

A LOOK AT THE LIFE AND WORK OF SYLVIA L THRUPP
(1903-1997), MEDIEVAL HISTORIAN AND SOCIAL SCIENTIST
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At the 2004 meeting of the Medieval Academy, we presented a session on the life and work of Sylvia Thrupp. We read more casual versions of our papers, and the panel, chaired by Judith Bennett (who read Diane Owen Hughes' paper in her absence), also included talks about Thrupp from two of her doctoral students from Michigan, Barbara Hanawalt and Elaine Clark, plus a paper by Hughes about *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (Hughes now being a member of that editorial board).

We were moved to pay this belated tribute to Sylvia Thrupp because we were deeply impressed by the amazing lifespan of her ground-breaking monograph on London (*The Merchant Class of Medieval London: 1300-1500*), published in 1948, by the way she became an innovator in the 1950s of the development of social and interdisciplinary history, and by the way she weathered the slings and arrow of academic

misogyny without losing sight of her own goals and projects. We have tried to trace her life and work from her birth in England in 1903 to 1960-61, when she went from Chicago to Michigan and began to gain wider recognition as an important figure in medieval history and American social science. Caroline Barron has looked at Thrupp's life into the 1940s, and Joel Rosenthal picks up the tale with her appointment at the University of Chicago in 1946. Though by the end of her life she was a Fellow of the Medieval Academy and of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the recipient of a lifetime award for scholarly achievement from the American Historical Association, such recognition was a long time coming.

As a fellow of the Medieval Academy, Thrupp received tribute in a memorial notice (*Speculum* 75(2000): 778-9) written by Giles Constable, Barbara Hanawalt, and

Edward Peters. Shortly after her retirement, her Michigan colleagues presented her with a volume of her own collected papers: *Society and History: Essays by Sylvia L. Thrupp*, ed., Raymond Grew and Nicholas H. Steneck, and with an exhaustive bibliography which we reprint below with a few additions (University of Michigan Press, 1977). Sylvia Thrupp was not accorded the honor or recognition of an entry in *Women Medievalists and the Academy*, ed. Jane Chance (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005). However, a session at the 41st International Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo, May 2006, was sponsored by the Medieval Midwest History Conference in her memory.

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“The smell of profit is a
pleasing one
Whose sure appeal many
men acclaim;
To gather riches most go
on the game,
For men who want a boy
will pay for fun.”

— Ganymede to Helen in the
anonymous, 12th-century Latin
poem “Ganymede and Helen”
(edited and translated by
Stephen Coote)

