

How do “categories” used in the past
to describe women in science
influence our view of nowadays
female mathematicians / scientists ?

“If one would like to gather everything that would make women who were very grounded in science well-known...one would write a fairly long history which would not be an uninteresting one”

Canon Goujet, 1728 in A. Rebière, *Les femmes dans la science : conférence faite au cercle Saint-Simon*, le 24 février 1894



M.C de Gotha (1751-1827)



J. Lalande (1732-1807)



J. Sniadecki (1756-1830)

personae

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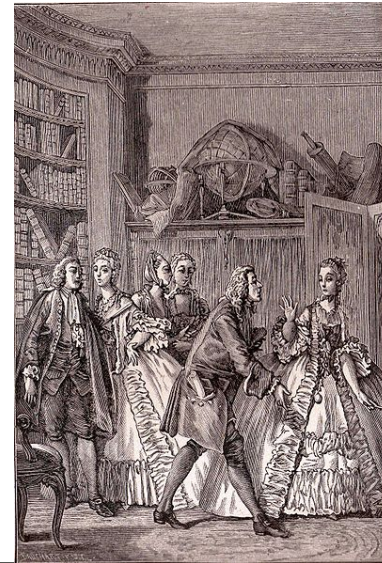
Sibum, H. Otto, Lorraine Daston, «Scientific Personae and Their Histories », In *Science in Context*, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

- **Persona** in Latin = mask in the Greek sense = who models the personality, not who hides it !
- A **cultural identity** that models both the individual (in body and mind) and creates a **collective** with a shared and recognizable **physiognomy**. The bases of the personae are varied: a social role (mother ...) / a profession (a physicist ...) / an anti-profession (flaneur ...) / a vocation (priest ...)
- It is not a presentation of individuals but of **species**, identifying a class rather than an individual.
- The personae appear and disappear according to a **specific context**. A nascent persona indicates the creation of a new type of individuals whose distinctive traits mark a recognized social species. Being a persona requires some degree of **cultural recognition**, just like a group physiognomy that can be condensed into a type.

Female scientist **personae** from Humanism to Enlightenment



Docta Puella
XIVth- XVIth



Femme savante
XVIIth- XVIIIth



M.G. Agnesi
(1718-1799)



E. Du Châtelet
(1706-1749)

Femme savante of 17th - 18th centuries

Vocabulary used in french dictionaries of savants for women (18th century) :

La Porte 1769, Delacroix 1769, Briquet 1804

- **No noun**, except “**savante**” - One exception for Mme Du Châtelet (“savante mathématicienne”)
- Usually description of the **actions** : “she wrote...”, “she calculated...”, “she observed...”, “she studied geometry...” and of the family link to a male savant

Femme savante of 17th - 18th centuries

Vocabulary used by french savants about women (18th century) - correspondences

- Learned **calculator** / trained **calculator** / logarithm **calculator** / The muse that makes these calculations for me
- Women **astronomers** / schoolgirl in astronomy / learned in astronomy / **astronomer** / young **astronomer** / **companion** of work / **helper** / **counselor** / **Professor assistant** in astronomy / **colleague** / **lecturer**
- **Collaborator** in chemistry
- **Academician**
- **Secretary**
- Mistress of business by proxy
- Guide / oracle / prodigy / learned woman



.....and Men ?



What about 19th
century women ?

Which persona ?

A. Rebière, *Les femmes dans la science : conférence faite au cercle Saint-Simon*, le 24 février 1894, p. 79-80

- “In order to clarify the more real influence that women are believed to have on the progress of science, it would be necessary, first and foremost, to study
- the **professional scientists** who devoted most of their lives to scientific studies: philosophers , mathematicians, physicists and naturalists. [...]
 - the **simple curious**, who, devoted to other labors, have nevertheless touched the sciences properly so called. [...]
 - the **collaborators**, who helped the scientists, actively and discreetly. [...]
 - the **protectors**, who founded prizes in academies or spread their benefits in other forms.”

Women scientists of 19th century

Vocabulary used in french dictionaries of savants for women (19th century)

Quérard 1826-1842, Rebière 1894 and 1897

- Quérard : same description than 18th century books, but use “**mathematician**” for S. Germain
- Rebière for 18th and 19th c women : use the **names** “**mathematician**”, “**philosopher**” as “**femme savante**”, with the description of the **actions**
- Rebière for end of 19th c women : **professions** as “**ingeneer**”, “**astronomer**” for women who received a degree

Women scientists of 19th century

Vocabulary used by french savants about women
(19th century)

- **Mathematician / geometer**
- **Philosopher**
- **Enthusiastic amateur of science**
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Some Hints....

- *Personae* according to profession fit better the 20th century than the centuries before....but what about the “amateurs”/ “collaborators” during the 20th century : are they included ? (ex : V.Fages, 2012)
- *Persona* “Femme savante” covers a huge diversity of realities : what about a classification according to practices ?
- Advantage about a study according to practices and not profession / diploma : include “amateurs”, include topics which were not included in modern sciences

Discussion

- What was the impact of the access to science universities granted to women at the end of the 19th century on these “categories”/ *personae* ? Do these “categories”/ *personae* still apply ?
- Do or/and did they foster or hinder our understanding of science's production by women ?
- How do these past “categories”/ *personae* influence our way of describing women's activities in science ?
- How does the selection of women made according to these “categories” / *personae* in dictionaries bias our view about women in science in the past ?
- Do these categories have an impact on the *persona* “woman of science” or “female mathematician” we (historians of mathematics or science) regard nowadays, and the public imagine ?

THANK YOU !