known products, beyond that 1976 path breaker, would seem to be *Women in Medieval History and Historiography* (1987) and her role as a co-editor of the second edition of *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (1987); she also figures as an author in each effort. But beyond these books there is a good deal more, some of it along these same lines, some branching out considerably.

In 1983, thanks to a grant from the Fund for Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) and working with the late Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Sue Stuard wrote a booklet (soft covers, plastic spiral binder), *Restoring Women to History: Materials for Western Civilization*. This is a guide for the perplexed—that is, the perplexed instructor, female or male, who asks, "how can I add a feminist component to Western Civilization?" The endeavor

seems to be heavily influenced by that famous question posed by Joan Kelly: was there an Athenian cultural breakthrough for women, as well? Was there a Roman imperial expansion for women, as well? Was there a Carolingian renaissance for women, as well? And so forth. To reinforce the intellectual and political clout of its “add women and stir” approach, it offers extensive bibliographies that amplify the essays or the running commentaries on “how to do it.” The whole affair is well designed to bring home a realization of how myopic was the politically-oriented, male-focused narrative that passed as the hegemonic voice in virtually every classroom some 25 years ago. As I have indicated, Susan went to great lengths to practice as well as to preach—and this is above and beyond that Mediterranean scholarship that I have touched in passing.

If the publications I have mentioned are her basic ones—those on which her reputation as an evangelist has been built, in good part, and from which much of her influence as a mentor and inspiring leader have sprung—they are not quite the whole story. It may take some work to find her “A New Dimension? North American Scholars Contribute Their Perspective” in the proceedings of a conference at SUNY Binghamton, *Medievalism in American Culture* (edited by Bernard Rosenthal and Paul Szarmach), but it is another piece of considerable interest. Further versatility shows in her co-edited volume, *Witnesses for Change: Quaker Women over Three Centuries* (1989), where she also appears as an author, dealing with dissenting (and trouble-making) women of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Furthermore, and not necessarily the least just because I mention it at the end, in a discussion of Sue’s contributions to the profession we should note that for years she represented the Medieval Academy of America at the annual meeting of the American Council of Learned Societies. This entails reporting back to the Academy regarding many things: the politics of academia, scholarly dealings with the federal government and its myriad agencies, the currents and trends within the disciplines and the various learned societies, and endless threats to scholarly funding as well as to intellectual and academic freedom. She

carried out this assignment with her usual conscientious application and, to the pleasure of those who heard her reports to the MAA, without the flamboyance some of her predecessors thought to be integral to the task.

To conclude: to receive the sort of affectionate praise that Sue Stuard is now having heaped upon her is not meant simply to embarrass her, though that has its reward. One does not come in for this sort of celebratory occasion unless one can meet three criteria. One is that one has to be a very good professional—a first rate historian. Secondly, one has to have made an impact on the profession beyond that swathe cut by one’s publications, through service to the profession, through being a role model as a teacher and mentor, through being a scholar whose work (and whose career) has served as a guiding light for those who have followed, especially in fields other than those of the honoree’s special expertise. And lastly, one has to be a great colleague and friend. One of my favorite lines in *Beowulf* runs to the effect of “he slew not his hearth companions while drunk.” I don’t think Sue Stuard went for any of her hearth companions, drunk or sober. We know that in large part because so many are here today, ready, willing, and eager to testify to her generosity, her intellectual acumen, her leadership, and her “niceness.”

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