

# Ancient Women Mathematicians

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INVIDI Technologies Corporation

Impact of Women Mathematicians on Research and Education in  
Mathematics, March 16-18, 2018

# Outline

- 1 Introduction
  - Ancient Mathematicians
- 2 Hypatia of Alexandria
  - Hypatia's Backstory
  - Who Was Hypatia as a Person?
  - Hypatia's Contribution
- 3 Theano
  - Theano's Backstory
  - The Story of an Ancient Power Couple
  - Theano's Contribution

# Great Mathematicians

- Everyone knows that history's great mathematicians were all men.
- The book [Men of Mathematics](#), by E.T. Bell in 1937.
  - BUT EVERYBODY IS WRONG.
- Revolutionary contributions of women in computation, geometry, decision theory, mathematics, abstract algebra and etc.

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# Women Mathematicians at Men age

History remembers the names of the women who made significant advances in ancient eras.

- Hypatia of Alexandria, the daughter of Theon, a mathematician and Philosopher.
- Theano, the wife of the Greek mathematician and philosopher Pythagoras.

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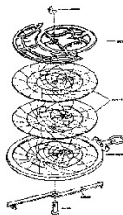
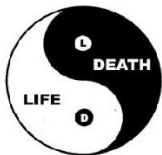
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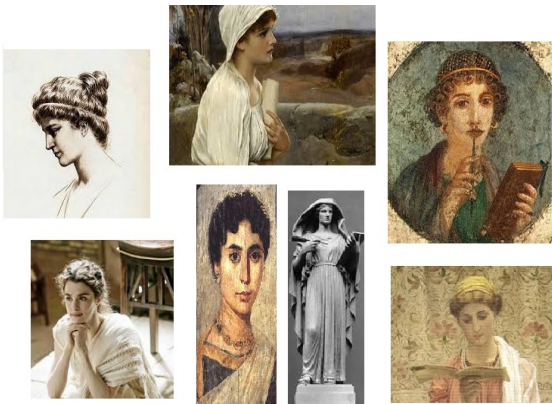
# Who was Hypatia?

## Backstory



# Hypatia

She was born between 350 A.D- 370 A.D in the city of Alexandria.  
The same city that was built and named after Alexander the Great.



# Alexandria

- Alexandria was known as the center of knowledge and education.
- Still many believed that women are intelligently inferior to men.
- Hypatia was raised above this due to the guidance and teaching of his father Theon.













# Theon of Alexandria

- Theon, Hypatia's father was born some time between 340 A.D to 365 A.D
- He was a mathematician, astronomer and member of museum (library of Alexandria).
- He was one of the most educated person in Alexandria.
- Because of him Hypatia got education in many subjects such as art, literature, science, religion and philosophy.





# Education

- Hypatia gained most of her education in Alexandria.
- Spent some time attending school in Athens.
  - Got a fame as a mathematician.
- Hypatia was a great teacher so that people all around the world came to Alexandria to just attend her lectures.
- At core she was a world leading mathematician, astronomer and philosopher.

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# Who Was Hypatia as a Person?

Hypatia was described as generous and honorable with a radiant personality.

**"... self-possession of manner, which she had acquired in consequence of the cultivation of her mind... on account of her extraordinary dignity and virtue"**

**-Socrates**

- Much 'iconised' as a martyr for:
  - women intellectuals
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# Who Was Hypatia as a Peron?

- Hypatia was Pagan and Neo-Platonist in a highly diverse city.
- Around 400 A.D, she became the head of Platonist school where she imparted the knowledge of Plato and Aristotle to pupils included Pagans, Christians and Jews.
- After Rome state religion declared to be Christianity, religious confrontations were growing in frequency and Hypatia's class was not excluded either.

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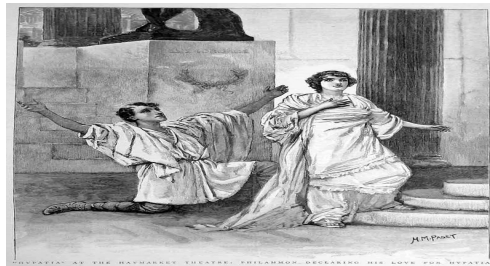
# Orestes

- Alexandria was ruled by a Roman Perfect named Orestes, a Pagan like Hypatia.
- As a pagan, Orestes was an adversary of new Christian bishop, Cyril.
- He vigorously objected to Cyril's expulsion of the Jews from the city.



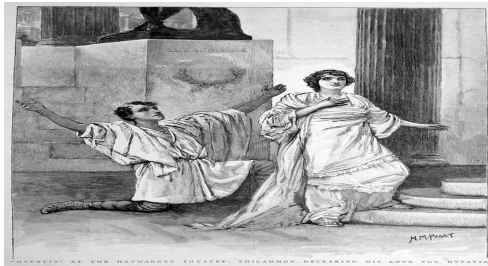
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## Orestes and Cyril

- Prefect Orestes enjoyed the political backing of Hypatia.
- Several Christians thought that Hypatia's influence had caused Orestes to reject all re-conciliatory offerings by Cyril.
- Cyril recognized Hypatia as a threat for the authority and plotted against her.
  - As a woman who represented heretical teachings, including experimental science and pagan religion, she made an easy target.

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# Hypatia's Death

- On March 415 A.D, the monks of Cyril attacked Hypatia returning home.
- Dragged her from the carriage, took her to the church, Casesareum, where they stripped her and then murdered her with tiles.
- After tearing her body in pieces they burnt her limb by limb.





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- Either way her life was taken too early where she still had much more to give.
- With Hypatia out of the way Orestes resigned shortly after and allowing Cyril to gain total authority of Alexandria.



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# Hypatia's Contribution

- Hypatia is given credit for inventing **Astrolabe**,
  - A device being used to measure star positions relative to earth as well as to purify water.
- She wrote several papers in philosophy and astronomy, however, only fragment of those writing still exist today.

## Hypatia's Mathematical Work

Edition of Ptolemy's *Almagest*

Commentary on Apollonius' *Conics*

Commentary on *The Astronomical Canon*

Commentary on Diophantus' *Arithmetica*



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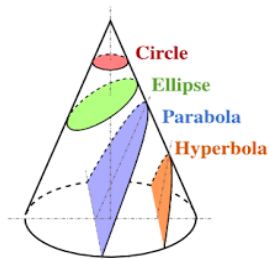
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- **Commentary Ptolemy's Almagest:** The Almagest is the Ptolemy's version of the solar system and its motion. This commentary was written by Hypatia's father with her help.
- **Commentary on Apollonius' Conics:** Conic is the introductory of property of a cone and conic sections.



# Hypatia's Contribution

- **Commentary on The Astronomical Canon:** It is argued whether it was an addition of Ptolemy's Handy Tables or commentary Ptolemy's Almagest.
- **Commentary on Diophantus' Arithmetica:** The Arithmetica is a collection of algebraic and number theory problems along with their solutions.

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# Theano

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- Traditionally she is known as Theano of Croton.
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- Theano's father was a member of a religious group focused on the cult of Osiris.
- This group believed in reincarnation, and it is known that the Pythagoreans were inspired by their philosophy as well.
- Theano was said by many to have been the wife of Pythagoras.
- Researchers still cannot pinpoint what her role was in Pythagoras' research.
- The famed mathematician and philosopher is known for his great theories, but did he accomplish his work on his own, or did Theano has a part to play in his discoveries as well?

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- Pythagoras was born on the island of Samos (582 – 500 BC), near the coast of Asia Minor.
- Pythagoras founded a school of philosophy, Pythagoras School.
- Married Theano, a woman with an unusual intellect, extraordinary skills.



<sup>1</sup>Pythagoreans celebrate sunrise by Fyodor Bronnikov. ( Public Domain )

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# The Story of an Ancient Power Couple

- Theano and Pythagoras had five children, two sons and three daughters.
- One of the sons was named Telauges and their daughters were named Damo, Myria and Arginote. The name of the second son has been forgotten over the years.



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- **Damo** is especially remembered for protecting her father's writings and the texts of other philosophers.
- Damo was a physician, who followed her research and debated with Europhon.
- Theano and Damo discovered that a fetus is only able to survive after seven months of pregnancy.



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# Theano – A Woman Who Ruled the Pythagoras School

- Theano ran the Pythagorean school following her husband's death.
- Pythagoras's academy accepted men and women on an equal basis.
- It is believed that at least 28 women studied at the school.



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# Theano's Contribution

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- According to reports saved in historical writings, Theano was an author of
  - Cosmology
  - The Theorem of the Golden Mean
  - The Theory of Numbers
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- It describes the irrational number that appears in many aspects of nature.
- Theano also created a theory about the universe and ten concentric spheres: the Sun, the Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury, Earth, Counter-Earth, and the stars. She believed that the stars were unable to move.

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# Theano's Last Days

- Offshoots of the Pythagorean academy continued for some 200 years after its founder's death.
- For centuries, historians underestimated the role of women in ancient science.
- However, the history of the school of Pythagoras shows that some of them were also scientists and inspirations to men in this field.
- Theano was one of these women.
- She died during the 5th century BC and may have been buried near her school.

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# Other Female Mathematicians

Mary Cartwright, Emmy Noether, Sophia Kovalevskaya, Ada Lovelace  
Sophie Germain, Maria Agnesi and Emilie du Chatelet



**Thank you**  
**Any Questions!**

