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# The Lost Novels *Parthenope* and *Calligone* in the Context of the Papyri of Early Greek Historical Novels

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## Abstract

*Parthenope* and *Calligone* are historical novels featuring two young, aristocratic women. Both will inherit their respective kingdoms and have been educated as men in the Greek *paideia*, which includes oratorical and military training. For *Parthenope*, we have three papyri: *P.Berol.* 9588 + 7927 + 21179, *P.Oxy.* 435, and *P.Mich.* inv. 3402v. Additionally, an *ostrakon* from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD confirms that the novel was already known before that date (*O.Bodl.* 2175). For *Calligone*, we have two papyri: *P.Oxy.* 5355 and *PSI* 981, dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. In the narratives, *Parthenope* is the daughter of the tyrant Polycrates of Samos and *Calligone* is the daughter of Eubiotus, a fictitious king of Boristhenes, the historical Milesian colony on the Black Sea. Although the two novels share certain common features, they also exhibit distinct features, which we shall examine in greater detail.

## Keywords

*Parthenope*, *Calligone*, *P.Berol.* 9588, *P.Berol.* 7927, *P.Berol.* 21179, *P.Oxy.* 435, *P.Mich.* inv. 3402v, *O.Bodl.* 2175, *P.Oxy.* 5355, *PSI* 981, ancient Greek novels, historical novels

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## Introduction

Love, war, and travel are some of the ingredients of adventure novels, which was the last major genre to emerge in Greece, where almost all the literary forms of our Western tradition were also born.

The end of the Hellenistic Age and the beginning of the Empire were marked by an innovative artistic process, particularly by the phenomenon known as *poikilia*, or variety of genres (Grand-Clément 2015). Literary resources, characters, and scenes from the earlier literary tradition are revived and combined with new themes and forms as new social and cultural concerns emerge. This process culminates in the emergence of a new genre: the novel. As a late product, the novel inherits, for example, the detailed descriptions of the *Iliad*, the voyages, shipwrecks, and banquets of the *Odyssey* and *Argonautica*, the love themes of lyric poetry or tragedy, the characters and situations of new comedy, the episodes of war from historiography, and the judgements and speeches of rhetoric, to name just a few of these easily recognisable *topoi*.

The manuscript tradition managed to bring down to our days the set of titles that form the canon of love and adventure novels: *Callirhoe* by Chariton (c. late 1<sup>st</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD); *Ephesian Story* by Xenophon of Ephesus (c. first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD); *Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius (c. mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus of Lesbos (c. second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), and *Theagenes and Chariclea* by Heliodorus (c. 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century AD). There are also Latin novels: *Satyricon* by Petronius (c. mid-1<sup>st</sup> century AD), *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius (c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), and *The Story of Apollonius, King of Tyre* (5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century AD, with a Greek original likely dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century AD). Additionally, biographical novels (c. 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century AD), such as *Life of Alexander* by Pseudo-Callisthenes (c. late 3<sup>rd</sup> – early 4<sup>th</sup> century AD), *Life of the Philosopher Secundus* (c. second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), *Life of Aesop* (c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), and *Lucius or The Ass* (c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), along with some shorter works by Lucian (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD).

## The Papyri of Lost Novels

Some fifty papyri with fragments of other novels that were lost in Antiquity or during Byzantine times have survived to the present day. Most of them were copied in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. The first comprehensive editions of these texts were the notable works of Lavagnini (1922) and Zimmermann (1936). In 1991, Professor Dostálová published a pioneering work on the study of both papyri fragments belonging to Greek novels preserved by the medieval manuscript

tradition and those papyri belonging to lost novels. She also classified the material according to the setting in which the action takes place: historical novels, novels with Eastern themes, including Asia Minor, and, finally, novels with Egyptian themes (Dostálová 1991). In the same year, an edition and commentary of the most important papyri was published by Kussl (1991) and a complete study by Stramaglia (1996) followed. The first modern editions were those by Stephens – Winkler (1995) and López Martínez (1998 [microfiche: Alicante 1994]). Since 1998, three updates on the topic of novel fragments have been published: Messeri (2010), Henrichs (2010) and López Martínez (2022b). The *Fiction in Papyrus* website ([www.ficcionenpapiro.es](http://www.ficcionenpapiro.es)) is a platform designed to facilitate access to fragments of lost Greek novels. It includes scholarly publications, and a range of materials aimed at younger readers, such as illustrated stories, podcasts, and videos.

I refer to the information in the editions by Stephens – Winkler (1995) and López Martínez (1998) for editions and studies published before 1998. Both works were very useful but have now been rendered obsolete by the publication of new papyri. I refer to López Martínez (2022b) for new developments on the subject. For the last ten years, I have been preparing a new edition of these texts, which I hope will be published in 2026.

### The Papyri of Lost Historical Novels

Within the set of papyri of novels, I have identified 19 fragments of ‘historical’ or ‘mythical-historical’ novels.<sup>1</sup> From the text preserved on the papyrus, we can deduce that the plot of these novels refers to historical characters or events. Chariton also places the plot of the novel in 4<sup>th</sup> century BC Sicily. Callirrhoe is the daughter of General Hermocrates of Syracuse, who defeated the Athenians in the Peloponnesian Wars. The action takes place in various parts of the Mediterranean, starting in Sicily, passing through Asia Minor, and even reaching the Persia of Artaxerxes II. The historical veneer that Chariton aims to give to the novel is especially evident in the opening words of the text: *Χαρίτων Ἀφροδισιεύς, Ἀθηναγόρου τοῦ ῥήτορος ὑπογραφεύς, πάθος ἐρωτικὸν ἐν Συρακούσαις γενόμενον διηγῆσθαι* (1.1.1). This beginning is a clear evocation of the *prooemia* of Herodotus and Thucydides: *Ἡροδότου Ἀλικαρνησσεὸς ἱστορίας ἀπόδεξις ἦδε, ὡς μήτε τὰ γενόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων τῷ χρόνῳ ἐξίτηλα γένηται, μήτε ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά, τὰ μὲν Ἑλληνισι, τὰ δὲ βαρβάροισι ἀποδεχθέντα, ἀκλεᾶ γένηται, τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ δι’ ἣν αἰτίην ἐπολέμησαν ἀλλήλοισι* (1.1.1) and *Θουκυδίδης Ἀθηναῖος*

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1 Alluding to Cornford (1907).

ξυνέγραψε τὸν πόλεμον τῶν Πελοποννησίων καὶ Ἀθηναίων, ὡς ἐπολέμησαν πρὸς ἀλλήλους, ἀρξάμενος εὐθύς καθισταμένου καὶ ἐλπίσας μέγαν τε ἔσεσθαι καὶ ἀξιολογώτατον τῶν προγεγενημένων (1.1.1).

The historical novel did not enjoy literary prestige in Antiquity itself. However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has become one of the best-selling forms of fiction and one of the most popular genres among the public, although most readers today are unaware of its Greek origins.

We have titled these fragmentary historical novels after their protagonists: *Ninus*, *Sesonchosis*, *Parthenope*, *Calligone*, *Antia*, and a possibly lost *Semiramis*. The title and the name of the forged author of the *Diary of the Trojan War* have come down to us because they appear in the text of one of the papyri. The author identifies himself as Dictys of Crete and claims to have accompanied the hero Idomeneus to the Trojan War.

*Ninus*, *Parthenope*, *Sesonchosis*, and *Calligone* present a similar structure. Their plots revolve around the loves, travels, and adventures of a character who is also quoted by historiographical sources. It is also possible that the action of the novel alludes, even if only minimally, to historical events or figures. In any case, novelists do not pay much attention to historians' chronology and often mix data from historical and mythical sources. The first of these was probably *Ninus*, a scholarly experiment that worked very well (López Martínez, forthcoming).<sup>2</sup>

Common elements in their plots include: 1) Information about the childhood and adolescence of their protagonists; 2) Given their royal status, the stories emphasise their comprehensive education, including oratory, literature, horsemanship, weaponry, and military strategy; 3) Allusion is made to paternal advice on good government; 4) As young adults, the protagonists must prove themselves in military campaigns and sea voyages; 5) Upon their father's death, the protagonist becomes the leader of a great empire. A notable feature of these historical novels is the presence of female figures, whether protagonists or secondary characters, who play a prominent role in the plot of the novel.<sup>3</sup>

Alongside the above, the fundamental ingredient of these historical novels is the reciprocated love between the two sexes, both on the part of the protagonist and his partner. The presence of Eros is key, unlike in other biographical accounts, such as *Life of Alexander*.<sup>4</sup>

2 There are various theories on the chronology of the first fragmentary novels, cf. Tilg (2010), Gargiulo (2013), and López Martínez (2019) and (forthcoming).

3 On the importance of female characters in complete or fragmentary novels, see López Martínez – Sánchez-Moreno Ellart – Zaera García (eds.) (2023).

4 On the concept of 'sexual symmetry', see Konstan (1994).

In this contribution, I will focus on two lost historical novels featuring young, aristocratic women, *Parthenope* and *Calligone*. Both have been raised as boys and will inherit their respective kingdoms.<sup>5</sup>

### **Parthenope**

According to my hypothesis, *Parthenope* was written at the beginning of the Imperial period, between the end of the first century BC and the beginning of the first century AD, almost simultaneously with or shortly after *Ninus* (cf. López Martínez 2019). The success of both novels, *Ninus* and *Parthenope*, must have spread rapidly throughout the Roman Empire, from Mesopotamia to the Nile Valley in Egypt.

We have three papyri from *Parthenope*: *P.Berol.* inv. 7927 + 9588 + 21179 (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD); *P.Mich.* inv. 3402v (3<sup>rd</sup> century AD) and *P.Oxy.* III 435 (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD). Also, an ostrakon has come down to us, *O.Bodl.* 2175 (early 1<sup>st</sup> century AD), which may contain a fragment of the novel, or a scholarly text inspired by its plot.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the papyri and Greek literary sources, we have Persian testimonies that are fundamental for the reconstruction of the text and the plot. On the one hand, we have 400 verses of an epic poem entitled *Vāmiq u 'Adhrā* (*The Lover and the Virgin*) by 'Unṣurī and also from the collection of narratives *Dārāb-nāmah*. There are also three loose pages from a Coptic codex containing the narrative of the martyrdom of Saint Parthenope (c. 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century) and a *synaxary* with the Arabic translation of a martyrology, according to which the death of this non-existent saint, who probably lost her life for defending her virtue, is commemorated on the 21<sup>st</sup> tybi.<sup>7</sup> The monograph by Hägg-Utas (2003) gives an exhaustive account of all these sources and testimonies.

The starting point of *Parthenope* is set in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, in Samos, one of the islands of the Eastern Sporades, near the coast of Asia

5 On women warrior, see Gera (1997). Regarding this type of novel heroine, see López Martínez - Ruiz-Montero (2023).

6 Editions of the papyri: *P.Berol.* 7927 + *P.Berol.* 9588 + *P.Berol.* 21179: Stephens - Winkler (1995: 81-89), López Martínez (1998: 121-132 [microfiche edition: Alicante 1994]), López Martínez - Ruiz-Montero (2016a), López Martínez - Ruiz-Montero (2021). *P.Oxy.* III 435: Stephens - Winkler (1995: 97-99), López Martínez (1998: 133-134), Kussl (1991: 165-167), López Martínez - Ruiz-Montero (2016b). *P.Mich.* inv. 3402v: Alvares - Renner (2001). *O.Bodl.* 2175: Stephens - Winkler (1995: 94), López Martínez (1998: 135). A global approach, both from the scientific point of view and from the artists' perspective, by López Martínez - López Juan - Navarro López (2023).

7 An adaptation of this Christian version for younger readers by López Martínez (2024a), in the collection *Greek Tales on Papyrus*.

Minor. The protagonist is the unnamed daughter of the tyrant Polycrates of Samos, patron of philosophers and poets, such as Anacreon and Ibcus, who are also involved in the action of the novel (Hdt. 2.39.121, 3.39–140 and 6.41). According to Herodotus, the unnamed girl of Samos expresses her desire to remain unmarried (Hdt. 3.124.2: *βούλεσθαι γὰρ παρθενεύεσθαι*). From these words, the author of the novel constructs a character, taking into account the ancient name of the island of Samos, *Παρθενία*.<sup>8</sup> Also evocative is the first name of the river *Ἰμβρασος*, which was *Παρθένιος* ('of the maiden').<sup>9</sup>

The fiancée and cousin of the Assyrian prince Ninus is also an unnamed character (*ἡ παῖς*, *P.Berol.* 6926 II.146; *ἡ παρθένος*, *P.Berol.* 6926 II.251, II.278 and II.205, and *ἡ κόρη*, *P.Berol.* 6926 II.248 and II.296), by the contrary, the Polycrates' daughter is unnamed in historiographical sources (Herodotus) but bears a name in the papyri, Parthenope, 'who has the face or look of a maiden'.

The founder hero of Samos was *ὁ Ἀγκαῖος*, son of Poseidon and Astypalea and lord of the Leleges. Ancaeus accompanied Jason on the ship Argos and was noted for his skill at the helm: *ἦτοι ὁ μὲν πτολίεθρον ἀγαυοῦ Μιλήτιοι / νοσφισθεῖς Ἐργίνος, ὁ δ' Ἰμβρασίης ἔδος Ἥρης, / παρθενίην, Ἀγκαῖος ὑπέρβιος· ἴστορε δ' ἄμφω / ἡμὲν ναυτιλίας ἡδ' ἄρεος εὐχετόωντο* (*Apoll. Rhod.* 1.186ff.; cf also 2.865ff.). I will refer, again, to the couple formed by Poseidon and Astypalea, in connection with the mosaics of the city of Zeugma.

In addition to the daughter of Polycrates, Lycophron tells us of a Siren named Parthenope: *οὐ σῆμα δωμήσαντες ἔγχωροι κόρης / λοιβαῖσι καὶ θύσθλοισι Παρθενόπην βοῶν / ἔτεια κυδανοῦσιν οἰωνόν θεάν. / ἀκτὴν δὲ τὴν προῦχουσαν εἰς Ἐνιπέως / Λευκωσία ῥιφέισα τὴν ἐπώνυμον* (*Lycophr. Alexandra* 719–723 et seq.) and, by Dionysius the Periegeta, we know that the waves of the sea washed his body onto the beach of the city of Naples, which was named after him: *μέλαθρον ἀγνής Παρθενόπης*, "tomb of the pure Parthenope" (*Dion. Perieg.* 358).<sup>10</sup> It is also interesting that the term *ἀγνή* refers to the shrub called *ἄγνος* (*Vitex agnus*

8 Nicander, *Alex.* 149 and Callimachus 4.45: *ἡ νήσοιο διάβροχον ὕδατι μαστόν / Παρθενίης (οὐπω γὰρ ἔην Σάμος), ἥχι σε νύμφαι / γείτονες Ἀγκαῖοι Μυκαλησιδίdes ἐξείνισσαν.*

9 The river was also called *Παρθένιος*, because the goddess Hera was born at its mouth, under an *ἄγνος* (-ου, ἡ): *τὸ δὲ ἱερὸν τὸ ἐν Σάμῳ τῆς Ἥρας εἰσὶν οἱ ἰδρῦσασθαί φασι τοὺς ἐν τῇ Ἀργοῖ πλέοντας, ἐπάγεσθαι δὲ αὐτοὺς τὸ ἄγαλμα ἐξ Ἀργους· Σάμιοι δὲ αὐτοὶ τεχθῆναι νομίζουσιν ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τὴν θεὸν παρὰ τῷ Ἰμβράσῳ ποταμῷ καὶ ὑπὸ τῇ λύγῳ τῇ ἐν τῷ Ἡραίῳ κατ' ἐμὲ ἔτι πεφυκυῖα. εἶναι δ' οὖν τὸ ἱερὸν τοῦτο ἐν τοῖς μάλιστα ἀρχαῖον ὃ οὐχ ἦκιστα ἄν τις καὶ ἐπὶ τῷ ἀγάλματι τεκμαίροιο* (*Pausanias* 7.4.4). The place became the Heraion of Samos.

10 Cf. also Strabo 1.2.13: *ἐὰν δὲ προσθῆ τις ὅτι ἐν Νεαπόλει Παρθενόπης δείκνυται μνημα μᾶς τῶν Σειρήνων, ἔτι πλείων προσεγένετο πίστις, καίτοι τρίτου τινὸς λεχθέντος τούτου τοῦ τόπου. ἀλλ' ὅτι ἐν τούτῳ τῷ κόλπῳ τῷ ὑπὸ Ἐρατοσθένους λεχθέντι Κυμαί.*



*castus*), with whose branches the women formed a tapestry over the beds during the Thesmophoria.

Parthenope's partner is Metiochos. He is also a historical figure and, like her, an aristocrat. Metiochos is the son of Miltiades the Younger of Chersonesus (c. 550–489 BC), the great hero of the Battle of Marathon, and his first wife. Miltiades remarried to a Thracian princess named Hegesipyle, with whom he had several children.

The basis on which the character is built is to be found in historical sources, but the author of the novel also incorporates elements of myth. This combination of history and myth is evident in the iconography of the city of Zeugma. The protagonists of the mosaics that decorate the public and private buildings of this wealthy city on the banks of the Euphrates River are aquatic divinities and sea creatures. Water also plays an important role in the legend of the Assyrian queen Semiramis, who descends from a line of Amazons and travels alone to the battlefield to meet her husband and take an active part in the war. In fact, Semiramis' mother is *Δερκετώ*, a nymph who threw herself into Lake Ashkelon tormented by her feelings for a beautiful young man. It is particularly important to note that the couples of Parthenope and Metiochos and Psyche and Eros decorate the same room in Zeugma: both are women who are in active search of a lover.

What I present below is my reconstruction of the plot of the novel, based on evidence both from iconography and from Greek (history, myth, papyri), Christian, Arabic and Persian literary sources. I refer to the monograph by Hägg - Utas (2003) for the exhaustive catalogue of all sources and for the abbreviations I will use to refer to them.

The beginning of the novel would record the family ancestry of the protagonists, especially Parthenope, and the marriage of her parents (FP 1–15). During her birth, her father had a dream (FP 16–29). Already as a child, Parthenope is noted for her intelligence and intuition (Hdt. 3.124.1). She receives a complete education that includes poetry, sport, riding, weapons and military instruction (PF 28–39). Calligone also demonstrates her military training when she helps the Amazons and their queen Themisto to organise an army of people ruled by women to fight against the Scythians (*P.Oxy.* LXXXIII 5355, fr. 1, col. III, 26–32).

The first meeting and possible love at first sight between Parthenope and Metiochos takes place in a religious context, in the temple of Hera at Samos, perhaps during the procession in honour of this goddess (PF 84–85). Metiochos arrives accompanied by his friend Theophanes (PF 58–59), as Pamunis does with Sesonchosis when he meets Meameris (*P.Oxy.* 3319, col. II, 11–12 and col. III, 7). Parthenope's mother also plays a central role in the novel, like Arete

in the *Odyssey*, and accompanies Parthenope during this first meeting in the temple (PF 98).

Like Alcinous, Polycrates also offers a banquet in honour of the newcomer (cf. *Od.* 8–12). Arete, wife of Alcinous and mother of Nausicaa, interrogates the stranger to discover his origins and intentions (*Od.* 7.236–239). Like Nausicaa, Parthenope is also a marriageable princess.

Ninus may be relating his latest adventure to a powerful woman who has saved him from a shipwreck (*PSI XIII* 1305.3). Also, Queen Themisto asks Calligone, and in reply, the young woman explains that her father is an ally of the Amazons (*P.Oxy.* LXXXIII 5355, fr. 2, 6–8). Like Ulysses, Ninus and Calligone, also Metiochos explains to his host where he comes from and who he is.

Like Odysseus (so does he twice: *Od.* 7.240–297 and 9–12), Metiochos recounts his life in the first person. First, his childhood in Athens under the care of an aristocratic mother, whose name remains unknown. As a teenager, he arrives with his father in the Chersonese. There, Miltiades marries a young Thracian princess (*Hdt.* 6.39 and 41) and has children with her. The stepmother Hegesipyra slanders Metiochos and intrigues against him in order to promote the dynastic rights of her own sons. Finally, the young man flees to Samos to take refuge in the court of the tyrant Polycrates, a blood relative.

Other court figures are invited to the welcome banquet: the poet Ibycus and his daughter Parthenope. The girl takes an active part in the conversation, unlike Ninus' cousin. Anaximenes is also present, acting as *συμποσίαρχος*. The philosopher is surely aware of the mutual attraction between the two young men and proposes a philosophical-rhetorical debate on the nature of love, reworking themes from Plato's *Symposium*.

When it is Metiochos' turn, the boy acknowledges that he does not truly understand the nature of Eros and delivers an irreverent speech in which he rejects the 'romantic' conception of Eros, which traditionally depicts him as a boy armed with a bow and arrows. Metiochos' words are full of Platonic echoes but displease Parthenope (Fernández Garrido 2022). By contrast, Ninus knows Eros, but not in its ultimate consequences, as the Assyrian prince himself laments. Parthenope, in response, engages in a public debate and defends the traditional romantic view of Eros with words that show that she too is a *docta puella*. What has survived of the scene suggests an early version of the 'Taming of the Shrew' *topos*. Next is the poet Ibycus, who is followed, again, by Metiochos, whose speech consists of a song with a mythical theme to the sound of the lyre (GF 4).

The banquet scene is probably followed by a courtship ritual, which would give way to a more intimate moment (GT 2a). Persian sources suggest that

Polycrates appoints Philetas as the young woman's guardian (PF 289–293). There would be initial opposition to the wedding on the part of her parents, which upsets Parthenope (PF 325–327). Calligone also reacts with despair and shows that she is a woman with a strong character when she gets angry (PSI VIII 981, col. II, 1–2: παντελῶς τὴν γνώμην διασεχεισμένη...).

As in *Ninus*, we cannot be sure whether the wedding takes place. In any case, Metiochos has to leave (Hdt. 6.41.2–3). In the distance, he misses Parthenope, writes letters to her (GF 3, for example) and, during the voyage, Metiochos' ship is attacked by Phoenician pirates and the young is taken prisoner by the pirates who bring him to King Darius. The Persian king showered him with gifts and gave him a house. Metiochos reciprocates by gaining the king's trust and showing courage in battle. According to Herodotus, the king rewards him with an estate and a Persian wife, whose children will become full Persians (Hdt. 6.41.3).

Meanwhile, Parthenope leaves Samos and sets out in search of her beloved. Like Calligone, Parthenope travels in search of help or to find Metiochos. As I have mentioned, Semiramis herself travels to join her husband on the battlefield (Diod. 2.6.5).<sup>11</sup> Throughout her adventures, Parthenope stops at various ports and visits several islands, including the mythical Corcyra.

There, in Corcyra, we find her on one of the papyri. It is possible that she has fallen prey to kidnappers who have sold her to a slave trader. This merchant is called Demoxenos and sells her for a talent to a nobleman of Corcyra. The papyrus also mentions a certain Alexander, who is probably the faithful servant of an aristocrat whom Parthenope is to marry. The wedding is announced in the city theatre before an assembly of the Corcyrans, and it will soon take place, for a man named Euphranias is already arranging the ceremony (GF2).

From this moment on, there are no more papyri. What happens from now on? Does Parthenope marry the Corcyran nobleman? Was she already married to Metiochos? Will she become a bigamist? That is what happens in *Callirhoe*. Some testimonies about Parthenope seem to suggest the same (GT2a). On the contrary, both ceremonies could have been interrupted unexpectedly and Parthenope could have remained unmarried.

There are several hypotheses regarding the ending of this novel: One hypothesis that Hägg takes into account suggests the plot of the *Life of Saint Parthenope*, which ends with the protagonist's martyrdom. Therefore, he argues that the Greek novel would also have an unhappy ending, not concluding

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11 In López Martínez (forthcoming), I have referred to *P. Vindob.* inv. G 26765, which includes a quotation from the *Iliad* (XIII.278) and alludes to difficulties and dangers, possibly a *πλάγη*. If my hypothesis is confirmed, it could be a fragment of *Parthenope*.

with the lovers' reunion. Another possibility is that the novel concludes with the lovers' reunion and Parthenope's return to Samos, where she ascends to the throne.

### **Calligone**

*Parthenope* could have served as a model for the author of *Calligone*. The protagonist, 'beautiful by birth', is the daughter of the king of Boristhenes, the historic Milesian colony located in Pontus, at the mouth of the Dnieper River, near the site that local archaeologists now refer to as Olbia.

Two papyri from *Calligone*, *P.Oxy.* 5355 and *PSI* 981, have come down to us from the ancient Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus – today's El-Bahnasa, some 190 km from present-day Cairo. They are now in the Sackler Library and the Archaeological Museum of Alexandria, respectively, and date from the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, so the writing of the work must have been earlier.<sup>12</sup>

Calligone is also an aristocrat with a military background. The novel recounts her shipwreck in the land of the Amazons, where she aids them in organizing their army for war against the Scythians. She is also young, passionate, and very much in love. The character could be inspired by real Ukrainian women, whose tombs have yielded arrows, bows, and other objects related to horse training (4<sup>th</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC), or by Hypsicrates herself, the last wife of Mithridates VI. Eubiotus is the king and father of Calligone. He has been beset by problems, the nature of which we do not know, perhaps a Scythian attack or a conspiracy by members of his own court. In view of these troubles, he takes his sons away from Boristhenes.

Perhaps Calligone, because she is older, has embarked on a different ship from her brothers because she has a mission to call for help. Calligone's ship is shipwrecked in the country of the Amazons, whose queen, Themisto, receives her at court and is impressed by the beauty and stature of the shipwrecked woman. The girl gains the trust of these warriors fighting against the Scythians and

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12 Editions of the papyri: *P.Oxy.* 5355: *editio princeps* by Parsons (2018). *PSI* 981: *editio princeps* by Edgar in Norsa (1927). Other editions by Zimmermann (1936: 46–50, nr. 4, plate II), Stephens – Winkler (1995: 267–276), and López Martínez (1998: 145–155, nr. 16). See also recent studies by Koroli – Papatomas (2019), Ruiz-Montero (2020), Ruta (2021), and López Martínez (2022a). I have also prepared an approach for younger readers of this novel, *The Adventures of Calligone and the Amazons*, Madrid 2021. I have attempted to demonstrate that deep-rooted linguistic themes with a long history in literary history can be explained to younger audiences with the help of traditional tales or cartoons, cf. López Martínez (2024b).

helps them organize and expand their army, incorporating soldiers from other peoples, including Maeotas, Sarmatians, and Alans, under female leadership.

Later, the second papyrus depicts a scene where her father, Eubiotus, also arrives on the battlefield. Calligone and her father enter the tent together. Furious and in love with Erasinus, she curses the goddess Artemis. She tries to reach for her weapon but is unable to, as Eubiotus has hidden it.

Based on the study of anthroponymy and literary and historical context, I propose that certain aspects of the characters of this novel might be inspired by real women who inhabited the cities of the Black Sea coast during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC - 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

## Conclusions

As I have already mentioned, in these early historical novels, the presence of female characters stands out. Alongside the marriageable princesses with military training and, therefore, the ability to handle weapons and lead armies (the indomitable Parthenope, daughter of the tyrant Polycrates, and the Pontic Calligone, daughter of King Eubiotus). We also have warrior queens (the Amazon Themisto) and stepmothers (Hegesipyla), to cite just two stereotypes from an extensive catalogue, whose models can be traced back to myth, popular tradition and, in any case, to earlier literature, especially the *Odyssey*.

The author of *Parthenope* presents a new paradigm of the hero for an original and different literary genre that could have served as a model for other novels written later, such as, probably, *Calligone*.<sup>13</sup> The protagonist is a woman deeply in love. Despite her delicate nature, she is also cultured, brave, and capable of facing danger alone. She actively embarks on a long sea voyage to find her beloved. Like *Ninus*, she is a princess who embodies the ideal of Greek *paideia*. This ideal, formulated by old Phoenix in the *Iliad* IX.443, emphasises the importance of being both a skilled orator and a courageous warrior: τοῦνεκά με προέηκε διδασκόμεναι τάδε πάντα, / μύθων τε ῥητῆρ' ἔμεναι πρηκτιτῆρά τε ἔργων.

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13 Of which there is also a comic version, *Panionis* (P. Oxy. LXXI 4811 + PSI XI 1220), cf. López Martínez (2016) and López Martínez (forthcoming).

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