

*Hypatia of Alexandria: A Fiercely Intelligent Woman**

Liana De Girolami Cheney
University of Massachusetts, Lowell, USA

The novel *Hypatia: Or New Foes With an Old Face* by Charles Kingsley, published in 1853, provided valuable insight into Hypatia's achievements and the unfortunate circumstances surrounding her untimely demise. Kingsley's novel portrayed a fiercely intelligent woman, Hypatia, who sparked the interest of many artists, particularly sculptors. They were eager to capture in their statues the personification of this remarkable ancient mathematician, philosopher, and scientist of ancient Egypt, Hypatia of Alexandria (355-415). This essay has two parts. The first provides a brief overview of Hypatia's life and accomplishments. The second part focuses on four sculptures from the 19th century created by different artists: *Hypatia* (1873-1876) by the American Howard Roberts, *Hypatia* (1874) by the Italian Odoardo Tabacchi, *Hypatia* (1890) by Francis John Williamson, and *Hypatia* (1894) by Richard Claude Belt. The two latter works are by British sculptors.

Keywords: Hypatia of Alexandria, Egyptian-Greek woman scientist, victimization, Neoplatonism, Charles Kingsley, 19th-century sculptures

Introduction

Hypatia of Alexandria was born in Alexandria, Egypt, in 355, and her name, Hypatia, means "highest" or "supreme" in Greek. Although information about her life is scattered and sometimes contradictory, it is clear that she was a fiercely intelligent woman who made significant contributions to mathematics, philosophy, and science. She hailed from a family of scholars, with her father, Theon of Alexandria, being an astronomer and mathematician. Unfortunately, she was violently martyred by a Christian mob in Alexandria in 415. Her legacy serves as a reminder of the need to respect and appreciate the achievements of remarkable individuals like her. Her outstanding achievements were recognized even in the 19th century, with sculptures erected in her honor.

The first part of this essay provides a brief overview of Hypatia's life and accomplishments. The second part focuses on four sculptures from the 19th century. The first sculpture, *Hypatia* (1873-1876) by the American Howard Roberts, is at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. The second sculpture, *Hypatia*, was completed in 1874 by the Italian Odoardo Tabacchi in Turin and is currently in a European private collection. The third

* **Acknowledgements:** A version of this essay was delivered at the AIWAC3 in Rome in 2023. I am grateful to Professors Consuelo Lolobrigida, University of Arkansas Rome Center, and Adelina Modesti, University of Melbourne, for inviting me to this international conference. I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Adam Watertown, the Librarian of The Royal Academy of Arts in London, for helping me trace information on the statue of *Hypatia* by Francis John Williamson. I would also like to thank Dr. Jeff Richmond-Moll, the Archives Coordinator of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, for assisting me in the archival documentation of Howard Roberts. Thanks to the *Journal of Literature and Art Studies* for enabling me to reaffirm my published ideas in Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Howard Roberts' *Hypatia of Alexandria: A Form of Neoplatonic Beauty*", *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 4.12 (December 2014), pp. 1080-1902.

Liana De Girolami Cheney, Ph.D., Professor of Art History (emerita), University of Massachusetts, Lowell, USA.

sculpture, *Hypatia* (1890-1891) by the British Francis John Williamson, is in a private collection in London. The fourth sculpture of *Hypatia* (1894) is by another British sculptor, Richard Claude Belt, now in the Draper's Livery Hall in London.

Hypatia's Life and Achievements

Unfortunately, there are limited historical records about Hypatia that offer insights into her academic life, personality, and accomplishments. Many records were destroyed during the revolt of March 415 in Alexandria, Egypt. This tragic event occurred during Lent under the reign of the Roman Emperor Theodosius II (401-450) and Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria (375-444).

The most important primary sources that are presently known are as follows: (1) an entry in the *Suda Lexicon* (Suidas—10th century); (2) a passage in the *Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Scholasticus*; (3) an excerpt from *The Chronicle of John*, Coptic Bishop of Nikiu; (4) six letters by Hypatia's pupil, Synesius of Cyrene; and (5) four miscellaneous short extracts from other works: (a) the inscription at the beginning of Book III of Theon's Commentary on *Ptolemy's Almagest*; (b) a brief reference in an ecclesiastical history by *Philostorgius*; (c) another brief reference in the *Chronicle of John Malalas*; and (d) a further brief reference in the *Chronographia of Theophanes* (Dzielska, 1995, pp. 1-26, 67-100, 111-119; MacLennan, 2013, pp. 8-11).¹

The three most significant of these primary sources are the following. First, the *Byzantine Encyclopedia Suda Lexicon* of the 10th century offered a detailed account of Hypatia's personality as a learned philosopher and beautiful woman. Second, the *Ecclesiastical History* written in 439 by the Christian historian Socrates Scholasticus (380 BCE-439 CE) noted her intellectual abilities in philosophy and her famous lectures on the subject that attracted scholars from abroad (Scholasticus, n.d.; Schaff & Wace, 1890; Urbainczyk, 1997).² And third, in correspondence with her pupil Synesius of Cyrene (373-414), who became the Bishop of Ancient Libya (Ptolemais), they exchanged thoughts about Neoplatonism. He incorporated Hypatia's Neoplatonic ideals into his explanations and writings on the Doctrine of the Trinity (MacLennan, 2013, p. 28).³

Hypatia was a cultivated woman who received her education from her father, Theon of Alexandria, a mathematics teacher at the University of Alexandria (Alexandrian Academy) who edited *Euclid's Elements*. Following in her father's footsteps, Hypatia became a professor at the Academy in 390. She was highly regarded for her lectures and speeches on philosophy, science, mathematics, and astronomy. The teachings of Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle influenced her philosophical concepts, and she followed the Neoplatonic ideas of Plotinus (MacLennan, 2013, pp. 27-40, esp. pp. 34-35; Armstrong, 1984).⁴ Her Neoplatonism focused on the divine first cause, the One, which was considered the originator of the universe.

Additionally, she believed in the pre-existence and immortality of the soul. The concept of the human soul has been a philosophical and theological discussion topic for centuries. According to some Neoplatonic

¹ Maria Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, trans. by F. Lyra (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 1-26, 67-100, 111-119, for most substantial references on Hypatia. See Bruce J. MacLennan, *The Wisdom of Hypatia* (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2013), pp. 8-11.

² Socrates Scholasticus in *Historia Ecclesiastica* (VII. 15 and VIII. 9). For an English translation of *Historia Ecclesiastica* (*Ecclesiastical History*), see A. C. Zenos's publication in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Ser. 2, Vol. 2, eds. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1890); and Theresa Urbainczyk, *Socrates of Constantinople: Historian of Church and State* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

³ MacLennan, *The Wisdom of Hypatia*, p. 38.

⁴ MacLennan, *The Wisdom of Hypatia*, pp. 27-40, esp. pp. 34-35; Plotinus, *Ennead V*, trans. by A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1984).

philosophers, a human being consists of two parts: a lower irrational soul, the body, and a higher rational soul, the mind. The rational soul is believed to be immortal as it partakes in the One, the supreme being. This understanding of the soul has implications for our understanding of human nature, the afterlife, and the purpose of our existence.

Hypatia made two significant contributions to mathematics. She wrote explanatory essays on geometry and mathematics in Diophantus's *Arithmetic (Arithmetica)* (Dzielska, 1995, p. 71).⁵ The 13 volumes of this treatise contain one hundred mathematical problems with proposed algebra solutions. Other significant essays explained Apollonius's conic shapes in geometry, which assist in solving problems in mathematics. The Greek geometer Apollonius of Perga (Perge, 260-160 BCE) introduced the terms and concepts of parabola, ellipse, and hyperbola in his cone design. These measurements were also employed in astronomical calculations. Unfortunately, Hypatia's essays have not survived, but other scholars, such as the Christian historian Socrates Scholasticus and Bishop Synesius of Cyrene, noted them (Dzielska, 1995, pp. 71-73).⁶

Although there were known types of astrolabes invented by Apollonius, as seen in the floor mosaic in the House of Leda at Soluntum in Sicily,⁷ Hypatia's contribution to astronomy is that she fabricated astrolabes and designed a portable one for ship navigation (Dzielska, 1995, p. 73).⁸ In her commentary on Ptolemy's astronomical work, *Planetary Hypothesis (Almagest)*, Hypatia supported the idea of a geocentric (earth-centered) universe. Hence, she followed the Ptolemaic tradition, which disagrees with Aristarchus of Samos's heliocentric model. Aristarchus (310 BCE-230 CE) Was another astronomer associated with the Alexandrian Academy in the third century. He theorized that the Earth orbits around the Sun in an elliptical, not circular, movement; the orbits occur while the Sun is at the center.

While pursuing her education, Hypatia's success and pagan intellectual influence made her a target of Christian persecution. Despite professional jealousy from some male scholars in the Alexandria Academy, she persevered and continued to pursue her academic goals and passions. Although some women from Alexandria envied her, she remained focused on her teaching growth and professional success.

She was a beautiful and cultured woman who chose not to marry, though she had many suitors, including her students. Her teachings of Neoplatonism did not initially cause any issues with her Christian pupils. Legend has it one of her pupils, Orestes, governor of Alexandria, who was unhappy because she did not favor his sexual advances, and he plotted with a Christian mob to kill her in 415 by dismembering and burning her body in the Academy where she taught (Dzielska, 1995, pp. 38-39).⁹ But another interpretation of the revolt sees it as less a religious revolt than a response to political issues with the governance of Alexandria (Dzielska, 1995, pp. 104-105).¹⁰ Despite her significant academic achievements and widespread admiration for her intellect and physical attractiveness, this remarkable woman's life was tragically ended by a historical massacre.

19th-Century Sculptures of Hypatia

The second part of this study focuses on three life-size marble sculptures of Hypatia's brutal death. In Europe,

⁵ Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, p. 71.

⁶ Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, pp. 71-73.

⁷ For the image, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrolabe#/media/File:Soluntum,_Casa_Leda,_mosaic_of_an_armillary_sphere.jpg.

⁸ Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, p. 73.

⁹ Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, pp. 38-39.

¹⁰ Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, pp. 104-105.

the impact of the revival of the classical tradition is a vast subject of consideration, including the new fascination with archeology prompted by excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum in Italy; the interest of American artists to study sculpture in Paris and Rome and visit the ancient artistic sites; and the significant writings on Greek and Roman art by the German scholar Johann Joachim Winkelmann with his books on *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764) and *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks* (1765). Furthermore, Plato, Platonism, and Neoplatonism studies were well established in the intellectual circles of Paris and America (Taylor, 1816; Coleridge, n.d.; Kooy, 2002; Vos, 2006, p. 542).¹¹ These philosophical investigations were prompted by significant cultural influence from literary writings, such as the poems of the literary critic Théophile Gauthier (1811-1872). He wrote a collection of poems on art entitled *Èmaux et Camées* (1852), which fostered Neoplatonic interest in his humanist circles. Anglo-American writer Henry James (1843-1916), an admirer of Gauthier's writings, claimed that Gauthier's poems in *Èmaux et Camées* revealed the "robustness of vision and association to Plato" (Oslermark-Johansen, 2011, p. 124, n. 41).¹²

No writer was more important in this endeavor than the English novelist Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), whose famous book *Hypatia: Or, New Foes With an Old Face* was published in 1853 (Kingsley, 1899).¹³ Kingsley began publishing chapters of his book in 1852 in *Frazer's Magazine*, receiving a positive reception from its readers. There were several editions with illustrations published after his death, notably the two-volume edition illustrated by William Martin Johnson (American, 1862-1909) in 1895 (Kingsley, 1895),¹⁴ and a revised copy with illustrations published in 1897 by the bookbinder and New York publishing company of Thomas Y. Crowell (1836-1915) in collaboration with the American book-plate maker and painter Edmund H. Garrett (1853-1929) (Kingsley, 1897).¹⁵ Kingsley's focus on Hypatia was initially based on and inspired by French novels and two poems by Charles Marie-René Leconte de Lisle on *Hypatie* (Leconte de Lisle, 1874, pp. 65-68; Dzielska, 1995, pp. 4-8).¹⁶ Kingsley's *Hypatia* gained immense popularity across England, Europe, and America in the 19th century, contributing to the visualization of this saga in many paintings and sculptures.

Howard Roberts's *Hypatia*

The American sculptor Howard Roberts (1843-1900) composed a plaster cast of *Hypatia* in early 1873 in Paris and completed the sculpture in marble in Philadelphia in the same year (Figures 1a and 1b) (Cheney, 2014, pp. 1080-1902).¹⁷

¹¹ Thomas Taylor, *The Six Books of Proclus on the Theology of Plato* (London: Printed for the Author, 1816) as well as many other books of translations of Plotinus, Proclus, Iamblichus, and Plato; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poems* (London: Routledge, n.d.); Michael John Kooy, *Coleridge Schiller and Aesthetic Education* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002); and Antonie Vos, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus* (Edinburgh: University Press 2006), p. 542, on the Neoplatonic philosopher Victor Cousin (1792-1867), who provide awareness of Hellenistic Platonic ideals to the French humanists in the 19th century.

¹² Lene Oslermark-Johansen, *Walter Pater and the Language of Sculpture* (London: Ashgate, 2011), p. 124, n. 41.

¹³ Charles Kingsley, *Hypatia: Or, New Foes With an Old Face* (New York: Co-operative Publishing Society, 1899). Internet Archive <https://archive.org/details/hypatiac01kingiala/mode/2up>.

¹⁴ Charles Kingsley, *Hypatia: Or, New Foes With an Old Face; Illustrated From Drawings by William Martin Johnson* (New York: Harper, 1895).

¹⁵ Charles Kingsley, *Hypatia: Or, New Foes With an Old Face* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1897).

¹⁶ Charles Marie-René Leconte de Lisle, *Poèmes antiques* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1874), pp. 65-68; Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, pp. 4-8.

¹⁷ I discussed the commission and cited the archival documentation on this statue in a previous study on Roberts in Cheney, "Howard Roberts' *Hypatia of Alexandria*, pp. 1080-1902.



Figures 1a and 1b. Howard Roberts, *Hypatia*, 1873-1876, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, PA.
Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.

He signed his name, *HRoberts*, next to Hypatia's sandaled foot on the surface of the second slab of the supporting base. Although highly regarded as an American artist, his productivity as a sculptor was minimal, completing only seven known sculptures, including *Hypatia*. The purpose of this commission still needs to be determined. Documents on the commission note how the sculpture was gifted to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Arts by the Roberts estate in 1939. Although Roberts never taught there, he attended the Academy as a student and was registered as a member (Sellin, 1975, pp. 311-312; Rischl, 1976, pp. 394-396; James-Gadzinski &

Cunningham, 1997, pp. 86-89).¹⁸

The subject of an ancient mathematician, astronomer, and philosopher of the Neoplatonic Alexandria School was an unusual theme for an American sculptor at this time. It appears to be a personal creation, probably from Roberts's life experience. Roberts was a learned man interested in portraying literary heroines victimized by religious fanatics. Hypatia was persecuted and brutally murdered by a Christian mob in Alexandria because she taught non-Christian philosophy and did not abide by the laws of Christian rulers.

Roberts's fascination with Charles Kingsley's book on *Hypatia* originated in 1859 when The Academy of Music in Philadelphia performed *The Black Agate, or Old Foes With New Faces*, a play based on Kingsley's book of 1853. As an enlightened Philadelphian, Roberts undoubtedly attended the performance and was moved by the play's theme.

Inspired by the victimization of Hypatia, Roberts modeled his statue on this passage from Kingsley's novel.

On the nave, fresh shreds of her dress strewed the holy pavement—up the chancel steps to the altar—right underneath the great still Christ, and even those hell-hounds paused there. She shook herself free from her tormentors and, springing back, rose to her full height, naked, snow-white against the dusky mass around—shame and indignation in those wide clear eyes, but not a stain of fear. With one hand, she clasped her golden locks around her; the other long white arm was stretched upward toward the great still Christ appealing—and who dare say in vain?—from man to God. (Kingsley, 1897, XXIX)

In his statue of *Hypatia*, Roberts included as many Greek attributes as possible to identify the image of Hypatia with an ancient maiden.¹⁹ He selected a bright white marble to approximate the Parian marble used by ancient Greek sculptors. A disheveled Hypatia, partially nude, revealing her breasts, alludes to a vicious sexual assault. With her right hand, the figure holds a chiton (dress tunic) and himation (mantle) at the waistline. The belt wrapping around the himation is decorated with a Greek-key design. The border above the himation fringes is decorated with Greek architectural motifs—beads, triangles, and floral patterns.

Attempting to hold on to her clothing with her right hand, Hypatia clutches a large candelabra with her left hand to maintain her balance. The candelabra (candle tree) is designed to resemble a Greek tripod used for offerings, with intricate details imbuing it with a sacrificial aesthetic. The base comprises three lions' paws, surrounded by a drum carved with the Greek tongue motif. The column is wrapped with a motif of large acanthus leaves, a decoration that symbolizes death. At the same time, the knop holds another slender column that terminates into a sconce where the candle is usually placed, but it is missing here. The candelabra is a lampstand that functions as a candleholder. In Christian churches, it is generally placed on the altar to be lit at the service of the Mass, symbolizing the presence of holiness. At Hypatia's feet are other Christian symbols: a full-length Crucified Christ on the cross, the traditional symbol of Christianity, and a censer, an incense burner, with an elaborate cover. The censer burns a fragrant incense that creates smoke. The smoke physically symbolizes

¹⁸ Unfortunately, at present, there are no drawings of this sculpture. Data on this artist is limited, as noted in the correspondence with Dr. Jeff Richmond-Moll, Archives Coordinator of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, on 28 March 2014. See David Sellin, "The First Pose: Howard Roberts, Thomas Eakins and a Century of Philadelphia Nudes", *Bulletin of the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, 70 (Spring 1975), 311-312; Joe Rischl, "Howard Roberts (1843-1900)", in *Philadelphia: Three Centuries of American Art*, ed. by Darrel Sewell (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1976), pp. 394-396; and Susan James-Gadzinski and Mary Mullen Cunningham, "Howard Roberts, 1843-1900", in *American Sculpture in the Museum of American Art of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts*, eds. by Susan James-Gadzinski and Mary Mullen Cunningham (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1997), pp. 86-89.

¹⁹ In Paris, during his sojourns and artistic training, Roberts likely acquired knowledge of Greek and Roman art by seeing ancient sculptures in museums and through cultural awareness and knowledge of Winkelmann's writings on this subject.

purification and spiritually alludes to the Christian faith (Exodus 30). In his sculpture, Roberts used both pagan and Christian objects of sacrifice to draw attention to Hypatia's assault. By doing so, he suggested that such acts of violence can diminish the spiritual significance of these objects.

Roberts selected these religious objects to symbolize Christianity, alluding to the cause of Hypatia's persecution for not being a Christian follower. The figure's exaggerated contrapposto stance, unbalanced posture, and messy attire differ from her stern and angry gaze (Figure 1a). His dramatization of the event created a visual paradox for the viewer—knowing the horror story but viewing a beautifully carved statue.

By portraying the protagonist in a beautiful composition of carved and polished marble, with idealized human proportion and sensual lines, Roberts glorified martyrdom and violence for the sake of a stunning sculpture. Transgressing the gravity of the subject, Roberts aimed to compose a beautiful form, enhancing the physicality of the sculpture by using bright white marble. When viewing the beautifully carved sculpture, the observer is elated by perceiving beauty and delighted in experiencing beauty.

Hence, it is clear why Roberts selected Hypatia, who was an advocate of Neoplatonism. His interest in or affinity for Neoplatonism originated from his educational experiences in Philadelphia and Paris (MacLennan, 2013, p. 40).²⁰ He associated the representation of his protagonist, Hypatia, with her philosophical ideals, Neoplatonism, and mathematical quests in carving a statute of a beautiful woman with the Neoplatonic pursuit of the study of beauty and symmetry.

During his time in Paris, as he worked on refining the shape of his statue of Hypatia, Roberts became increasingly fascinated with Neoplatonic sources. This philosophical interest spurred him to delve deeper into the subject, ultimately leading to a more nuanced and informed sculptural interpretation. As a sculptor, he was interested in measurements, proportions, and a sense of balance in the form and the proper selection of materials for his sculpture. Hence, he found affinities with the concepts of Plotinus regarding symmetry and beauty in an art form. At the same time, the concepts of measurability and aesthetics related to his muse, Hypatia. In her teachings, Hypatia postulated these concepts in her understanding of Plotinus's philosophical and artistic theories (Dzielska, 1995, p. 9; MacLennan, 2013, pp. 36-38).²¹ Plotinus commented on beauty: "The symmetry of parts towards each other and a whole, with, besides, a certain charm of color, constitutes the beauty recognized by the eyes, that in visible things, as indeed in all else, universally, the beautiful thing is essentially symmetrically, patterned" (*Ennead* I. 6-8).

Fascinated with the heroine Hypatia and her philosophical Neoplatonic ideas about beauty, Roberts fused a metaphorical image of a beautiful woman, employing the Neoplatonic concept of beauty and proportions in his sculpture. Hence, the historical figure of Hypatia, who lectured on Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus at the Alexandria Academy, is carved in white marble.

Odoardo Tabacchi's *Hypatia*

Under the influence of Roberts, other sculptors also became interested in this subject. The rediscovery in 1877 of the sculpture *Hypatia* by the Italian Odoardo Tabacchi (1831-1905) provides a new insight into the interpretation of the martyrdom of Hypatia (Figures 2a and 2b).²²

²⁰ MacLennan, *The Wisdom of Hypatia*, p. 40.

²¹ Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, p. 9; MacLennan, *The Wisdom of Hypatia*, pp. 36-38.

²² For biographical notes on this sculptor, see <https://www.artepiemonte.it/portfolio-articoli/tabacchi-odoardo>.



Figures 2a and 2b. Odoardo Tabacchi, *Hypatia*, front and profile views, 1874, marble, 19.5 x 124.4 cm. Private collection, Italy.

Tabacchi completed the marble sculpture in 1874 in Turin. He signed and dated his work as Odoardo Tabacchi, Torino 1874. He then exhibited the sculpture in several cities, Naples at the National Exhibition of Fine Arts in 1877 and Paris (Panzetta, 1994, Entry on Tabacchi, p. 204).²³ The statue was composed of three sections whose joints are visible. Several sculpture parts were restored, including the fingers, toes, and base.²⁴ Cleverly, Tabacchi used the marble vein to emphasize the stance's vertical movement.

Unlike Roberts's *Hypatia*, Tabacchi's sculpture captures an agonizing moment in Hypatia's martyrdom. She is naked (Clark, 1956, p. 23)²⁵ and tied up to a post with a plaque at the top inscribed with her name, Hypatia, a paradoxical allusion to the inscription on the cross in the Crucifixion of Christ (INRI). Tabacchi, unlike the other sculptors, chose to represent Hypatia as a young female, even though she was a middle-aged woman when she

²³ Alfonso Panzetta, *Dizionario degli scultori italiani dell'Ottocento e del primo Novecento*, 2 Vols. (Turin: Umberto Allemandi, 1994), Entry on Tabacchi, p. 204. See Sotheby's 2017 Auction, *19th and 20th Century Sculpture*, Lot 19. See <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2017/19th-20th-century-sculpture-117232/lot.19.html>.

²⁴ Sotheby's Entry, <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2017/19th-20th-century-sculpture-117232/lot.19.html>.

²⁵ Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), p. 23, noted that the word *naked* physically implies being "deprived of clothes" and morally alludes to a state of "embarrassment".

was murdered (Dzielska, 1995, p. 102).²⁶ Tabacchi carved a beautiful, young, nude female seated on a marble base that functions as a sacrificial altar. Her stripped clothes encircle the base's lower part, supporting the sculptural composition. Tabacchi's emphasis on her body tied to a pole and her nakedness reveal her state of humiliation. The seated nude figure has her hands and feet tied to a vertical post, preventing her from moving and forcing her into a crouching pose. At the same time, Tabacchi created a provocative image by playing with the viewer's sentiments of debasement and eroticism in observing a beautiful naked female (Clark, 1956, p. 415).²⁷ In his portrayal of Hypatia, he emphasized a beautiful, young, innocent woman confronting her gruesome predicament with a fearful expression of an open mouth and an intense gaze. His statue embodied the horrifying and cruel moment of the castigation of a beautiful, intelligent woman, a renowned scholar, by the product of intolerance formed by fixed ideologies.

Francis John Williamson's *Hypatia*

Another unusual version of *Hypatia* was carved by the British sculptor Francis John Williamson (1833-1920) (Figures 3a and 3b). The statue was completed around 1890 and exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts in the same year (Graves, 1905/1906, VI, 296-297, Entry on Williamson's exhibitions, esp. 297; *Royal Academy Pictures, Illustrating the Hundred and Twenty-Second Exhibition of the Royal Academy*, 1888/1891).²⁸ Upon seeing the sculpture, Her Majesty Queen Victoria (1819-1901) purchased it for her collection (Spielmann, 1901, pp. 18-19, esp. p. 19).²⁹ Williamson composed several marble busts of the Queen; for example, one from 1887 is in view at Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow.³⁰

Williamson portrayed the figure naked without attributes except her long hair. Her bold stance is in defiance of her aggressors. The figure of Hypatia stands in a contrapposto stance before a tall pedestal, which, along with the long braids, assists with the vertical support of the statue. This upright stance recalls Roberts's standing figure, unlike the crouching position of Tabacchi's statue. Williamson's long, voluminous tresses behind her back contrast with the exposed nude body, paradoxically remembering the traditional tragic and bold images of religious young females with long braids, such as Mary Magdalen and Lady Godiva.

In Williamson's *Hypatia*, one arm partially covers her breasts while the other is upwardly extended as a sign of victory. Her daring gaze contrasts with Roberts's enraged *Hypatia* and Tabacchi's fearful young *Hypatia*. Williamson, too, was inspired by Kingsley's historical novel. In the representation of Hypatia, he echoed the sentiments of Roberts's imagery. Still, with a contrasting dramatic emphasis on presenting a standing, twisting moment of a nude female, he conveyed a state of agitation, anger, and even humiliation as seen in Tabacchi's sculpture. In depicting a standing nude figure with a raised arm, Williamson focuses on the fierce nature of Hypatia and her historical defiance, like that of an Amazon warrior.

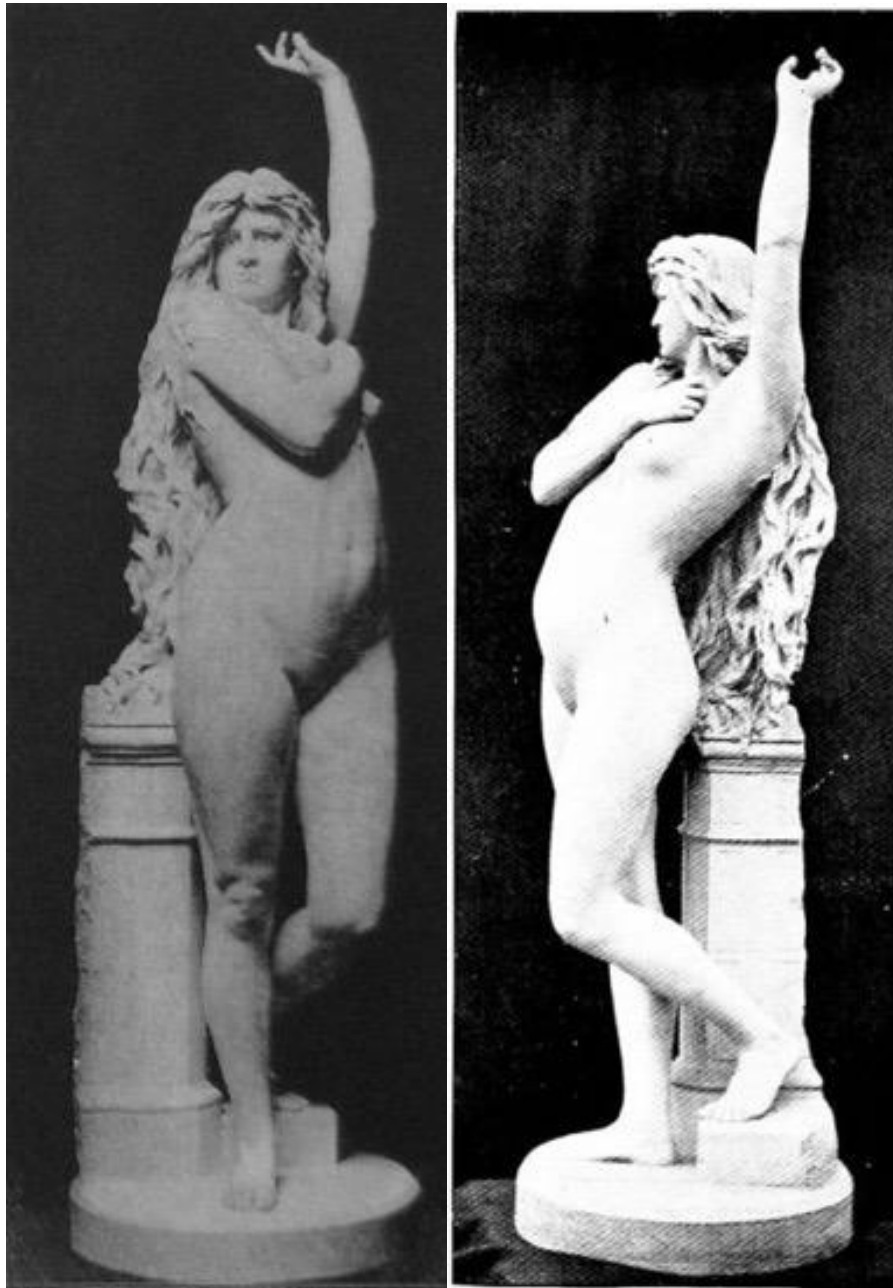
²⁶ Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, p. 102.

²⁷ Clark, *The Nude*, p. 415, on degradation of the body and eroticism.

²⁸ Algernon Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and Their Work From Its Foundation in 1769 to 1904*, 6 Vols. (London: Henry Graves & Co. Ltd. and George Bell and Sons, 1905/1906), VI, 296-297, Entry on Williamson's exhibitions, esp. 297 recording *Hypatia* exhibited in 1890, <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/book/the-royal-academy-of-arts-a-complete-dictionary-of-contributors-and-their-royal-academy-pictures-illustrating-the-hundred-and-twenty-second-exhibition-of-the-royal-academy> (London: Cassell & Company, 1888/1891), p. 115, illustrates Williamson's *Hypatia*. This publication was part of the Royal Academy Supplement of *The Magazine of Art*, 1890/1891, <https://archive.org/details/royalacademypict1890roya/page/n120/mode/1up>.

²⁹ Marion Harry Spielmann, *British Sculpture and Sculptors of Today* (London: Cassell, 1901), pp. 18-19, esp. p. 19. *Internet Archive*, Web. 22 December 2011.

³⁰ For the image, see <https://www.flickr.com/photos/internetanddigital/31136542791>.



Figures 3a and 3b. Francis John Williamson, *Hypatia*, front and side views, 1890, marble. No size available. Private collection, London. Photo courtesy: The Victoria Web Internet Archive and <https://victorianweb.org/sculpture/williamson/8.html>.

Richard Claude Belt's *Hypatia*

The British sculptor Richard Claude Belt (1851-1921) led a tumultuous professional life marked by several legal disputes and health problems, including visual impairment. His marble sculpture of *Hypatia* (1894), a mighty nude statue currently exhibited at Draper's Livery Hall in London (Figures 4a and 4b), reflects boldness and defiance, potentially mirroring his turbulent personal life. In his nude portrayal of *Hypatia*, Belt emphasized her physical beauty and adhered to the classical aesthetic principles of the 19th century, omitting the attributes associated with Hypatia's martyrdom as portrayed in the sculptures of Roberts and Tabacchi. The woman's full-

bodied figure resembles a Greek warrior goddess. Her forward-stepped movement, contrapposto stance, dramatically raised arm, and hand reaching for the sky symbolize freedom. This recalls the French Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* from 1830. The painting is an oil on canvas, currently displayed at the Louvre Museum in Paris. Belt captured Hypatia's intellectual brilliance and charisma through the material of polished marble sculpture and the use of the nude human body to express beauty, metaphorically Neoplatonic wisdom.

Both sculptors, Belt and Williamson, represented a standing nude with raised arms and a fearless, Amazon-type woman. While Belt favored depicting a frontal view of a heroic nude, Williamson opted for a serpentine stance, a classical pose. In contrast, Roberts focused on the brutality of her death by not showing a disheveled figure whose clothes have been torn apart, revealing her nude breasts, while surrounding his imagery with religious symbolic objects to explain this aggression.



Figures 4a and 4b. Richard C. Belt, *Hypatia*, 1894, marble. Draper's Livery Hall, London.

Photo courtesy: The Victoria Web Internet Archive and <https://victorianweb.org/sculpture/belt/6.html>.

Conclusion

These four sculptors' unique carving styles honor the remembrance of Hypatia, a remarkable female (Figures 1a, 2a, 3a, and 4a). Curiously, they all represented her as a much younger person than she actually was when she died, especially Tabacchi, who portrayed her as a very young female. Thus, Hypatia's persona as a fiercely intelligent woman, defiant of her victimization, continued to evoke artistic creativity in the 19th century for sculptors such as Roberts, Tabacchi, Williamson, and Belt. In his sculpture, Roberts aimed to delight the senses with the impact of white marble. This delight has a bittersweet twist. The eye is guided in seeing the part and the whole of the form; once the eye captures the totality of the form, the intellect processes the visual experience with both delight and horror.

Tabacchi dealt with the imprisonment of the body—the tied-up hands and feet—and the humiliation of being stripped of clothes but added conflicting and disturbing elements of eroticism. Belt and Williamson, in contrast, dealt with defiance of the aggressors, not seen but known by the viewer; hence, the figure is naked and bold. Roberts also partially projected the sentiments of these sculptors but added to his image aesthetic conceits of beauty inspired by Hypatia's Neoplatonic ideals of beauty, measurability, and truth in narrating or visualizing a myth to reveal the truth.

References

- Armstrong, A. H. (Trans.) (1984). *Plotinus Ennead V*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library.
- Cheney, L. G. (2014). Howard Roberts' *Hypatia of Alexandria*: A Form of Neoplatonic Beauty. *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 4(12), 1080-1902.
- Clark, K. (1956). *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University.
- Coleridge, S. T. (n.d.). *Poems*. London: Routledge.
- Dzielska, M. (1995). *Hypatia of Alexandria*. (F. Lyra, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Graves, A. (1905/1906). *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and Their Work From its Foundation in 1769 to 1904*, 6 Vols. London: Henry Graves & Co. Ltd. and George Bell and Sons.
- James-Gadzinski, S., & Cunningham, M. M. (1997). Howard Roberts, 1843-1900. In S. James-Gadzinski & M. M. Cunningham (Eds.), *American Sculpture in the Museum of American Art of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (pp. 86-89). Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art.
- Kingsley, C. (1895). *Hypatia: Or, New Foes with an Old Face; Illustrated from Drawings by William Martin Johnson*. New York: Harper.
- Kingsley, C. (1897). *Hypatia: Or, New Foes with an Old Face*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co.
- Kingsley, C. (1899). *Hypatia: Or, New Foes with an Old Face*. New York: Co-operative Publishing Society.
- Kooy, M. J. (2002). *Coleridge Schiller and Aesthetic Education*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Leconte de Lisle, C. M.-R. (1874). *Poèmes antiques*. Paris: Alphonse Lemerre.
- MacLennan, B. J. (2013). *The Wisdom of Hypatia*. Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications.
- Oslermark-Johansen, L. (2011). *Walter Pater and the Language of Sculpture*. London: Ashgate.
- Panzetta, A. (1994). *Dizionario Degli Scultori Italiani dell'ottocento e del primo Novecento*, 2 Vols. Turin: Umberto Allemandi.
- Rischl, J. (1976). Howard Roberts (1843-1900). In D. Sewell (Ed.), *Philadelphia: Three Centuries of American Art* (pp. 394-396). Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art.
- Royal Academy Pictures, Illustrating the Hundred and Twenty-Second Exhibition of the Royal Academy*. (1888/1891). London: Cassell & Company.
- Schaff, P., & Wace, H. (Eds.). (1890). *A. C. Zeno's Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers/Ecclesiastical History*. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Company.
- Scholasticus, S. (n.d.). *Historia Ecclesiastica* (n.pub.). VII. 15.
- Sellin, D. (1975). The First Pose: Howard Roberts, Thomas Eakins and a Century of Philadelphia Nudes. *Bulletin of the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, 70, 311-312.

- Spielmann, M. H. (1901). *British Sculpture and Sculptors of Today*. London: Cassell.
- Taylor, T. (1816). *The Six Books of Proclus on the Theology of Plato*. London: Printed for the Author.
- Urbainczyk, T. (1997). *Socrates of Constantinople: Historian of Church and State*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Vos, A. (2006). *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus*. Edinburgh: University Press.