

Abstracts

Marianne Alenius

Den lærde neostoiske, danske filosof Birgitte Thott (1610-1662) og hendes inspiration fra den antikke filosof Seneca den yngre

TBA



Rosa Skytt Burr

Supra Sexum: Thott and the Dispute about the Intellectual Limits of the Female Sex

In her lifetime, Birgitte Thott was considered an *extraordinarily* learned woman who seemed, in the eyes of certain learned men, to be a fascinating exception to the un-learnedness of the female sex. Consider, for instance, Hendrich Ernst's praise of Thott as "den Erlige begafvede med mange skattelige oc rare Dyder høye ofver Qvinde-Kiønnet begafvede (...) Frue" or Jørgen Rosenkrantz's claim that Thott is "prydet udi Lærdom oc Sprogets Kundskab ofver sit Kiøn". I suggest that we understand these decelerations as instances of the concept *supra sexum*, a dubious honor granted to women so learned that they had ostensibly gone beyond the limits of the always already unlearned female sex.

Thott herself was also concerned with what learning does to women. In her writing, though, learning does not allow or force women to cross the limits of their sex, but rather makes them become better mothers, humans, rulers, teachers, Christians and members of their communities. She takes aim, not explicitly at the logic of *supra sexum*, but rather at the prevalent idea that learning is harmful for women. Her arguments are complex and include both the claim that learning makes all members of »det Menniskelige Kiøn« more virtuous in the stoic sense of the word *and* the claim that learning specifically helps keep women within the limits of female propriety and modesty.

In my presentation, I will explore how the exceptionality and strangeness of the learned woman is articulated in some of the laudatory poems from Thotts translation of Seneca's philosophical works (1658) and in Schönau's entry on Thott in his *Samling af Danske Lærde Fruentimer* (1753). Through my reading of in the 1658 dedication of Thott's Seneca translation and chapter 46 of her unpublished treatise of moral philosophy *Om vejen til et lykosaligt liv* (approx. 1659 according to Alenius), I will then compare and contrast the learned men's descriptions of Thott with an analysis of her own view on what learning does to women in regards to the boundaries of their sex.



Sabrina Ebbersmeyer

Birgitte Thott's Seneca Translation (1658) in a European Perspective

When Birgitte Thott's Danish translation of the philosophical works of Seneca appeared in print in 1658, the European dimension of this publication became immediately apparent to the reader. Not only does Thott herself place her translation in a European context in the preface to the reader, also the various laudatory poems to this work allude to the European facets of this publication. However,

there is also something special about this publication that we do not find in any other edition of Seneca's works: it is dedicated to the female sex.

What role did Thott's Seneca translation play in the European revival of Stoicism during the Early modern period? Why was Thott as a woman intellectual interested in Stoic philosophy? What does this translation tell us about women's participation in the learned world?

In order to develop tentative answers to these questions, I will proceed in three steps: Firstly, I will put Thott's translation into the context of the European revival of Stoicism and the renewed interest in Seneca's works during the Early Modern Period. Secondly, I will compare Thott's approach to Seneca to that of other European women philosophers. Thirdly, I will reflect on translation as one specific way of women intellectuals to participate in public philosophical debates.

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Randi Lise Davenport

«What reason is there for them [men] to be wise and assume that we cannot be?» Spanish Women Writers, Education, and Neostoicism in the Seventeenth Century

My contribution to the workshop on Birgitte Thott and her intellectual context will attempt to draw some parallels to the contemporary Spanish female scene. Research on Early Modern Spanish women writers has increased considerably in the past few decades, which has also increased the sheer numbers of Spanish female writers from this period. I will give a very brief overview of this research, focusing on aspects relevant to Thott research, and restricting my examples primarily to women writers of her generation.

The most famous and celebrated of these was undoubtedly the *professional* writer María de Zayas's (ca. 1590-d. after 1660). One of the concerns she shared with Thott was the question concerning women's abilities and right to education, as her lament in the prologue to her *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares (Amorous and Exemplary Novels, 1637)* quoted in the title to this paper shows. However, she was not the only woman who expressed herself on the matter, neither was she alone in expressing ideas imbued with the Neostoicism in vogue at the time from a female perspective.

As a brief excursion, I would also like to make a very modest contribution to Thott reception and book history, offering a description of the exemplar of Thott's 1658 translation of Seneca at the University Library in Tromsø, showing a couple of its marginal glosses.

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Matilda Amundsen Bergström

Mulieres Philosophantes – Philosophizing Women in a Swedish 17th Century Dissertation

In 1699, Peter Hedengrahn (1677-1727), student at Uppsala University in Sweden, submitted his disputation pro exercitio, titled *Exercitium Academicum Mulieres Philosophantes Leviter Adumbrans*. In it, Hedengrahn argues for the intellectual abilities of women, connecting philosophical arguments about the nature of both reason and women, to a historical account of learned women inspired by the popular "lärde fruntimmer" genre. In a Swedish context, the work is unique. Not only is this the earliest text on learned women to be printed in the country, it is also the

first academic dissertation about learned women. With it, the popular debates about women's intellectual abilities were brought into academia.

In my talk, I will examine Hedengrahn's arguments for women philosophers, focusing on how he portrays philosophy and how he makes use of women exemplars in his argumentation. Paying specific mind to genre, I will lastly discuss how the academic context might have influenced Hedengrahn's argument.



Anne-Sophie Sørup Nielsen

'Philosopher' an honorary title: On Birgitte Thott in Christoph August Heumann's *Acta Philosopharum* (1721)

What does it mean to be a philosopher? And why is this title so heavily guarded? Historians of philosophy function as the gatekeepers of the field, deciding who will be remembered as the great philosophical minds of their time and who will vanish into oblivion. In this paper, I will investigate the portrayal of women philosophers in Christoph August Heumann's *Acta Philosopharum*, focusing on his entry on the Danish philosopher Birgitte Thott. My aim is to determine which criteria Heumann makes use of to classify these women as philosophers, and to establish whether or not Heumann applies different notions of philosophy when he reviews female and male intellectuals.

Christoph August Heumann (1681-1764) was one of the first historians of philosophy to write about women philosophers, listing 28 learned women from all over Europe in the third volume of his *Acta Philosophorum* (1715-1727). Although Heumann is recognized as a significant figure in the development of the historiography of philosophy (Mulsow [et al.], *Christoph August Heumann (1681–1764)*, 2017; Santinello & Piaia, *Models of the History of Philosophy* [vol. II], 2011), his catalogue of female philosophers has received considerably less attention, with the notable exceptions of Elisabeth Gössmann's transcription of the catalogue in *Eva – Gottes Meisterwerk* (1985) and the excellent article *From a 'memorable place' to 'drops in the ocean'* (2019) by Sabrina Ebbersmeyer. Examining the way in which Heumann writes about female intellectuals is useful both in order to understand the discipline of philosophy and its limits, as well as women's inclusion and exclusion from philosophy.

My paper will proceed in three stages: First, I will briefly present Heumann and his impact on the histories of philosophy of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. After this, I will perform a close reading of the entry on Birgitte Thott in *Acta Philosopharum*, comparing it to other entries on both learned women and male philosophers. This will give rise to a discussion about a number of questions concerning the definition of the philosopher and the role of women in philosophy. Finally, I will offer some concluding remarks on the gendering of philosophy as an academic discipline.



Ellen Krefting

Establishing female literary authority in *La Spectatrice danoise* 1748-1750

La Spectatrice danoise was a moral weekly published in Copenhagen, in French, from 1748 to 1750. Behind the mask of the Danish female spectator was a young male writer, the French huguenot and freemason Laurent de la Beaumelle. What is interesting however, is how "La spectatrice" over the first issues of the journal establishes her position and authority as a "female writer", referring extensively to the tradition of French learned women and female writers of the 17th and early 18th century (Scudéry and "les préceuses", Anne Dacier etc), and also briefly mentioning the Danish learned woman Birgitte Thott. Nevertheless, the position of the female writer appears ambiguous: strong arguments in favour of female writers' rights to go public with their knowledge, experiences and opinions are combined with appeals to the readers to keep their expectations low, since one cannot take women's writing too seriously.

In my paper, I will use *La Spectatrice danoise* as a point of departure for discussing questions of gender, knowledge, rationality and the position of the female writer in the Dano-Norwegian context of the middle of the 18th century, with a side glance at La Beaumelle's contemporary in Copenhagen, Friderich Christian Eilschov and his *Forsøg til en Fruentimmer-Philosophie eller Alvorlige og lystige Samtaler med et Fruentimmer om det der er nyttigt og fornøylegt i alle Philosophiens Parter: efter Fontenelles Maade*, from 1749.



Anne Birgitte Rønning

On Women's Abilities and Female Education in Books Targeted at Female Readers by the End of the 18th Century

Hans Jørgen Birch's *Billedgallerie for Fruentimmer indeholdende Levnetsbeskrivelser over berømte og lærde danske, norske og udenlandske Fruentimmere* (Portrait Gallery of Women containing life stories of famous and learned Danish, Norwegian and foreign women") – 3 volumes (1793-95) is the last publication in the tradition of *gynaecea* in early modern Denmark. It marks the decline of a genre and is an important sign of inconsistencies and change in the discourse on women, as well as changes on the book market and a growing new female readership.

My paper will present and discuss Birch's *Billedgallerie* in both a diachronic and a synchronic context: It will first be compared diachronically to Fredrik Christian Schønau's *Samling af Danske Lærde Fruentimmer bekiendte, med adskillige mest historiske Anmerkninger forøget*, ("Collection of Danish learned women, who by their knowledge and published or posthumous writings have made their names famous in the learned world, with several mostly historical remarks increased" 2 vols. 1753), then synchronically to a couple of other publications from the 1790s targeted at female readers and discussing women's abilities and female education: Isabella Howard's *For unge Fruentimmer, som ville gjøre sig og deres tilkommende Mænd lykkelige* (1792) and *Om den Delicatesse, som anstaaer det smukke Kjøen, Tilligemed nogle Grundsætninger til at befordre unge Jomfruers Lyksalighed i og uden for Ægtestanden* (1795) (translated from *Thoughts in the form of Maxims addressed to Young Ladies on their first Establishment in the world*, the latter including Dorothe Liebeskind's preface to the German edition of Howards work) and Jens Krag Høst's *Lommebog for Fruentimmer. En nytaarsgave* (1796).

