

Author's Note

From Selene of Alexandria

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Selene, her family, friends and servants are entirely fictitious. I created them to show how the decisions and actions of the powerful are played out in ordinary people's lives. All the major events – the riots leading up to Cyril's affirmation, the consolidation of the Christians, the Jewish trap and consequent expulsion, the attack on Orestes, and Hypatia's murder – as well as many minor events, are documented. Hypatia, Cyril, Orestes, Hierex, Archdeacon Timothy, Ammonius, and the presbyter Peter did exist and participate in these events, although I used "literary license" in portraying their physical appearance, dialog and the details of their relationships.

I first came across this fascinating story of ambition, power, and political assassination in 1980 while attending Judy Chicago's groundbreaking feminist art exhibit "The Dinner Party" where Hypatia, the Lady Philosopher of Alexandria, had a "plate." Captured by the inherent drama of Hypatia's life and death, I embarked on a journey to bring her story to modern readers. During the next seventeen years I haunted libraries, bookstores, and the Internet looking for more material to fill out the sketchy and conflicting details available

Hypatia had captured the imaginations of many before me and had become a metaphor in literature for the brilliance of the Classical Age and depravity of the coming Dark Ages. Most stories painted a legend of a beautiful, virginal, young woman cut down by fanatical monks. She was particularly popular in the Age of Enlightenment.

In 1720, the Protestant John Toland published an essay titled *Hypatia or, the History of a Most Beautiful, Most Virtuous, Most Learned, and in Every Way Accomplished Lady; Who Was Torn to Pieces by the Clergy of Alexandria, to Gratify the Pride, Emulation, and Cruelty of the Archbishop, Commonly but Undeservedly Titled St. Cyril*. Ecclesiastic circles responded with a pamphlet by Thomas Lewis called *The History of Hypatia, A Most Impudent School-Mistress of Alexandria. In Defense of Saint Cyril and the Alexandrian Clergy from the Aspersion of Mr. Toland*.

In recent times Hypatia has evolved into a feminist icon; a woman mathematician and scientist celebrated for her rationality and intelligence, destroyed by superstitious, barbarous men. She appears in several biographies of women in science and mathematics as well as the more light-hearted *Uppity Women of Ancient Times* by Vicki Leon where she is described as "The world's first martyr to mathematics."

Sorting through the hyperbole, I found a compelling voice in the work of Maria Dzielska, a Polish classical scholar. Ms. Dzielska does a masterful job in reviewing the literary heritage of Hypatia's story and going to primary sources to present a more realistic and much less biased historical picture in *Hypatia of Alexandria*, translated by F. Lyra and

published by Harvard University Press in 1995. It's her version of Hypatia's life that I have expressed in this work. Without Ms. Dzielska's meticulous research, this would be a very different book.

Cyril appears in the record as a Machiavellian character more enamored of power than of God. Having read translations of his letters and speeches, I chose a more charitable interpretation showing his motivation rooted in a true religious experience. His contemporaries laud his political acumen. His earliest acts were to eliminate those factions that opposed his appointment including other Christian sects and the Jews.

There is no proof that Cyril ordered the death of Hypatia. Contemporary sources both condemn him on the basis of jealousy and exonerate him on the basis of mob violence. I chose the interpretation that he wished to discredit Hypatia, but, in his youth and inexperience, underestimated the extent of his power. However, given the bloody times and since there were no repercussions for Hypatia's death; he probably was not contrite about the outcome.

Little is known of Orestes other than the dates of his administration, his admiration for Hypatia, and the attack by the Nitrian monks. There is some controversy over whether he survived the attack, but Dzielska believed he did and was either recalled or resigned after Hypatia's death. I created a background and early history for Orestes that enhanced my story.

Hierex was a Christian teacher who openly admired Cyril. He did run afoul of Orestes based on Jewish accusations of sedition and was severely beaten. Again, I used literary license to propose an intimate relationship with Cyril. The violent incident gives Hierex a motive for orchestrating the campaign against Orestes.

Archdeacon Timothy is mentioned only as a rival for the Bishopric. Ammonius and Peter are named in the attacks on Orestes and Hypatia. I found no details about any of their lives.

I included in the story a number of places from recent archeological digs such as the glassmakers' shop, theater, classrooms, tombs, monasteries and cisterns. Most of the cisterns were filled in at some time, but when is unknown. I chose to have them available for Selene's escape. I visited a cistern in Istanbul (formerly Constantinople) and the description is primarily from there. Other minor events such as the couple divorcing because of demonic influence and the fire walking priest are taken from actual incidents, but not necessarily during this three-year time period.

There seems to be a great deal of confusion over the nature and extent of the Great Library of Alexandria and when it was destroyed. Some claim it burned during a Roman attack in 48 BC, others that Theophilus burned it with the Serapeum in 391 AD, and still others that Islamic invaders burned the remnants when they took Alexandria in 641 AD. Most large cities such as Alexandria had several public libraries available to scholars, students, and private citizens. I chose to go with the researchers who claim the Roman

and Christian attacks destroyed "sister" libraries and by the time the Islamic burning, the Great Library had dwindled due to neglect (bugs, theft, deterioration) to a much smaller collection of mostly Christian texts.

The Museum was one of the great learning centers of antiquity and attracted scholars from all over the world to study philosophy, mathematics, science, nature, literature, and medicine. The original buildings were part of a magnificent palace complex, which took up nearly one-third the land inside the walls of Alexandria and contained The Great Library, scholars' living quarters, classrooms, a zoo and gardens with exotic plants. This complex was destroyed during Diocletian's reign; however, there is substantial evidence that the Museum and its library continued in other buildings, possibly in the vicinity of the Caesarion, originally a pagan temple complex in the harbor area.

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