

# 1911 Encyclopædia Britannica, Volume 14 — Hypatia



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**HYPATIA** (Ἑπατία) (c. A.D. 370–415) mathematician and philosopher, born in Alexandria, was the daughter of Theon, also a mathematician and philosopher, author of scholia on Euclid and a commentary on the *Almagest*, in which it is suggested that he was assisted by Hypatia (on the 3rd book). After lecturing in her native city, Hypatia ultimately became the recognized head of the Neoplatonic school there (c. 400). Her great eloquence and rare modesty and beauty, combined with her remarkable intellectual gifts, attracted to her class-room a large number of pupils. Among these was Synesius, afterwards (c. 410) bishop of Ptolemaïs, several of whose letters to her, full of chivalrous admiration and reverence, are still extant. Suidas, misled by an incomplete excerpt in Photius from the life of Isidorus (the Neoplatonist) by Damascius, states that Hypatia was the wife of Isidorus; but this is chronologically impossible, since Isidorus could not have been born before 434 (see Hoche in *Philologus*). Shortly after the accession of Cyril to the patriarchate of Alexandria in 412, owing to her intimacy with Orestes, the pagan prefect of the city, Hypatia was barbarously murdered by the Nitrian monks and the fanatical Christian mob (March 415). Socrates has related how she was torn from her chariot, dragged to the Caesareum (then a Christian church), stripped naked, done to death with oyster-shells ([ὄστράκοις ἀνεΐλον](#), perhaps “cut her throat”) and finally burnt piecemeal. Most prominent among the actual perpetrators of the crime was one Peter, a

reader; but there seems little reason to doubt Cyril's complicity (see [CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA](#)).

Hypatia, according to Suidas, was the author of commentaries on the *Arithmetica* of Diophantus of Alexandria, on the *Conics* of Perga and on the astronomical canon (of Ptolemy). These works are lost; but their titles, combined with expressions in the letters of Synesius, who consulted her about the construction of an astrolabe and a hydroscope, indicate that she devoted herself specially to astronomy and mathematics. Little is known of her philosophical opinions, but she appears to have embraced the intellectual rather than the mystical side of Neoplatonism, and to have been a follower of Plotinus rather than of Porphyry and Iamblichus. Zeller, however, in his *Outlines of Greek Philosophy* (1886, Eng. trans. p. 347), states that "she appears to have taught the Neoplatonic doctrine in the form in which Iamblichus had stated it." A Latin letter to Cyril on behalf of Nestorius, printed in the *Collectio nova conciliorum*, i. (1623), by Stephanus Baluzius ([Étienne Baluze](#), *q.v.*), and sometimes attributed to her, is undoubtedly spurious. The story of Hypatia appears in a considerably disguised yet still recognizable form in the legend of St Catherine as recorded in the Roman *Breviary* (November 25), and still more fully in the *Martyrologies* (see A. B. Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art* (1867) ii. 467.)

The chief source for the little we know about Hypatia is the account given by Socrates (*Hist. ecclesiastica*, vii. 15). She is the subject of an epigram by [Palladas](#) in the Greek Anthology ([ix. 400](#)). See Fabricius, *Bibliotheca Graeca* (ed. Harles), ix. 187; [John Toland](#), *Tetradymus* (1720); R. Hoche in *Philologus* (1860), xv. 435; monographs by Stephan Wolf (Czernowitz, 1879), H. Ligier (Dijon, 1880) and W. A. Meyer (Heidelberg, 1885), who devotes attention to the relation of Hypatia to the chief representatives of Neoplatonism; J. B. Bury, *Hist. of the Later Roman Empire* (1889), i. 208,317; A. Güldenpenning, *Geschichte des oströmischen Reiches unter Arcadius und Theodosius II.* (Halle, 1885), p. 230; Wetzer and Welte, *Kirchenlexikon*, vi. (1889), from a Catholic standpoint. The story of [Hypatia](#) also forms the basis of the well-known historical romance by [Charles Kingsley](#) (1853).



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