

THE INCORPORATION OF GIRLS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN GREECE

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From the Hellenistic era onwards, epigraphic evidence proves that some cities in Asia Minor, especially in Ionia and Aeolis, had continued Sappho's educational tradition.

In 2nd cent. BC, in the city of Teos, three γραμματοδιδάσκαλοι, had been chosen to teach both paides and partenoi². At Smyrna and Pergamos, there was a magistrate who was responsible for the supervision of girls³. A very fragmented inscription from Pergamos recorded the curriculum of girls' schooling: it included penmanship, music and reading as well as epic and elegiac poetry⁴. Tation, the daughter of Apollonios, is recorded as the winner in the contest for penmanship⁵. In the 2nd cent. BC, the city of Larissa in Thessaly, honoured a poetess from Smyrna, by granting her the rights of προξενία, έγκτησις and προστασία⁶. The city of Tenos honoured Alcinoe from Aetolia, who, according to the restoration of the inscription, had

¹ This article is based on a paper which was presented under the title «From Sappho to St Macrina and Hypatia: The changing patterns of women's education in postclassical antiquity» at the 4th International Conference of SSCIP, 18th of September, 2010.

² Syll. 3 no 578, ll.9-10.

³ CIG no 3185.

⁴ Ath. Mitt 37, (1912), no 16.

⁵ At. Mit. 35, (1910), no 20.

⁶ IG, IX 2, no 62.

composed a hymn to the patron gods of the island, Zeus, Poseidon and Amphitrete, during her visit⁷. The honors given to these women were similar to the ones reserved for benefactors of the cities.

The epitaph of the female στεφανηφόρος Menophila, (Sardis, 2nd cent.BC) emphasizes that the book which she holds on her funeral relief is proof of her premature wisdom (she was in her early teens when she died)⁸. The female members of the Graeco-roman elite seem to have acquired a level of education, so that they were able to fulfill their new, upgraded roles in the postclassical societies. According to Rena van den Bergh, from the 2nd cent BC onwards, both the elementary schools of Rome and their methods, had been Hellenized. Boys, as well as girls, seem to have attended these schools. Also, both boys and girls of wealthy families, when reaching the age of seven, were placed under the charge of a paidagogos⁹.

Choirs of aristocratic girls sang in religious rituals; many inscriptions of Hellenistic date recorded this i.e maidens selected by the παιδονόμος, sang hymns and danced in rituals in order to honor Zeus (Magnesia, 2nd cent BC)¹⁰. The epitaph of a girl named Teitiane, who was daughter of a curator of the city of Amisos (Pontos), mentions among her other merits, that she had been educated¹¹. Also, two alimenta inscriptions from Lycia, reveal that girls were included in those programmes: the super-benefactor Opramoas, promised that he would fund the education of all the children of the citizens of Xanthos¹². Licinius Longus provided, among other things, an annual gift of money for 250 selected boys and girls (1st cent AD)¹³. These inscriptions back the argument that elite women acquired a certain level of education in the cities of Asia Minor. Menander the Rhetor confirms that this practice continued up to late 3rd cent. AD¹⁴. Also, Paul of Aegina, quoting the 1st cent AD writer Athenaus of Attaleia, stated that girls attended the lower

⁷ IG XII 5, no 812.

⁸ W.H.Buckler-D.M. Robinson, Sardis: Greek and roman inscriptions,(Leiden, 1932), no 112.

⁹ Rena van den Bergh, «The role of education in the social and legal position of women in roman society», *Revue Internationale de droits del' Antiquite*, XLVII, (2008), p. 354.

¹⁰ F. Sokolowski, *Lois Sacrees del' Asie Mineure*, (Paris, 1955), no 32.

¹¹ IGR III, no 96.

¹² SEG XXX, (1980), no1535.

¹³ IGR III, no 492.

¹⁴ Maenader Rhetor, I. 363.3.

grade of school¹⁵. Pleket while commenting on an inscription of Roman imperial date from Roman Athens, honoring a certain Vedia Papiane, a priestess for life of Athena, observes that she had symbolical value for the control of children's education¹⁶.

Also, a Milesian woman whose name did not survive has been recorded as holder of the office of *paidonomos*¹⁷. Nevertheless, the value of education for boys was greater than for girls, even in the Roman imperial period. For instance, Dio Chrysostom, (late 1st cent. AD) remarks in one of his orations, that whilst golden earrings are acceptable for Athenian girls' ears, only education befitted the ears of Athenian boys (Or. 32.3).

The problem of women's participation in the gymnasium: In archaic and classical Greece the gymnasium was the place for the training of the *ἐφῆβοι*, the citizens –to-be and their education, was, primarily, physical and of a military nature. One of many duties of the citizen of classical Greece was his military service. In fact, democracy was based on the citizen –soldier, the hoplites. As women were excluded from military service, their education was limited to the supervision of the household. Of course, there was an exception: Sparta.

Nevertheless, the Spartan *agoge* for girls, was mainly physical and had nothing to do with modern notions like feminism. Simply, the Spartan state was based on the pursuit of *εὐγονική*. As for the other Greek cities, with the possible exception of Chios, it seems that excluded women from the gymnasium.

In the Hellenistic and Roman era the words, *gymnasiarchos*, *gymnasiarchia*, *gymnasion*, acquired a new meaning. The Hellenistic and Roman gymnasium as an architectural structure had been transformed into a multi-use complex: it included cultural facilities such as libraries¹⁸. The whole population, not only the free male citizens, could attend various cultural events in the gymnasium's premises and to participate in distributions of oil. So there is evidence, mostly, epigraphical, for the presence of women in the gymnasium, but this does not mean that women were included in the contemporary educational system on par with men. In

¹⁵ R. A. Kaster, «Schools in late antiquity», TAPA 113, (1983), p. 327-329.

¹⁶ SEG XXXIV, (1984), no 1124.

¹⁷ I Milet. I.7,n 265.

¹⁸ S.L. Glass, «The Greek gymnasium», in W. Raschke (ed), *The Archaeology of the Olympics*, (London, 1988), p.153.

an inscription from the Phrygian city of Dorylaeum, a lady named Antiochis Teuthra, has been recorded as *γυμνασίαρχος ταις γυναξιν*¹⁹. That could be interpreted as proof, that women were included in the educational institute of the local gymnasium with one of their gender, as their leader.

But this interpretation, seems too risky: the lady's husband was *γυμνασίαρχος* for the men from his own funds which can be easily interpreted as the couple having been distributors of oil for the population on gender terms. This interpretation can be backed by the fact that similar inscriptions from Stratonikeia record priestesses or priestly couples, performing the *gymnasiarchia*, for the local population. i. e a priestess was *gymnasiarchos* for the women, providing them with oil, perfumes and ointments²⁰.

Also, *gymnasium*, as a Latin word, could simply be translated as distribution of oil²¹.

Despite the limited participation of women in the local politics, their primary role seems to have been financial and honorific-it was based on elitism; some rich women acted as patrons of the cities but this did not improve the situation of the average woman.

Could a woman become a philosopher? Philosophy, even in our days, is not a woman-friendly field. The situation in antiquity could be hardly better. We know the names of about sixty female philosophers from antiquity, (sixty-three according to R. Hawley), but almost nothing of their work survives.

Also, most of them were either wives or daughters of well Known philosophers or semi-legendary figures. There is one woman, Hipparchia the Cynic, (4th cent, BC) whose personality or bits of it survived in some short passages of Diogenes Laertios.

She was the only woman among the 82 philosophers whose lives were recorded in his «Lives of the Philosophers». Hipparchia was an exceptional and –at the same time–an ordinary woman. She overcame her parents' objections and married the Cynic philosopher Crates, whose cynic way of life she shared. So, she broke all the conventions of the time, i.e she wore clothes similar to the one worn by men and she did not hesitate to participate

¹⁹ IGR IV no 522.

²⁰ BCH XV, (1907), no 140.

²¹ See, AE, (1960), no 214.

to symposia. In one of those symposia, one of the other participants, who was defeated by her in a philosophical exchange retaliated by raising up her dress.

Hipparchia did not act as being bothered by the man's boorish act.

This same man tried to humiliate Hipparchia in another way: he used against her a passage of Euripides' *Bacchae*, «Isn't she the one who abandoned her loom?» (*Bacchae*, 1236).

It was a reference to the disasters befalling people when women chose to abandon their traditional roles. Agave, the mother of Pentheus, King of Thebes, madden by Dionysos, killed in a frenzy her son and boasted to her father that she had become a great hunter. Hipparchia was accused for acting like a new Agave. But to this accusation, she replied that she abandoned weaving, because she chose to pursue *paideia*²². Hipparchia's reply makes clear that the traditional role of women could not be reconciled with a serious pursuit of wisdom—a philosopher with a distaff in her hands could not be found in the ancient world.

Was the situation similar in Hellenistic and Roman Greece? Our sources are ambivalent.

First of all, we do not have evidence to support the argument that women could become, formally, teachers. There is only a short phrase «Hermione *grammatike*» inscribed on a female mummy in Memphis²³. This could be interpreted as Hermione, the teacher but also as Hermione, the wise, a typical characterization for women of the elite in the Graeco-roman world. As far as we know, a philosopher delivered speeches in public. Could the Greeks and the Romans tolerate a woman as a public speaker? According to Amy Richlin, the scanty Roman evidence suggests that the woman—orator was an anomaly. The list of female orators is very short, it includes only three names: Sentia, Gaia Afrania who is described as «barking» in the courtroom and, finally, Hortensia, the only one who is given praise²⁴.

Some women trained their voices, but for medical reasons. Nevertheless, according to Maud Gleason, we never hear of women giving speeches as a form of vocal exercise.

²² Diogenes Laertios, Hipparchia, translated by. M. Christopoulos (Athens, 1999), (in Greek) p. 56 κε.

²³ S. Pomeroy, «Women in Roman Egypt», *ANRW II*, 10.1 (1988), s. 715-721.

²⁴ A. Richlin, «Gender and Rhetory: Producing Manhood», in M. Golden-P. Toohey, (eds), *Sex and difference in Ancient Greece and Rome*, (Edinburgh, 2003), p. 206.

Women's vocal exercise consisted of practicing scales and singing or reciting poetry, whereas men's consisted of practicing scales and giving speeches. Also, medical writers of the Roman imperial era, were of the opinion that both an athletic life and singing could delay women's periods. M. Gleason observes that though it seems possible that ancient female gymnasts sometimes exhibited the amenorrhea that has been reported in 20th century athletes and ballet - dancers, this does not hold true for opera singers²⁵.

Dio Chrysostom in one of his orations, which was delivered at Tarsos, though he admitted that to listen to a woman's voice is not unpleasant, he did this only in order to shame the male citizens of that city, whose speech reminded him of snoring (Or. 33.39-40).

Of course, there were some exceptions: in an inscription from Delphi (2nd cent. AD), a certain Apphia, was honored with citizenship, because she gave a series of beautiful and sweet speeches, showing the high quality of her education²⁶. It seems that Apphia recited religious hymns, nevertheless, the epithet «sweet» could never been given to a man's public speech, without compromising his manhood.

Some women have been recorded as «wise»or- even- as «philosophers», usually in their epitaphs, i.e a certain Epiphania, of Athenian descent, wife and daughter of ναύκληροι, a much travelled lady, was characterized in her epitaph as «born among the Muses and as sharer of their wisdom» (Moesia, 2nd/3rd cent AD)²⁷. As G.H. Horsley observes «the epitaph gives some emphasis in a not specific way to the cultural education which the deceased had gained»²⁸. It seems that there is an allusion in this line similar to Sappho's fr. 55, in which the Lesbian poetess, reminds an uneducated woman that she will disappear from memory, since she did not share in the «Roses of Pieria».

Both Dio Chrysostom and Plutarch dedicated at least one of their works to a woman, Dio his dialogue named «Χρυσήϊδα» to an un- named female friend and Plutarch his book on Isis and her mysteries to his friend Clea, who served as priestess of the Egyptian goddess at Delphi- so, we ca deduce that,

²⁵ M. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-representation in Ancient Rome*, (Princeton, 1995), p. 95-97).

²⁶ Foilles de Delphes, III, (1930), no 79.

²⁷ SEG XXIV, (1969), no 1088.

²⁸ G.H.Horsley, «Charity motivated by piety in an epitaph», in *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, 2 (1982), P. 56.

though rare, intellectual friendships between educated people of the opposite sex, could be developed in Roman Greece.

As Karin Blomqvist observes, the Interlocutress in «Χρυσήδα» is not an ordinary woman but she was a real participant in the dialogue advancing with her questions it further²⁹.

As for Plutarch, he presents an oddity, two women, Cleobulina, daughter of Cleobulos of Rhodes and Melissa, the wife of the tyrant Periander, as being present at the symposium of the «Seven wise men»: how can one interpret this anachronism? In the archaic and classical era, no woman except flute-or dancing girls and hetaerae could be present at a symposium. It is obvious that the symposium of the Seven Wise men is a literary construction of Plutarch's imagination. According to Judith Mossman, the presence of Cleobuline can be explained, because she was considered as representative of a kind of wisdom – she was a creator of riddles in hexameter. As for Melissa, she was included in the list of the participants as wife of Periander, the theme of love was common in the literary genre of the symposium. In Plutarch's time, the heterosexual/conjugal love v. homosexual love had become a literary 'topos'³⁰. The important thing is that in the late 1st cent, AD, a great man of letters could present two respectable women participating in a literary symposium, without causing a scandal. Of course, in Plutarch's time, Roman matrons could participate in mixed social gatherings.

A certain Magnilla was honored for being both philosophos herself as well as daughter and wife of philosophers (Apollonia, Mysia, 2nd cent. AD)³¹. Unfortunately, the epigraphic text in its usual brevity does not help us to analyze the meaning of the word philosophos attached to a woman, but it makes clear that only women raised in a philosophical household could be trained in philosophy. Another woman who was called philosophos was the empress Julia Domna, wife of the emperor Septimius Severus (192-211 AD).

Julia did not produce any philosophical work, she simply read books on philosophy, especially after losing-temporarily-her husband's attention. Also, she had created a «philosophical salon» consisting of, mostly, second-rate philosophers who could not find a more prosperous job i.e a post in the

²⁹ K.Blomqvist, *Myth and Moral message in Dio Chrysostom*, (Lund, 1989), p.98-99.

³⁰ J. Mossman, «Plutarch's Dinner of the Wise men», in J. Mossman(ed), *Plutarch and his intellectual world*, (London, 1997), p. 119-139.

³¹ IGR IV, no 125.

imperial bureaucracy. She was not the first intellectual empress- Plotina, wife of the Trajan had acted as patroness for philosophers in the 2nd cent. AD.

Some moralists, like the Roman stoic Musonius Rufus, wrote treatises on the philosophical education of women; one has to be sceptic about the so-called «proto-feminism» of Musonius and the other Stoics³². Despite M. Rufus inclusion of women in the category of students of philosophy, he insisted that study of philosophy would make women better homemakers, not participants in public life³³. Also, he proposed that only some girls, the exceptional ones, should be given an education similar to the one given to the boys. As for athletic training, it should be reserved again only for the large and muscular girls³⁴.

Even in late antiquity, it was thought improper even for the most gifted women to teach in public. Eunapius (4th cent, AD) mentions that he made an exception by including a woman, Sosipatra of Ephesos, in his list of philosophers, because she was a woman who surpassed men, even her own husband in wisdom³⁵. But Sosipatra's education had been enclosed in a metaphysical aura and though she held a chair in philosophy, she was teaching inside her oikos-not in public or in a philosophical school³⁶.

Musicians and doctors: One is tempted to come to the conclusion that there was a sort of vocational training for women in antiquity. There are many sources, both philological and epigraphical, which indicate that some women were musicians. Music was considered integral part of education in the Graeco-roman world. Alison Glazebrook argues that the lyre and other musical organs signified intellectual authority when depicted on Attic vases, not the bookrolls. This is why according to her, even a great poetess like Sappho, who had been depicted on a 6th cent. BC hydria holding a lyre, on later period Attic vases was, usually, depicted holding a book-roll. It seems that the Athenians wanted to make clear that a woman even a talented one, could have never been connected to the real wisdom of the male way of

³² See, D.M.Engels, «Women's role in the home and the state: Stoic theory reconsidered», *Harvard studies in classical Philology*, v.10, 101, (2003), p.267-288.

³³ *Op.cit*, p. 280-282.

³⁴ *Op.cit*, p.279.

³⁵ *Lives of the philosophers*, 466.

³⁶ *Op. cit*, 469.

cultural expression, i.e music³⁷. Our sources imply that the only female musicians before the Hellenistic era, were hetaerae, who learnt to play a musical organ to enhance their trade. Nevertheless, their music did not enjoy a high reputation³⁸.

From the Hellenistic era onwards, though the playing of musical organs remained connected to prostitutes, some women who were respectable, managed to pursue a career in music. For instance, an inscription from Delphi(86 BC)recorded the honors awarded to a certain Polygnota, a citizen of Thebes for having given recitations³⁹.

This social trend went on in the Roman period: one of the three daughters of a certain Hermionax, named Hedeia won the contest for kithara playing and singing at the festival of Nemea (1st cent.AD)⁴⁰.

Though it contrasts to the common notion about the almost Oriental subjugation of Greek women, it seems that from the 5th cent BC onwards, some women practiced medicine and many more, midwifery⁴¹. The story of Hagnodike, despite its apochryphal character, reveals that due to notions of modesty, even the patriarchal Athenians were obliged to allow freeborn women to practice medicine, (we cannot be sure if female doctors were restricted to an all female clientele). It was easier for midwives to be accepted, because their role was subordinate. Of course a female doctor had to be not only literate but well-educated. For the midwife, the level of education required to perform successively her duties depended on the category she aspired to belong. According to the Greek doctor Soranos (2nd cent AD) a midwife should be able to read and write. They had to be learnt in some theoretical aspects of gynaecology and obstetrics, or a few of them could become equal to doctors by being trained in all types of treatment, even to surgical interventions⁴².

³⁷ A. Glazebrook, «Reading women: Book –rolls on Attic vases», *Mouseion*, series III. V. 5, (2005), p. 34-35.

³⁸ Hans Herter, «The Sociology of prostitution in Antiquity in the context of Pagan and Christian writing», in M.Golden-P.Toohy, (eds), *Sex and difference in Ancient Greece and Rome*, (Edinburgh, 2003), p. 95.

³⁹ S. Pomeroy, «Technikai and Mousikai: The education of women in the fourth century and in Hellenistic period», *AGAH*, v 2.1, 1977, p. 52.

⁴⁰ W.Pleket, *epigraphica II*, (Leiden, 1969), no 9.

⁴¹ See F.R. Fetief-L. Cilliers, «The healing hand: the role of women in ancient medicine», *Acta Theologica Supplementum*, 7, (2005)p. 165-188.

⁴² Soranos, *Gyn.* I. 3-4.

It seems, though, that there was a basic difference in status between the women practicing midwifery in the two parts of the Roman Empire: those in the Western part, as far as we can deduce by the study of the sixteen surviving inscriptions referring to a midwife, were slaves or freed women, therefore they were of lower status, whereas the midwives working in the Eastern part belonged to a more respectable social class⁴³.

Despite the existence of female doctors, it seems that the famous medical schools in antiquity did not accept female students. We should not forget that in antiquity, a sort of medical degree was not a requirement for practicing medicine, -most Greek and Roman students of medicine could be trained close to a well known doctor. It was natural that many of them were sons of doctors. The few inscriptions referring to female doctors, usually reveal that these women were daughters or wives of doctors or both. For instance, the doctor Glykon praised his deceased wife Pantheia, in the epitaph he set up for her as being superior to him in the practice of medicine (Pergamos, 2nd cent AD)⁴⁴.

Further evidence which confirms the high level of education acquired by some female doctors, is the reference to books written by them, though only one medical treatise written by a woman, a certain Metrodora, (2nd cent AD) survived the ravages of time.

Late antiquity, continuation and change: After the crisis of the 3rd cent. AD, the Roman empire could not survive without being transformed: the cities started to decline, slavery was being –slowly- transformed into serfdom, Christianity became widespread, especially in the Eastern provinces. Culture could not avoid being changed, too.

The men of the elite continued to study the classical syllabus, even the Christian bishops had been through a classical education. But what happened to their sisters? According to the emperor Julian (361-363 AD), his mother Basilinna had been taught the poems of Homer and Hesiod by a slave eunuch who had been raised exactly for that role by her father⁴⁵.

⁴³ F.R.Fetief_L. Cilliar, p. 183-184.

⁴⁴ Pleket, 1969, no 20.

⁴⁵ Julian the Apostate, Misopogon, translated by. G. Abramides, (Thessalonike), 1997, p. 65.

The empress Athenais-Eudocia having been raised in an intellectual household, her father Leontios had been lecturer of philosophy in the university of Athens(5th cent. AD), was well –versed in the Greek letters: she composed poems in hexameters, consisting of passages taken from classical poetry. Melania the Elder, a lady of senatorial rank, who became one of the greatest female ascetics of early Christianity (5th cent AD) could read and write fluently in both Greek and Latin, although she preferred to study the Bible. Nevertheless, many Christian parents thought that many works of the classical writers were not suitable for the education of girls, i.e Emmeleia, the mother of St Basil, of Gregory of Nyssa and of St Macrina, limited her daughter’s education to the study of the Bible and of the works of the Fathers of the Church. She believed that both comedies and tragedies were immoral plays, full of sexual explicit themes, so they were not material for the education of girls⁴⁶.

In sum, the sources of late antiquity record little change in the pattern of education for women: only the daughters of the elite acquired education, they were taught in private and the only change was for the worse-a Christian girl ought to read only the Bible and other religious texts, philosophy, serious theology and rhetoric were reserved for men.

The only woman who is recorded in this period as delivering a public speech was the empress Athenais, who gave a speech in Antiochia in order to thank the citizens of that city for their hospitality by alluding to their common ancestry.

ABSTRACT

The ancient sources are silent on women in general and on women’s education in particular. It is well known that there was perhaps a kind of liberal education for the daughters of the aristocratic class in some archaic city-states: the fragments of Sappho’s poetry are testimony to such a hypothesis. Also, we have some ambiguous sources referring to the education of the Spartan women. All these are well Known *topoi* in the historiography of women’s education in antiquity.

Nevertheless, the Greek world changed drastically in the Hellenistic era and even more in the Roman imperial era. The city-states were transformed politically, socially and economically, due to the “globalization” of the Roman empire. All these political and economic changes affected the position of women in the emerging Graeco-Roman world. Epigraphical and literary sources give ample evidence that the

⁴⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, Life of St Macrina.

girls of the elite were incorporated to a system of education similar to that of boys up to the age of twelve. Early marriage cut short any female ambition of higher education. There were some exceptions, especially among the circles of medical doctors who seemed to allow, occasionally, their wife or daughter to be educated on medicine through them. Also, there were midwives, now of a more sophisticated kind, than in classical antiquity. It seems that some kind of vocational education existed for girls of servile or lower social status. Finally, the emergence of Christianity altered drastically the syllabus of female education: well born ladies were not taught anymore the works of the great authors of antiquity due to their supposed immorality. St Macrina, sister of St Basil could have been a well-versed in the biblical literature but not to the work of “pagan” authors.

RESUMEN

Las Fuentes antiguas resultan en general bastante parcas respecto a la mujer y, especialmente, respecto a la educación de la mujer. Se sospecha que sí hubo una suerte de educación liberal para la mujer aristocrática en la época arcaica griega: los fragmentos de Safo serían un testimonio de ello, y también tenemos algunas fuentes ambiguas en referencia a la educación de la mujer espartana, *topoi* ambos muy conocidos en la historiografía de la educación de la mujer en la antigüedad.

Sin embargo, el mundo griego cambió radicalmente en el periodo helenístico y más en el romano, en la era imperial. Hubo una suerte de “globalización” política y económica que afectó de diversas maneras la posición de la mujer en el ámbito griego. Existen evidencias epigráficas y literarias de que las hijas de la élite fueron incorporadas un sistema educacional similar al de los chicos a partir de los 12 años. El pronto matrimonio cortaba las ambiciones femeninas por una educación más alta, con notables excepciones en ciertos grupos, como familias de médicos o ciertas viudas relativamente jóvenes y también hay evidencias de vocaciones por la cultura entre mujeres de origen bajo y hasta servil. Finalmente, el cristianismo alteró profundamente las pautas educacionales de la mujer de clase alta. Por ejemplo, dejaron de enseñarles la obra de los grandes autores paganos, uno de los pilares de la educación altoimperial; aducían presunta inmoralidad. Mujeres como Santa Macrina, hermana de San Basilio, pudieron haber sido mujeres versadas en literatura bíblica, pero no en la obra de clásicos paganos.

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