



Women in Early Christianity: Translations from Greek Texts

Patricia Cox Miller

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From the fictional Thecla in the second century to the very real Olympias in the early fifth century, the history of women in early Christianity was as complex and rich as the religion itself. This comprehensive sourcebook brings together translations of a variety of ancient Christian texts that elucidate how women were perceived and portrayed in the Greek literature written in the second to the sixth centuries. The texts included in the volume have been generously excerpted, providing the modern reader with an in-depth view of the historical reality of early Christian women's lives as well as a nuanced perspective on the many ways in which women were understood in theological and ecclesiastical frameworks.

Few documents written by early Christian women have been preserved; contemporary readers therefore do not have much direct access to these women's own perspectives on their lives and roles as Christians. Nevertheless, there are many kinds of texts that can be used both to reconstruct the history of actual women in early Christianity and to analyze the ancient ideologies and rhetoric that affected how they were perceived. This volume offers many different kinds of texts in order to present as complete a view as possible of early Christian women: documentary sources such as church orders and proceedings, popular narrative sources such as the novelistic apocryphal acts, biographies and lives of saints, and theological treatises on virginity and marriage.

What emerges from these texts is a colorful portrayal of the many faces of ancient Christian women in their roles as teachers, prophets, martyrs, widows, deaconesses, ascetics, virgins, wives, and mothers. Whether celebrated as saints or denigrated as harlots, early Christian women were magnets of theological and social thought.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Patricia Cox Miller is W. Earl Ledden Professor of Religion at Syracuse University. She is the author or editor of numerous works including *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and History* (coedited with Dale Martin).

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK:

"Patricia Cox Miller has produced a treasure house of primary sources for those exploring the history and theology of women in Christianity. . . . The author organizes and introduces the sources but lets them speak for themselves. This is a rich source book with a wonderful range of sources and bibliographic listings, and it should be welcomed by those who appreciate the value of a ready reference book." *Magistra*

"Patricia Cox Miller has skillfully sifted, sorted, and glossed a richly diverse collection of ancient texts that testify to the history of Christian women in their roles as teachers and prophets, martyrs and ascetics, widows and deaconesses, wives, mothers, sisters, and, finally, theological symbols. The texts not only speak for themselves but also, at Miller's prompting, convey a fascinating and complex story. This is much more than a

sourcebook in the usual, supplementary sense: it is a work of history that stands on its own."?Virginia Burrus, Drew University

"As a generation of scholarship has shown, early Christian texts can be mined for tantalizing, if fragmentary, evidence of the historical lives of early Christian women. They can also provide access to the complex and sometimes contradictory portraiture of 'woman' as an idealized category in the early church. *Women in Early Christianity* collects a rich array of documentary, literary, and ideological material from the first five centuries of Christian movements and organizes these sources thematically so that both historical women and figures of the feminine come into sharp relief. This book provides a new generation of students with a collection that is both accessible and challenging."?Elizabeth A. Castelli, Barnard College

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