

Women and the Study of Logic in the Middle Ages

Dr. Sara L. Uckelman
s.l.uckelman@durham.ac.uk
@SaraLUckelman

International Medieval Mind Conference
Lincoln, 01 July 2022

A bit of background

This talk has grown out of reflection on two developments in the study of logic:

A bit of background

This talk has grown out of reflection on two developments in the study of logic:

- A growing interest in medieval logic.

A bit of background

This talk has grown out of reflection on two developments in the study of logic:

- A growing interest in medieval logic.
- A growing recognition of the gender-imbalance in logic/math/philosophy.

A bit of background

This talk has grown out of reflection on two developments in the study of logic:

- A growing interest in medieval logic.
- A growing recognition of the gender-imbalance in logic/math/philosophy.

A natural combination of these two issues results in the question: Where are the women in medieval logic?

The easy answer

Proposition

There weren't any.

The easy answer

Proposition

There weren't any.

Proof.

Logic was practiced in the universities.

Universities didn't admit women.

Ergo, there were no medieval female logicians. □

The easy answer

Proposition

There weren't any.

Proof.

Logic was practiced in the universities.

Universities didn't admit women.

Ergo, there were no medieval female logicians.

Not so easy ...

Dispensing with the easy answer

It is true that women were not allowed at Oxford, Cambridge, and Paris (all founded early 13th C) until quite late. But:

Dispensing with the easy answer

It is true that women were not allowed at Oxford, Cambridge, and Paris (all founded early 13th C) until quite late. But:

- This was not true of Italian and Spanish universities.

Dispensing with the easy answer

It is true that women were not allowed at Oxford, Cambridge, and Paris (all founded early 13th C) until quite late. But:

- This was not true of Italian and Spanish universities.
- The university was not the only place to learn.

Dispensing with the easy answer

It is true that women were not allowed at Oxford, Cambridge, and Paris (all founded early 13th C) until quite late. But:

- This was not true of Italian and Spanish universities.
- The university was not the only place to learn.
- There's more to the Middle Ages than just the 13th C onwards.

(Poss. Apocryphal) Women in the Universities

Bologna

- Maria di Novella was professor of mathematics at Bologna in the 13th C.
- Dorotea Bucca (1360–1436) was chair of medicine and philosophy at Bologna from 1390–1430, following the death of her father.

Salamanca

- Beatriz Galindo (c. 1465–?) studied grammar at one of the university's dependent institutions, and then taught philosophy and medicine at Salamanca, as well as tutored Isabel the Catholic in Latin. A commentary on Aristotle, *Notas y comentarios sobre Aristóteles*, is attributed to her. Little on the *Notas* appears to be available in English.

Study outside the universities

- Convent education.
- Private tutoring.
 - ▶ Eloise d'Argenteuil (12th C)
 - ▶ Flamenca and Margarida (late 13th C)
- Correspondence courses.
- Changing attitudes to the education of women

Convent education

The foundations for philosophical education by women were set by the founders of convents.

- Radegund: established first Frankish convents in the 6th C.
- Hild (d. 680): abbess of Whitby, taught five English bishops.
- Hrotsvith (d. 927): abbess of Gandersheim, “is said to have written works on logic and rhetoric” [Waithe, *History of Women Philosophers*, vol. 2]
- Anglo-Saxon nuns: “we hear of Anglo-Saxon nuns . . . even becoming accomplished logicians”; in the 7th C, Anglo-Saxon nunneries were a place where “female children of the laity, even of the higher ranks. . . were instructed. . . sometimes in rhetoric and even in logic” [Wright, *Womankind in Western Europe*, pp. 81, 86]

Flamenca

- Occitan romance *Flamenca*, composed around 1287.
- Two young women are rewriting some poetry for one to send to her lover.

Flamenca

- Occitan romance Flamenca, composed around 1287.
- Two young women are rewriting some poetry for one to send to her lover.

*Flamenca said to her, "Who has taught you,
Margarida, who has shown you—
by the faith you owe me—such dialectic?" (5441–5443)*

Correspondence courses

- Alcuin of York's letter to a holy nun (8th C): Advances a method of syllogistic reasoning for dealing with heretics, praising the nun's awareness of grammar and rhetoric and implying knowledge of logic as well.

Education of Women in the Renaissance

- Depended on social class/time period.
- Focus on the promotion of virtue.
- Leonard Bruni (1370–1444): girls should study the ancient classical and Christian authors in order to learn grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, moral philosophy, and how to become virtuous.
- Public oratory and disputation are omitted, because they are “considered unbecoming and impractical for women”.
- Ludovico Dolce (1508–1568): Women should “not teach school or ‘dispute’, that is, participate in academic disputation”.
- “A girl ought not require Latin learning, because she had no public role to play” (Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600*, p. 89).

Two different questions

Instead of asking “Where are the women logicians?” first ask:

Two different questions

Instead of asking “Where are the women logicians?” first ask:

- What is logic?

Two different questions

Instead of asking “Where are the women logicians?” first ask:

- What is logic?
- What is a logician?

What is logic?

- Dialectic
- Argumentation and the practice of debate.
- Connected to philosophy of language: signification, meaning.

What is a logician? (1)

- ① One who writes treatises on logic?
- ② One who practices or uses logic?

What makes one a logician? (2)

If (1), then maybe there were no medieval women logicians. Why?

- Strong connection between production of textbooks/theoretical treatises and university activity.
- Logic as a male pursuit.
 - ▶ Eloise rejects what Townsend calls the “tradition of dialectical disputation and the social customs of ritualized male aggression”
 - ▶ “Je ne suis logicienne”, Christine de Pizan write to Pierre Col.

Eloise d'Argenteuil

- c. 1090?/1100?–1164.
- Student and lover of Abelard.
- Recognized as an important ethical philosopher in her own right in modern times.
- After Abelard's death, Peter of Cluny complimented her on the fact that she had “left logic for the gospel, Plato for Christ, the Academy for the cloister”.

Christine de Pizan

- Born in Venice, 1364; grew up in the French court of Charles V as her father was the king's astrologer, alchemist, and physician.
- Began writing after being widowed at 25.
- Best known for her French courtly poetry, but also wrote books on practical advice for women.
- *The Book of the City of Ladies*: Dialogue between allegorical women representing Reason, Justice, and Rectitude, written in a highly skilled dialectical style.
- “Je ne suis logicienne”: But shortly afterward she poses a standard logical puzzle: “Se tu dis oyl, c'est faulx. . . Se tu me dis non, doncques te dis je vraye ma proposicion” (“If you say yes, it's false. . . If you tell me no, then you have proved true my proposition”).

What is a logician? (3)

But if (2)...

We've already mentioned a few cases of women (apparently) trained in logic. Some other educated women are worth investigating:

- Dhuoda
- Hildegard von Bingen
- Julian of Norwich

Dhuoda

Dhuoda, aka Dodana or Duodena (9th C)

- Wrote a handbook *Liber Manualis* for her two sons.
- The *Liber* is a guide to good conduct, and the only known work by a Carolingian woman known to have survived.
- Evidence for the learning of a woman at her period: She is familiar with the grammarian Donatus, and with Isidore's etymologies.

Hildegard of Bingen

Hildegard von Bingen (Germany, fin. 11th C.)

- Wrote fiction and non-fiction, including botany and medicine.
- Contributions to rhetoric via theological letters and poems and as a traveling preacher.

Julian of Norwich

Julian of Norwich (Norwich, 1342)

- First woman known to have written in Middle English.
- A mystic theologian, rather than a philosopher.
- “Long Text” (63,000 words) is a treatise reflecting on a set of divine visions, seeking to understand their meaning and signification.
- Complex theory of signification: “Woldst thou wetten this lord mening in this thing?” ... “love was his mening”.

A few false starts, aka methodological issues (1)

- Hrotsvith: “is said to have written works on logic and rhetoric” [Waithe, p. xx], or possibly just logic [Wright, p. 48].

A few false starts, aka methodological issues (1)

- Hrotsvith: “is said to have written works on logic and rhetoric” [Waithe, p. xx], or possibly just logic [Wright, p. 48]. But these treatises are now lost, possibly destroyed in the great fire during rule of Gerberg II (959–1001) [Eckenstein, p. 160].

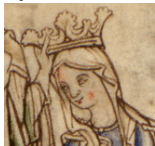
A few false starts, aka methodological issues (2)

- Queen Edith



A few false starts, aka methodological issues (2)

- Queen Edith



“I saw her often when still a boy, I visited my father, who was dwelling in the king’s court; and very often when I met here as I was coming from school, she questioned me in my grammar and verses, and, most readily passing from the solidity of grammar to the lightness of logic, in which was was skilful, she would confute me with the subtle threads of her arguments. . .” Ingulf, *Ingulfi Historia Croylandia*.

What do we gain from this?

- A better understanding of our history.
- The ability to reassess the contributions of women.
- New insights into and from medieval logic/dialectic.



Eloise



Hildegard



Christine



Julian