

# *Finding Their Voices*

**Women in Byzantine and Latin  
Christian Philosophy**

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# Phyllis Wheatley d.1784

“Inspire, ye sacred nine,  
your vent’rous Afric’ in  
her great design.”



# Macrina d.379



- The sister of Gregory of Nyssa d. ca. 395.
- Appears in his dialogue *On Soul and Resurrection*, a Christian rewriting of Plato's *Phaedo*.

# Macrina on the soul and God

Anyone who says that the soul is a likeness of God should declare that all that is foreign to God falls outside the definition of the soul. For the similar is not preserved through deviations. Since, then, such things are not ascribed to the divine nature, one could reasonably suppose that they are not substantial for the soul either.

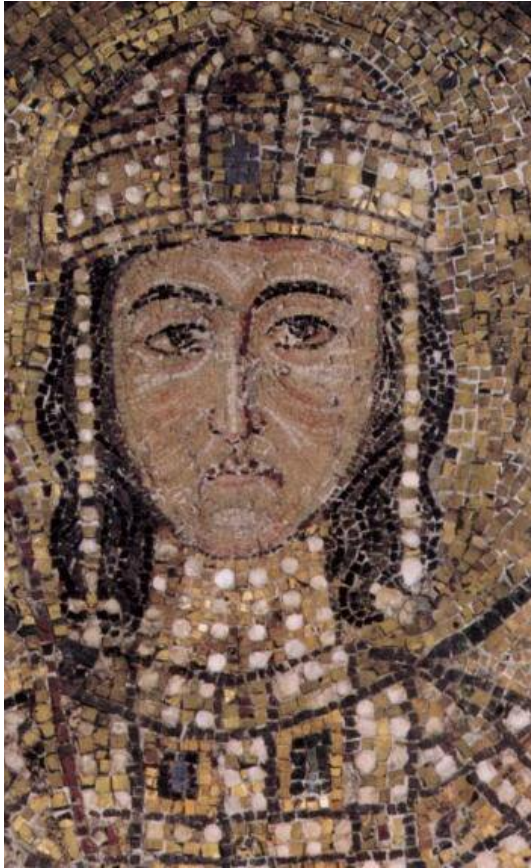
Psellos  
d. after 1801



Describes his mother Theodora and her ascetic lifestyle, which he was unable to emulate, saying: "my devotion to philosophy is limited to its cloak."



Anna Komnene  
d. ca. 1153



The works which philosophers of our time addressed to her bear witness to her love of learning, works concerning those writings of Aristotle on which commentaries had not been written until her time.

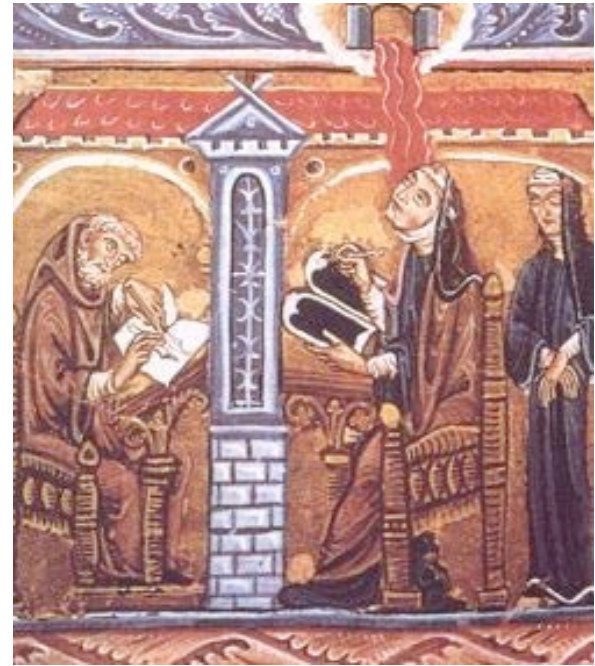
– George Tornikes, funeral oration for Anna

Anna's repeated practice of breaking out of the proper boundaries of history, breaking out of a masculinized historian's voice, to speak and participate in the discourses her culture marked as feminized, only to point out and apologize for her transgression, focuses attention both on her essentially female nature, and her ability to transcend that nature.

– Leonora Neville

# Hildegard of Bingen d.1179

O great the wonder that in a female body a king entered. God did this as humility rises above all. And O great the happiness in that woman, because the evil that came from woman [Eve], this one [Mary] then swept away.



# The Beguine mystics in 13<sup>th</sup> c.

## MECHTHILD OF MAGDEBURG

- Wrote the *Flowing Light of Divinity (Das fließende Licht der Gottheit)*
- “Learned tongues are taught by the unlearned mouth.”

## HADEWIJCH OF ANTWERP

- “The Father took the Son to himself with me and took me to himself with the Son. And in this unity into which I was taken and where I was enlightened, I understood this essence and knew it more clearly than, by speech, reason, or sight, one can know anything that is knowable on earth.”



# Marguerite Porete d.1310

- Executed in Paris for refusing to recant her book *The Mirror of Simple Souls*
- “Annihilation” of the soul in God: the soul “does not seek for knowledge of God among the teachers of this world, but by truly despising this world and herself.”
- Abandonment of virtue

# Affective mysticism in late 14<sup>th</sup>

C.

- Catherine of Siena d. 1380
- Julian of Norwich d. after 1416

In a religiosity where wounds are the source of a mother's milk, fatal disease is a bridal chamber, pain or insanity clings to the breast like perfume, physicality is hardly rejected or transcended. Rather, it is explored and embraced.

- Caroline Walker Bynum

# Women Renaissance humanists

- Christine de Pizan  
d. ca. 1430
- Isotta Nogarola d.1466
- Laura Cereta d.1499
- Cassandra Fedele d.1558
- Moderata Fonte d.1592
- Archangela Tarabotti  
d.1652
- Lucrezia Marinella  
d.1653



# Women Renaissance humanists

“I have now achieved immortality and need no longer be anxious about the public’s opinion and estimation of me.” – Nogarola

“Since this mortal life of ours will live on after death, I have renounced – for it is holier to do so – that glory, transitory and slipping, which being full of the contrariness of earthly beings, separates us from the true religion of pious faith.” – Cereta

# Women Renaissance humanists

“It is a very sweet victory indeed to outstrip men of eloquence.”

– Fedele

“You have the authority, but we have the inborn ability (*vestra est auctoritas, nostrum ingenium*).”

– Cereta



# A last word from Christine de Pizan

One day, a man criticized my desire for knowledge, saying that it was inappropriate for a woman to be learned, as it was so rare, to which I replied that it was even less fitting for a man to be ignorant, as it was so common.

