



CELEBRATING **GIRL POWER** THROUGHOUT HISTORY

# SHEVOLUTION

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WRITTEN BY  
**LOU TRELEAVEN**

ILLUSTRATED BY  
**PETRA BRAUN**

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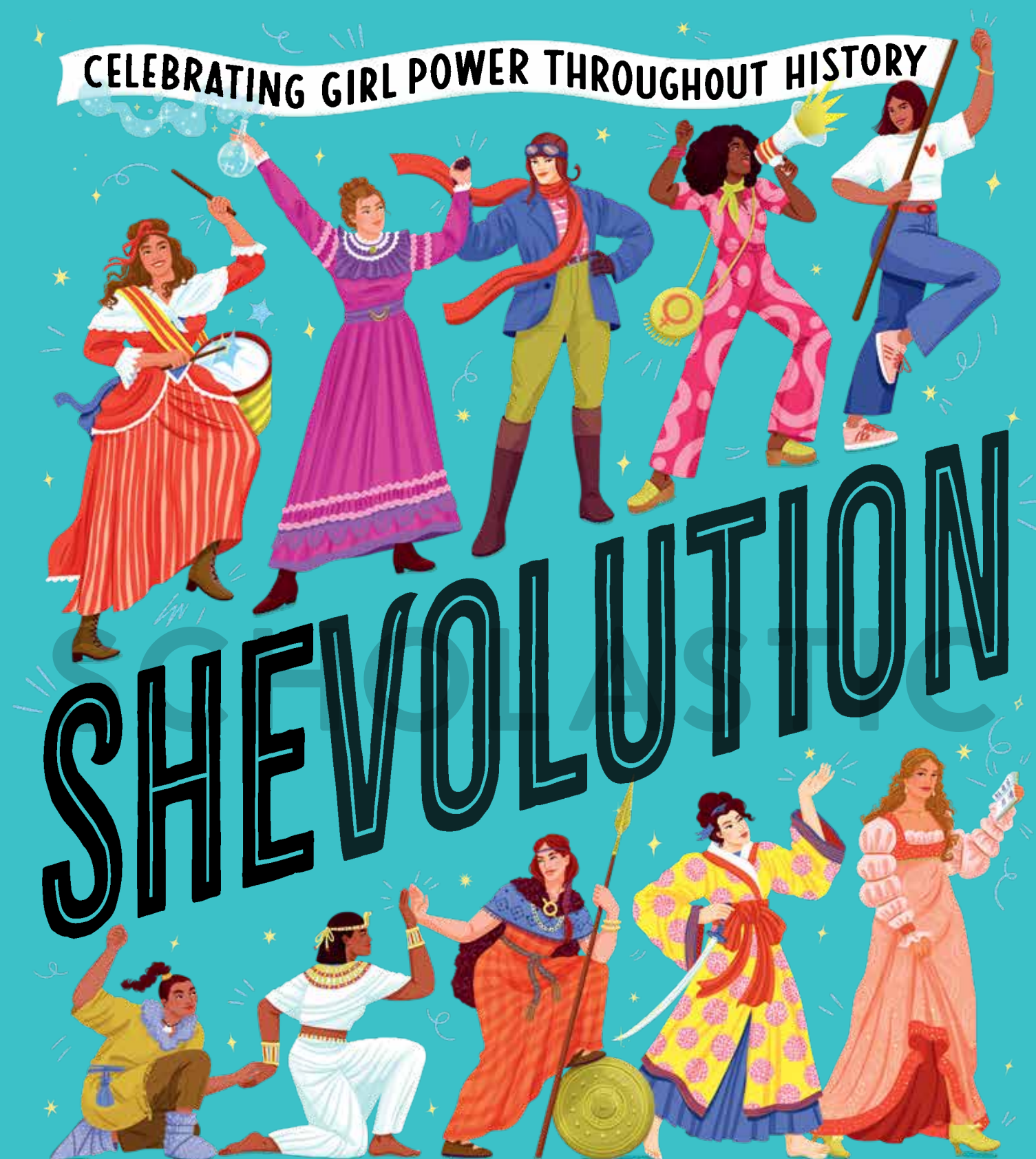
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# IN THE BEGINNING



There is a beginning to every story and this story begins with one woman. Before there was you – or your sister – there was Eve. At the start of our *Shevolution*, before there were queens ruling countries or girls going to school, there was Eve: a powerful, enterprising, strong-willed survivor. She could have had any name, but whatever her name was, she is our worldwide common ancestor. Mother to us all.

Our shared relative and the origin of our *Shevolution*.

**E**ve might have lived around 200,000 years ago, but she still would have looked like us. She would have talked and laughed with her friends like us, marvelled at sunsets, gazed at the Moon and fallen in love like us. But her life would have been very, very different to ours. Instead of sleeping in a nice warm bed, she would have curled up under the stars. Instead of popping into a shop when she was hungry, she would have had to hunt for meat and gather fruit, nuts and roots.

*Scientists call this woman Eve because in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions, Eve was the first woman.*

You might be wondering how in the world we know that everyone alive today is related to one woman. Surely that's impossible? The answer is in our DNA – this special instruction code that tells your body how to breathe, grow, live and learn; that tells you how much you look like the other members of your family, even sometimes how much you behave like them.

Inside our cells is a very special type of DNA – mitochondrial DNA – which is only passed on from our mothers. This means that scientists can use this DNA to trace back an unbroken chain from every woman and girl all the way back to one: Eve.

*Sometimes the person we think of as 'Eve' will change. As family lines end, the most common ancestor to us all will switch to another woman.*

Right now, the person we think of as Eve lived in Southern Africa in the Stone Age. She would have had a family and a community and no idea that one day, eight billion people would be related to her.





# WHERE IS EVERYONE?

Eight billion would have been an unimaginable number to Eve. Her life – and the lives of every modern human at that point in time – would have been lived in Africa. There may have only been 50,000 people like her in existence and almost certainly no more than a million. At this stage, humans had been using stone tools for around 2.4 million years, giving us the ‘Stone Age’ name, and Eve’s family would have picked up new skills as they grew, just like you. They were pretty good at it, too.

At the beginning of the Stone Age, as humans got to grips with their new stone tools, a Stone-Age woman might be wrapped in animal skins, living in a cave eating

nuts and berries, and – if she was lucky – the occasional small creature, before moving on to a new location. By the end of the Stone Age, nearly three million years later, she’d be more likely to be living in a clay hut, cooking freshly speared deer over a fire, with a nice broth boiling away in a fancy homemade pot. She would also have had a stylish-for-the-time handsewn outfit, thanks to the invention of the needle.

Before the idea of farming cropped up around 10,000 years ago, people lived by either hunting or gathering food. Many people imagine that it would have been the men who charged off with spears to hunt for animals

to kill and eat, while the women stayed near the cave looking after the children and prepping a side salad from their finds on a recent foraging trip. But guess what? They’re wrong. Recently, historians looking at Stone-Age graves have discovered new evidence: female skeletons buried with valuable spears, just like male hunters. And doesn’t that make sense? With so few people and every one of them important for the survival of the group, everyone would have done whatever was necessary to eat and to live. Of course! Being smaller and lighter, women would have been good at creeping up on their prey – even if they had a baby strapped to them at the time. Stone-Age women were multi-skilled survival specialists.

Life wasn’t only hunting, gathering and heading back to the family cave though. Just like you, people would have had downtime, but without a games console or the internet, Stone-Age leisure time would have been rather

different to yours. With no social media to record your every move, what could you do to let people know about your life? Paint. Paint the cave, in fact. Cave-dwelling people left many beautiful clues to their existence, painting animals and people on the walls. You can even see the shapes of their hands, as they used them as stencils, painting around them to create patterns and prints, even holding pigment in their mouths to ‘spray paint’ over them. Recent studies of these hand stencils have revealed something wonderful: many are female, which makes it likely that the stunning paintings they have been found next to are by female artists, too.

A hundred thousand years after Eve was keeping herself busy with stone tools, hunting and gathering her food, and decorating her cave with her exploits, her descendants began to travel. They began to leave Africa and gradually started the spread of humankind around the world.

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# PRINCESS, PRIESTESS, POET

Once people started to move beyond their original home in Africa, developments for Eve's later descendants happened at different times in different locations – not surprising since there was no way then to let people far away know what you'd discovered. And discover they did! People began to dig for copper around ten thousand years ago in what would eventually be Iraq. Later, when tin was discovered, people found that together they made a harder metal: bronze. And so the Bronze Age began, initially here and there until the knowledge spread or was discovered all over. That wasn't the only new development. People also started to farm, planting crops and keeping animals penned in and protected from wild predators so they could use them for food. Villages, towns and even cities began to spring up; eventually whole nations were created. Ancient burials found in Spain show women buried with men in lavish, expensive tombs situated under important buildings, meaning they both would have held powerful positions. Men and women also dressed the same in skirts or shifts, and both carried daggers. Bronze-Age women could be powerful queens, priestesses or warriors. Some were even all three...

*How do you tell a male skeleton from a female? You might think they're all the same, but actually a woman's skeleton looks different to a man's. Because women are able to give birth, their pelvises – the bony frames that keep our legs attached to us – are wider.*

In an age where there was still so much to be discovered and understood, people believed in many different things. The world was a great mystery, and perhaps belief in a variety of gods helped people find a way to understand the mystery. Some of these gods were female and were served by female priestesses. If you were a priestess, you would usually live at the temple dedicated to your goddess. Your job would be to offer gifts of things like food and clothing, and even animal sacrifices. You could also perform marriages and help people who had illnesses or injuries. Another of your jobs would have been to predict the future. No need for a crystal ball though. All you had to do was look through the guts of a freshly killed animal and you would find a way to work out what the gods wanted. You could also interpret dreams, which were seen as messages sent from the gods. It was probably a difficult job, especially if you were telling someone something they did not want to hear.

Priestesses also had the chance to be creative and write their own songs and hymns. **ENHEDUANNA** of Mesopotamia (where Iraq, Syria and Turkey are today) wrote many hymns to the goddess Inanna. They were so popular that they were inscribed on stone tablets and can still be read today. Before Enheduanna's time, it wasn't usual for authors to put their names to their writing. But this talented priestess wrote about herself in her songs and how wonderful it felt to create art. You could say she was the first celebrity author.

Priestesses were usually from ruling families so they would quite often be rulers themselves as well. Enheduanna was one such priestess. Her father was Sargon the Great of Akkad. People who lived in Akkad worshipped a fierce goddess called Ishtar, while in nearby Sumeria the people worshipped the more gentle goddess Inanna. When Sargon

the Great conquered Sumeria, Enheduanna helped him by writing songs that merged the two goddesses, so that eventually people started thinking of them as one and the same. Having this common belief made it easier for Sargon to rule his people.





# EQUALITY CALLS

In ancient Egypt, a woman had more freedom and rights than in some countries today. She was free to find a career, to fall in – and out of – love, to fight and to lead. The Egyptians believed in *ma'at* or balance in all things. There were even god and goddess couples. Isis ruled over humanity together with her husband Osiris and gave the gift of equality between men and women to her people. Well, almost. Men were the heads of their households, but women could choose who to marry, travel where they wanted, hold important jobs and had equal legal rights, unlike women of other societies at the time, such as the ancient Greeks.

It's said that a Greek woman named **AGNODICE** wanted to be a doctor, but she wasn't allowed to train in her own country because of her sex. Agnodice was so determined to follow her dream that she travelled to Egypt to become a doctor there. She then returned home to work, but it still wasn't easy. Agnodice had to disguise herself as a man in order to work as a doctor in her own country.

If you were a woman in ancient Egypt and wanted to get one of the more desirable jobs, the starting point was to become a scribe – someone who recorded events and finances, and kept things organized, all using hieroglyphs written in ink on papyrus. To become a scribe meant years of study, but once qualified you could become a priest, a teacher or a doctor.

If you were a woman who didn't have the money to study to become a scribe or you weren't born into the right

family, you could do a more manual job such as weaver, baker, cook, brewer, launderer or sandal-maker. The wealthier classes employed people or forced enslaved people to work for them.

To bag the very top job in Egypt, the only way was to become a wife of the pharaoh, or ruler, and work your way up to being the top wife: the queen. The queen would help her husband govern and stand in for him if he was travelling or away at war.

**HATSHEPSUT** was the most powerful queen of ancient Egypt. She even ruled on her own as pharaoh when her husband died. During her reign, she organized adventurous trading expeditions, fought alongside her soldiers in battle and had many impressive buildings erected. The most famous were four huge obelisks inscribed with writing glorifying the gods – and herself, of course.

As an ancient-Egyptian woman, you were free to marry who you wanted – but you had to choose wisely. Your marriage would last into the afterlife and for all eternity. If things went wrong, though, you could get divorced. Unlike in some time periods and countries, even today, divorce was not seen as shameful, and the woman could keep the family home and her children. However, the hope was for a happy union, and the rights that women and girls were afforded gave them much greater power to achieve their own happiness.

**BASTET** was the daughter of the Sun god and a popular goddess for many ancient-Egyptian women. Her special concerns were the home, family, childbirth and women's secrets. Women would make offerings to her or carry amulets in her form in the hope of getting her help. Because she took the form of a cat, cats in ancient Egypt were treated with great admiration and respect. They still demand this same treatment today.



# AN IRON WILL

*The Celts of Ireland worshipped many gods in the Iron Age, but their goddesses were just as important.*

As the *Shevolution* continued – although at a very different pace in different places – there was another leap forward for the descendants of Eve. People worked out how to extract iron from rock and use it to make steel. This new material meant that weapons and tools became much stronger. Farming improved, it was now possible to build larger structures and war became ever more deadly. The Iron Age had begun, and Iron-Age women were ready for it.

What were people in the Iron Age like? How different were their lives to yours? When men died in Iron-Age Britain, they were usually buried with a sword and a shield. Iron-Age women were buried with a brooch and a mirror. But an ancient grave on Bryher – an island in the Scilly Isles – had scientists puzzled for a long time. The grave contained a sword and a shield ... and a brooch and a mirror. Was this a man or a woman? All that was left of the body were a few small pieces of bone and teeth, so the shape wasn't obvious, and the remains were too decayed to test for DNA. But then things changed. Scientists discovered that a person's sex can be found out through their tooth enamel. The teeth were examined, and the ancient body was discovered to be female. Mirrors are thought to have been used in battle for signalling and also for communicating with the gods, so the items left in the grave point to the woman being a warrior or powerful leader. And ancient sites are still unlocking secrets about the lives of mighty Iron-Age women.

If you wanted something to last for thousands of years, you wouldn't think of putting it in a bog, but that's exactly what happened to some Iron-Age bodies. Bogs and swamps can preserve bodies because they prevent oxygen from causing decay. They are also full of a chemical called tannin, which preserves soft body tissue and even clothing.

An Iron-Age woman was dug up from a bog in Huldremose, Denmark, and scientists were able to discover some amazing things about her, including that her last meal was rye, seeds and some sort of meat. They also found that she had once broken her leg, but it had healed, her right arm was almost severed, she was around 40 years old – quite elderly for the Iron Age! – and she lived her life over 2,200 years ago.

*She wore a checked woollen skirt that was once blue, a scarf that used to be bright red and two sheepskin capes.*

*She had some precious keepsakes sewn into her clothing: an old horn comb, a blue hairband and a leather cord.*

Bogs were used to making offerings to the gods and to sacrifice animals. Was the woman a human sacrifice, or was her death a sad accident? Was her arm injured before or after death? Her ultimate secrets will never be known, but at least now she will be remembered by history.





# THE POWER OF WRITING



The age of antiquity – the Classical Era – began around two and a half thousand years ago. This was when people started to record their own history and we can know and understand much more about the lives of women and girls in our *Shevolution*. At this time, huge empires expanded across continents and Greek and Roman influences were everywhere: from politics and law to architecture, language and art. A new age was coming.

Away from Europe, the Persian empire grew across Western Asia from ancient Iran and was the first empire we know of to accept the different faiths and languages of its subjects, instead of trying to change them. Persian women also had more rights and freedoms than women would 2,000 years later in Victorian England: they could own lands and estates, supervise workers and travel freely for business or pleasure. Some even fought in the Persian army alongside men. Women received equal pay, and actually got more pay if they were pregnant. How do we know all this? We can read the records. Inscribed tablets found in the ruins of the city of Persepolis show travel expenses being paid to women from royal funds. These freedoms stopped, however, when the Persian empire finally fell, conquered by armies from the nearby Arabian empire.

Of all the mighty women in Persia, **IRDABAMA** was probably the most powerful. A trader and merchant, she had nearly 500 people working for her, and owned vineyards and

farms in Babylonia, Egypt, Media and Syria. But Irdabama didn't just sit back and let the money roll in. She spent a lot of time travelling and making sure everything was running smoothly. As a result, Irdabama was one of the richest women of her time.

Unlike in Persia, a woman's life over in ancient Greece was very restricted. While men could go about freely, as a woman you were expected to stay inside your home or courtyard. If you really had to, you could visit a neighbour and attend public events, so you would probably be desperate for the next wedding, funeral or religious ceremony to be held. Your job was to raise the children, cook and sew. If you lived on a farm, you might help with the harvesting. Apart from that there were no career options for women. As an ancient-Greek girl you might be taught some basic lessons at home, but your main task was to learn how to run a household. Once you reached your teenage years, you were married off and had to run your own home.

There was one role for a Greek woman that did give her power. And it was a role unlike any other. The oracle, or Pythia, was a special priestess who predicted the future. If you wanted to know how your latest war might end, you would ask the oracle. If you wanted to get some guidance on the fate of your empire, you'd ask the oracle. It can't have been easy to get this job – and the privilege that came with it – although it's not entirely known what the selection process would have been like.

It is known that you would be a woman over 50 and would have to live away from your family at the temple of Apollo in Delphi, and – just a few times a year – you would have to descend to the lower level of the temple and enter an altered state, so that you could make your predictions. It's possible that there, deep underground, gases released from the earth below helped to make the

oracle reach that state. Whatever you said during the ceremony was recorded and interpreted by others and was believed to be advice from Apollo himself. You would do this until the end of your life, at which point the next oracle would be chosen. The oracles are a rare example of Greek women in ancient times having the power to influence society.

*Enslavement was common in Greece during this time, and even an average home would have three or four slaves living and working in it. They might be captured prisoners or born into slavery.*

*An enslaved woman had even fewer rights than a free one, and her quality of life depended entirely on her enslaver.*



# PLOTS AND PLANS

While the women chosen to make predictions at Apollo's temple in Delphi were still going about their work, the Romans began to expand their empire. At one point Roman territories became so vast that one in four people on the planet were Roman citizens. You may already know that the Romans are famous for introducing the world to plumbing, straight roads, the modern calendar, a single currency, spas, underfloor heating and even fast food (perfect for hungry Roman soldiers on the move), but you may not have heard much about the lives of Roman women. Despite being so advanced in so many ways, the ancient Romans, much like the ancient Greeks, valued women as wives and mothers. And like ancient-Greek women, Roman women were expected to concentrate on running the home. You could have a job, but it was rare, and power would be out of your reach.

*The only way you could have a big influence on the world stage was to marry a leader – or give birth to one...*

Female members of Emperor Augustus's family had very colourful lives, but their exploits often put them in danger. The emperor's only biological child, **JULIA THE ELDER**, did not behave as her father wished. To help his political schemes, Augustus chose a husband for Julia – not once, but three times. Julia's first two husbands died and the third left her. Julia decided to form her own relationships instead, but Augustus was so angry with her behaviour that he had her banished to an island in 2 BCE.

Julia's daughter, **AGRIPPINA THE ELDER**, was lucky enough to have a happy marriage and a large family – until her husband died in mysterious circumstances. Boldly she accused the next emperor, Tiberius, of poisoning him. When Tiberius refused her request for a grand public funeral, she brought her husband's ashes home to Rome herself and paraded with them down the streets to Augustus's royal tomb, accompanied by crowds of mourners. By disobeying the emperor in this way she was basically accusing him of murder and Tiberius never forgave her. His revenge was long and slow. He executed one of her sons, and a second son died of hunger in exile. Agrippina the Elder was also exiled to an island, where she starved to death in 33 CE.

Julia's granddaughter, **AGRIPPINA THE YOUNGER**, was just as fiery a character as her mother and grandmother. Her aim was to put her son, Nero, on the throne, so she married Emperor Claudius and persuaded him to make Nero his heir. She then, so the rumour goes, cooked up a poisonous mushroom supper to finish him off in the year 54 CE. Agrippina was also rumoured to have killed her first husband and to have plotted to kill her brother so she had a slightly murderous history. The small problem remained of Claudius already having a son of his own ready to be the emperor, but Nero helped out by murdering his stepbrother and taking the throne. Agrippina had succeeded in her ambition. But, as teenagers sometimes do, Nero soon got tired of having an interfering mother around and, after a number of failed attempts, finally managed to have her assassinated in 59 CE.

*Agrippina had brought her son up to be as ruthless and deadly as herself.*

Julia the Elder

Agrippina the younger

Agrippina the Elder





# DARK TIMES

Sixteen hundred years ago, as the mighty Roman Empire fell, culture and science began to take a back seat. Warring tribes, invasions and religious differences created division among the now millions of people on Earth. The early Middle Ages – the Dark Ages – saw superstition, strict hierarchy and the power of the church take over. In Europe, there was a societal place for everyone. This ‘feudal’ system placed the monarch at the top of the heap with their lords directly below them, followed by knights, then farmers and merchants, with lowly peasants beneath them all. Serfs – the lowest of the low – were firmly at the bottom, lower even than peasants. At every level, women and girls were considered ‘less than’ and ‘possessions’ of their husbands or fathers. Even rich women were treated as objects to be fought over, won and lost, and their education was deliberately limited. The most powerful women were usually widows who were able to take over their husband’s affairs and businesses, but even then a male relative might still be on hand to tell them what to do.

A woman named **CHRISTINE DE PIZAN** was one of the rare medieval women to have a good education. And her education was thanks to having access to a library. It was not just any old library, either. Christine was the daughter of the royal astrologer for Charles V of France and lived at court where she had access to the kind of education – and reading material – usually reserved for boys. A few years into her young marriage, Christine’s husband died, leaving her with three children and the need to make a living. And so she wrote. At first she worked as a scribe – writing for other people – but then she began to write her own ideas.

*And they were brilliant!*

She wrote letters, essays and books including *The Book of the City of Ladies* in 1405 which imagined a town that was run and lived in only by women. Her point was that

if women are given equal rights they can contribute equally to society.

The medieval era also brought with it the Black Death, which was a horrific plague that swept across the Islamic world and Europe in the 14th century. Starting with egg-sized swellings in the armpits or groin, the Black Death caused fever, sickness and diarrhoea, and, for one in three people, a speedy and painful death. The population shrank and, for decades afterwards, many women who had been widowed went on to run their husbands’ businesses and make important decisions. But, as the population regrew, these freedoms and new opportunities were lost again.

Back in the Middle Ages you would not have been able to choose your husband. Marriages were arranged by parents and were used to boost the family’s finances or place in society. As a girl in medieval Europe you could be married from the age of 12 and would join your husband’s family with a big bag of cash (if they were lucky) called a dowry. If you had any possessions or land of your own, that would go to your husband, too. Before the wedding, a notice would be put on the church door in case anyone wanted to object. Reasons for not being able to marry included: being too closely related, trying to get married on a feast day, being a monk or nun, or the priest being a murderer.

Religions and beliefs changed a lot in the Middle Ages. Before this era, most people worshipped pagan gods representing things like the Sun and Moon, or ideas such as love, war or nature. The spread of organized religions like Christianity and Islam across Europe and Western Asia meant that their powerful leaders became bigger influences. The idea that women should stay in the role of dutiful homemaker won out and those who stood out for being ‘different’ were viewed with suspicion, violence or even a death sentence for being a ‘witch’.







# NOT SO MANY CHOICES



Just like in ancient Rome, one of the few ways women in medieval times could wield any sort of power or influence was through marriage to a high-status man. A woman named **ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE** did just that – not just once, but twice.

Eleanor's father was the super-rich Duke of Aquitaine in France. When her father and brother died, Eleanor became a very wealthy woman. This may have been why she was married off to the heir to the French throne in 1137, who would later become King Louis VII. The couple did not get on well, but – luckily, being the king – Louis was able to have their marriage annulled in 1152. Eleanor then got hitched to Henry Plantagenet, the future king of England, that same year. That marriage didn't go too well either ... to say the least. Eleanor even plotted to kill her husband and Henry had her imprisoned. After Henry's death in 1189, Eleanor's son, Richard, became king and released her. An experienced ruler now in her sixties, Eleanor helped to run England and France, stood in for King Richard when he was abroad, and returned the favour by helping to get him released when he was taken prisoner. When Richard died, Eleanor retired from court life but was still very involved in affairs in her homeland of Aquitaine until her death in 1204. She was buried next to Henry – something probably neither of them would have wanted.

*Of course, not many women had the option of becoming a queen.*

And, since surgeon, director, judge, prime minister and champion athlete were all firmly off the careers table, you'd have to look to what is now a more unusual alternative in order to avoid marrying and living

under the control of a husband – becoming a nun. The Benedictines were a popular order of Christian nuns, but new orders such as the Poor Clares began to appear in the Middle Ages and opened up new opportunities for girls and their families. It might not sound terribly appealing, and life as a nun could be harsh – you had to live very simply by strict rules and spend your life praying and serving your community – but you would be independent from your family and the demands of society. You might also be able to read books and educate yourself. A standout nun at the time was the almost superhumanly clever Hildegard of Bingen. She studied philosophy, music composition, medicine, literature, biology and cosmology, and made advances in science as well as being famous for her religious visions and her music.

*For women like Hildegard, convents could provide the space and time to pursue their own interests away from the world.*



# WISE ADVICE

In the Middle Ages, whether you were a nun or a queen or a young girl waiting to see which way life would go, if you got sick, there were no doctors' surgeries to go to for help. Instead, you might seek out the village wise woman. She would rummage through her herbs and natural remedies for the right cure and might give you a charm or even perform a 'spell' to help make you feel better. These homespun remedies sound a bit haphazard today, but the skills and traditions were based on knowledge gathered over many years and handed down from mother to daughter. Women were also much more familiar than men with handling the human body, as they helped each other give birth and raise their children.

Later on, as universities were founded and men began to train formally in medicine, healing became a male profession, and female healers could be punished for not being qualified. By the end of the Middle Ages, women who muttered spells and had unnatural knowledge of plants were seen as working for the devil and could be accused of witchcraft. Only helping with childbirth was still seen as a woman's job, and the village midwife remained on hand to ensure the Shevolution would continue.

There is an amazing record of advice shared between a group of wise women in Belgium in the 1400s called the Distaff Gospels. They show how healing, tradition and superstition were entwined, resulting in some creative remedies...

*To protect yourself from nine different diseases, ride a bear for nine paces.*

*Stay away from swords while pregnant. If you do get too near a sword, ask the sword-bearer to tap you on the top of the head with the flat of the sword. You'll give birth to an extra-brave baby!*

*To avoid tremors, don't eat a cat's head.*

*And finally, you won't get back pain if you never wipe your bottom with a leaf!*

For many illnesses there was no hope of a cure and, unlike you, a child in the Middle Ages was not invited to be vaccinated against them. Riding a bear would do absolutely no good against measles or chickenpox, so a Middle Ages childhood was a particularly dangerous one. Girls who survived to become adults then faced another deadly danger: giving birth. Labour pains were thought

to be God's punishment for human sin (fortunately untrue) and, with no painkillers, no medical help and no hygiene, it was a risky experience. But never fear, you could always have worn a birthing girdle: a piece

of parchment with special prayers on it that would be strapped around your waist. It would not have done anything for the pain, but may have done something to ease anxiety at least.





# FORMIDABLE DAYS FOR FORMIDABLE WOMEN

You might wonder if medieval times might have been a bit better for women outside Europe. Anything is possible ... but ... no. Take medieval Japan. As a child you obeyed your father, then when you grew up you obeyed your husband. If your husband died, you obeyed your son. Women even ate separately from men. So life for women born in medieval Japan was not so very different to the lives of women in Europe. But it wasn't all bad and – if you were lucky enough to be born into the right family – you might find some exciting opportunities.

## POETIC IMMORTAL

If you were born a noblewoman you would have had a rare possession: leisure time. Some noblewomen used this luxury to write and create art. Some outstanding female poets nurtured their skills and, of the 36 poets declared 'Poetic Immortals' in an 11th-century Japanese poetry anthology, five were women. **IZUMI SHIKIBU** was a famous poet known as 'the Floating Lady'. She specialized in poems of love and longing and lived at the emperor's court. She was fairly low in rank, which meant she could observe the comings and goings and the court gossip without too much notice. She wrote a diary-style account of court life, alternating entries with her poems. Her vivid, wistful creations are still admired today.

## FEARLESS WARRIOR

The samurai were the aristocratic warrior class in Japan. If you were born into this class you were trained to fight. It was mostly men who fought in battle, but women also carried weapons and were expected to defend their homes, children and crops. They were even presented with a knife on their wedding day. However there are also records of female samurai fighting in wars alongside men. **TOMOE GOZEN** was the most renowned. By all accounts she was a fearless commander, and was described in an epic poem of the time as 'a match for a thousand warriors'.

## A CLAWED ATTACK

*Kunoichi* were female ninjas or *shinobi* – a type of secret warrior, sent to spy on and sometimes assassinate members of the samurai. They were feared even more than the male ninjas because no one suspected these 'innocent-looking' women – until they slipped on their *Neko-te*. These were claws up to 7.5 centimetres (3 inches) in length that the *kunoichi* used to attack their enemies. Poison could be added to the tips for maximum impact.

## THE ARTFUL ASSASSIN

*Gei* means art, and *geisha* were highly trained entertainers who sang, danced, played music and acted as gracious hosts. But their visits could have a more deadly purpose: occasionally they were asked to act as spies and sometimes even assassins.

## DOWN ON THE FARM

Exciting opportunities weren't likely to come your way if you were born into a lower-class family. Rather than dramatic assassin work, you'd be more likely to find work on a nearby farm. Not for you a life of leisurely poetry-writing – digging, planting, weeding and harvesting would be the order of the day, every day.

## A SERVING OF SAMURAI

If farming wasn't the role for you, there were other opportunities, but don't get your hopes up too soon. In medieval times there were very few labour-saving devices. No vacuum cleaners or fridge-freezers here to move our *Shevolution* along (and the microwave and air fryer were even further off the horizon). If a job needed doing, you'd either have to do it yourself or – if you were of a higher class – get one of your servants to do it. Working for the senior samurai class was seen as the most desirable position for lower-class women who hadn't gone down the farming route.

## THE MONEY COUNTERS

If you were a member of a merchant family, you might be taught to read and write as a child so that you could be put in charge of the business accounts. Your family could become quite wealthy in this area, but you'd actually be seen as part of one of the lowest classes of society. This was because merchants sold things that others had made rather than having the skill to make goods themselves. In medieval Japan, there was greater respect given to the craft than to the selling.





Lucrezia



## THE ORIGINAL INFLUENCERS

Back in Europe, after the dark and turbulent times of the Middle Ages, culture, art, literature and science began to flourish once more. It was a rebirth of all these things and, because the Italian states were at the heart of this rebirth, this time is known as the Renaissance. Of course, women's lives were still very much limited and under the control of their fathers and then their husbands. And, of course, being born into a wealthy family could help you be more independent, but you were also more likely to be forced into a tactical marriage to benefit your family rather than finding someone you actually liked. But, despite the limitations they faced, some Italian women still found a way to become forces to be reckoned with.

**LUCREZIA BORGIA**, the daughter of a cardinal who would become pope, was born into the notorious – and criminal – Borgia family. She was highly educated and fluent in many languages, but used like a chess piece by her father, so that he could grab more political power. He married Lucrezia off three times, getting her divorced when he no longer needed the family connection.

Luckily, Lucrezia's third marriage was a happier one than her first and second and, as Duchess of Ferrara, she became an influential woman in society, leading an artistic community and skilfully administering the Ferrara estate. When her father died she could finally live her own life, free from the Borgia family's power games. Lucrezia also had a famous sister-in-law, Isabella d'Este...

Going to school might not always feel like fun – especially on a gloomy Monday morning – but can you imagine if going to school wasn't even an option, let alone a right? Getting an education wasn't on the cards for children from lower-income families, and even people with money didn't bother educating boys and girls equally. A Renaissance girl from a wealthy family might learn languages, the classics and some maths along with music, dance and art, but she wouldn't learn nearly as much as her brothers. Enter **ISABELLA D'ESTE**. She certainly learned all these things, but her parents were different. They believed in educating their children equally. By the time she was 16, Isabella had become

Isabella



Sofonisba



a real scholar, as well as a talented musician and dancer, and was able to hold her own in conversations with ambassadors and artists alike. When her husband, the Marquis of Mantua, was away at war, Isabella ruled their people herself, improving the textile-based economy and promoting art and culture. With her money she helped legendary Renaissance artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. She travelled all over Italy and wrote many letters about her experiences, so many that 12,000 of them still survive today. She also bought land and sheltered thousands of refugees when Rome was invaded in 1527.

*Skilled in many areas, she was a true Renaissance woman of power.*

Even though there were many incredible artists in Italy in this time, it was a real challenge for a woman to become one herself. Most students studied under experienced artists first, and those artists were men.

They weren't likely to take on a female apprentice. The scandal! Another barrier for female artists was the need to study anatomy to understand how to draw the human body accurately. Was there any chance of girls going to an anatomy lesson? Absolutely not. Despite this, some exceptional female artists broke through these barriers and managed to make a name for themselves.

**SOFONISBA ANGUISSOLA** was Italian-born but became court painter for the king of Spain due to her astounding artistic talents. The legendary Michelangelo even gave her advice on her paintings and drawings. She is known for her self-portraits, which fewer people painted at the time, and for her pictures of the female members of her family who posed for her. Sofonisba's paintings are now on display in galleries around the world.



# STRANGE OPINIONS

Just like today, not everyone in history was able to become an influencer, but many people's minds were being expanded. During the early modern era (c.1500–1750), incredible discoveries were being made which totally transformed how people thought about the world. Suddenly artists were painting in 3D perspectives, and people learned that our planet, Earth, travels around the Sun. Scientific knowledge soared, religion was reformed and new machines leapt into life, but for the average girl nothing much changed: you were still expected to be a dutiful daughter, obedient wife and devoted mother.

Roles for women in Europe were usually in the home, except for a few jobs which were seen as 'female', such as governesses and midwives. Typical jobs in the home included assisting your husband if he was a farmer, or if you were married to a nobleman you would be expected to entertain visitors to keep your husband's status high. But this was meant to be invisible work, and obviously there would be no pay! Women were expected to be modest in their ways, obey men and give birth to the next generation. In order to challenge these expectations, you would need either your own money or a status which gave you greater freedom and education.

## DOS AND DON'TS (BUT MOSTLY DON'TS)

Read the following with caution, you might not like what you hear! The advice below was written in two 'conduct' books published in England in the 17th century, which instructed girls on how to behave. Whether they followed these grim recommendations is another matter!

*Don't wear skimpy dresses or 'cobweb attires'.*

*Avoid gaudy dresses and 'phantasticke fashion' - such as large sleeves.*

*Don't share any 'strange opinions'.*

*Don't be proud - remember you will be eaten by worms in the end.*

And finally...

*Don't have too much fun and laughter or you'll be punished in hell.*

## SAVVY MERCHANTS

Holland was the only country in the entire world at this time where all girls could go to primary school. Dutch women in the port towns used their maths and literacy education to become bold traders and merchants, running their husbands' businesses while they were away at sea. An English visitor was so amazed that he wrote home to describe how Dutch women chatted to men in the street, visited pubs and even ice-skated

through the night! There were also two different types of marriages in Holland. In one, the woman handed over her possessions and rights to her husband, as was usual in the rest of Europe. In the other, she kept her rights as though she were a single woman. Thankfully for us and the rest of Eve's descendents, the second type of marriage eventually became the more popular option!





# THE WITCHING HOUR



The Renaissance era might have begun in Italy, paving the way for new beginnings, but, at the same time, a strange and terrible craze was poised to sweep the western world ... the time of witch hunts and witch trials. A dangerous time for anyone who might be ‘too loud’ or ‘too quarrelsome’. A time when anyone behaving suspiciously could be accused of the crime of being ... a WITCH! Tens of thousands of women – and some men too – were put to death in horrible ways. There was even a witch-hunting manual, *Malleus Maleficarum* or ‘The Hammer of Witches’, written in Germany. Accusing someone of being a witch could be a way to get rid of a neighbour you didn’t like or who you blamed for your own misfortune. If they were too troublesome or unladylike, too ‘simple-minded’ or independent, or just homeless and ‘in the way’, it wouldn’t be difficult to persuade others that they might be up to no good.

## CONFESS!

Not everyone who was accused like this would have been found guilty, but many of those who confessed did so under torture. And sometimes making a confession – even if it wasn’t true – could save your life.

In Scotland at the end of the 16th century, a woman named **MARGARET AITKEN** was accused of being a witch, but managed to switch sides by declaring she could tell if someone was a witch...

*just by looking at them.*

She joined the hunters to save herself from being killed and became known as ‘the Great Witch’, assisting witch-hunting minister John Cowper by pointing out potential witches. But Margaret’s methods were completely random and she was easily tricked when those she had

accused one day appeared in front of her the next in different clothes and in a different order; she pointed out a different group as witches. The hunt collapsed, but Cowper and his fellow ministers and magistrates hushed things up. After all, plenty of people Margaret had accused had already been put to death. They might have got away with it if it hadn’t been for Marion Walker – a local widow who managed to get hold of the Great Witch’s ultimate confession: that she’d made up her accusations to save herself. Marion circulated this information around Glasgow. The magistrates threatened to put anyone who shared it into a ‘scold’s bridle’ – a humiliating metal mask that held down the tongue. But it was too late: brave Marion had made them accountable for their actions.

Salem in Massachusetts in the United States is still famous for being the scene of a horrifying series of witch trials in the 17th century. Two hundred people were accused. Twenty were put to death. Only a few years later, the trials were declared unlawful, and eventually most of the ‘witches’ were pardoned. But three centuries later, one woman was still left accused: **ELIZABETH JOHNSON JUNIOR**. In 2022, an American middle-school class took up her case. Their teacher helped them collect evidence and present it to the state senator.

*Thanks to those children, Elizabeth was finally pardoned 329 years after being accused of witchcraft.*

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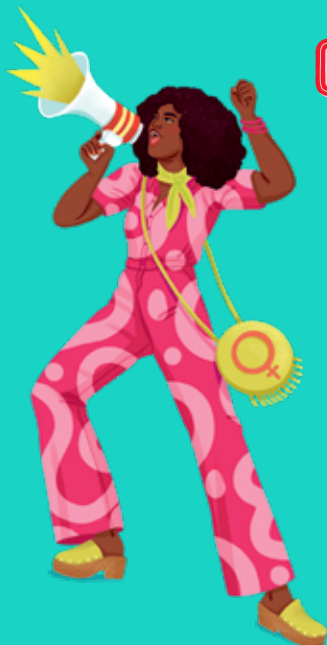


# IN THE BEGINNING

**There is a beginning to every story and this story begins with a woman.  
Everyone alive on the planet today can trace their ancestry back to just  
one person – we call her Mitochondrial Eve.**

But who would she have been, what would her life have been like?  
And what has happened for her billions of descendants? A whistlestop tour  
through prehistory, history, and on to the future, *Shevolution* spans an  
extraordinary 200,000 years, following the journeys of the female pioneers  
who have shaped us all. And all can trace back to our shared relative  
and the origin of our *Shevolution*.

**CELEBRATING GIRL POWER  
THROUGHOUT HISTORY**



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