



The Songs of Bilitis

Pierre Louys

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First published in Paris in 1894, this purports to be translations of poems by a woman named Bilitis, a contemporary and acquaintance of Sappho. However, Bilitis never existed. The poems were a clever forgery by Pierre Louÿs--the "translator"; to lend weight, he had even included a bibliography with bogus supporting works and fabricated an entire section of his book called "The Life of Bilitis". Louÿs actually did have a good command of the classics, and he salted Bilitis with a number of quotations from real poets, including Sappho, to make it even more convincing. When the fraud was exposed, it did little, however, to taint their literary value in readers' eyes, and Louys' open and sympathetic celebration of lesbian sexuality earned him sensation and historic significance.

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