

PART IV EDUCATION

1. WOMEN AND THEIR ROLE IN HISTORY – The impact of women in the progress of society

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Abstract: *The past eras of history were not, most of the times, permissive with the activity and manifestation of women within the society. For various reasons, women were neither helped nor encouraged to participate in large-scale social actions, they did not have access to ancient sports competitions, they were denied education to become painters, writers, philosophers or leaders. Despite all these impediments that intervened in history, women manifested themselves in society with a lot of power, either in literature (Sapho), philosophy (Hypathia) but also in state leadership (as pharaohs, in ancient Egypt). The present work brings to attention the names of great female personalities from ancient but also from recent history, women endowed with exceptional intelligence and character, who contributed to social progress and, above all, demonstrated that women can play an important role, which cannot be ignored in the history of humanity.*

Key words: *woman, history, social progress, biography*

1. Historical conditions

The beginnings of history were marked by the two primitive forms of social organization, *matriarchy* and *patriarchy*. Within the *matriarchy*, which lasted for a short period of time, clan membership was established by maternal descent, while, within the *patriarchy*, we find a male-led system of government, accompanied by the *dominant position of men* in social and cultural systems. The father was the one who exercised authority as *pater familias*, over the entire family (viewed in a broad sense, up to the 4th degree).

This system of authority has been perpetuated in history, determining the maintenance of women in a secondary social position, her purpose being mainly oriented towards reproduction and her role in the household. Rights in society existed only for men and, even in the ancient Greek and Roman society, considered as the basis of the current culture and civilization, the education of women was limited only to the aristocracy class and the fields accepted for education in the case of women were those of morality, poetry and the dance.²⁷⁰

Beginning with the “Edict of Milan” (313) of Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337), followed by the “Edict of Thessalonica” (380) of Emperor Theodosius (346-395), Christianity became a religion, first tolerated, and then constitutive of the Roman Empire. Religious dogma, unfortunately, never paid attention to the woman in a socially positive way, being cast on her *ab initio*, the stigma of “sin” and the cause of the human “fall” from Paradise, the cause of suffering and death.²⁷¹

We cannot say, however, that there exists any religion that puts the sign of equality between women and men, since “salvation”, “enlightenment”, “spiritual”

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²⁷⁰ <http://www.istoriesicivilizatie.ro/matriarhatul-cateva-consideratii/> - accesat 02.10.2023

²⁷¹ https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creștinismul_în_Europa - accesat 02.10.2023

character and social purpose are considered exclusively male privileges in most religions. The only exception is the Taoist religion which supports equality between women and men as a divine essence (Marinela Rusu, 2018, p. 20), expressed in the well-known Yin and Yang diagram. I have mentioned all these aspects in order to foreshadow more clearly the difficulties through which an intelligent, talented woman, endowed with a spirit of action had to go through in order to be able to assert herself. The only chance that would have made it easier for her to assert herself was the fact of belonging to a higher, aristocratic class.

2. Ancient history and female intelligence - Cleopatra, Sappho and Hypathia

Ancient history mentions numerous female personalities, geniuses, great creators or exceptional leaders. Female figures who have overcome the myths about the involvement of the fairer sex in politics have existed since the 50^s BC (Budin, Stephanie, Lynn & Turfa Jean MacIntosh, 2016, p. 42). In ancient Egypt there were ten female pharaohs from the ruling class, the most famous of which are **Cleopatra**, **Nefertiti** and **Hatshepsut**. **Cleopatra**, born in 69 BC in Alexandria, became the queen of Egypt, the last pharaoh of Egypt. Cleopatra was an ambitious, strong woman who wanted great things for her people. She became queen at only 17 years old, spoke 9 foreign languages and was a charismatic, seductive woman who delighted everyone around her with her melodious voice (Caldwell, Stella; Hibbert Clare; Mills Andrea & Skene Rona, 2017, p. 46).

The poetic talent and the exceptional personality made **Sappho** from the Island of Lesbos (Mytilini) remain in the history of literature as an essential landmark. In the first decades of the 6th century BC she was forced to go into exile (in Sicily) due to the reign of Pitacos. She will return to the country on the occasion of the amnesty granted. The poet's father was one of the landowners of the island. The biographical note in the Byzantine lexicon "Suda" claims that she was married to a wealthy citizen of Lesbos, Kerkylas, with whom she had a daughter (Cleis or Kleis), named after the poet's mother.

The fact is confirmed by Ovid (*Heroides*), as well as by an anonymous biography, deciphered from a papyrus. As for Sappho's public activity, she ran a kind of *school* (or circle) called the "House of the Muses" for young noble women, under the patronage of the Muses, the Graces and Aphrodite (Erika Kuhlman, 2002, p. 25). She dedicates passionate verses to some of her students. The ancients called Sappho the "tenth muse" and sometimes placed her work alongside that of Homer. Catul and Horace adapted and imitated some of her poems, bringing the **Sapphic meter** to Rome. In the universal lyric, there were poets who tried to write verses in Sapphic meter, among which was the Romanian poet, Mihai Eminescu.

A remarkable personality of the ancient world was also the thinker – philosopher and mathematician, **Hypathia from Alexandria**.²⁷² She was not only a mathematician and philosopher but also an astronomer, pedagogue, inventor and musician, becoming through all her concerns, a perennial symbol of reason, science and thought freed from dogmas. Independent, penetrating and intelligent spirit, the daughter of the mathematician Theon from Alexandria, she is the first woman who

²⁷² <https://historia.ro/sectiune/portret/hypathia-din-alexandria-o-minte-sclipitoare-579876.html> - accesat 02.10.2023

made a substantial contribution to the development of the sciences. Around the year 400, she asserted herself decisively within the Neoplatonic school in Alexandria, holding numerous conferences on scientific topics.

A charismatic teacher, she exhorts students to trust reason and use their mental capacities to the full, to reach the ultimate reality (Maria Dzielska, 1996). Her plea for the necessity of the effort to understand the world, which can be explained through scientific study, attracts the enmity of the rising Christians, who equate science with paganism, Christians who, in the end, will kill her with unimaginable cruelty. Hypathia will remain in the memory of mankind through her apology for independent and critical thinking, the refusal of dogmas, the permanent development of intellectual capacities, for the passion of epistemic searches and last but not least, the sacrifice for the sake of an idea. In her memory, a lunar crater bears her name today.

3. Women who changed history in the modern world

The modern era came with new ideas, provided by the **Enlightenment current** also called the *Age of Light* or the *Age of Reason*, an anti-feudal intellectual, philosophical, ideological and cultural movement, carried out during the revolutions of the century XVII-XIX in the countries of Europe, North America and South America and aiming to create a “rational” society, by spreading culture, “enlightenment” to the masses (Stephen Eric Bronner, 2004). As a result of the new way of thinking, women began to make their presence felt more in society. The idea of education for women begins to take shape, it becomes a current demand of women and is increasingly accepted by society.

A female presence who openly expressed her opinion for the benefit of the community of which she was a part was **Elizabeth I, Queen of England** (1533 - 1603), “Queen of Great Britain” who dedicated her whole life to a kingdom in which she put all her the hopes. She was one of the women who had a say in the men's entourage, ambitious and courageous, the Queen of England transformed an isolated island and shunned by the world, into one of the most powerful and prosperous nations of Europe. She called herself the “Virgin Queen” because she chose to “marry” her country. She gained the trust of her subjects and fought against the enemies of the motherland by defeating the Spanish Army.

The reign of Queen Elizabeth is called the *Elizabethan era* or the *Golden age*, being marked by the increase of England's power on the world level. It was also a time of extraordinary artistic and cultural flourishing: William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson are some of the playwrighters who lived during her reign. Elizabeth was considered a temperamental and sometimes indecisive ruler. Towards the end of her reign, a series of economic and military problems affected her popularity. However, she is recognized for her charisma and stubbornness, at a time when the sovereigns of neighboring countries were facing internal difficulties that threatened their thrones. “Even if the sex I belong to is considered weak, you will find in me a rock that does not bend to any wind.”²⁷³

²⁷³ Michael I. Levy ed., (2010). *The 100 Most Influential Women of All Time*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Educational Publishing and Rosen Educational Services, p. 175

Joan of Arc (1412-1431) was a fighter for justice and led the resistance against the English invasion of France in the Hundred Years' War. Captured by the English, they handed her over to church officials and she was tried for heresy, witchcraft and clothing. She was condemned and burned at the stake in 1431 at the age of 19. In a posthumous retrial, Joan of Arc was cleared of all charges and canonized as a saint in 1920 by the Roman Catholic Church. Her story appears in various cultural representations, including paintings, plays, operas and films. She is celebrated for her fearlessness, courage and refusal to conform to social expectations that dictated that women should be passive, meek and submissive.



Elizabeth I (1533 –1603)



Ioana D'Arc (1412-1431)

Few women have marked history like the one who would become the famous sultana **Roxelana-Hurem Sultan** (1502-1558). She was a first-rate female character, who single-handedly built every stage of her tumultuous life, from a poor slave to the most feared and controversial sultan in the entire history of the Ottoman Empire. Her power and influence intrigued both the Ottomans and the royal courts of Europe, and the obsessive love that the greatest sultan of all time had for her is a fascinating subject even today. She had an always surprising personality, a magnetic charm and an indestructible ambition, combined, it seems, with a very attractive appearance, and these qualities made her immortal in the consciousness of many people (Cristiana Astefanoaiei, 2023).

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, we can already speak of an increasingly active and impossible to ignore presence of women on the social scene. Women are starting to become much more visibly active socially and even politically, becoming leaders of demanding social movements, manifesting themselves in the field of science, in its multiple forms (research and application), in the fields of literature, art, entertainment and fashion.

Jane Austen (1775 - 1817) was one of the most famous writers in world literature. She is the author of six world-famous novels. Also called the “queen of romantic comedy”, Jane Austen defined an entire literary genre with social observations, through her classic novels, such as “Pride and Prejudice” and “Kindness and Feeling”. Her novels are funny, charming and question the roles of women in society.

Austen had to hide her identity as the author of some of the most popular novels of her time, and it was only after her death that her brother, Henry, revealed to the public that she was the true author. Her literary influence remained, and the themes and lessons in her novels are still relevant today. Over time, her stories have been turned into famous films that have received numerous nominations and awards.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ marieclaire.com - accesat 02.10.2023

Susan Brownell Anthony (1820-1906), leader of the American Civil Rights Movement, who played an important role in the Women's Rights Movement in the 19th century to guarantee women's right to vote in the United States. For 45 years she traveled thousands of miles in the US and Europe, giving between 75 and 100 speeches a year on women's suffrage (Wilke Joane, 2002).

Florence Nightingale (1820 - 1910) known as “The Lady with the Lamp”, was a British social reformer nurse and statistician known as the founder of the modern sanitary service. In 1860, she founded the Hospital of St. Thomas and the Nightingale Training School for Nurses (Sarah J. Deutsch & Nancy J. Parezo, 2008, p.92). Her efforts to reform healthcare greatly influenced the quality of medical care in the 19th and 20th centuries. Thanks to her ambition and dedication, the hospitals have been transformed into adequate treatment facilities, properly equipped from a sanitary point of view and with specialist staff ready to attend to the sick at any time.²⁷⁵

Marie Curie (1867 - 1934) was a scientist of Polish origin, the only female double Nobel laureate and the only scientist to receive two Nobel Prizes in two different scientific fields (physics and chemistry). Marie Curie discovered *radium* and *polonium* and was constantly involved in finding cures for cancer. Marie Curie developed methods to separate radium from radioactive waste in sufficient quantities to allow it to be studied and used for its therapeutic properties.

With the outbreak of the First World War, Marie Curie established a radiology center where she assisted military doctors in treating wounded or sick soldiers.²⁷⁶ “*In life we don't have to fear anything, but only to understand. Now is the time to understand more, so that we can fear less*”, said Marie Curie (apud Erika Kuhlman, 2002, p. 241). She faced constant adversity and discrimination throughout her career, because science, in general and physics, in particular were male-dominated fields. However, her research remains relevant and has influenced the scientific world until now.

A similar case was that of **Mileva Marić**, Einstein's first wife, who did not enter the academic world - that is, the University of Zurich, precisely because women were not allowed to teach, although her merits were very close to those of the great physicist. There is still debate as to her major contribution to Einstein's great discoveries in physics.

Amelia Earhart (1897 - 1937) was the only female pilot to set numerous flight records. In 1932, Amelia became the first woman (and the second person after Charles Lindbergh) to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. In the same year, Amelia broke a new record: she became the first woman to fly solo across the United States. She took off from Los Angeles on the west coast of the US and landed in Newark, New Jersey on the east coast after 19 hours of flight time. Also, in 1935, she became the first person to fly solo from Hawaii to the US. On June 1, 1937, Amelia Earhart took off from Oakland, California to circumnavigate the world. She was accompanied by navigator Fred Noonan.

The two flew to Miami, then to South America and from there, across the Atlantic, to Africa. Next was the eastward flight to India and then to Southeast Asia.

²⁷⁵ history.com - accesat 02.10.2023

²⁷⁶ <https://www.nobelprize.org> - accesat 02.10.2023

The two were last seen on July 2 on Howland Island when they stopped to refuel. After that, the plane disappeared under unknown circumstances. The wreckage of the plane was never discovered and was eventually declared lost at sea. Their disappearance remains one of the greatest unsolved mysteries of the 20th century²⁷⁷. “*Women must try to do things the same as men. When they fail, their failure should be a challenge to other women*”, said Amelia Earhart (apud Erika Kuhlman, 2002, p. 198).



Amelia Earhart (1897 - 1937) Ana Aslan (1897 - 1988)

Ana Aslan (1897 - 1988) was a Romanian doctor specializing in gerontology, academician and director of the National Institute of Geriatrics and Gerontology. Ana Aslan became internationally known for her studies on the effect of **procaine** on the regulation of the autonomic nervous system. After a three-year study, she developed a drug (**Gerovital H3**) that she prescribed to prevent aging. In 1952, she founded the Institute of Geriatrics in Bucharest, the first such institute in the world. The institute contained three units: clinical, biological and social gerontology.

In 1952, Ana Aslan received the “Leon Bernard” award from the World Health Organization for her research in the field of delaying the aging process. Numerous world personalities traveled to Romania to undergo treatment with Gerovital. Among them were: J. F. Kennedy, Nikita Khrushchev, Salvador Dali, Charlie Chaplin, Charles de Gaulle, Tito, Mao Zedong, the King of Saudi Arabia, Aristotle Onassis, Kirk Douglas, Marlene Dietrich and many others. In 1970 she produced a similar medicine (**Aslavital**). This therapy became very popular and was used not only in Romania, but also in many other European countries.²⁷⁸

CoCo Chanel (1883-1971) was one of the most famous and successful women in the fashion industry, becoming a symbol and a reference point of elegance and boldness. Her revolutionary ideas helped her become truly unique. The famous fashion designer **changed the style of women's clothing**, taking male models and turning them to the advantage of women. Her elegant and casual designs inspired women of fashion to abandon the complicated and uncomfortable garments such as petticoats and corsets that were prevalent in the 19th century. Among her classic innovations are the Chanel suit, the quilted purse, the jewelry and the “black dress.”

In 1921, Coco Chanel entered the perfume market with the theory that floral and musky scents were not to the public's liking. She attracted the attention of the female audience when she introduced the perfume Chanel no 5, which differed both in smell and name. At the time, perfumes had much more laborious names. The appearance of the bottle also shocked the public. “Chanel no 5” perfume was in a transparent rectangular crystal bottle. Shortly after its introduction to the market, the perfume became the most purchased in the world (Cristiana Astefanoaiei, 2023).

²⁷⁷ history.com - accesat 02.10.2023

²⁷⁸ <https://historia.ro/sectiune/portret/hypathia-din-alexandria-o-minte-sclipitoare-579876.html> - accesat 02.10.2023



CoCo Chanel (1883-1971)

Indira Gandhi (1917 – 1984)

Princess Ileana of Romania (1909-1991) was the youngest daughter of Queen Maria of Romania. She gave proof of an extraordinary will in her efforts to help others during the Second World War, until the first days of 1948, when the communists sent her into exile. During the war, Princess Ileana stayed in Romania, with her husband and six children at Bran Castle. The princess became a volunteer nurse at the Red Cross in Brasov and started building a war hospital in Bran (Marinela Rusu, 2022, p. 70).

Sofia Ionescu-Ogrezeanu (1920-2008) wrote: “I am not a beautiful woman. Beautiful is what you leave behind” (apud Ștefan, I. M., Firoiu, V., 1975, p. 82). Sofia Ionescu-Ogrezeanu became the first female neurosurgeon in Southeast Europe, after a surgical intervention performed during the Second World War. This moment forever changed the life of the young woman who imagined a quiet life as a doctor in her small hometown, Falticeni. Instead, she became one of the best doctors and worked for 47 years as a neurosurgeon in Bucharest (Ștefan, I. M., Firoiu, V., 1975, p. 83).

Anne Frank (1929 – 1945). “The diary of a young girl” of Anne Frank is one of the most sincere, powerful and emotional testimonies of the Second World War. The Frank family was a Jewish family that lived in Germany, then Holland, during Hitler's rise to power and during the Second World War. The family hid in a secret annex of a house in Amsterdam, together with four other people during the war, but they were discovered and sent to a concentration camp in 1944. Of the Frank family, only Anna's father survived, and he took the decision to publish Anna's diary. Anne Frank's diary has been translated into almost 70 languages and is a portrayal of one of the most inhuman moments in history, seen from a personal perspective. Her memories sensitizes us and teaches us about emotion, passion, love, hope, desire, fear and power (Caldwell, Stella; Hibbert Clare; Mills Andrea & Skene Rona, 2017, p. 67).

A woman who, overnight, had to be at the head of the democracy of the largest people in the world - **Indira Gandhi** (1917 – 1984), also became a symbol of women's freedom in India, if not in the whole world. Over time, she demonstrated the power of perseverance and demonstrated an educated and well-intentioned mind. She was assassinated in 1984. The publication “Time” considered her one of the most influential women of the 20th century.

Katherine Graham (1917 - 2001) was the president of the board of directors of the well-known publication “The Washington Post”. At the time, thanks to her actions, the newspaper became the most important source of information in the United States, especially after she was the only publishing director to agree to the publication of the investigative journalism *The Pentagon Papers* and *Watergate*.

Although, at that time, other publications, including the “New York Times” received a court order not to make disclosures about the political scandal, Katherine's decision to publish *The Pentagon Papers* and the *Watergate* investigation brought her a reputation of brave, fair and thorough journalist who wanted to give readers access to important information. In 1998, Katharine Graham won the Pulitzer Prize for her autobiography, “Personal History”. Her story and actions are an example to all women, that anything is possible²⁷⁹.

Margaret Thatcher (1925 - 2013) was the first female Prime Minister in Europe and the only British Prime Minister in the 20th century to win three consecutive terms, from 1979 to 1990. She accelerated the evolution of the British economy from statism to liberalism and due to her distinctive personality became the most famous British political leader after Winston Churchill.

During her terms, she reduced the influence of unions, privatized certain industries and changed the terms of public debate. Nicknamed the “Iron Lady”, she opposed Soviet Communism and fought a war to maintain control of the Falkland Islands. Eventually, members of the Conservative Party, of which she was a member, forced her to resign in 1990.²⁸⁰ The first female Prime Minister of Great Britain was one of the initiators of libertarian thought, she believed in free exchange between markets and the power of individual responsibility. She maintained a strong and open relationship with the President of America at the time, Ronald Reagan.

An iconic presence in public life, **Princess Diana** (1961-1997) was noted for her compassion, her personal style and charm, her charity work and her unhappy marriage to Prince Charles. From the time of her engagement to Prince Charles of Wales in 1981, until her death in a car crash in 1997, Diana was one of the most famous women in the world - a pre-eminent celebrity of her generation. During her lifetime, she was often described as “the most photographed woman in the world” (Erika Kuhlman, 2002, p. 324).



Margaret Thatcher (1925 - 2013)

Prințesa Diana (1961-1997)

Maya Angelou (1928 – 2014) said: “I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel” (apud Wilke Joane, 2002, p. 76). Maya Angelou is one of the most influential women in American history and was a poet, singer and civil rights activist. Angelou had a difficult childhood. As a black woman raised in Stamps, Arkansas, Maya experienced racial prejudice and discrimination throughout her life. The book “I Know Why the Bird in the Cage Sings” and her other works were one of the strongest voices in the civil rights movement, exploring topics such as identity, rape, racism and literacy, demonstrating how a love of literature can help you overcome racism and trauma (Wilke Joane, 2002, p. 76).

²⁷⁹ womenonthefall.org. - accesat 02.10.2023

²⁸⁰ britannica.com. - accesat 02.10.2023

Frida Kahlo (1907 - 1954) is considered one of the greatest artists in Mexico and the world. She became famous after she was seriously injured in a tram accident, and when she recovered, she started painting portraits. In addition to her career as a painter, Frida was also actively involved in Mexican political life. While a student, she got involved in several projects and joined the Young Communist League and the Mexican Communist Party. She was also one of the few girls to enroll at the Preparatory National School and became known for her jovial personality and love of traditional clothes and jewelry.²⁸¹

Malala Yousafzai (1997 - present) said: "I tell my story not because it is unique, but because it is the story of many girls" (Cristiana Astefanoaiei, 2023). Malala Yousafzai was born in Pakistan on July 12, 1997. Yousafzai's father was a teacher and ran a girls' school in her village, but when the Taliban took power in her town, they imposed a ban on all girls going to school. In 2012, at the age of 15, Malala spoke publicly about women's rights to education, which is why an attacker shot her in the head on the school bus. Malala survived and moved to Great Britain, where she became a powerful presence on the world stage and became the youngest laureate of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014, at just 17 years old. Malala studies philosophy, politics and economics at the University of Oxford.

4. Conclusions

Women's participation in social progress is an indisputable fact. Despite the historical conditions, often against the affirmation of women in society, they managed to make themselves heard, to express their opinions and grievances, they fought for their rights and are still fighting against gender discrimination and moral and organizational impediments of society. Women of all times aspired to self-affirmation and today, following the sacrifices made, they acquired not only the right to education, to social and political affirmation, but they gained the opportunity to recognize their qualities and endowments as valuable as and those of men. That is why women will claim their place in history alongside men, as is natural, because together they have contributed and will contribute to its development.

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