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THE RECEPTION OF NIOBE'S MYTHOLOGICAL *EXEMPLUM* FROM THE HELLENISTIC POETRY TO THE IMPERIAL LATIN LITERATURE

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The mythological story of Niobe is a constant motif in ancient literature since Homer included it in the *Iliad*. Thus, this first textual reference to Niobe has been reused, remodeled and even reinterpreted down through the ages until the imperial Latin literature. We do not only refer here to the tale, in terms of its form or content, but to the connection between the use and function of the episode itself. All this indicates the dynamism of texts, that is to say, that the texts themselves and their interpretation are not fixed, but they might change depending on the author's literary need.

Greco-Latin literature / Mythical purpose / Niobe / Reception / Textual afterlives

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LA RECEPCIÓN DEL *EXEMPLUM* MITOLÓGICO DE NÍOBE DESDE LA POESÍA HELENÍSTICA A LA LITERATURA LATINA IMPERIAL

El relato mitológico de Níobe es un motivo constante en la literatura antigua que se remonta a la *Ilíada* de Homero. Así, esta primera referencia textual sobre Níobe ha sido reutilizada, remodelada e incluso reinterpretada a lo largo de los siglos hasta la literatura latina de época imperial. No solo nos referimos aquí al relato mítico, en términos de forma o contenido, sino también a la conexión entre el uso y función del propio episodio. Todo ello indica el dinamismo de los textos, es decir, que ni

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estos ni su interpretación eran fijos, sino que podían cambiar dependiendo de la necesidad del autor en su obra.

Literatura grecolatina / Función mítica / Níobe / Recepción / Inmortalidad textual

Just as we cannot understand texts only as physical objects, the mythical stories that Greek and Latin literary texts precisely contain cannot be described as static entities either, but as dynamic representations of human experience itself. In particular, this volatile human experience comes directly from those authors who introduced in their works numerous mythical stories —many of them very well-known in the Greco-Latin tradition— with different objectives: comparative function, paradigmatic function, parodic function, etc. The same myth narrated by different authors may have a completely different approach or a flagrant intertextual tension with earlier authors[1]. Thus, the text is reused, modified or (re)interpreted, according to the author's own interests. This is the case of the mythical episode of the Phrygian Niobe, a really significant character within the Greco-Latin literature. According to FORBES-IRVING[2], this story belongs to the thematic structure of crime and punishment, but this pattern clearly looses steam when Niobe becomes a symbol of grief, pain or affliction[3]. The traditional version of the myth tells that Niobe challenged the goddess Leto as long as she claimed that her ability to bear children was much greater than Leto's, because the goddess had only conceived Apollo and Artemis. This criminal sin of *hybris* against the goddess must be punished and, for this reason, Leto sends her children to murder the entire offspring of the boastful Niobe. According to some versions, Leto decided that Apollo should kill Niobe's sons and Artemis Niobe's daughters. After the massacre, Tantalus' daughter, bewildered and consumed by the loss of her offspring, ends up petrified on Mount Sipylus[4]. Thus, we aim to analyze in these pages the evolution of those texts that convey the tragic episode of Niobe in order to observe how those texts have been transformed, which elements have been included or disappeared within the story and how and for what purpose Greco-Latin authors have reused the myth in their works since Homer.

As is well known, Homer is the first poet who offered the very first reference to Niobe in Greek literature and made of her a symbol of suffering and affliction[5]. He resorts to this mythological character in the last book of the *Iliad*[6] when, after prince Hector's death, the Trojan king, Priam, goes to the Achaean camp and enters Achilles' tent in order to beg him to return the outraged corpse of his son, Hector. Achilles finally agrees, but he decided to release the body of the Trojan prince at dawn, after having supped and rested (νῦν δὲ μνησώμεθα δόρπου, v. 601). When the old man refuses to eat and drink because of his grief, Achilles tries to convince him. For doing so, he tells Priam that he should eat, as even Niobe did. Despite her suffering due to the slaughter of all her children (τῇ περ δώδεκα παῖδες ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ὄλοντο / ἓξ μὲν θυγατέρες, ἓξ δ' υἱέες ἡβώοντες, vv. 603-604), she also remembered food (καὶ γάρ τ' ἠΰκομος Νιόβη ἐμνήσατο σίτου, v. 602)[7]. Consequently, just as the famous Niobe ate, Priam must do the same, because her misfortunes were far more terrible than Hector's death.

Homer makes use of the mythological episode of Niobe as an *exemplum* in a comparative form, but with an exemplifying or paradigmatic function[8]. Aeschylus, however, far from including the episode of the daughter of Tantalus just as a brief reference, dedicates a complete drama to her. But, from what can be read in the fragment of *Niobe*, Aeschylus's aim slightly differs from the Homeric mention of the Phrygian. The title of the play evinces that the playwright would have presented the entire mythical episode of Niobe on stage. Aeschylus mentions the origins of the young woman (Ταντάλου β[ίαν), the disastrous marriage (ἀλ̣ίμενον γάμ̣ον; κακοῦ), her pride and boastfulness (i.e. ἐξαρθεῖσα [κ]αλλισ[τ or τὴν τάλαιναν εὔμορφον φυήν) and the slaughter of her offspring (τόνδ' ἐφημένη τάφον / τέκνοις ἐπῴζει ζῶσα τοῖς τεθνηκόσιν). We also suppose that, according to the traditional version of the myth, Aeschylus would have included the final petrification, though it is not preserved in the papyrus itself[9].

Both Homer and Aeschylus are clear examples of how texts themselves and their interpretation are not inflexible, but they do change depending on the literary needs of the author. In Aeschylus' case, the poet highlights certain mythical parts such as Niobe's arrogance and hubris. That way, it seems that the crime and punishment pattern becomes more relevant in Aeschylus' story in order to give his verses a moralizing aspect (vv. 14-19), while, for Homer, Niobe's facet of a suffering mother, who finds it difficult to eat because of her pain, is enough to build the comparison between Priam and Niobe herself[10]. Later, in the Hellenistic period, Niobe's episode became a really well-known myth, present in the mythological heritage of the Alexandrine erudites. Callimachus in the *Hymn to Apollo* reuses the mythological character of Niobe with the same mythical function as Aeschylus but within a different literary context. The speaker of the hymn, whether Callimachus or not, intends to give some instructions to the faithful, specially, how they should keep silent when Apollo is praised. To exemplify this particular order, Callimachus makes allusive references to some myths, namely, the death of Achilles and the lament of Thetis as well as the fateful story of Niobe. The paradigmatic function appears again because Callimachus tries to show that, if characters such as Thetis or Niobe herself shelve their sorrows in front of the god, the same should be done by the faithful who attend to Apollo's ritual:

> οὐδὲ Θέτις Ἀχιλῆα κινύρεται αἴλινα μήτηρ,
> ὁππόθ' ἰὴ παιῆον ἰὴ παιῆον ἀκούσῃ.
> καὶ μὲν ὁ δακρυόεις ἀναβάλλεται ἄλγεα πέτρος,
> ὅστις ἐνὶ Φρυγίῃ διερὸς λίθος ἐστήρικται,
> μάρμαρον ἀντὶ γυναικὸς ὀϊζυρόν τι χανούσης.
> ἰὴ ἰὴ φθέγγεσθε· κακὸν μακάρεσσιν ἐρίζειν.
> ὃς μάχεται μακάρεσσιν, ἐμῷ βασιλῆι μάχοιτο· (Call. *Ap*. vv. 20-26)
>
> Nor does Thetis, his mother, mourn for Achilles, wherever she hears the paean cry. And the weeping rock postpones its grief, the moist stone that is fixed in Phrygia, a marble rock in place of a woman uttering some lament. Give the

> ritual cry (*hie*, *hie*). It is a bad thing to quarrel with the Blessed Ones. Whoever quarrels with the Blessed Ones, let him quarrel with my king. (ed. & trans. S. A. STEPHENS, 2015).

To exemplify the importance of silence (a symbol of respect to the god), the poet of Cyrene affirms that even the sea keeps silent when Apollo arrives and the aedos celebrate him. He also includes two more mythological references in an *enumeratio exemplorum*: the sea, Thetis and Niobe. With his usual elegance, Callimachus makes allusive references to some myths, namely, the Achilles' death (precisely by Apollo) and the eternal lament of Thetis. Thus, not only the goddess (Thetis) will remain silent, but Niobe. In spite of her suffering, the appearance of Apollo makes her hold her tears (ἀναβάλλεται ἄλγεα). Callimachus only focuses, unlike Aeschylus, in the final part of the myth and resorts to the metamorphic episode portraying the petrification of the woman. All this amplifies Apollo's power since, even though Niobe has already been punished with the death of her children, her sentence continues: she still fears Apollo, although she is now a stone, she respects him and follows the different steps of his ritual, in this case, silence. Callimachus' intention is clear: if a goddess like Thetis or a mythological heroine like Niobe contain their cries, we, mere mortals, should do the same. Callimachus focuses, like Homer, on Niobe's characterization as an unhappy mother and the function of the myth is not merely comparative (due to the comparative form of the *exemplum*), but seeks to teach something about Apollo's ritual to the reader or audience (like Aeschylus), a god so close to Callimachus' family and to his native Cyrene as well. Then, it seems that the Calimachean reference may be an intriguing symbiosis of Homer and Aeschylus' texts, dedicated to the mythological figure of Niobe that will have a great literary impact[11].

Likewise, in the Hellenistic poetry, within the epigrammatic genre, the paradigmatic function of Niobe's story appears in several epigrammatists. Specifically, Theodoridas in *APl*. 16.132 summarizes some parts of the myth of the daughter of Tantalus. It does not mention the previous details, but it does include elements such as Niobe's suffering (μυρία πένθη), the slaughter of her offspring, the daughters murdered by Artemis and the sons by Apollo (τὰ μὲν Φοίβου τόξα, τὰ δ' Ἀρτέμιδος), the metamorphosis and the location of the wailing stone (Σίπυλος). Thus, the *persona loquens* addresses any ξένε who reads these verses and, through Niobe's experience, reminds them of all the misfortunes that may happen if mortals do not keep their mouths shut: θνατοῖς ἐν γλώσσᾳ δολία νόσος, ἃς ἀχάλινος / ἀφροσύνα τίκτει πολλάκι δυστυχίαν (vv. 7-8)[12]. Meleager, for his part, also focuses on the description of the slaughter of the offspring in *APl*. 16.134. The lyrical subject tells Niobe the sad news (ἄγγελον ἄτας) about the death of her male children (βαρυπενθέσι Φοίβου / γειναμένα τόξοις ἀρσενόπαιδα γόνον / οὔ σοι παῖδες ἔτ' εἰσίν)[13]. But it is at that particular moment that Artemis begins to attack the daughters (αἰαῖ, πλημύρει παρθενικαῖσι φόνος, v. 6) who try to find the protection of their mother (ἁ μὲν γὰρ ματρὸς περὶ γούνασιν, ἁ δ' ἐνὶ κόλποις / κέκλιται, vv. 7-8). Meleager also includes, like Theodoridas, the metamorphosis

and the proverbial loquacity that leads to Niobe's downfall: ἁ δὲ λάλον στέρξασα πάλαι στόμα, νῦν ὑπὸ θάμβευς / μάτηρ σαρκοπαγὴς οἷα πέπηγε λίθος (vv.13-14, "And the mother, who erst took pleasure in her tongue's chatter, now for horror stands like a rock built of flesh"). Antipater of Thessalonica also dedicates some epigrams to the episode of the death of Niobe's children and her following metamorphosis. In *APl*. 16.131, for example, the epigrammatist provides some different elements to the traditional scheme, such as the number of Niobe's children, since he affirms that she gave birth to 14 children (δίς ἑπτά τέκνα, v. 1) in comparison to Homer (12 children) or the connection that Antipater builds between Niobe and his father Tantalus because of the similar crimes committed by both of them (Τάνταλε, καὶ δὲ σὲ γλῶσσα διώλεσε καὶ σέο κούραν, v. 10: "Tantalus, your tongue was fatal to you and your daughter alike", trans. GOW & PAGE, 1968). In a display of erudition, Antipater based the entire composition on charlatanism and arrogance that become the ruin of all men. Thus, the poet includes two mythological *exempla*, Tantalus and Niobe, father and daughter. On the one hand, he narrates the episode of the death of Niobe's children, namely, how they died and who murdered them (vv. 1-4). He also highlights her proverbial characterization of a suffering mother (vv. 5-8)[14]. However, in the last distich Antipater introduces the figure of Tantalus and, in fact, the *persona loquens* addresses Tantalus himself to remind him that the origin of his misfortunes and Niobe's are the same. And they actually share the same harsh punishment too. It is true that the paradigmatic function of the myth in Meleager's or Antipater's poems is less evident than in Theodoridas' composition, but both refer to the loquacity of the Phrygian heroine, so the moralizing tone is undeniable.

This moralizing tone also remains in *AP* 7.743. Not only Antipater focuses on the narration of the mythological episode, but reuses the figure of Niobe in order to create a comparison with a fictitious character, Hermocratea. It is Hermocratea herself who recalls the story of the daughter of Tantalus. Thus, she explains that she has not given birth 14 but 29 children (εἴκοσιν… καὶ ἐννέα τέκνα, v. 1) and that she has not suffered the death of any of them (οὔθ' ἑνὸς οὔτε μιῆς αὐγασάμην θάνατον, v. 2). Neither Apollo killed her sons, nor Artemis her daughters, but both deities cared for them instead until they reached adulthood. Antipater manages to compare the ordinary Hermocratea's happy life with the unhappy existence of the legendary Niobe. In addition, in the last two verses, through the inclusion of the prudence of Hermocratea, γλώσσῃ σώφρονι (v. 8), in comparison to Niobe, the paradigmatic function in the composition is evident, that is, good sense and moderation allow everybody to achieve happiness.

The texts dedicated to Niobe have been changing over the years and not all literary erudites reuse this mythological episode in a very similar way in their compositions. Some opt for innovation, introducing new mythological data as an *amplificatio* (i.e. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) or choose a less well-known version of the story (Parth. 33) while others are simply seized by the traditional version, imitating the preceding textual references. In the Greek bucolic poetry of the Hellenistic period, there are also references to the literary character of Niobe, specially, in the *Megara*, falsely attributed to the Syracusan Moschus. We refer here to the dialogue

between the mother-in-law (Alcmena) and daughter-in-law (Megara). Megara is unhappy because her husband is always carrying out different impossible tasks and because Alcmena, Heracles' mother, does not cease in her cries either. Facing Megara's bitter complaint, Alcmena objects that a mother cannot be blamed for crying the lack of her children (4.81-87):

> τῷ μή μ' ἐξείπῃς ποτ', ἐμὸν θάλος, ὥς σευ ἀκηδέω,
> μηδ' εἴ κ' ἠυκόμου Νιόβης πυκινώτερα κλαίω.
> οὐδὲν γὰρ νεμεσητὸν ὑπὲρ τέκνου γοάασθαι
> μητέρι δυσπαθέοντος· ἐπεὶ δέκα μῆνας ἔκαμνον
> πρὶν καί πέρ τ' ἰδέειν μιν, ἐμῷ ὑπὸ ἥπατ' ἔχουσα,
> καί με πυλάρταο σχεδὸν ἤγαγεν Αἰδωνῆος,
> ὧδέ ἑ δυστοκέουσα κακὰς ὠδῖνας ἀνέτλην.
>
> So never say that I do not care for you my darling, even if I weep faster than Niobe of the beautiful hair. A mother should not be blamed for lamenting a child who is in trouble; after all, I suffered for ten months carrying him inside me before I cast eyes on him, and he almost brought me to Aidoneus, Warden of the Gate, so terrible were the pains I suffered at his birth. (ed. & trans. HOPKINSON, 2015)

To exemplify the pain of a mother, the poet decides to reuse the proverbial reference to the unfortunate Niobe, who will never stop her laments because of the loss of all her offspring. So, if Niobe does not stop lamenting his unhappy fate, Alcmena cannot be less. The novelty here consists in how the poet links these two mythological characters, Niobe and Alcmena, as exempla of suffering mothers, in addition to the comparative function of the myth itself, which clearly differs from the dogmatic and lapidary nature of the epigrammatic genre.

The wide reception of the Niobe's Greek myth shows the acceptance that this character had in Latin literature. We do not refer here just to the mythological character itself, but to the previous Greek literary texts that included in their verses or lines references to the Phrygian Niobe as well. As an example, it would be important to highlight the influence of the epigrammatists in Ovid's *narratio* on Niobe, that will be discussed in detail all along the following pages. The development and evolution of Greek texts, especially from the Hellenistic period, can be seen in many Latin authors, whether in poetry or prose. Cicero precisely in *Disputationes Tusculanae* (III 63) reuses the character of Niobe again with a comparative function. He reflects here on the attitude of people towards the death of a loved one. Cicero affirms that traditionally good people are those who show unbearable pain and sadness when they lose a member of their families or a beloved friend (*Quae nemo probaret, nisi insitum illud in animis haberemus, omnes bonos interitu suorum quam gravissime maerere oportere*, "All this no one could approve except for the rooted idea that it is a duty for all good men to show the deepest possible sorrow at the death of relations")[15]. To exemplify this, Cicero names, in an *enumeratio*

exemplorum, various mythological episodes very appropriate to his reflection, such as Bellerophon, Hecuba or Niobe. First he explains that Bellerophon preferred solitary places and avoided associating with other men during his mourning. Then, he mentions Niobe, who will not stop lamenting her tragic fate, even petrified (*Et Nioba fingitur lapidea propter aeternum, credo, in luctu silentium*, "And Niobe is imagined in stone to represent, I suppose, everlasting silence in sorrow"). However, Cicero proposes here a rationalized end of Niobe's metamorphosis. Cicero affirms that she was not petrified, but the metamorphosis is just a metaphor of her silence since Apollo and Artemis murdered her children. He also includes Hecuba who, as he exposes, is represented as a dog because of the hatred she felt towards those who destroyed her family. Thus, the externalization of pain is revealed in multiple ways, either distance, eternal suffering in silence or hatred and resentment. It is basically the idea of Niobe as the clear example of pain after losing a relative or friend. The comparative function of the myth is once again present, but there are also new mythical details. Cicero inserts the myth into a new context, namely, a reflection on the good or bad behaviour when facing death. The Phrygian becomes the externalization of exaggerated pain, far away from her traditional side as a painful mother and far away from the crime and punishment pattern in which the myth is traditionally framed as well. It would be also interesting to mention the rationalization of Niobe's metamorphosis and the element of silence, the element that precisely provokes, according to Cicero's opinion, the representation of Niobe as stone.

In Latin drama, Seneca resorts to Niobe's story twice in his tragedies, taking both the form and content of previous Greek texts and the use and function of the myth as well. In *Agamemnon* (vv. 392-399), after the dialogue between Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, the chorus is about to list the gods to be praised (Phoebus, Juno, Pallas or Lucina) and, among these gods, Seneca mentions Artemis and her revenge, namely, the slaughter Niobe's children. Seneca also narrates the end of the mythical episode, Niobe's metamorphosis and her eternal suffering. Then, Seneca ends the mythical *narratio* with a general advice to all mortals: *colit impense femina virque numen geminum,* vv. 380-381: "Both men and women lavish worship / on your twin godhead"[16]. Thus, within the religiosity distinctive of the tragedy, Niobe becomes an *exemplum dissuasorium* of what happens if anyone challenges the gods, hence the paradigmatic function that the episode displays here. In addition to the use and function of the myth itself, we should point out the lexicon used by Seneca to describe the metamorphosis of Niobe, since it closely resembles the lexicon that Callimachus uses in his *Hymn to Apollo*. Seneca describes Niobe as a *flebile saxum* that reminds of the Callimachean expression ὁ δακρυόεις… πέτρος and places Niobe already fixed in the Sypilus, *stat nunc Sipyli*, like the poet of Cyrene in ἐνὶ Φρυγίῃ… ἐστήρικται. Besides, both authors refer to the Phrygian as μάρμαρον/*marmora*:

tu Tantalidos funera matris
victrix numeras
stat nunc Sipyli vertice summo

flebile saxum,
et adhuc lacrimas marmora fundunt
antiqua novas,
colit impense femina virque
numen geminum.

Victorious, thou countest o'er the corpses that their mother, child of Tantalus, bemoaned; now on Sipylus' high top she stands, a weeping statue, and to this day fresh tears the ancient marble drips. Zealously both maid and man adore the twin divinities.

In *Hercules Oetaeus* (1848 ff.), after Hercules' death, Seneca presents Alcmena and Philoctetes, who tells her how her son died on Mount Eta. That is why Alcmena, in a monodic lamentation, verbalizes her mourning. Here Seneca includes implicit references to Niobe's episode. He does not mention how the slaughter of the offspring occurred, but he does mention that her fourteen children died. In addition, the playwright alludes to the metamorphosis of the Phrygian since it is said that Niobe was immobile (*stetit*) or that her pain makes her to be transformed (*saxa vertit*). Thus, the function of the myth is obviously comparative, as it recreates a parallel between Alcmena and all the mothers worldwide, who suffer when losing their children, with Niobe's own eternal pains:

quid tale genetrix ulla mortalis tulit?
deriguit aliqua mater ut toto stetit
succisa fetu bisque septenos gregem
deplanxit una; gregibus aequari meus
quot ille poterat? matribus miseris adhuc
exemplar ingens derat —Alcmene dabo.
cessate, matres, pertinax si quas dolor
adhuc iubet lugere, quas luctus gravis
in saxa vertit; cedite his cunctae malis.

Has any mortal mother ever given birth to anything like him? There was a mother that grew rigid with grief, when she stood with her whole brood cut away, one mother mourning a twice sevenfold flock. But that son of mine could equal so many such flocks? For sorrowful mothers there was no great exemplar as yet: I Alcmene shall provide one. Cease, you mothers still compelled to grieve by persistent pain, or turned to stone by your weight of grief: all must yield place to these sorrows of mine.

Just as we find Hellenistic reminiscences about Niobe, specially from Callimachus' texts, in the *Agamemnon*, now Seneca seems to rely on the Greek bucolic poetry, from the Hellenistic period as well, in order to create a parallel between two mythological characters: Alcmena and Niobe. It is not an innovation made by the

author, but the erudite reuse of *Megara*'s poem. Remember that in the *Megara*, falsely attributed to Moschus, the anonymous poet built the very first comparison between these two female characters with the same comparative function. Ovid, for his part, chooses Niobe's story on several occasions. In *Amores* (3.12.31), specifically, the poet of Sulmona makes an enumeration of different supernatural events, mostly metamorphoses, as examples of absurd ideas. Niobe's story only works here as one more example after the reference to his father Tantalus in an erudite display of the poet (*proditor in medio Tantalus amne sitit; / de Niobe silicem*)[17]. However, in *Tristia* the inclusion and function of the myth clearly differs from *Amores*. Ovid addresses here the emperor Augustus and tells him that anybody can make him stop mourning his destiny, just as the gods could not prevent Niobe from crying[18]. Thus, the poet retakes the comparative function of Niobe's myth and makes a comparison between Niobe and himself, within a mythological enumeration. Just as tears served Niobe as a relief and Ovid chooses writing to complain — trying to obtain the emperor's forgiveness—:

> *'At poteras' inquis 'melius mala ferre silendo,*
> *et tacitus casus dissimulare tuos'.*
> *Exigis ut nulli gemitus tormenta sequantur,*
> *acceptoque graui uulnere flere vetas?*
> *Ipse Perilleo Phalaris permisit in aere*
> *edere mugitus et bouis ore queri.*
> *Cum Priami lacrimis offensus non sit Achilles,*
> *tu fletus inhibes, durior hoste, meos?*
> *Cum faceret Niobem orbam Latonia proles,*
> *non tamen et siccas iussit habere genas.*
> *Est aliquid, fatale malum per uerba leuare:*
> *hoc querulam Procnen Halcyonenque facit*[19]. (Ov. *Tr*. 5.1.49-60)

> 'But', you say, 'you might better endure your sorrows by keeping silent, and in silence hide your misfortunes.' Do you demand that no groans should ensue upon torture, and when a deep wound has been received, do you forbid weeping? Even Phalaris allowed Perillus within the bronze to utter bellows of torture through the mouth of the bull. When Priam's tears did not offend Achilles, do you, more cruel than an enemy, restrain me from weeping? Though Latona's children made Niobe childless, yet they did not bid her cheeks be dry. Tis something to lighten with words a fated evil; to this are due the complaints of Procne and Haleyone.

The same happens in *Epistulae ex Ponto*, because he compares Niobe's sorrows with his own sorrow in exile. The innovation here resides in the combination, within a lamentation context, of Niobe's figure and a historical event, that is to say, *Getae*'s fights through the coinciding elements such as the arrows, the cold or the terrible fate.

Hic me pugnantem cum frigore cumque sagittis
cumque meo fato quarta fatigat hiems.
Fine carent lacrimae, nisi cum stupor obstitit illis
et similis morti pectora torpor habet.
Felicem Nioben, quamuis tot funera vidit,
quae posuit sensum saxea facta mali!
Vos quoque felices, quarum clamantia fratrem
cortice uelauit populus ora nouo!
Ille ego sum lignum qui non admittar in ullum;
ille ego sum, frustra qui lapis esse velim.
Ipsa Medusa oculis ueniat licet obuia nostris,
amittet uires ipsa Medusa suas.
Viuimus ut numquam sensu careamus amaro,
et grauior longa fit mea poena mora[20]. (Ov. *Pont*. 1.2.25-38)

> Here am I fighting with cold, with arrows, with my own fate, in the weariness of the fourth winter. My tears are limitless save when a lethargy checks them, and a deathlike stupor possesses my breast. Happy Niobe, though she saw so many deaths, for she lost the ability to feel pain when she was turned to stone by her misfortunes. Happy you also whose lips, in the act of calling upon your brother, the poplar clothed with new bark. I am one who am transformed into no wood, I am one who in vain wish to be a stone. Should Medusa herself come before my eyes, even Medusa will lose her power. My life is such that I never lose the bitterness of sensation and my punishment becomes worse through its long duration".

Thus, the cold, the arrows and the fate do not only allude to the historical moment of the *Getae*'s fights, but the poet of Sulmona creates an erudite parallel between the mythical episode of Niobe and this particular historical event. We highlight then some of the elements such as the cold in Mount Sypilus (Phrygia), in which the daughter of Tantalus is petrified, the arrows that remind of the murder of her children by Artemis and Apollo and Niobe's unfortunate fate. In addition, other elements like the endless tears or Ovid's stupor are easily comparable to the feelings of Niobe, whose eternal tears are proverbial as well as her fear when transformed into stone[21]. It seems that Ovid relied on the earlier textual tradition both for the use and the comparative function of Niobe's myth. In addition, the second innovation comes from the mythical variant that the poet includes here, namely, the petrified Niobe lost her own soul and, therefore, she no longer suffers from her proverbial pains. The version of the traditional petrification in which Niobe, despite being already a stone, kept crying and lamenting, changes completely, because the poet's intention is quite different. He wants to be like Niobe, who after being transformed, lost consciousness of pain. She is no longer the figure of the eternal suffering that, even turned to stone, continues to cry, but her metamorphosis is the element that actually frees her from her old condition and gives her a fresh start.

The myth has undoubtedly evolved in Ovid's hands, who, following the pattern of Hellenistic authors, offers different versions of the same story. This is the case of the Ovidian *Metamorphoses*, in which the poet proposes an *amplificatio* of Niobe's episode with a very different ending from the one narrated in *Epistulae ex Ponto*. As we can observe, the *amplificatio* is not created only from the reading and analysis of a single author previous to Ovid —mainly Hellenistic— who would have written about the famous Phrygian. Instead, the *amplificatio* seems to contain elements from several texts. For example, the lexicon used by Ovid is similar to the lexicon used by Callimachus in *Ap*. vv. 20-26[22] or the use of the paradigmatic function, also present in most epigrams. Besides, to reinforce this exemplary function, Ovid links the mythical episode of Arachne and Niobe, since both stories fit perfectly into the pattern of crime and punishment:

> *Ante suos Niobe thalamos cognouerat illam,*
> *tum cum Maeoniam uirgo Sipylumque colebat;*
> *nec tamen admonita est poena popularis Arachnes*
> *cedere caelitibus uerbisque minoribus uti*. (Ov. *Met*. 6.148-151)

> Now Niobe, before her marriage, had known Arachne, when, as a girl, she dwelt in Maeonia, near Mount Sipylus. And yet she did not take warning by her countrywoman's fate to give place to the gods and speak them reverently.[23]

It should be also pointed out the element of happiness mentioned by Ovid. The poet affirms that, had Niobe not precisely boasted of her immense happiness (*et felicissima matrum / dicta foret Niobe*, *si non sibi uisa fuisset*, vv. 155-156), she would have been the happiest mother. It is this idea of her possible happiness what brings to mind one of the epigrams of Antipater of Thessalonica. We shall remember that, in *AP* 7.743, Antipater says that a woman called Hermocratea is happy and victorious, because all her children reached adulthood, in comparison to the unfortunate Niobe, who had to face an unhappy eternity without children, since she could not keep her mouth shut. The Ovidian entire episode is framed within a moment of worship of the goddess Leto, hence the suitability of the myth. If we read the text carefully (vv. 159 ff.), it seems that we are in a ritual due to the prayers, the bouquets of flowers, the incense or the women's hair, which is described always gathered with laurel. In comparison to the pious people, Niobe enters the temple wearing her hair long and loose, a single element that differentiates Niobe from the rest of the pious women:

> *Ecce uenit comitum Niobe creberrima turba,*
> *uestibus intexto Phrygiis spectabilis auro*
> *et, quantum ira sinit, formosa mouensque decoro*
> *cum capite inmissos umerum per utrumque capillos*
> *constitit*. (Ov. *Met*. 6.165-169)

> But lo! comes Niobe, thronged about with a numerous following, a notable figure in Phrygian robes wrought with threads of gold, and beautiful as far as anger suffered her to be; and she tosses her shapely head with the hair falling on either shoulder.

Even though the Ovidian innovation relies on presenting pious women opposed to Niobe, the mention of Niobe's hair is already found in the Hellenistic epigrammatic poetry, specially, in Meleager's composition *APl*. 16.134. Here the *persona loquens* tells Niobe to untie her hair ribbon (λῦε κόμας ἀνάδεσμον, v. 3), so this physical characterization of the woman can be read in both authors (Meleager and Ovid), but with different meaning. The loose hair in Ovid symbolises Niobe's haughtiness in comparison to the humility of the supplicants, while in Meleager the loose hair is part of the mourning ritual. Perhaps Ovid describes Niobe's hair loose just for this reason: an anticipation of the tragic ending. On the other hand, the reference to the Phrygian's loquacity becomes proverbial. It already appears in Theodoridas (τᾶς ἀθυρογλώσσου Ταντα̃λίδος Νιόβας, v. 2), Meleager (λάλον στέρξασα πάλαι στόμα, v. 11) or Antipater and later in Latin authors such as Ovid[24]. It is the starting element that leads to the following mythical events within the story, after all. Regarding the death of the children, either Homer or the epigrammatist Theodoridas narrate that Apollo was the god who killed Niobe's sons, while Artemis the daughters. Theodoridas only offers a brief description of the death of the children. He describes how they fall to the ground due to the divine arrows (ἃς ἐπὶ γᾶς ἔστρωσε δυωδεκάπαιδα λοχείαν / ἄρτι, τὰ μὲν Φοίβου τόξα, τὰ δ' Ἀρτέμιδος, *APl*. 16.132.3-4: "whose brood of twelve children is laid low now on earth, these by the arrows of Phoebus, and those by the arrows of Artemis"). However, Meleager (*APl*. 16.134) presents the mythical moment in short scenes in which he describes first how the sons died and then how the goddess tried to reach the daughters. The poet pays more attention to the daughters' murder because he details how they tried to embrace their mother, either on her knees (ματρὸς περὶ γούνασιν) or on her lap (ἐνὶ κόλποις, v. 7). Some lied on the ground (ἁ δ' ἐπὶ γᾶς, v. 7), or manage to get to Niobe's lap (ἁ δ' ἐπιμαστίδιος, v. 7). Others double up with terror (ἁ δ' ὑπ' ὀιστοῖς πτώσσει, vv. 8-9). Antipater, in a very similar way, presents the sons already dead (vv. 7-8), while he describes the dying process of some daughters:

> τίπτε, γύναι, πρὸς Ὄλυμπον ἀναιδέα χεῖρ' ἀνένεικας
> ἔνθεον ἐξ ἀθέου κρατὸς ἀφεῖσα κόμαν;
> Λατοῦς παπταίνουσα πολὺν χόλον, ὦ πολύτεκνε,
> νῦν στένε τὰν πικρὰν καὶ φιλάβουλον ἔριν.
> ἁ μὲν γὰρ παίδων σπαίρει πέλας, ἁ δὲ λιπόπνους
> κέκλιται, ἃ δὲ βαρὺς πότμος ἐπικρέμαται,
> καὶ μόχθων οὔπω τόδε σοι τέλος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄρσην
> ἔστρωται τέκνων ἑσμὸς ἀποφθιμένων.
> ὦ βαρὺ δακρύσασα γενέθλιον, ἄπνοος αὐτά
> πέτρος ἔσηι, Νιόβα, κάδεϊ τειρομένα. (*APl*. 16.133)

> Why, woman, lift your shameless hand to Olympus, letting godlike tresses fall from a godless head? Looking at Leto's great wrath, O mother of many, bewail at once your bitter and foolhardy strife. Of your daughters, this one is gasping beside you, that one lies breath-bereft, over this one a heavy doom impends. Nor is that yet your troubles' end; the swarm of your male children too lies low in death. Deep-lamenting the day you were born, your own body shall become a lifeless rock, Niobe, worn out by sorrowful cares". (ed. & trans. GOW & PAGE, 1968)

Antipater specifies that one of the daughters dies near her mother (ἁ μὲν γὰρ παίδων σπαίρει πέλας, v. 5), and some are already dead (ἁ δὲ λιπόπνους / κέκλιται, v. 5-6) while others are about to die (δὲ βαρὺς πότμος ἐπικρέμαται, v. 6). All these elements that appear in the Greek mythological tradition about Niobe, whether in Homer, Callimachus or the epigrammatists, are collected within the Ovidian *amplificatio*, so that the reception of precedent texts, especially Hellenistic texts, seems really determinant to this story of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Although we have read in the epigrams just a brief allusion to the massacre of Niobe's sons, Ovid decides to describe in detail how they die too (vv. 218-266). Therefore Ovid relies on the greater influence of tradition, but innovates in some aspects:

> *Stabant cum uestibus atris*
> *ante toros fratrum demisso crine sorores.*
> *E quibus una trahens haerentia uiscere tela*
> *imposito fratri moribunda relanguit ore;*
> *altera solari miseram conata parentem*
> *conticuit subito duplicataque uulnere caeco est,*
> *oraque non pressit, nisi postquam spiritus ibat.*
> *Haec frustra fugiens collabitur, illa sorori*
> *inmoritur; latet haec, illam trepidare uideres;*
> *sexque datis leto diuersaque uulnera passis*
> *ultima restabat; quam toto corpore mater,*
> *tota ueste tegens 'unam minimamque relinque;*
> *de multis minimam posco' clamauit 'et unam' .*
> *Dumque rogat, pro qua rogat, occidit*. (Ov. *Met*. 6.287-301)

> The sisters were standing about their brothers' biers, with loosened hair and robed in black. One of these, while drawing out the shaft fixed in a brother's vitals, sank down with her face upon him, fainting and dying. A second, attempting to console her grieving mother, ceased suddenly, and was bent in agony by an unseen wound. She closed her lips till her dying breath had passed. One fell while trying in vain to flee. Another died upon her sister; one hid, and one stood trembling in full view. And now six had suffered various wounds and died; the last remained. The mother, covering her with her crouching body and her sheltering robes, cried out 'Oh, leave me one, the littlest! children, the littlest

> I beg you spare—just one!' And even while she sprayed, she for whom she prayed fell dead.

Ovid is in charge of presenting how the daughters died: some collapse (*relanguit*) or fall suddenly (*conticuit subito*), others flee (*fugiens*) and die upon each other (*inmoritur*), while Niobe, again, is nothing more than a spectator of the events. The poet of Sulmona also mentions how afraid one of the daughters was due to her imminent death (*trepidare*), in a similar way that Theodoridas (*APl*. 16.134) highlights the stupor of one of Niobe's daughters when seeing the arrows of the twin gods (ἄλλα δ' ἀντωπὸν θαμβεῖ βέλος, v. 9). Regarding the last daughter who was murdered in the Ovidian text, there is another similarity between these two poets: Ovid and Theodoridas. The epigrammatist points out that one of the daughters embraces her mother's knees (ἁ μὲν γὰρ ματρὸς περὶ γούνασιν, vv. 7-8) and another tries to hide herself in Niobe's lap (ἁ δ' ἐπιμαστίδιος, v. 8) both seeking maternal protection. The element of Niobe's protection also appears in the last verses of the mythical episode in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. However, unlike Theodoridas, the poet of Sulmona does not describe the daughters seeking the protection of their mother, but it is Niobe herself who tries to cover her youngest daughter with her body and dresses (*Quam toto corpore mater*, / *tota ueste tegens*, vv. 298-299)[25]. Now, the last aspect that should be also mentioned is the final metamorphosis of the Phrygian. As the *Metamorphoses* is a work thematically linked by metamorphic tales, it is obvious that Ovid wanted to describe Niobe's petrification in detail[26]:

> *Orba resedit*
> *exanimes inter natos natasque uirumque*
> *deriguitque malis: nullos mouet aura capillos,*
> *in uultu color est sine sanguine, lumina maestis*
> *stant inmota genis: nihil est in imagine uiuum.*
> *Ipsa quoque interius cum duro lingua palato*
> *congelat, et uenae desistunt posse moueri;*
> *nec flecti ceruix nec bracchia reddere motus*
> *nec pes ire potest; intra quoque uiscera saxum est.*
> *Flet tamen. Et ualidi circumdata turbine uenti*
> *in patriam rapta est; ibi fixa cacumine montis*
> *liquitur, et lacrimis etiam nunc marmora manant.* (Ov. *Met*. 6.301-312)

> Now does the childless mother sit down amid the lifeless bodies of her sons, her daughters, and her husband, in stony grief. Her hair stirs not in the breeze; her face is pale and bloodless, and her eyes are fixed and staring in her sad face. There is nothing alive in the picture. Her very tongue is silent, frozen to her mouth's roof, and her veins can move no longer; her neck cannot bend nor her arms move nor her feet go. Within also her vitals are stone. But still she weeps; and, caught up in a strong, whirling wind, she is rapt away to her own

> native land. There, set on a mountain's peak, she weeps; and even to this day tears trickle from the marble.

Ovid offers here a very different version of the nature of Niobe herself after her metamorphosis, in comparison to the version provided in his *Epistulae ex Ponto*. Although she is transformed into stone, the woman will be forever mourning her unfortunate fate. It is then an aetiological ending, since tears seem to flow from a womanlike stone in Mount Sipylus (*et lacrimas etiam nunc marmora manant*). Ovid plays with the ambiguity of Niobe's characterization: an animate or inanimate being —depending on the version that interests him most—. Actually, in *Epistulae ex Ponto*, Ovid affirms that he prefers to suffer the fate of Niobe, that is, petrification, instead of living in exile. Here the petrification does not symbolise punishment but freedom, a way of forgetting the pain. However, the version of the *Metamorphoses* is quite different since Ovid wants to highlight the most tragic part of the tale, the eternal punishment and suffering.

The funereal and moralizing context of Niobe's story in Greek epigrammatists and in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* changes completely now in Propertius' elegies. Elegy 2.20, for example, deals with Propertius' commitment of fidelity to Cinthia, because she is complaining about the bad behaviour of Propertius. Thus, to show Cinthia's anger, Propertius enumerates some mythological feminine characters, famous due to their misfortunes: Briseis, Andromache, Philomela and Niobe. Regarding Niobe's tale, the poet compares here two situations, namely, the cry of Niobe and the *querelae amoris* of Cinthia because of an alleged infidelity. Therefore, Propertius substitutes the funereal and moralizing context of the story for a loving context, with a clear comparative function:

> *Quid fles abducta grauius Briseide? quid fles*
> *anxia captiua tristius Andromacha?*
> *quidue mea de fraude deos, insana, fatigas?*
> *quid quereris nostram sic cecidisse fidem?*
> *non tam nocturna uolucris funesta querela*
> *Attica Cecropiis obstrepit in foliis,*
> *nec tantum Niobe bis sex ad busta superba*
> *sollicito lacrimas defluit a Sipylo.* (Prop. 2.20.1-8)

> Why do you weep more bitterly than the abducted Briseis? Why in your anxiety do you weep more sorrowfully than captive Andromache? And why do you frantically weary the gods with tales of my infidelity? Why do you complain that my loyalty has sunk so low? Not so shrilly does the mourning bird of Attica utter her nightly dirge in Athenian trees; not so does Niobe, whose pride caused twice six deaths, pour down her tears from anguished Sipylus. [27]

Besides, another ingenious (re)interpretation of the myth is offered in elegy 3.10. This elegy is about the birthday of Propertius' beloved Cinthia, so the poet claims

that this day should be perfect, without wind, clouds or waves and, of course, without *Niobes* moaning. Then, the poet includes the motif of the unfortunate Niobe within a festive, convivial or celebratory context, a completely innovative context in comparison to previous Latin or Greek texts and authors:

> *transeat hic sine nube dies, stent aere uenti,*
> *ponat et in sicco molliter unda minax.*
> *aspiciam nullos hodierna luce dolentes,*
> *et Niobae lacrimas supprimat ipse lapis*. (Prop. 3.10.5-8)

> May this day pass without a cloud, the winds be stilled in heaven, and the wave calmly lay aside its threats on the shore. May I see no one grieving in this day's light, and even the rock that was Niobe suppress its tears.

Thus, the reference to Niobe's tale functions here as a paradigmatic *exemplum* of suffering, sadness and misfortune, a traditional aspect of this mythical character. However, Propertius has successfully reinterpreted and reused the story within a loving context in 2.20 and in a festive, convivial or celebratory context in 3.10. Both are contexts completely different from the literary contexts in which other Greco-Latin authors have previously inserted this mythical episode.

But the funereal context of Niobe's myth remains in Greek imperial epigramatists such as Bassus in *APl* 7.386, Leonidas in *AP* 7.549 or Julianus as well as Latin poets like Ausonius (*Epit.* 27)[28]. All these authors make use of traditional mythical details about Niobe's tale in order to write their compositions. Bassus and Ausonius reuse the ambiguity of Niobe's nature before and after her metamorphosis. Antipater (*APl.* 16.131: δίς ἑπτά, v. 1), Leonidas (*AP* 7.549: ἑπτὰ δίς, v. 2), or Ausonius (*bis septem,* v. 3) agree on the exact number of Niobe's children and use similar lexical expressions. Besides, Ausonius (*Epigr.* 63: *sed sine sensu*, v. 3) and Julianus (*APl*. 16.130: εἰ δ᾽ ἄρα καὶ ψυχὴν οὐκ ἔλλαχε, v. 3), following Ovid's[29] and even Theodoridas' texts[30], discuss whether Niobe was aware of her acts even before her petrification or not. Therefore, the dynamism of the texts is evident because they are subject to continuous changes, either by imitation, reinvention or reuse with different nuances. This dynamism, within those texts that narrate Niobe's tale, is precisely observed in one of Martial's compositions:

> *Non possum uetulam. quereris, Matrinia? possum*
> *et uetulam, sed tu mortua, non uetula es.*
> *possum Hecubam, possum Niobam, Matrinia, sed si*
> *nondum erit illa canis, nondum erit illa lapis.* (Mart. 3.32)

> I can't do an old woman. You complain, Matrinia? Well, I can, even an old woman. But you are not old, you're dead. I can do Hecuba, I can do Niobe, Matrinia, but only if the one is not yet a bitch, the other not yet a stone. (ed. & trans. D. R. SHACKLETON BAILEY, 1993).

Martial surprisingly inserts Niobe's myth into an erotic context. This composition is about a dialogue with Matrinia, an elderly woman to whom Martial explains that he can actually love an older woman, but not her (Matrinia), since she is closer to being a corpse. Thus, Martial completes the composition with the inclusion of two mythical figures, Hecuba and Niobe, as mature women who can still be loved, as long as Hecuba has not become a dog and Niobe has not been petrified yet. This new erotic context with satirical hints will have some literary impact since the Greek poet, Macedonius, will reuse this love context in one of his epigrams[31]. However, Macedonius' innovation resides in the comparison of the stony Niobe with his impassive beloved. The lyrical subject tells that a lovesick cowherd is astonished to see how the rocky Niobe is still able to cry. That is why he compares Niobe who, despite being a stone, is capable of mourning, with the *dura puella* called Evipe, because Evipe, even though she is human, is so insensitive to the *erastés*' love that she seems a real stone[32].

Through the analysis of different Greco-Latin texts, we have observed how Niobe's popular myth have been transformed since the eighth century BC until the fourth century AC. This constant change in the texts that contain the story of this mythical figure involves the inclusion or removal of certain mythical elements (content) such as the epigrammatic compositions that offer previous mythical details and some innovations as well[33], the (re)use of the Callimachean lexicon in Seneca or Ovid, the (re)use of literary contexts (form) like Propertius, Martial or Macedonius[34] or the use and function of the mythological episode itself[35]. So, in conclusion, all these Greco-Latin authors have reused, expanded, modified or (re)interpreted the multiple preceding texts that narrate the myth of the daughter of Tantalus, by shaping the story to a greater or lesser extent, in order to make it appropriate to their works. Thus, they have managed to offer infinite new aspects and literary contexts in which they are able to (re)use the everlasting story of the stony Niobe.

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Notas

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[1] Cf. GALLÉ CEJUDO (2001), GUICHARD (2000), HUTCHINSON (2013) y PORDOMINGO (2000).

[2] FORBES-IRVING (1990, pp. 146-147).

[3] BOYD (2020).

[4] RUIZ DE ELVIRA (1982, pp. 188-190).

[5] BOYD (2020) explains that "Homer does not emphasize" here "the process of change itself; instead, three of the four verses are devoted to the place where she is now located, Mt. Sipylus in Lydia. Only in the last line does Homer move to the theme of eating" but "Ovid, on the other hand, suppresses the Homeric interest in eating as an indication of mortality, and instead brings out the aetiology implicit in the Homeric version, describing the change in elaborate detail (*met*. 6.303-9)".

[6] We follow here the edition of D. B. MONRO and T. W. ALLEN (1963) for the selected fragments of Homer's *Iliad*.

[7] Hom. *Il*. 24.601-604: "but for now let us take thought of a meal. For even the fair-haired Niobe took thought of food, though twelve children perished in her halls, six daughters and six sons in their prime. The sons Apollo slew with shafts from his silver bow, angered against Niobe, and the daughters the archer Artemis, since Niobe had compared herself to fair-cheeked Leto, saying that the goddess had borne but two, while she herself was mother to many; so they, though they were but two, destroyed them all. For nine days they lay in their blood, nor was there anyone to bury them, for the son of Cronos turned the people to stones; but on the tenth day the gods of heaven buried them; and Niobe took thought of food, for she was wearied with the shedding of tears". Translated by A. T. MURRAY — W. F. WYATT (1924).

[8] Displaying gentle persuasion or consolation, according to BOYD (2020).

[9] Cf. fr. 154a (SOMMERSTEIN, 2009).

[10] In *Antigone* (vv. 823-833), Sophocles also creates a poetic parallel between Niobe, turned to stone, and Antigone's own rocky tomb, two similar ways of attaining life in death. Thus, through the inclusion of Niobe's fate, Sophocles achieved his goal, that is to say, to make Antigone a tragic heroine as Niobe, both symbols beyond space and time. A detailed analysis of Niobe's myth within Sophocles' *Antigone* in KORNAROU (2010). Moreover, it should be important to add that Sophocles also mentions Niobe' misfortunes in *Electra*, alluding again to the images 'stone' and 'tomb' and Niobe's eternal weeping as well (vv. 150-153). Sophocles tries to compare Electra's feelings, after the loss of her father Agammenon, with the proverbial cries of Itis's mother (transformed into a bird) and Niobe herself. It seems clear that Sophocles offers a comparative use of Niobe's myth in *Antigone*, but a more exemplifying vision of Niobe's story in *Electra*.

[11] It should be also noted the Callimachean veiled influence of the use and function of the myth of Niobe in Late Latin literature. Claudianus dedicates a panegyric to the third consulate of Honorius and makes use of another metamorphic myth this time the episode of the Heliades to show that even the three sisters, who never ceased in their laments because of the death of Phaethon, remain silent and endure their tears in the emperor's presence (7.119-125): *summissus adorat / Eridanus blandosque iubet mitescere fluctus / et Phaëthonteas solitae deflere ruinas / roscida frondosae revocant electra sorores*, "Eridanus bows his head and worships, bidding his waves flow gently to the sea; and Phaëton's leafy sisters, that ever weep their brother's death, check the flow of their dewy amber" (trans. M. PLATNAUER, 1963). It is a quite similar use to that made by Callimachus with the metamorphic episode of Niobe in the Hymn to Apollo. Even though both texts differ in the mythical or historical characters, Niobe/Heliades and Apollo/Honorius, it seems that Claudianus was inspired by the Calimachean text on Niobe, although he innovates as he changes the characters, Niobe versus Heliades and Apollo versus Honorius.

[12] For the epigrams that form part of Meleager's *Garland* or Philip's *Garland*, we use the texts edited by A. S. F. GOW & D. L. PAGE (1965 and 1968). Otherwise, it would be noted in footnotes. For those epigrams coming from other collections, we use E. CAPPS, T. E. PAGE & W. H. D. ROUSE's edition (1970-1983).

[13] "Niobe, daughter of Tantalus, hearken to my word, the announcer of woe; receive the most mournful tale of thy sorrows. Loose the fillet of thy hair; thy male children, alas! thou didst bear but to fall by the woe-working arrows of Phoebus. Thy boys are no more. But what is this other thing? What do I see? Alack! alack! the flood of blood has overtaken the maidens. One clasps her mother's knees, one rests on her lap, one on the ground, and the head of one has fallen on her breast. Another is smitten with terror at the shaft flying straight to her, and one stoops before the arrows, while the rest still live and see the light. And the mother, who erst took pleasure in her tongue's chatter, now for horror stands like a rock built of flesh".

[14] Also in Antipater of Sidon's epigram *APl*. 16.133.

[15] Cicero's selected fragments are translated by J. E. KING (1927).

[16] Seneca's selected fragments are edited and translated by J. G. FITCH (2018).

[17] Edited by A. RAMÍREZ DE VERGER and F. SOCAS (1991).

[18] It should be also noted that, even though Ovid says that the gods could not forbid Niobe from crying, there is one textual reference that attests how the Phrygian had to cease in her

laments. This is the case of the Callimachean *Hymn to Apollo* in which Niobe keeps silent at the god's arrival.

[19] Latin text edited by E. BAEZA ANGULO (2005). Translated by A. L. WHEELER & G. P. GOOLD (1924).

[20] Latin text edited by A. PÉREZ VEGA (2000). Translated by A. L. WHEELER & G. P. GOOLD (1924).

[21] The stupor is a typical element when describing metamorphic contexts that already appears in Homer's *Odyssey* (3.371-3) or in the Hellenistic period (A.R. 4.1427-1431; *APl*. 16.134). Cf. BUXTON (2009, pp. 29-30), PLAZA SALGUERO (2020, p. 130).

[22] Cf. ἐνὶ Φρυγίῃ… ἑστήρικται and *fixa … cacumine montis*; πέτρος and *saxum est*; δακρυόεις and *flet;* μάρμαρον and *marmora*.

[23] The selected fragments of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are revised by A. RUIZ DE ELVIRA (1969) and translated by F. J. MILLER & G. P. GOOLD (1916). Regarding Arachne and Niobe's combination, L. VOIT actually affirmed that both symbolise "den Charakter des Exemplarischen, der vom Einzelfall losgelösten Allgemeingültigkeit erhält" (1957, p. 139).

[24] Tantalus and Niobe's charlatanism also in *Met*. 6.212-213 and in *APl*. 16.131.

[25] L. VOIT analyses in detail Niobe's episode within Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and he defends the idea that Ovid, even though he provides the pathetic dramatization of the tale, the entire *narratio* could be moulded by a possible Hellenistic model (1957, p. 146). It is true that we do not have the hypothetical work of this Hellenistic author L. VOIT mentioned, from whom Ovid could have taken his version of Niobe's myth. But, it is also true that at least we do have some direct sources such as the epigrammatists (i.e. Niobe's hair, foolishness, the description of the murder of Niobe's children or the paradigmatic function of the myth itself, among other details), Apollodorus (i.e. the survival of two of Niobe's children), Pherecides or Euphorion (i.e. the petrification). All these authors could have provided significant elements to Ovid's *amplificatio*.

[26] Despite some critics consider that Ovid is the one who included the decisive changes in Niobe's tale, these pages prove that the majority of the traditional elements of the ancient tale appear again in the Ovidian *narratio*, elements that are modified, reused or reinterpreted. Besides, it should be also noted that these critics as FRÉCAUT (1980, pp. 135-136) mostly focus on Niobe's metamorphosis in which there are clearly many Ovidian details, in comparison to the rest of the mythical elements that build the tale itself and that they are not that innovative. We could not completely agree with G. K. GALINSKY (cited in FRÉCAUT, 1980: 136) either since he affirmed that Ovid does not change any part of the ancient myth about Niobe, but "simply humanizes the meaning of the event". However, Ovid does change certain external details such as the combination of two tales, Arachne and Niobe, linked by the paradigmatic function of both myths, apart from other aspects like Leto's ritual in the temple —from the private to the public sphere, cf. L. VOIT (1957, p. 147)—, the reuse of Niobe's hair (loose instead of gathered with laurel) or the detailed description of the death of Niobe's sons and the metamorphosis itself.

[27] Propertius' selected verses are edited by P. P. FEDELI (1985 & 2005) and translated by G. P. GOOLD (1990). This last pentameter (2.20.8), *sollicito lacrimas defluit a Sipylo*, has become in a disputed text on which A. S. HOLLIS (1997) tried to throw light. He had compared a new fragment on Niobe by Michael Choniates, pupil of Eustathius of Thessalonica, with the text of Propertius (2.20.1-8), due to the following similar phrases

ῥέουσαν δάκρυα and *lacrimas defluit*, both referring to Niobe. Thus, he explains that (καταρ)ῥέω with an internal accusative may be the exact equivalent of *defluere* with an internal accusative, even though the Greek form is not attested in the Hellenistic period and the Latin form is not attested before the time of Ambrose. The point is that A. S. HOLLIS defends the reading *lacrimas defluit* thanks to Eusthatius and Michael's texts on Niobe (1997, pp. 578-582).

[28] Niobe's *exemplum* is also used in funerary inscriptions (SZEMPRUCH, 2019).

[29] Ov. *Pont.* 1.2.30: *posuit sensum saxea facta mali.*

[30] *APl*. (A) 132 (= Theodorid. 18 G.-P.): ἀφροσύνα (v. 8).

[31] *AP* 5.229: Τὴν Νιόβην κλαίουσαν ἰδών ποτε βουκόλος ἀνὴρ / θάμβεεν, εἰ λείβειν δάκρυον οἶδε λίθος. / αὐτὰρ ἐμὲ στενάχοντα τόσης κατὰ νυκτὸς ὁμίχλην / ἔμπνοος Εὐϊππης οὐκ ἐλέαιρε λίθος. / αἴτιος ἀμφοτέροισιν ἔρως, ὀχετηγὸς ἀνίης / τῇ Νιόβῃ τεκέων, αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ παθέων. "A cowherd once seeing Niobe crying, was astonished that a stone could shed a tear. But the live stone that is Euippe do not take pity me wailing through the gloom of so long a night. Love is responsible in both cases, conveyor of grief to Niobe on account of her children, but to me on account on my passion" (ed. & trans. J. A. MADDEN, 1995).

[32] A more extended analysis on intertextuality between all these Greek and Latin authors in PLAZA SALGUERO (2021).

[33] i.e. Niobe's loquacity, how the death of Niobe's children occurred, the metamorphosis or the rationalization of the metamorphosis, Niobe's nonsense or hubris, the number of children or even the discussion around Niobe as an animate or inanimate being (Martial 3.32, Julianus *APl*. 16.130, Ausonius *Epit.* 27 and *Epigr.* 30 or Macedonius *AP* 5.229). Even though L. VOIT (1957) affirmed that there should have existed an Hellenistic source from whom Ovid would have taken Niobe's tale, it seems that many of the traditional elements are spread in different sources. That way, all these literary sources are the base of Ovid's *amplificatio* in his *Metamorphoses* offering the readers the complete episode of Niobe's tragedy.

[34] Apart from the funereal contexts in which the myth is traditionally framed, some other authors make Niobe's tale appropriate to their works, adapting the story to different literary contexts such as convivial, loving or even erotic sequences.

[35] The comparative function of Niobe's myth appears in *Megara*, included here in the Herculean cycle, reused again by Seneca in *Hercules Oetaeus*. Cicero also opts for the same comparative function but with some innovations such as Niobe's representation as the exaggerated pain. Ovid also uses Niobe as a comparative *exemplum* in *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*. Homer, for example, introduced the comparative *exemplum* of Niobe as a suffering mother into the Trojan cycle. On the other hand, the paradigmatic function of the myth appears in Aeschylus, Callimachus, the epigrammatists and later in Latin poets such as Ovid (*Metamorphoses*), Seneca (*Agamemnon*) and later Claudianus (Panegyricus on the third consulate of Honorius).