

Research Article

The Odyssey of Women Writers in Antiquity: an example of coeducation and fostering vocational science

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Abstract

This paper describes four methodological proposals for rescuing from oblivion and highlighting women writers in Graeco-Roman Antiquity. In workshops employing a variety of active methodologies, students become acquainted with Greek writers like Sappho, Diotima of Mantinea and Aspasia, and their Roman counterparts, including Sulpicia and Agrippina the Younger, while also becoming aware of the authorship of these women writers and their lack of visibility. The proposals take the shape of activities aimed at fostering a vocation for science among baccalaureate students in Spain but can also be easily adapted to secondary and even higher education in other educational contexts.

Keywords: Women writers, Diotima, Aspasia, Sappho, gender equality

Introduction

At Pablo de Olavide, a public university in Southern Spain, a project aimed at popularising and fostering vocational science, funded by the Fundación Española para la Ciencia y la Tecnología (Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology, FECYT) and aimed at baccalaureate students (aged between 16–18) at secondary schools in Andalusia, was developed during the academic year 2022–2023. This experience was continued during the following academic year in the activities scheduled in the framework of a science communication event revolving around the humanities, organised by the same university. During the two academic years, a total of six events were conducted with the participation of 800 students from 16 education centres in Western Andalusia, accompanied by their teachers.

The scientific objective was to highlight women writers throughout history and to prompt students to reflect on the circumstances that have led to the fact that the Western literary canon is still androcentric. On the one hand, there is a need to reconsider the history of literature and, consequently, cultural and social history with an eye to progressing towards a more inclusive and fair society through the implementation of coeducation strategies (Romero and Lugo, 2014, 1035–1059; Vargas Jiménez, 2011, 137–147). At the same time, the project attempted to increase and improve the culture of science and innovation of baccalaureate students by disseminating research in this field in an enjoyable and participatory way. The project was thus in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, specifically with those of Quality

Education and Gender Equality (Boeren, 2019, pp. 277–294). To this should be added that in Spain, especially in the field of non-university education, science tends to be identified with the experimental kind, for which reason it is imperative to stress that research is also performed in the humanities and to enhance the prestige of careers in this field.

The project's main activity involved the conducting of a series of events with the participation of different groups of baccalaureate students. In addition to workshops with researchers focusing on a specific topic, authoress/es or period, many of which had to do with Graeco-Roman Antiquity, there were recreational activities for all at the beginning and at the end of each event. As to gamification activities (Corrales, 2021, 23–48; Martínez Navarro, 2017, 252–277; Romero Claudio and Álvarez Ramos, 2020), the first consisted of a quiz using the app *Kahoot!*, whereas the second took the shape of a team gymkhana on the campus of Pablo de Olavide University. The different questions in the quiz were related to the obstacles that authoresses in all ages have had to overcome to write and publish and to be read and acknowledged for their literary works. Supporting materials were also published: a video entitled *The Odyssey of Women Writers*¹ and an educational-informative booklet² (Nisa Cáceres and Marina Castillo, 2023) containing the methodology of the workshops conducted in the first edition, which was awarded the Rosa Regàs prize by the regional government of Andalusia for its coeducational value.

This paper describes the activities carried out in the four workshops devoted to women writers in Antiquity, in the expectation that the different proposals will be applicable and useful in other educational environments. The first three deal with Greek writers (Sappho of Lesbos, Diotima of Mantinea and Aspasia of Miletus), whereas the fourth addresses Roman writers. Each subsection of this paper is divided into two parts: (1) A brief presentation and contextualisation, both useful for teachers for

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introducing the activities to their students, accompanied by the proposal's objectives; and (2) A series of practical activities and their methodological development. Some of the materials, as they are presented to students, are included in the tables of each subsection.

The different proposals pursue the following general objectives:

- To highlight the great female figures of Antiquity who played an important role in culture, literature and thought.
- To understand the socio-historical context in which they pursued their activities and the factors that have contributed to their lack of visibility or to the distortion of their work.
- To detect the gender biases present in both the extant primary (mostly male-authored) and secondary sources.
- To familiarise students directly with the primary sources, with ancient texts, for the purpose of fostering their critical thinking and creativity.
- To understand that our knowledge of the past is constructed in an ongoing and ever-changing process.

Sappho of Lesbos

Presentation

Known in Antiquity for the vividness of her lyric poetry, in which she addressed love themes from a quotidian perspective, Sappho of Lesbos is currently famous for her homoerotic verses. In the workshop described below, the intention is to become acquainted with the poetess through some of the extant fragments of her oeuvre.³

The value of Sappho's work is down to both the fact that she is one of the known ancient poetesses and the intimate quality of her poetry. In her poems, she reflects very realistically those moods inherent to the feeling of love. Of her original work, estimated in the region of 10,000–12,000 verses, only around 650 have survived.⁴ The subsequent consideration of her figure has been very varied throughout history, as evidenced by the fact that Plato calls her 'the Tenth Muse' (*Palatine Anthology* 9.506.2), whereas in his *Address to the Greeks* (33) Tatian refers to her as a prostitute.

Born into a noble family in Mytilene on Lesbos in the sixth century BCE, she married a man called Kerkylas of Andros with whom she had a daughter, Cleis. She was commissioned to write epithalamia, or wedding hymns, and began to surround herself with a group of girls, with whom she formed the 'House of the Muses' Servants'. She possibly taught them literature or music, prepared them for marriage or they worshipped the Muses or Aphrodite. From her poems it can be deduced that Sappho maintained romantic and sexual relations with several of these girls, which has converted her into an icon of bisexuality or lesbianism: indeed, the terms 'sapphic' and 'lesbian' derive from her name and place of birth.

The main objective of this workshop is to offer students the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the figure of Sappho of Lesbos in a straightforward and engaging manner, with three main objectives:

- To become acquainted with the relevance of Sappho in Antiquity and with the scant biographical information available on her, in order to examine the context in which she wrote her poetry.
- To understand the importance of her figure throughout history, how her poetry has been received and how a veil has been drawn over some aspects of her life and identity.
- To leverage creative and critical thinking to understand how classical Graeco-Roman culture and its ideas about gender have influenced subsequent cultures.

Methodological proposal

Students are offered the chance to read and reflect on some of Sappho's translated works,⁵ which together with the activities are included in a dossier (see [Figure 1](#)). In the first activity, the idea is simply to answer some questions, whereas the final activity involves creative writing in groups. The intention is to combine the teaching of the Graeco-Roman Classics with creativity in order to recreate the lives and experiences of women in Antiquity (Hauser, 2019, 168–169).

Task 1. In Fragment 16, Sappho broaches the subject of beauty, observing that this can have a different meaning for each person.

1. Why do you think that Sappho uses the mythological example of Helen?
2. Judging by how she speaks of her, who might Anactoria have been?

Task 2. Fragment 31 reflects physical sensations inherent to attraction and falling in love:

1. In your view, are these emotions described positively or negatively and why?

Task 3. Lastly, let us play openly and creatively with the fragmentary nature of Sappho of Lesbos' extant works. Divide yourselves into groups of between three and five people, choose some of the following briefer fragments (33, 38, 51, 102, 131, 147) and try to imagine and write in each case a poem containing it.

1. You can write verses above and/or below the fragment.
2. The poems do not have to rhyme.
3. You can use contemporary language or references. How would Sappho have written if she had been alive today?

Figure 1. Sappho Workshop.

The workshop, which lasts 60 minutes, has been organised for between 25 and 30 students. They are first provided with some biographical information on Sappho in an initial approach (5 min), accompanied by some sort of meme to arouse their interest through humour. For the next 15 minutes, Fragments 51, 36, 31 and 38 of Sappho's work are compared with Lope de Vega's sonnet 126, *Esto es amor* ('Various Effects of Love'), the lyrics of the song *En la imaginación* ('In the Imagination') by Silvia Pérez Cruz, another humorous meme and a sequence from Céline Sciamma's film *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019), respectively. The students participating in the workshop are also asked to reply orally to Questions 1 and 2 about Fragments 16 and 31, appearing in the table above.

Following this, the active methodologies are implemented in the second part of the workshop, in which the students are divided into groups of either four or five and each given pens, paper sheets and a dossier containing fragments by Sappho. The idea is that, in groups, they should put their heads together to include the fragments in new poems which they themselves must write from their own current perspective (20 min). For 10 minutes, the members of each group read aloud those poems that they themselves have liked most. Then, in the last 10 minutes some considerations are set out on the link between Sappho and lesbianism or bisexuality, before stressing her contemporary influence with the reading of Fragment 147.

The aim of the creative writing activity is that the participants familiarise themselves with Sappho's oeuvre not from an academic or conventional perspective, as something far removed from their time, but on the understanding of how those fragments can indeed be relevant nowadays. According to Emily Hauser (2019, 175), 'When I have allowed creativity to sit alongside research [...] I have enjoyed Classics the most, and [...] I have been able to impart that enjoyment in inquiry to others'. The experience of this workshop has actually demonstrated on several occasions that students, working in groups to compose such poems, can show a high degree of sensitivity, often connecting with the poetess of Lesbos at a very intimate and personal level.

Diotima of Mantinea

Presentation

The name and figure of Socrates are familiar even to those who know nothing about the Classics. Students find his philosophical method particularly appealing, which converts him into a sort of midwife attending women in labour: through a dialogue with other conversation partners (Phaedrus, Cratylus or Phaedo, who give their names to several of the works by his disciple Plato) the teacher, accompanied by them, gains access to the solution, to certain aspects of truth, to 'their latent ideas', according to the definition of 'maieutic' appearing in *The Oxford Dictionary*. In the history of philosophy, on the other hand, Socrates was a veritable milestone: with certain vagueness, we talk about the 'pre-Socratics', foundation stones of sorts of critical thinking and philosophical enquiry, because there is the belief that the Athenian marked a turning point. Furthermore, Socrates is credited with being the teacher of none other than Plato and Xenophon, plus other young philosophers living in fifth-century Athens, as well as being recognised as an influential figure in his time whose commitment has remained engraved on Western imagination: nor do students forget the hemlock that he used to commit suicide with the intention of setting an example for the city that had unjustly accused him. In his magnificent book *Un mestiere pericoloso*

(*A dangerous profession*), a profession that is none other than the exercise of philosophy, of freethinking, Luciano Canfora (2000) addresses the difficult relationship of philosophers with their age and political power in ancient Greece.

Lastly, if students are asked about Plato, it is more than likely that they will mention the handful of myths and powerful images peppering and illustrating his philosophy: his allegory of the cave, the chariot and his world of ideas, among others, and also certain very widespread – and hackneyed – concepts that are often misunderstood, the most popular being 'platonic love'.

But in a memorable passage from *The Symposium*, the most well-known Platonic dialogue and precisely the kernel of the Socratic-Platonic erotic doctrine, Socrates himself recognises the intellectual debt owed to a foreigner, 'a Mantinean woman named Diotima: in this subject she was skilled, and in many others too' (Plato, *Symposium* 201d, transl. Lamb, 1925). We know precious little about Diotima, a sage and priestess who revealed to the teacher the nature of love and perhaps also the method that is nowadays known as Socratic.

Diotima, who might well be a mask in the Platonic dialogue, seems however to stand on her own virtues in the memory of Socrates and, of course, acts as a shining and inspirational example and as an enduring symbol – very appealing to young readers and students – reappearing in crucial moments and works such as *Hyperion* by the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) and the works that the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano (1904–1991) wrote in exile. In Hölderlin's epistolary novel, which the poet finished in the final years of the Enlightenment, Diotima is more than the lover of the main character: between the friendship of Alabanda and revolutionary hope, both ultimately betrayed, Diotima is the embodiment of love itself. As to Zambrano, she wears the mask of Diotima to describe, from her place of exile where no one now asks the savant anything, the crisis of her world. Following the path of this fascinating figure leads us to reconsider the role of women in the arts and thought in Antiquity and their huge repercussions – albeit often forcibly enshrouded – for our lives and history.

The objectives of this workshop can be summarised as follows:

- To familiarise young students with the enigmatic figure of Diotima of Mantinea and to follow her trail in subsequent literature.
- To prove that 'direct contact' with the Classics, namely, the reading of these works, without being content with the textbook information learnt at school, is a very pleasurable exercise and a box of equally marvellous surprises and revelations.
- Ultimately, to foster critical thinking, questioning the roots of the tradition received.

Methodological proposal

This activity and its results (Figure 2)⁶ allow students to acquire some background knowledge in order to reflect on stereotypes and the place and role that we give women in history in opposition to or together with men. Aspects include contrasts and tensions, like those between word pairs and concepts. For instance, *Sophia* ('wisdom') is written with a capital 'S' and in the feminine (in Spanish), but only fractions of that wisdom are applied or, better said, that abstract concept is found in daily life in the figure of the *sophoi*, namely, 'sages', men almost without exception. The same perhaps occurs with the Muse, who serves as inspiration chiefly for male authors, more often than not relegating female creativity to elusive and ideal spheres, seldom specific or embodied.


<p>Task. The face of wisdom</p> <p>Observe the faceless sage on the left and sketch their face. Note: it is not necessary to identify the painter of the work or the work itself but to complete their face based on the idea* that you have of a sage.</p> <p>* By the way, did you know that the word 'idea' has, like most of your vocabulary, Greek roots and that it signifies 'image' (and, therefore, 'mental representation', 'idea')?</p>	
<p>Once you have completed your portrait, do the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Show your portrait to your classmates and compare them all. 2. Try to create a 'facial composite' of wisdom, that is, analyse the portraits that you have drawn and identify those attributes that appear most often: beards, unkempt hair, glasses and so forth. 3. To end with, how many women have you drawn? 	

Figure 2. Diotima workshop.

The workshop continues with the texts: several passages from *The Symposium*, in which the figure of Diotima appears arguing about Eros, plus a few from Hölderlin's *Hyperion* (2008 [1797]) and Zambrano's monologue *Diotima de Mantinea* (2000 [1956]).

Resorting to anecdotes also serves to attract the attention of the participants, who usually show an interest in the details of Hölderlin's biography: his revolutionary ardour, his disillusionment and madness and the hospitality that the erratic poet received from the carpenter Zimmer and his family, who looked after him until his death ... and, beforehand, his unhappy love affair with Susette Gontard, the mother of a student of his, who he called Diotima. To end on a sensationalistic note, they are shown a picture in which the presenter is seen placing a wreath at the poet's tomb in the city of Tübingen.

Besides these anecdotes, it is explained that they are neither authors nor works that can be regarded as minor. For both the young Romantic poet and María Zambrano, Diotima was a key figure for expressing the rootlessness and radical solitude of the freethinker, of the free spirit, the disillusionment in the wake of the first warlike and revolutionary impulses and the twists and turns of

history. In the face of institutional banality that is often unworthy of the most just demands (like those defended by the authors of this paper), vs simplifying and stolid arguments, the always enjoyable reading of these ancient works and the versatile persistence of these figures of the past reveal a reality that thought clarifies and which is anything but uniform.

Aspasia of Miletus

Presentation

The third and last Greek authoress also had contacts with Socrates and perhaps was even personally acquainted with Diotima, with whom she shared important similarities. Apart from being a foreigner, there is also the fact that she is not directly known to us through her oeuvre (regrettably, this has been lost) but through the references of others. Indeed, despite her being an intellectual, art lover and authoress of political speeches, a biased portrait of Aspasia has passed into history due to the works of male authors, who have associated her with prostitution, erotism and moral

corruption, at a moment when women were excluded from politics (Pritchard, 2014, 174–193; Vallejo, 2019, 171–174).

In order to help students participating in the workshop to approach the figure of Aspasia, they are told that she was about their age (between 16–18) when she emigrated from Miletus to Athens, a city that was flourishing at the time. Similarly, to comprehend the city's ascendancy, recourse is made to interdisciplinarity, drawing from their previous knowledge (Segovia *et al.*, 2010, 138–169; Zavala Arnal and Salinas Ramón, 2017, 281–291), recalling unconnected content, covered in different modules and academic years, and interrelating it to understand the case at hand.⁷ All these considerations can serve as catalysts for the development of the activity.

After arriving in Athens, the sources mention Aspasia principally in relation to two men, who have made a huge contribution to the fact that news of her has come down to us. On the one hand, Socrates who, in one of the speeches of his disciple Plato (*Menexenus* 235e–236c, 249), recognises that she taught him the art of rhetoric and wrote some important speeches. On the other, the political leader Pericles, who was also a student of hers and later her partner. As a matter of fact, two of the main sources mentioning the Milesian woman relate her to Pericles, who was the target of political criticism at the time, for which reason Aspasia's image was also affected (Vickers, 2015, 163). In the first of these, the comedian Aristophanes, a contemporary Athenian, singles her out as the *casus belli* of the Peloponnesian War, in connection with the kidnapping of some prostitutes of whom, according to him, she was the owner (*Acharnians* 523–539). Secondly, from a now Roman and very different East (more than five centuries later), the philosopher Plutarch (*Pericles* 24.9, 32.5) describes the political leader as weak and pusillanimous, subject to the whims of Aspasia – publicly seeking her kisses and shedding tears for her before a court. Despite the fact that she outlived her husband, following the death of Pericles practically nothing is known about Aspasia. All of which

shows that her memory has nothing to do with her own worth or merits – which are indeed underscored in some sources – but to the fact that she forms part of the biography of another male figure, which has earned her the reputation of being a 'prisoner of history' (Henry, 1995).

Therefore, the workshop on Aspasia has a dual objective:

- In particular, the idea is to reflect on what is known about the authoress and why.
- In general, the intention is to observe how these questions serve to delve into how history 'functions', especially how it is constructed from a selection of available information.

Methodological proposal

The teaching methodology employed in the 90-minute workshop is described below. It starts with an introductory presentation lasting ten minutes, which takes into account both the focus of interest and reality of the students participating in it. An initial survey is conducted with the aim of determining what they know about Aspasia and her context (fifth-century BCE Athens) and helping them to connect this content with their previous knowledge.

The following activity is devoted to examining the available literary sources so as to help the students to broaden their knowledge of Aspasia. The class is divided into groups among which a text on Aspasia written by a different author – viz. Plato, Aristophanes or Plutarch⁸ – is distributed, together with a brief note about this author and a worksheet (see Figure 3). After reading the text, they are asked to determine whether it is a primary or secondary source. Between 20 and 25 minutes are devoted to this part of the workshop.

After concluding this activity, the members of each group are asked to place the author and his text on Aspasia on a timeline of Greece and Rome projected on a screen. During the following 15

<p>Task 1. Knowing the source and its information</p> <p>Authorship</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Author 2. Date 3. Primary or secondary source? 4. Type of text? <p>Content</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What does it say about Aspasia? 2. What is known about her life?
<p>Task 2. Assessment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Judging by the text that you have just read, would you say that we know much or little about Aspasia? 2. Why do you believe that the author only provides us with that information about her? 3. How might only possessing that information about her affect subsequent readers?

Figure 3. Aspasia Workshop.

minutes, they are then asked to debate on what is known about the life of Aspasia, according to each source, and the influence that the closeness of each one to the events has. This exercise highlights the importance of cooperative learning (Devi *et al.*, 2015, 1–14; Markoglou, 2022, 45–54; Slavin, 2014, 785–791).

In the second part, a deeper understanding of Aspasia is acquired directly. With the students still forming the same groups, they are asked to write a brief biographical note on the authoress. This exercise combines the information provided in the previous section. As a supplement to the previous debate, they are encouraged to reflect on the importance of putting information down in writing, as well as the type of information that is remembered.

After devoting between 20 and 25 minutes to writing the note, the spokesperson of each group reads it aloud. In the meantime, the most frequent ideas and keywords are noted down on the blackboard. This activity is followed by the workshop's verification stage with an action that has an impact on the participants. Specifically, the presenter selects the texts and randomly tears up some of them: one is torn to pieces which are then thrown away; another is torn up and its pieces are shredded with some scissors; another is torn into large pieces that are then crumpled; and one is left intact.

The intention behind this action is to compare the notion of preserving sources as an essential part of information transfer and, in sum, of the historical process. In turn, the fact that the content that the students themselves have created is destroyed helps them to understand the consequences of destroying sources and to become more committed to protecting them. This is supplemented by the screening of images relating to the agents influencing the destruction of sources, as well as to some papyrus discoveries. Likewise, one of the torn-up texts is selected, while explaining that the scarcity and fragmentary state of sources is commonplace in studies of the ancient world, and that the job of researchers is to study the available material with a view to reconstructing history.

The last ten minutes of the workshop are devoted to pooling information by way of conclusion. This involves connecting all the factors that have influenced the transmission of the figure of Aspasia and why she has been called a 'prisoner of history'. Similarly, the students are encouraged to engage in the activity by explaining to them that they have unknowingly participated in this process of recovering sources and have contributed to reinstating the figure of Aspasia. In short, their active participation in the activity goes a long way to favouring learning.

Roman authoresses

Presentation

The reading of any history or anthology of Roman literature can give the impression that this was the exclusive preserve of men. A closer reading of the literary and historical sources obliges us to reconsider the role of Roman women in literature. It is true that in ancient Rome higher education was the privilege of men belonging to the elite, as a way of preparing them for a career in politics, but women also came into contact with culture which was a necessary aspect of their daily lives.⁹

The education that women received at home could be continued in the homes of their husbands. Whereas some such husbands devoted themselves to the task of educating their young wives, others took a rather jaundiced view of this education (Seneca, *Consolation to Helvia* 17.4). For instance, Seneca's mother could not devote her time to the study of philosophy until she was widowed.

Notwithstanding these obstacles, there were many women who wrote – although their works have not come down to us – some of whom are discussed below.¹⁰

Correspondence was a mode of communication *par excellence*, some letters being so well written as to be regarded as literary works. Although some of the correspondence of great orators (like Cicero and Pliny the Younger) has survived, this is not the case with that of women. For instance, Suetonius mentions the correspondence between the emperor Augustus and the empress Livia as regards the future emperor Claudius, but only reproduces a few extracts from the letters that Augustus sent to his wife (*Claudius* 4), whereas there is no trace of those that Livia sent to her husband. The work of Cornelius Nepos contains fragments of two letters written by another famous woman, Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi brothers. However, their authenticity has been traditionally rejected. Genuine letters penned by women of the Roman Empire have survived thanks to Egyptian papyri (Bagnall and Criboire, 2015) and archaeological finds. In these cases, doubt has not been cast on their female authorship.

Two poetesses called Sulpicia are known to us. Of the first, who was the niece of Messalla Corvinus, the patron of Tibullus, Ovid and other poets, there are six extant love poems, no more than 40 verses, in the so-called *Corpus Tibullianum*. Of the second, praised by the poet Martial (10.35 and 38) only two verses have survived. Nero's mother Agrippina wrote her memoirs, a work that was cited as a historical source but which has not survived the passing of time.

Only a small fraction of all ancient literature has survived to this day and regarding literature written by women, a very rare phenomenon in itself, very little has weathered the centuries: 'Dentro del canon ellas son fragmentadas excepciones. Como Eurídice, vuelven a hundirse en la oscuridad cuando alguien intenta rescatarlas. Al seguir el rastro de sus huellas borradas, tanteamos un paisaje de sombras donde ya solo es posible conversar con los ecos'/'In the canon, these women are the fragmentary exceptions. Like Eurydice, when anyone tries to rescue them, they sink back into darkness. Following their erased footprints, we feel our way through a landscape of shadows where only the echoes can answer' (Vallejo, 2019, 384, trans. Whittle, 2022). In this workshop, the participants are encouraged not only to converse with those 'echoes' and 'shadows' but also to broaden the focus to construct a more inclusive history of literature, encompassing a greater variety of texts and also considering the role of women as receivers and promoters. The workshop's objectives are as follows:

- To highlight not only the female writers of ancient Rome but also the different roles played by women in Roman culture.
- To understand the socio-historical factors that hindered the access of women to education and writing.
- To detect the gender biases that contributed to silencing women writers at Rome in both the ancient literature and its contemporary interpretations.

Methodological proposal

The brief conceptual presentation described above is made to the students in a meaningful and experiential way adapted to their knowledge. The presenter recounts her own personal experience: as a student of classical philology in the 1990s; she was never taught about women in ancient literature nor did she translate the work of any authoress (except for Egeria in Vulgar Latin seminars). The students are offered several examples of manuals or anthologies of Roman literature (in English and Spanish), in which women are

Julia Balbilla	She wrote Greek poetry on the Colossi of Memnon	Julia Balbilla	She travelled to Egypt in the retinue of the emperor Hadrian
Agrippina the Younger	She wrote her memoirs	Agrippina the Younger	She was the mother of the emperor Nero
Sulpicia	She wrote love elegies	Sulpicia	She was the niece of Messalla, a patron of the arts
Cornelia	Some of her letters are contained in the manuscripts of the writer Nepos	Cornelia	She was the mother of the Gracchi brothers
Hortensia	She delivered a speech in the forum against the tax on wealthy women	Hortensia	She was the daughter of the orator Hortensius
Octavia	She was a patroness of the arts. She dedicated a library to the memory of her son Marcellus	Octavia	She was the sister of the emperor Augustus

Figure 4. Cutout information sheet for Roman women authors workshop.

conspicuous by their absence or have a token or biased presence. Explanations about authoresses, female readers and literary patronesses are combined with images of both artistic works (especially the paintings of Angelica Kauffmann)¹¹ and archaeological evidence of women writers (the poems of Julia Balbilla, the letter written by Claudia Severa on the tablets found in Vindolanda, Pompeian graffiti, etc.), which are related to the current reality of the students.

Additionally, the participants are shown several videos created with Artificial Intelligence¹² in which a painting of Sappho and a bust of Agrippina the Younger come to life and address them directly. On the other hand, in order to maintain their attention during the brief explanation, they are asked to take a mental note of the names of the women who are mentioned and to try to retain basic information. Following the explanation, each student is given a piece of paper containing either the name of one or another Roman woman or some information on her and her role in the Roman cultural world or on her family. In order to form groups, the students are asked to encounter others with bits of paper referring to the same woman (see Figure 4).

Each group works with one or several translated texts which are given to them in a dossier, along with the activities (Figure 5). The

groups 'Cornelia', 'Hortensia' and 'Agrippina the Younger' work with two prose texts (Texts 1: Pliny, *Letters* 1.16.6 and Text 2: Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 8.3.3), while the groups 'Sulpicia', 'Julia Balbilla' and 'Octavia' work with a text written by Ovid (Text 3: Ovid, *Tristia* 3.7). It is a simple proposal for cooperative learning (Devi *et al.*, 2015, 1–14; Slavin, 2014, 785–791), with group readings and questions and answers, followed by a debate and recap.

Conclusions

This study has described four proposals for recovering some female figures of Graeco-Roman culture, with a variety of methodologies and resources: gamification, cooperative learning, challenging preconceived ideas, creativity and teamwork. In sum, they are different options for meaningful learning.

It warrants noting that the absence of women writers from Antiquity in the secondary education and baccalaureate curricula is also the case in studies performed to date in this regard. For which reason, the compilation of an ample bibliography with an eye to helping teachers to include the authoresses analysed here in their classroom activities is equally important.

Text 1. At the beginning of the second century CE, Pliny the Younger mentions in a letter that a friend of his has shown him some of his wife's writings.

Questions

1. What is Pliny's opinion of the texts that his friend has shown him?
2. Why do you believe that he questions the female authorship of these texts?
3. Is Pliny bothered by the fact that a woman might be able to write literature?
4. Is there anything in Pliny's letter that grates?
5. What is the name of the wife of his friend?

Text 2. In his *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, Valerius Maximus tells the story of Hortensia, who defended the 1,400 richest women in the forum, who had been required to pay a tax to maintain the war effort.

Questions

1. How does this text resemble Pliny's letter?
2. What does this text tell us about the education of women of the Roman elite?
3. Although it is true that Hortensia's discourse has not come down to us, does she not deserve to be included in the history of literature?

Text 3. The Roman poet Ovid was exiled to Tomis (in present-day Romania) by the emperor Augustus as a punishment for having written *The Art of Love* (and for some other reason that is unknown). From his place of exile, he wrote letters in the form of poems to close relatives and friends. He dedicated one of these poems to young Perilla, certainly his stepdaughter (Perilla is a pseudonym).

Questions

1. How does Perilla entertain herself?
2. Who taught Perilla to write poetry?
3. To which great Greek poetess does Ovid compare Perilla?
4. What does this text tell us about the education of women of the Roman elite?
5. To what is Ovid referring when he tells Perilla that she should return to 'the good arts' and to her 'sacred duties' (*bonas artes et tua sacra*)?
6. What does Ovid say to his stepdaughter at the end of the text? What is he encouraging her to do?

Figure 5. Roman women authors workshop.

The workshops in which these proposals were implemented were so successful that they were repeated in the following academic year. The students participating in each workshop were able to gain a deeper understanding of female authorship in the past and to contrast it with the present. For their part, the classical culture (Latin and Greek) teachers attending them welcomed this initiative both because of the subject, necessary for coeducation, and the new resources and methodological strategies with which they provided them. In point of fact, some of them admitted to having implemented these proposals afterwards.

In conclusion, these workshops met their two main objectives: to recover and highlight forgotten women and to foster vocational science and humanities. Activities of this sort, in which university professors engage in a dialogue with secondary school teachers, also contribute to 'bridge the gap' (Goodman, 2017) between secondary schools and universities.

Competing interests

Manuel Alejandro González Muñoz, Rosario Moreno Soldevila, Marta Cuevas Caballero and Alberto Marina Castillo are employed at Pablo de Olavide University.

Notes

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySL-DU9dt4Y> (accessed 23 August 2024).

² As women writers are under-represented in Spanish curricula, there have been many proposals for remedying this problem, like, for example, López-Navajas (2014), López-Navajas and Querol Bataller (2014) and Sánchez Martínez (2019).

³ Regarding the fragments and their translation into Spanish, see Ingberg (1998), Luque (2004) and Carson (2019) and, into English, see Carson (2003), Rayor and Lardinois (2014) and Goldberg (2018). As to academic studies of Sappho, her context and her oeuvre: Greene (1996), Tsantsanoglou (2019) and Finglass and Kelly (2021).

4 Those 650 verses include the only complete hymn, the Hymn to Aphrodite, some 10 fragments with over half of the original verses, around 100 quotes in the works of other authors and some 50 papyrus fragments (Rayor and Lardinois, 2014, p. 7).

5 For conducting the workshops, a trilingual edition containing the Greek fragments, the English translation by Anne Carson and the Spanish translation by Aurora Luque (Carson, 2019), was chosen. The numbering of the fragments is that appearing in this edition, which is based on Voigt (1971). Depending on the mother tongue of the students, teachers can use other translations.

6 The image (of Plato) forms part of the fresco *The Athenian School* by Raphael, in the Stanza della Segnatura of the Vatican. Adapted from a Wikimedia Commons, public-domain file.

7 Some of these subjects of the secondary education curriculum include philosophy (the transition from *mythos* to *logos* in Asia Minor and authors like Socrates and Plato), mathematics and/or technology (Aspasia's contemporary Hippodamus of Miletus), ethical values (the origin and development of the concept of democracy), Spanish language and literature and classical culture (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes, among others).

8 To compensate the amount of reading of each source and owing to the fact that Plutarch is the author of the longest extant text in this respect, it can be subdivided into two or even three sections, depending on the number of students. There are other sources that mention Aspasia, although they are not included in this workshop. For further information on these additional sources, see López Rodríguez (2009, 234–239).

9 On the education of women in ancient Rome and their role in the literary world, see above all Hemelrijk (2004).

10 Regarding Roman authoresses, see, among others, Churchill *et al.* (2002), Greene (2005), López (1994), Natoli *et al.* (2022), Plant (2004), Snyder (1989) and Stevenson (2005). For the biographies of some of the women addressed in this workshop: Pavón (n.d.).

11 *Cornelia mater Gracchorum* (painted in 1785) and *Virgil reading the Aeneid to Augustus and Octavia* (painted in 1788).

12 In this case, created with the D-ID app, but there are other tools available that allow you to animate pictures into live talking people and for lip synchronisation. In this case, the text was written specially for the occasion and read by the presenter herself.

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