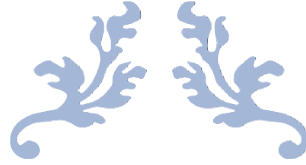

The Value of Reading Female Voices: An Analysis of the Situation of Poets Sulpicia, Melinno, and Julia Balbilla within the Roman Literary Tradition

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> *I shall speak about women's writing: about what it will do. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from bodies— for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text— as into the world and into history— by her own movement.*
>
> Hélène Cixous,
> *The Laugh of the Medusa*

The oft-quoted sentiment that history is written by the victors suggests that it is those whose voices survive in the historical and literary records of their respective societies who have themselves authored the modern narratives surrounding their cultures. Given the overwhelmingly male-authored contents of the Roman literary tradition, it would perhaps not be too bold a claim to make that the women of ancient Rome were not among these so-called 'victors'. Although Roman women, prohibited from taking on roles in government or army, were seen as having little use for instruction in the disciplines of rhetoric or martial strategy, there existed no explicit bar on female education in Rome: Ancient women, just as ancient men, were educated to the degree that they had access to schooling. Of course, status influenced access, but there is nothing in the literary or material record that suggests that it would have been unusual for a woman of means to have received a formal education. In fact, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that Roman women, as primary administrators of the *domus*, were often valued for their educations, as it allowed them to raise their children from an early age to reflect the values and virtues of their society. Moreover, from the revered Greek lyricist Sappho to the Roman author Caecilia Trebulla, elite, educated ancient women, like their male counterparts, also produced poetry that was widely circulated throughout imperial Rome. Why, then, if educated Roman women, like educated Roman men, wrote, do we not often read their poetry? Why does finding a female voice

within the Classical literary canon seem to be such a rarity? Is reading high poetry authored by an ancient woman even valuable to us?

With regard to the final question, I think that it is. In this paper, I will survey the works of three Roman imperial female authors, Sulpicia,[1] Melinno,[2] and Julia Balbilla,[3] in order to highlight the literary quality of their poetry and to demonstrate how they exploit their unique, gendered positions to authorize their presence in male generic traditions. Of the three 'Roman' poets that this paper will explore, only one, Sulpicia, actually writes in Latin; Melinno and Balbilla, who both write in Greek, remind us of the popularity of the Greek language among Latin-speaking members of the Roman educated-elite. The first— and, likely, the most frequently read— author upon whose poetry this paper will focus is the Latinist, Sulpicia.

Sulpicia, writing within the genre of Roman love elegy, composed her poetry under the reign of Emperor Augustus (r. 27 B.C. to A.D. 14). In her works, Sulpicia voices her frustrations with the Roman system of guardianship (3.14) and speaks to the anxious reality of tailoring one's social behavior so as to avoid reputational damage as a high-status woman (3.13). The second poet to be explored by this paper is Melinno, a figure of some mystery. We know only that she was active somewhere between the third century B.C. and the Hadrianic era, and her voice survives in the modern era through a single poem, commonly known as the "Hymn to Rome". Taking inspiration from her archaic, female predecessor, Melinno writes in Sapphic stanzas, and intricately weaves archaisms and dialectical forms into her verses. Significantly, Melinno's "Hymn to Rome" was the first to pair its genre and subject matter in a Greek composition. Finally, I will turn to the epigrammata of Julia Balbilla, an elite member of the imperial court

[1] Plant 2004: 106-07.
[2] Gutzwiller 2016: 400-01.
[3] Rosenmeyer 2018: 153-56.

and travel companion to Emperor Hadrian (r. A.D. 117 to 138). Her surviving poems, written in A.D. 130, exist as inscriptions on one of the Colossi of Memnon in Egypt, commemorating the emperor's visit to the monument. As a client of Hadrian, Balbilla's encomia adapt the dialect of Sappho for a political purpose, inventively employing the aesthetic preferences of her patron while demonstrating her poetic talents.

Although it is the gendered positionality at the forefront of Sulpicia's writing that allows the poet to radically engage with and challenge the traditional voices of Roman elegy, the ingenuity of Melinno and Julia Balbilla is not centered around topics to which only they, as women, can speak, even if they exploit the poetic possibilities of their gender to better address their less subversive subject-matters. Rather, what truly unites these three women is simple: they are erudite-elite Roman authors, playing with the conventions of poetry to push the medium forward. Their literary contributions, long understudied, are individually valuable to us as examples of high Roman poetry that reflect experiential material unique to an ancient *woman's* life and the Sapphic tradition to better authorize their female presence in a 'male' literary culture.

In order to provide a framework for reading these three female poets within the larger context of the male-dominated literary culture in which they wrote, I would like to look at the author Sulpicia first, and use her poetry to explain the lens through which I will explore the literary contributions of all three of our female authors. Sulpicia, Melinno, and Julia Balbilla represent three distinct genres within the body of Roman imperial poetry: Sulpicia writes love elegy, Melinno, a Sapphic hymn, and Balbilla, four epigrammatic political encomia. Given the clear distinctions between the meters, styles, vocabularies, and genres of these three poets, it is not my intention to unify the works of the women into one female voice, nor to draw from a miniscule sample size conclusions regarding a commonality between all women's writing. I do

not view my small selection of poetry as by any means representative of the whole of ancient female-authored literature. I instead seek to use the works of these poets to illustrate the value of studying female writing in the Classical field in general, and will apply the same multidimensional lens to each of my authors to elucidate the literary contributions of their works.

Emily Hemelrijk, in her study of the *matrona docta* (learned matron), describes Sulpicia as having a "complicated and contradictory"[4] poetic self-portrait. She distinguishes three aspects or positions through which one may read the multi-faceted Sulpicia: a social position, a poetic position, and a generic position, by which Hemelrijk means Sulpicia's place within the genre of love elegy.[5] In this paper, I will adopt Hemelrijk's language to independently define the social, poetic, and generic positions of poets Sulpicia, Melinno, and Julia Balbilla. An analysis of the situation of female poetic narratives within these three categories both contributes to our modern understanding of life in ancient Rome and illuminates how the presence of women authors within 'masculine' generic traditions expands the literary categories which they occupy.

As educated women of presumably elite statuses, whose poetry was not only circulated in antiquity but was also well preserved enough to survive to the modern day, the social positions of Sulpicia, Melinno, and Balbilla were likely relatively identical. In terms of distinguishing the 'social' position from the 'poetic' position, as Barbara Flaschenriem writes in her discussion of Sulpicia, "[t]he very act of writing, of modifying the codes of elegiac representation and speaking 'through' them, engenders a division— or fragmentation— of the narrator's poetic self."[6] It is in this fragmentation that I see a separation between the poetic *persona* and the social

[4] Hemelrijk 2004: 150.
[5] This dynamic lens is presented by Hemelrijk in regard to her discussion of Sulpicia in the chapter "Women and Writing: Poetry" of her book *Matrona Docta: Educated women in the Roman élite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (Ibid).
[6] Flaschenriem 1999: 48.

position. While the social position of a poet may influence her self-representation in her poetry, the persona she crafts within her narrative is just that: a crafted persona, over which the poet has chief authoritative control. The poetic position is subjective: it lies in the author's communication of personally interpreted and constructed characters within a poetic body. If the social position questions 'why', given her personal context, a poet may choose to portray a person or theme in a certain light, the poetic position asks 'how' that person and theme is portrayed, and what that portrayal says about the authorial, experiential perspective. In defining the generic positions of these women, I will look at how their individual co-options of traditionally 'male' poetic narrative roles into the 'female' sphere, either by speaking to grievances unique to Roman women (as Sulpicia does) or by channeling Sappho (as Melinno and Julia Balbilla do), challenge and adhere to the conventions of the generic traditions in which they situate their works.

The Social Position of Women

The poetry of authors Sulpicia, Melinno, and Julia Balbilla reflects the same educated-elite milieu in which their educated-elite male counterparts wrote. The high poetry composed by these three women, drawing, as we shall see, upon a diverse range of meters and themes found within the Roman literary tradition, suggests access to a rigorous education and a plethora of reading material, as well as sufficient leisure time in which to craft their works. It is for this reason that, before we look to the poetry of these three women, I would like to first expound how three different Roman institutions— namely the Roman *familia*, the Roman marriage system,

and the Roman educational system— effected the production of female-authored, erudite-elite poetry.

Women in the Roman Familia

First, we will turn to a woman's place in the Roman *familia* in order to get a sense for the system of guardianship against which the poetry of Sulpicia reacts and for the restrictions faced by all three of our female authors that make unique their artistic exploitations of their own experiential material. The *familia*, seen as a microcosmic representation of the state at large, functioned as the basic Roman socio-economic unit, managed by a single male figure called the *paterfamilias*, or the head of household. In the Roman system, the *paterfamilias* was guaranteed *patria potestas* (full paternal power) of *ius vitae necisque* (the power of life and death) over all members of his *familia*.[7] Thus, any legitimate child born in his *familia* was subject, from birth, to his control, or *potestas*, as his *filiusfamilias*, his son, or his *filiafamilias*, his daughter.[8]

Roman women, however, could never be designated as the *paterfamilias* of their family unit. In fact, women were never allowed to independently act on behalf of their families or themselves at all. In addition to their forced reliance on the *paterfamilias* of their household, women were further constrained by the life-long, mandatory appointment of a male guardian to their person. Although, until reaching puberty,[9] all children, regardless of their sex, were placed

[7] Chrystal provides a summary of the extremes of *patria potestas*: "As the birth of a daughter over that of a son was commonly looked down upon by Roman fathers, *patria potestas* empowered the *paterfamilias*, by virtue of *ius patrium*, *ius vitae necisque*, the power of life and death, to remove surplus members born of his family through sale or murder. In extreme cases, baby girls were exposed, as, given the lack of job opportunities and the expectation of providing dowries for women, the birth of a female child may place undue financial strain on the family" (Chrystal 2013: 17).
[8] Dupont 1993: 115.
[9] An age here defined as twelve for girls and as fourteen for boys (see Gardner 1991: 14).

in the custody of *tutores* (guardians) under the system of *tutela impuberis* (guardianship of a minor), only boys were permitted to relinquish their guardians upon coming of age. Girls, on the other hand, were released from *tutela impuberis* only to mark their transition from childhood to womanhood, as they graduated from their legal status as child-wards only to be immediately co-opted into an almost identical form of guardianship, under the same guardian if plausible,[10] called *tutela mulieris* (guardianship of a woman) when they came of age.[11] The system of *tutela impuberis* and that of *tutela mulieris* primarily differed in name, and, "[s]ave for relatively minor exceptions, a woman was always in the power of some man— of her *paterfamilias* or of her husband or of a guardian."[12] These *tutores*, or male guardians, managed the lives and affairs of women and children as proxies in their financial and legal decisions, acting as or in lieu of their *pateresfamilias*.

The *paterfamilias* was tasked with uniting members of a family into a common network of support so as to ensure the survival of the *familia* and with cultivating relationships with other *familiae* to guarantee mutual assistance when required.[13] Roman women, however, were excluded from roles of authority within the *familia*, and were primary actors in only one critical, socially-connecting, familial arrangement: marriage.

Women in the Roman Marriage System

[10] A young woman would be assigned a new guardian in cases in which her father had died, she had been married early, or she had proven her guardian to be 'unfit' for his position. Her guardian could be found 'unfit' if he was deemed deaf or insane and would often be replaced before a woman's marriage to ensure that a 'fit' guardian was tasked with arranging her dowry.
[11] Chrystal 2013: 33.
[12] Finley 2002: 149.
[13] Chrystal 2013: 13.

Second, we will turn to the Roman institution of marriage and the ways in which the stipulations of its various legal forms affected elite women. For Romans, marriage acted as a crucial and pragmatic medium through which the *paterfamilias* might ensure the survival of his lineage, maximize the economic production of his household with supplements to the familial labor force, and heighten his social status via the political accomplishments and social connections of his progeny. The Roman marriage system included a number of legal forms of contracted partnership, often stratified by social class to specify the rights accrued by different civil ceremonies.[14] Within these legal classifications of marriage, a bride may have been allowed to choose between a marriage *cum manu*, wherein she would adopt her husband as her new guardian, or a marriage *sine manu*, wherein her father would retain his role of authority over her person.

In the early Principate, the restrictions women faced— restrictions against which we will see the poet Sulpicia, living in this time of change, react— were strengthened and reinforced by Augustan policy. Emperor Augustus' campaign for *Res Publica Restituta* and his interest in protecting the elite class of Rome, its population having dwindled following decades of civil wars and proscriptions, drove him to champion himself as the new father of Roman virtues as his empire's *pater patriae*. Augustus sought to legislate morality with his passage of the *Leges Juliae* in 18/17 B.C. and the *Lex Papia-Poppaea* in A.D. 9[15] by incentivizing marriage and procreation and criminalizing both *adulterium*, a sexual act with a married woman, and *stuprum*,[16] a sexual act with a free man or remarried or unwed woman.[17]

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[14] See Bardis 1963: 226-27 for a complete overview of the various legal classifications of Roman marriage.
[15] An exception to this rule was made for those unmarried women who were registered as prostitutes, as sex work was a legal profession in the Roman world.
[16] In addition to its legal definition as a sexual crime, Glare 2012 s.v. provides the following literal meaning of *stuprum*: "a dishonor, disgrace, shame, defilement"; "debauchery, lewdness, violation".
[17] Treggiari 2013: 243.

The implementation of the Julian Marriage Laws affected female mobility and agency twofold: The *lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* ("The Julian Law on the Social Orders that Must Marry") limited marriages between members of differing socioeconomic backgrounds and rendered marriage obligatory for men between the ages of 25 and sixty and women from twenty to fifty. While all those who failed to wed in time, regardless of their sex, were penalized with limits on their inheritance rights, women incurred the additional financial penalty of taxation on their existing property.

Although, before the issuance of the *Leges Juliae*, the mean age of first marriage among upper-class Roman girls has been estimated to be in the late teens,[18] given the socioeconomic value placed upon marriage to young women from wealthy families, evidence suggests that aristocratic girls tended to be wed at an earlier age than that of the mean age of first marriage, closer to their early to mid-teens.[19] Given the incentivization of marriage by the *Leges Juliae*, "[w]hat Augustus appears to have done in fact is to take a practice of early marriage favored by most patricians and many *nobiles* in the late Republic and converted it into a standard to be followed by all aspiring office-holders in the future."[20] Although, with the approval of her husband or guardian, a woman could continue with her education after she had married, the daily housework and the pressures of child-rearing that came along with married life would often take up any free time she laid out for her academic exploits. Thus, the encouragement of early marriage set forth in the *Leges Juliae* served to disproportionately curb female education and agency.

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[18] Scheidel 2007: 5.
[19] Lelis, Percy, and Verstraete published their survey of literary references to age at first marriage of 31 women and 83 men in their work *The Age of Marriage in Ancient Rome*. They calculate that the average marriage age for women is between 14 and 15 years and note a concentration of marriages between the ages of 17 and 21 for men (Lelis, Percy, and Verstraete 2003: 103-25).
[20] McGinn 1999: 624.

Women and the Roman Educational System

Third, in addition to contextualizing our three Roman female poets in regards to the legal limitations placed upon them by their *familiae*, for an analysis of their erudite-elite poetic contributions to the Roman literary tradition, it is crucial also to understand an ancient woman's access to education. Education in Ancient Rome began as informal familial instruction aimed at preparing male Roman youths for the responsibilities of civic-military participation and of holding elected office, and at instilling in them the Roman sociocultural virtues of the *vir bonus*.[21] Although this early mode of instruction eventually evolved into a formalized system, Roman education retained these original pedagogical aims throughout its existence: its primary goal, "to create a nation of civic-minded citizens and responsible soldiers."[22] Even within this highly generalized model of early Roman domestic education, two significant, long-term consequences regarding female learning can be identified. First, early Roman education, given its nature as informal, family-based instruction, required the participation of available household members, including women, in conducting the early academic and moral instruction of youths. Second, the aim of this domestic preparation, to ready youths for the public positions they would assume as they entered adulthood, necessarily excluded women from the intentions of its mission statement.

I will now elaborate upon the first major implication of the Roman educational approach for women: the domestic setting for the formative moral instruction of children necessitated female participation. This means that, at the very least, because the 'ideal' Roman mother, or

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[21] Pascal identifies the virtues of the *vir bonus* as "*gravitas*, *pietas*, *justitia*, *fortitudo*, *constantia*, and *prudentia*" (Pascal 1984: 353).
[22] Pascal 1984: 353.

matrona, was expected to provide her children preliminary preparation for the religious, ethic, and civic duties of state, elite Roman women must have been exposed to some amount of instruction in the virtues that they were tasked with imparting. Since "[t]he great importance of family life and the enormous authority of the Roman father, which technically even included the supreme power of life and death over every member of the family, made education largely a function of life in the home[,] [t]he mother personally reared and educated the younger children"[23] until the boys grew older and were subsumed under paternal care. A 'good' *matrona*, relegated to the realm of the *domus* by her gender, would thus be expected to teach her children their familial and cultural history, suggesting that she herself had been educated in at least these topics.

Focusing our attention on a famous example of the 'ideal' *matrona* will help us to enucleate the paradox[24] of elite Roman women. Cornelia, a Roman noblewoman of the second century B.C. and mother of the populist politicians Tiberius and Gaius Sempronius Gracchus, was a controversial female figure in her own time.[25] But, despite the political activities of her sons and her own public influence that painted her in the second century as a potentially dangerous *dux femina*, Cornelia became in the late Republic onwards an embodiment of the ideal *matrona*: a virtuous widow who, despite the death of her husband, refused to remarry; a woman of colossal means who still remained unassuming and self-controlled; the mother of twelve children, to whose education she dedicated her life.

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[23] Clabaugh 2010: 167.

[24] Judith P. Hallett describes this so-called 'paradox' as the fact "that many well-born women are remembered as possessing forceful personalities and exerting a substantial impact on men's public affairs, despite their society's extolling of domesticity as a woman's only proper concern, and despite their own legal disabilities and formal exclusion from political participation" (Hallett 1984: 6).

[25] Dickison and Hallett 2015: 49

The philhellenic, learned pursuits of the male members of her *familia* would have provided a young Cornelia ample reading supplies from her home library,[26] and, as an adult, evidence suggests that she was proficient in Greek, known for "the purity of her diction and her good style of writing in Latin", and a patron to Greek scholars in her later years.[27] Cicero himself claims in *Brutus* 211 that *legimus epistulas Corneliae matris Gracchorum; apparet filios non tam in gremio educatos quam in sermone matris* ("We have read the letters of Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi; they made it plain that her sons were nursed not less by their mother's speech than at her breast"[28]). While it is clear from this statement that, in the public consciousness, Cornelia is remembered for her intellectual prowess, her education was only valued for its implications for her children in her role as the *matris Gracchorum*. It is *her* education that would have allowed her to identify the leading Greek teachers to, in turn, educate her sons. An elite woman, nursing her babies herself rather than leaving them to attendants, Cornelia came to represent the height of maternal providence, lending to her children both nutritional sustenance and a quality education. She is both a historically and politically influential actor, taboo ground for a Roman woman, and exalted as a 'good' *matrona*, glorified as the physical realization of the socially enforced ideal of female domesticity.

If, for Cicero, among many others, Cornelia represents the 'ideal' Roman *matrona*, let us next look at an example of a woman who was identified by the great orator as a 'bad' *matrona* for failing to uphold that ideal. Clodia, made infamous by Cicero's speech *Pro Caelio*, was, as a member of the aristocratic Claudian family, a sister of the tribune P. Clodius Pulcher, and the

[26] Cornelia's uncle, L. Aemilius Paullus (c. 229 B.C. – 160 B.C.), was a two-time consul of the Roman Republic and a prominent general of Roman campaigns in the Greek East. He was the first Roman to have acquired a great Greek library from the plundering of Hellenistic territory, transporting the complete collection of books from the library of the Macedonian king Perseus to Rome. We may expect that having access to such a library may have influenced both Cornelia's learning and her patronage of Greek scholars (Hemelrijk 2004: 51).

[27] Hemelrijk 2004: 62

[28] I use this translation as provided by Hendrickson and Hubbell 1939 in the Loeb volume.

widow of the consul Q. Metellus Celer, also an educated-elite Roman *matrona*. In 56 B.C., serious charges of political violence were made against Marcus Caelius Rufus, a man with whom Clodia once had an affair. With Caelius having reportedly ended their relationship on sour terms, Clodia publicly accused her ex-lover of attempting to poison her, and her brother, Clodius, eagerly assumed the role of prosecutor in the case against Caelius.[29] In Cicero's oratory defense of Caelius, he mercilessly attacks Clodia's character to invalidate her claims of attempted poisoning. Challenging the lack of womanly virtue connoted by her sexual behavior, Cicero questions Clodia harshly (Cic. *Cael*. 50):

> *si quae mulier sit eius modi, qualem ego paulo ante descripsi, tui dissimilis, vita institutoque meretricio, cum hac aliquid adulescentem hominem habuisse rationis num tibi perturpe aut perflagitiosum esse videatur?*
>
> If some woman lived this way, with the characteristics that I just described to you, devoted to a life of prostitution, surely it would not to seem to you shameful or scandalous if some young man had his reasons for being with her, would it?[30]

While Clodia's public image, tarnished by scandal, seems to stand in stark opposition to that of Cornelia's, the two *matronae* represent nearly identical social positions. Where one widow came to be remembered by the Roman populus not for her 'unwomanly' political meddling, but for her ability, endowed by her education, to engender the virtues of Romanitas in her children, the other remained infamous for her jealous *furor* and participation in illicit affairs. One is glorified for her life-long devotion to her husband, even after his death, and to her children, where the other is demonized, even accused by Cicero of living a *vita… meretricio*, for her public, sexual affiliation with another man. While the legal restrictions to a woman's person

[29] Leen 2001: 141.
[30] I take this translation from Yonge 1886.

were plentiful in the Roman world, it was perhaps the social enforcement of the ideal of female domesticity *matronis* (for matrons) that determined whether a woman was, despite her controversial presence in the public sphere, remembered as a virtuous contributor to society or as a reminder of the constant threat to the social order that was posed by women.

The second major implication for women's education within the Roman system lies, as mentioned, in the aim of this moral training in general. Girls and young women, prohibited from engaging in civic life, were outliers in the rigorous cultivation of masculine virtue behind the Roman educational system. Accordingly, what education would be fit for a woman at all, if the primary objective of instruction is preparation for a civic life from which women were excluded? As Roman women's studies scholar Lauren Caldwell describes, "[t]he various ways that Roman authors attempt to […] reconcile academic study with feminine virtue, reveal that there was no monolithic view of what education should do for girls," continuing on to note that "[t]he fact that the basic features of the educational process for girls remain frustratingly obscure […] reflects their lack of standardization."[31] Alongside her brothers, a girl might receive a home-based instruction at the elementary stage under the *materfamilias* or a *litterator* (a teacher of reading and writing, especially at an elementary level). Home learning from the *materfamilias* could also be supplemented by the appointment of a peripatetic tutor, or by attending school. Some fortunate young women from wealthy families were allowed to graduate to the *grammaticus* (secondary school) following their elementary education.[32]

With little ancient agreement regarding the proper translation of virtue instruction from boys to girls, it would seem that, while no women were explicitly barred from education, female access to schooling was primarily a matter of class privilege. If the father or the husband of a

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[31] Caldwell 2015: 18.
[32] Chrystal 2013: 77-8.

young woman had the means and the desire to seek education for his daughter or his wife, he would face no legal or social opposition. Her education and the degree to which she was allowed access to instruction, however, was dependent on the will of her *paterfamilias* or guardian, and, indeed, on the time constraints she might face after completing her socially sanctioned duty of bearing children. Although there was no standard for female education in ancient Rome, we can safely assume that many elite women, including our three female poets, were well educated in the kind of context described above.

But, even if women had sufficient education to write erudite-elite poetry, how did a female-authored work move from the domestic *domus* into the public sphere of circulation? We must look to the Roman process of publishing as a whole for an answer.[33] The publication of literature in the Roman world was largely dependent on the participation of groups of friends or 'coteries' in editing and publicizing a work. After a piece of literature had been composed by an author, he would send the draft to a close friend for comment and revision. Next, the revised draft would be read aloud or copied and sent to a group of friends for criticism. If, after receiving and implementing feedback, the author felt his piece to be sufficiently polished, his final draft would be sent to a wide array of his acquaintances, whereafter it was considered 'published.' For the Romans, 'publishing' a work simply meant that the piece was out of the hands of its author, and had been made publicly available to anyone, even those unknown to its creator, who wished to copy the text from a volume in a friend's or a public library, or to buy a copy of the work that was being sold by a party with access to the text.

As far as modern scholars know, the literary friendships that supported publication always consisted of men, and, while we know that women acted as literary patrons, we have no

[33] I model my summary of the Roman process of publishing after that of Hemelrijk (See Hemelrijk 2004: 141-2); For a more detailed overview of publication and literary coteries, see Starr 1897.

evidence for the existence of female specific coteries. Women, given their rare access to literary coteries, must have faced significant obstacles in circulating their work: As Hemelrijk well points out, “even if [women] had the necessary education, leisure and talent to write poetry, they lacked the encouragement of literary friends who would read and criticize their work and further its publication.”[34] So how do we have any female-authored writing at all? The most likely answer, that women relied on the literary connections of their male relatives to circulate their works, leads us to the first poet of this paper’s focus, Sulpicia, whose uncle Messalla was a Roman general and prominent patron of literature and art.

[34] Hemelrijk 2004: 142.

The Poet Sulpicia

Through her poetry, Sulpicia, having reached a high enough position of professionalism within her field to justify the circulation of her work, exemplifies a novel voice in her composition of erotic female elegy. Defying traditional expectations for a Roman woman's social and sexual behavior, Sulpicia inverts the gender roles and conventional themes of the 'male' genre of elegy through her adoption of a consistent, female perspective throughout her narrative.[35]

Sulpicia's Generic Position

The elegiac genre within which Sulpicia writes was defined throughout antiquity by its meter, an alternating sequence of the dactylic hexameter of epic and its softer, lighter counterpart, pentameter.[36] By the start of the Augustan Age of Rome, as the structure of empire began to replace that of the Republic, elegy, originally an ancient Greek medium, was reinvigorated by Roman love poets. Written after decades of civil wars, this Roman love poetry was conventionally 'subjective,' composed in an autobiographical style which allowed for frustrations regarding a number of social pressures to be voiced: among these pressures were Roman social conventions that implored citizen men to participate in the sociopolitical sphere, insistence from the literary world to retire from elegiac musings contribute to the 'noble' discipline of the composition of epic, and the passage of Augustan moral legislation that served

[35] Hemelrijk describes having access to a poet like Sulpicia as "almost 'too good to be true'", adding that "[i]t is a pity that, lacking other substantial examples of love poetry written by women of her time, we are unable to tell whether she was in any way typical of upper-class women writing love poetry or not" (Hemelrijk 2004: 154).
[36] See Luck 2002 for a thorough introduction to Roman love elegy.

to further regulate the sexual behavior of freeborn Romans. Adopting elegy to respond to these constraints, the poets of the early principate utilized their training in rhetoric to openly rebel against societal restrictions through their celebration of erotic love and idle pastimes, renouncing civic and militaristic commitments.[37] While Catullus (c. 84–54 B.C.), an important proto-elegist, offered the genre much inspiration, the literary canon of Roman love elegy traditionally is deemed to be Gallus, Tibullus, Propertius, Sulpicia, and Ovid,[38] all of whom were writing during the reign of Emperor Augustus.

The thematic and narrative elements of Roman love elegy center around interactions between two primary archetypal characters of the genre: the *amator* and the *docta puella*. The first of the tropes relevant to this paper, the voice of our protagonist and narrator, is the *amator*, a lover brought to the threshold of madness and entirely distracted from life by his infatuation with his beloved. He revels in the misery of desire and hopes to ensnare the object of his affection with his poetry. The second, the beloved about whom the *amator* writes, is the *docta puella*, or the learned girl.

The *docta puella*, an idealized representation of a beautiful, sexually available woman, educated enough to receive the seductive message of the *amator*'s poetry, would have been in the Augustan period a figure displaying controversial— even illegal— behavior, as the *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* classified sexual intercourse between a man and an unmarried, free woman who was not registered as a prostitute as *stuprum*, a crime of sexual immorality. In order to present an acceptable erotic relationship between the *amator* and his *docta puella*, the woman described in Roman love elegy must be a figure who could plausibly be understood to be a meretrix, allowed by her status to remain unmarried while engaging in sexual activities with

[37] Sullivan 2002: 318.
[38] James 2003: 4.

citizen men.[39] Roman love elegists, looking to dynamize their depiction of the *amator-docta puella* relationship, often crafted their tumultuous, on-and-off romances amidst a slew of hunter-prey analogies, characterizing the *puella* as *dura*[40]— harsh, headstrong, hard— and the narrator as aroused by her unattainability.[41]

The relevance of the *docta puella* pervades Roman love elegy. Her figure provides us with a famous Catullan reference to the great female poet Sappho: the beloved of Catullus' poetry is given the pseudonym 'Lesbia', after the birthplace of the famed Lesbian poet. The successors to Roman love elegy followed suit in their own respective naming of their *doctae puellae*: Propertius' Cynthia and Tibullus' Delia allude to Apollo, the god of poetry, and Ovid's Corinna is named for another great Greek female poet. Thus, the *docta puella* herself becomes the physiopoetic embodiment of elegy itself. Some modern scholars have in turn suggested that these fabricated love interests are in fact little more than symbols of an elegist's poetic material, the pseudonyms for the *docta puella* revealing her true identity as a mere metaphor for high poetry. They suggest that we separate real Roman women from the literary fiction of 'The Elegiac Woman,'[42] the true *puellae* from the metaphorical.[43]

While it is not this paper's purpose to seek an identification of the historical women behind the pseudonymic *doctae pullae* of male elegists, a complete rejection of their identities as reflections of actual Roman women does not serve us. Instead, I suggest we ask the question of how the fabricated *docta puella* might have influenced historical women, and the degree to which this elegiac construct might have inspired our *docta puella*, Sulpicia.

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[39] See Hallett 2002.
[40] For examples of the adjectival application of *dura* to the *docta puella,* see Ovid, *Am*. 2.4.23; Propertius 1.7.8, 1.15.1, 1.17.16; Tibullus 2.6.28.
[41] See Ovid, *Am*. 2.4.23; Propertius 1.9.25; Tibullus 2.6.28.
[42] I use Wyke's phrase here (Wyke 1987: 48).
[43] Hemelrijk 2004: 168-69. Here, I must note that, while Hemelrijk well illustrates the argument for *docta puella* as a "literary construct determined by poetic programmes and conventions", she herself does not subscribe to this view.

Sulpicia's situation as a female author within the elegiac genre makes necessarily unique her poetic narrative: she seems at once, as narrator and pursuer, to embody the elegiac *amator*, and, in her role as a learned female poet, to be a *docta puella*. In her choice to appropriate the active role of speaker in a genre in which woman is primarily an object of desire, Sulpicia subverts the traditional sexual dynamics of elegy. As a genre frequently containing thematic discussions of war, politics, and the rejection of public life, elegy was crafted in the 'masculine' tradition, centered around topics of limited experiential access for a female poet. Sulpicia represents the presence of a marginalized voice within the elegiac genre, and utilizes her elite education, her unique position as a female poet, and even the very syntax of her poetry to simultaneously authorize her narrative within the 'male' generic tradition in which she situates her writing and challenge that tradition's patriarchal norms.

Sulpicia's Social Position

To reconstruct an image of Sulpicia's social position and understand how her works came to be published, we must look to her status as it is reflected by the two male family members she names in her poetry. The first illuminating clue given to us by our poet is in her formal, self-assigned title, "Servi filia Sulpicia", in line 3.16.4, the only occasion upon which Sulpicia references herself by name within her poetry. Given this paternal reference, it is likely that Sulpicia's father was the Roman orator and jurist Servius Sulpicius Rufus, who was married to Valeria, the sister of the poetic patron Messalla.[44] Further evidence in support of Sulpicia's place within this lineage can be found in the second male relative Sulpicia names: her uncle Messalla

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[44] Jerome, *adv. lovian*. 4.

himself (3.14.5). Sulpicia's address to Messalla comes as a complaint about the restrictions placed upon her person by her guardian, suggesting that her father has died and she, unmarried, has become a ward of her uncle. M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus (c. 64 B.C. – A.D. 8), was a prominent poetic patron and influential literary figure in the Late Republican to early Augustan period of Rome. Chief among the client-poets of the so-called 'Messalla circle' was the elegist Tibullus, sixteen of whose love poems were collected and published in two books. Alongside these two books, the writings of a multitude of minor *littérateurs*, Sulpicia among them, were collected in a third book, the *Corpus Tibullianum*.[45]

Indeed, until moderately recently, despite being the author of six elegiac poems in her own right, given the presence of her works in the *Corpus Tibullianum*, Sulpician scholarship has been delegated to the realm of Tibullan study, her female voice mistaken for his inventive style. It is for this reason that, in looking at four of the six poems written by Sulpicia, I will be referring to her works with the numbers they had been traditionally assigned in the *Corpus Tibullianum*.[46] I have selected these four poems in particular, 3.13, 3.14, 3.16, and 3.17, out of Sulpicia's six because they exemplify the poet's unique syntax and demonstrate her thematic challenging of patriarchal norms.[47] The first true assertion against the Tibullan authorship of Sulpicia's poetry came in 1838,[48] with Otto Gruppe's article "Die römische Elegie". Gruppe argues that Sulpicia

[45] Davies 1973: 25.
[46] Sulpicia's six short works of elegy are presented within the *Corpus Tibullianum* as poems 3.13-18. This paper will explore only four of these poems: 3.13, 3.14, 3.16, and 3.17.
[47] Sulpicia's poem 3.15, which will not be featured in this paper, expands upon the narrative of poem 3.14, offering further details on the passage of the narrator's birthday. At four lines long, it is the shortest poem in Sulpicia's collection. Also not included in this paper is Sulpicia's poem 3.18, the final work of her collection, which consists of an apology to Cerinthus written as one long sentence— in contrast to her more frequent usage of self-contained couplets. Poem 3.18, while offering an interesting foil to Sulpicia's opening poem 3.13 (see Hemelrijk 2004: 149 for a discussion of the contrast between the first and last poems of the Sulpician corpus), represents a break in the author's characteristic style of couplet composition, and, accordingly, has not been explored by this paper.
[48] Before Otto Gruppe's argument in *Die römische Elegie*, the scholarly opinion on the authorship of Tibullus 3.8-18 was split threefold. Scaliger, among others, identified all eleven poems as the work of Tibullus, sometimes electing to adopt the *persona* of Sulpicia. Barth credited the works to a poet of the same name writing during the reign of Domitian, another 'Sulpicia' who is celebrated by Martial in his epigrams 10.35, 38. Heyne attributed the elegies to

must be the author of poems 3.13-18 of the *Corpus*, as, while the works are indeed metrically correct, it is "evident they come from no practised hand," and thoroughly "inconceivable that Tibullus could have written in this way."[49] While Gruppe's reasoning for isolating Sulpicia as an author within the *Corpus* has been criticized by many scholars for its patronizing tone and dismissal of the complexity of her poetic syntax, his conclusion, that elegies 3.13-18 are the work of the historical Sulpicia, has become widely accepted within the Classical field.[50]

Sulpicia's Poetic Position

We will now explore how Sulpicia introduces her crafted poetic persona as an inverted *docta puella* in her first poem, 3.13, to directly speak to the issues and frustrations which an aristocratic young Roman woman might face due to her social position.

3.13

Tandem venit amor, qualem texisse pudori
quam nudasse alicui sit mihi fama magis.
Exorata meis illum Cytherea Camenis
attulit in nostrum deposuitque sinum.
5 Exolvit promissa Venus: mea gaudia narret,
dicetur si quis non habuisse sua.
Non ego signatis quicquam mandare tabellis,
ne legat id nemo quam meus ante, velim.
Sed peccasse iuvat, vultus componere famae

a variety of anonymous authors, perhaps including Tibullus and a 'Sulpicia' figure herself. See Lowe 1988: 194 for more details on the history of Sulpician authorship.

[49] Gruppe 1838: 49.

[50] For the consensus that Sulpicia wrote poems 3.13-18, see Flaschenriem 1999: 37; Hemelrijk 2004: 148-49; Pomeroy 1975: 173; Smith 1913: 77-87. For a survey of the discourse surrounding the question of Sulpician authorship, see Keith 2006; Lowe 1988: 193-97; Santirocco 1979: 229-30. Feminist scholar Alison Keith, in her thorough survey of trends in interpreting Sulpicia, points explicitly to the fallacies behind the orthodox argument against the single, female authorship of poems 3.13-18, arguing facetiously that "it is presumably more inherently plausible that a Roman author (apparently male by definition) should imagine the emotions of a teenage girl than that a Roman woman should herself articulate adolescent emotions— though we have remarkably little evidence of Roman literary interest in the emotions of adolescent girls in general, and in particular in the case of the Roman elegy" (Keith 2006: 8).

taedet: cum digno digna fuisse ferar.

Finally, love has come, of such a kind that the reputation would
shame me more
to have hidden it than to have laid it bare to anyone.
Venus of Cythera, having been moved by my Muses, brings
that man and has placed him in our lap.
5 Venus delivers the promises: let her relate my inner joys,
supposing that someone will be said not to have had her
own.
I wish not to entrust anything to tablets having been sealed,
in order that nobody may not read my own before my man.
But it pleases me to have offended; it disgusts me to compose my
face for reputation:
Let me be said to have been a worthy woman with a worthy man.

In the first line of 3.13, Sulpicia, having announced the arrival of Amor, immediately classifies the love that has come to her with the relative clause introduced by *qualem*, granting her agency over her poetic portrayal of her love affair through her active control of definition. Subverting societal expectations of female sexual behavior, she then places *pudori* next to *texisse*, drawing a parallel not between shame and *amor* or *fama*, but between shame and a verbal covering up. The shame for the poem's narrator lies not in the act of engaging in the affair itself, but rather in the social compulsion that drives her to conceal her love for fear of damaging her reputation, demonizing the toxic constraints on women's sexual freedom rather than the sexually free woman.

In the second line of her poem, Sulpicia introduces the central theme of poem 3.13: *fama*. If one were to select at random a Latin dictionary in which to look up the noun *fāma*, they would likely find its frequent usage listed as meaning equally "a rumor, report," "public opinion, fame, repute, reputation," and "renown, fair fame, good repute."[51] As it is Sulpicia herself who, in her role as author, facilitates her audience's interaction with her poetic persona, she becomes the

[51] Glare 2012.

central authority in directing how we read her character within her narrative: she takes agency in crafting her own *fama*.

The word *fama* appears twice in Sulpicia's first poem, once in line 3.13.2 and again in line 3.13.9. Immediately following its first appearance, in lines 3.13.3-4, Sulpicia reports that Cythera, an alternative name for Venus, has brought forth the poet's lover and placed him in her lap,[52] calling to mind the scene of *Iliad* 3, wherein Venus delivers Paris from the battlefield and into Helen's bedchamber.[53] Closer still to the Augustan period in which Sulpicia writes, the line is also reminiscent of Virgil's allegory of *Fama* in *Aen*. 4.173,[54] as he describes the power of Rumor (*Fama*) in catalyzing Dido's tragic end. This parallel with Helen and Dido, whether Sulpicia intends a connection to be drawn here or not, highlights the significance of a reading of *fama* as crafted by a female narrative; although Helen and Dido, made famous by the 'masculine' tradition of epic within which they have little vocal agency, both find themselves victims of *fama*, Sulpicia, in drawing this literary parallel to self-characterize her poetic position within her love affair, becomes an active participant in crafting her own public reputation.

In line 5 of her poem, Sulpicia's exhortation *narret* again specifically emphasizes narrative exposure and the transition of inner emotions, here exemplified by *gaudia*, from the realm of the private to that of the public. With her use of the subjunctive *velim* in concluding line 8, Sulpicia weighs the potential consequences of publicizing her love, simultaneously aware that the scandal may jeopardize her social position and threatened by the notion of self-silencing her emotions so as to avoid moral damage.

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[52] This line referencing Venus too credits the Muses for having moved the goddess of love to bring Cerinthus to Sulpicia. Sulpicia's invocation of the Muses, a celebration of divine poetic aid, draws upon a common elegiac convention (see Ovid, *Am*. 1.30; Propertius 1.8b.15; Tibullus 1.4.65, 2.4.15).
[53] Hallett 2006: 38.
[54] Virgil describes: *Extemplo Libyae magnas it Fama per urbes— / Fama, malum qua non aliud velocius ullum;* (*Aen*. 4.173-174).

In the penultimate line of poem 3.13, Sulpicia adds a bold claim to her presentation of her *fama* in characterizing her amatory situation: In stating *sed peccasse iuvat* ("but it pleases me to have offended"), she communicates to her audience that she takes pleasure in, rather than feeling shame for, her socially illicit erotic behavior. Her use of the verb *peccasse*, the perfect active infinitive form of *peccō* meaning "I sin, transgress" or "I offend,"[55] clearly demonstrates her awareness of the fact that the actions she takes in her affair are publicly identified as transgressive in her society. Although her behavior would not seem out of place for the elegiac *amator* within whose tradition she situates her generic position, Sulpicia's social position as an upper class, unmarried woman makes radical her portrayal of her self-sexualized, poetic persona. In violating the restrictive conventions of socially acceptable female sexual expression, Sulpicia negotiates the disparities between the public, social presentation allowed to her by her status and the poetic persona she intends to portray, voicing through her poetic position the social limitations placed upon Roman women.

With her use of the noun *fama*, Sulpicia draws direct attention to the poem's central conceit of reputation and rumor, as, although she may be free to celebrate her love while it remains concealed within the private sphere of her life, committing her emotions to paper will expose her affair to the public sphere, tarnishing the purity of her passion with the moral judgments and societal outrage of the Roman populace. Following in the footsteps of her male compatriots, Sulpicia challenges the social norms that limit her behavior by inverting the expectations of 'virtuous' behavior as dictated by Roman moral convention. As a female elegist, however, the experiential material upon which she draws and the social and legal institutions which she protests differ significantly from the elegiac laments of male poets. Adopting the

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[55] Glare 2012.

political, subversive medium of elegy to write her poetry, Sulpicia, through her voicing of the female perspective, expands the genre in which she situates her work to criticize the systems which affect not only Roman men, but Roman woman as well. In her second poem, poem 3.14, Sulpicia further develops her treatment of the social limitations on female behavior by discussing the legal constraints placed upon women by the Roman system of guardianship.

3.14

Invisus natalis adest, qui rure molesto
    et sine Cerintho tristis agendus erit.
Dulcius urbe quid est? an villa sit apta puellae
    atque Arretino frigidus amnis agro?
5 Iam nimium Messalla mei studiose, quiescas,
    non tempestivae, saepe propinque, viae!
Hic animum sensusque meos abducta relinquo,
    arbitrio quamvis non sinis esse meo.

My hateful birthday is present, which will be spent in sadness,
    in the vexing countryside and without Cerinthus.
What is sweeter than the city? Or what villa could be suitable for a
    girl
    and the frigid Arno in an Arrentine field?
5 Now Messalla, too zealous over me, you should relax,
    trips are often not timely, kinsman!
Here I, having been abducted, leave behind my feelings and mind,
    although you do not permit me to be by my judgement.

In poem 3.14, Sulpicia's clear frustration with her lack of independent mobility provides us with an intimate view into the female perspective on the Roman system of guardianship. Although she follows the tradition and tropes of 'male' elegy, in speaking through a female voice, Sulpicia thematically and personally attests to restrictions faced specifically by women. Beginning her poem with a lament over the coming of her birthday,[56] Sulpicia makes clear that the *invisus natalis* is wretched for the fact that she is confined to the countryside. Perhaps, in

[56] Although whether Sulpicia is speaking of her own birthday here or of that of her beloved, Cerinthus, is left ambiguous in this line of Latin, her next poem, 3.15, which will not be explored by this paper, clarifies that she is, in fact, referring to her own birthday.

Sulpicia's narrative scorn for rurality and longing for the city (3.14.1; 3-4), we may read a semi-playful nod to the bucolic dreamscape in which fellow elegist Tibullus sets his poetry;[57] rather than keeping to the Tibullan generic tradition of idealizing the simple country life, Sulpicia finds herself away from the city only because of her entanglement in the strict binds of her *tutela mulieris*, the lack of mobility afforded to her by her legal status keeping her from her beloved.

Furthermore, in line 5 of poem 3.14, Sulpicia puts a name to her oppressive guardian. She complains about *nimium Messalla mei studiose* ("Messalla, too zealous over me"), and implores her uncle to grant her more independent space and choice. While she requests diminished attention from her uncle, Sulpicia does not question the convention by which her uncle controls her bodily movement. It seems clear from this protest that Messalla holds *patria potestas* over his niece, suggesting that Sulpicia is fatherless, and, more significantly for our reading, unmarried. Although her love poems are all notionally about her beloved, and, indeed, she references him in line 2, the focus of this work rests on the frustrations of a young, unwed woman, unable to travel freely and without supervision.

Sulpicia is not at all shy in voicing these frustrations either: In line 7, the poet characterizes herself in the countryside explicitly as *abducta*, having been led away from the city by her guardian against her own feelings and mind. Further, in the following line, reporting that she is not permitted to act on her own judgement, Sulpicia uses the noun *arbitrio* (3.14.8) from *arbitrium*, frequently applied as a legal term meaning "the decision of an arbiter," "judgement, decision, opinion," "mastery, dominion, authority, power, free-will, choice, pleasure."[58] In bringing law court vernacular into her poem and using it to describe *her* judgement, Sulpicia

[57] For examples of the bucolic setting of Tibullan elegy, see Tibullus 1.1, 1.5, 1.8, 2.1, 2.3.
[58] Glare 2012.

points to the legal system that denies her her personal agency and self-guardianship as the root cause for her pain.

In poem 3.14, we also find the first reference by Sulpicia to her beloved's name, through which we can assess an aspect of her generic position. Following in the elegiac tradition of her male counterparts, Sulpicia applies to her '*doctus puer*' the pseudonym Cerinthus,[59] a name which finds its root in the Greek noun for 'bees-wax', κηρός. Cleverly, Sulpicia's naming of Cerinthus[60] acts both as a sort of term of endearment[61] for her lover and as a guiding metaphor for her poetry. Just as Propertius' *docta puella*, Cynthia, and Tibullus' Delia become embodiments of their authors' poetry through their nominal reference to Apollo, Sulpicia's identification of her beloved Cerinthus calls to mind the poetic language characteristic of the elegiac genre, as bees-wax is as *mollis* and *levis* as a verse of pentameter. The ancient use of bees-wax as a tool for writing, a familiar practice for our poet's Roman audience, furthers Sulpicia's parallelism between the beloved subject who inspires her work and her poetry itself. In creating a 'female' narrative within the 'masculine' elegiac tradition, Sulpicia's generic position subverts the gender dynamics of her genre, creating a *doctus puer* to provide us with another lens through which to read the *doctae puellae* of Augustan Rome.

In her fourth poem, poem 3.16, Sulpicia continues her attendance to the traditional features of the elegiac genre, this time by utilizing a distinctive generic situation to frame her response to finding competition in her pursuit of her love interest.

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[59] To see more clearly the etymological root of this name, expressed by the Roman alphabet as 'Cerinthus', look to its Greek transliteration, 'Κήρινθος'.

[60] The name 'Cerinthus' also appears in Horace's *Satires* 1.2.80-82 in a passage that I will later address. While the idea that Sulpicia names her beloved after the Horatian Cerinthus may detract from a reading of intentional wordplay on the part of our poet, it would also "provide additional testimony for her literary learning, an important credential in her claim to poetic merit that is often overlooked, if not vehemently denied, by those who pass judgement on her writing" (Hallet 2006: 41).

[61] Although, in saying this, I reveal my own idiomatic biases, it is hard to ignore the parallel between the pseudonym connoting 'bees-wax' and the common English pet name 'honey'.

3.16

Gratum est, securus multum quod iam tibi de me
permittis, subito ne male inepta cadam.
Sit tibi cura togae potior pressumque quasillo
scortum quam Servi filia Sulpicia:
Solliciti sunt pro nobis, quibus illa dolori est,
ne cedam ignoto, maxima causa, toro.

It is pleasing that you now permit yourself to be very careless of me,
otherwise I, inept, may fall suddenly, badly.
Let care of the toga and of the prostitute, burdened by a small basket, be more preferable for you
than Sulpicia, daughter of Servius.
They are anxious for me, those for whom the greatest cause for pain is
that I might yield to an ignoble bed.

Sulpicia opens her poem 3.16 having found herself in a sort of love triangle between herself, Cerinthus, and another woman, a situation typical for the jealous *amator* of Roman love elegy. In her narration, however, she responds neither with the angered lament we might expect from the wounded male elegist[62] nor the envious wrath of a male-fabricated, slighted *docta puella*.[63] Sulpicia instead meets Cerinthus' affair with a mirthful statement of gratitude, thanking her lover for revealing his true nature before she has further degraded her social position by voicing her love for an unfaithful partner. In this shifted positionality, wherein a female elegiac lover pursues her male object of desire, perhaps we are shown a more authentic response of a woman's jealousy in Sulpicia's social insecurity than in the rage of the written *docta puella*, who is only made more desirable by her unwavering passion for her self-serving *amator*.

[62] See Ovid, *Am*. 2.19; Propertius 2.9; Tibullus 1.6, 1.9 for the typical response of the male elegiac narrator to the introduction of a rival lover.
[63] See Propertius 1.3.35-36 for Cynthia's speech against her lover's infidelity.

In lines 3 and 4 of poem 3.16, Sulpicia weighs her poetic persona against this other woman, a prostitute, who has caught the attention of her beloved Cerinthus. Interestingly, Sulpicia principally describes the prostitute as *pressumque quasillo* ("pressed down by a small basket"), defining her rival not by the woman's occupational sex work, but by her basket for weaving, a common secondary trade for Roman prostitutes. In emphasizing the connection between the *scortum* and wool-work, Sulpicia presents the prostitute both as a member of the productive female economy and as a practitioner of the noble art of weaving, the cultivation of which skill was commonly believed to imbue a woman with virtue.[64] Such a reading reinforces the similar and yet diametrically opposed social positions of the two women; while the humble status of the prostitute seems at first to serve as a contrast to that of the aristocratic Sulpicia, the male authority of Cerinthus subsumes their differences, as elite Roman men were allowed access to women of all social classes.

Furthermore, Sulpicia creates a verbal parallel between herself and this prostitute, naming the woman in a three-word epithet, *pressumque quasillo scortum*, in lines 3.16.3-4, just ahead of her own formal, three-word self-identification as *Servi filia Sulpicia*. Here, Sulpicia draws specific attention to her own title, *Servi filia Sulpicia*, making unique line 4 by choosing to close the pentameter with *Sulpicia*, a break from her usual ending of pentameters with disyllabic words. The name of Sulpicia's father, Servius Sulpicius Rufus, here takes the form *Servi*, which, but for the capital 'S', hints at the identification of Sulpicia as the daughter of a slave, *servus,*

[64] Flaschenriem's reading of this comparison, to which she credits the influence of Santirocco, stands in direct opposition to my own. She sees the phrase *pressum… quasillo* as pointing "with devastating economy" to the prostitute's position as a "mere *quasillaria*", who is, in stark contrast to the elite Sulpicia, "oppressed by day-to-day toil, the monotonous and 'unremunerative' task of spinning wool" (Flaschenriem 1999: 47). See also Santirocco 1979: 233 for this alternate perspective.

servi.[65] This unites Sulpicia's poetic persona with that of the prostitute, simultaneously highlighting the opposing statuses of the women and naming them as daughters of equal birth. Reflecting back upon the theme of guardianship explored in poem 3.14, perhaps Sulpicia suggests both a desire to conduct herself with the independence of the prostitute, whose social position allows for her public expression of sexuality, and a fear that she herself has become a slave to Roman legal conventions and public opinions regarding sexual stigma.

Earlier in this paper, in discussing Sulpicia's application of the pseudonym 'Cerinthus' to her beloved, I briefly alluded to a passage from Horace's *Satires*.[66] I will now return in greater detail to this point. In *Satires* 1.2.80-82, Horace chastises a figure named Cerinthus for seeking extramarital involvements with adorned, high-status Roman *matronae* rather than with toga-clad prostitutes: *nec magis huic inter niveos viridisque lapillos / (sit licet hoc, Cerinthe, tuum) tenerum est femur aut crus / rectius, atque etiam melius persaepe togatae est.* The parallel between this passage and Sulpicia's poem 3.16 seems obvious, and if her Horatian reference was in fact intentional, Sulpicia is again expanding her own generic position by borrowing aspects from 'male' poetic traditions and subverting their gendered expectations. While Horace playfully scolds his Cerinthus for scorning prostitutes while taking up with elite women, Sulpicia, an elite woman, laments her Cerinthus' decision to pass his time with a meretrix rather than with herself.

Sulpicia's fifth poem, 3.17, well demonstrates the way in which she syntactically connotes discrepancies between the internal desires she expresses through her poetic position and the external actions required of her given her social position; Sulpicia's syntactical distancing of her internal state from her external state thereby metaphorically reinforces her critique of the

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[65] I credit this insight into Sulpicia's use of the parallel forms *Servi* and *servi* to feminist scholar and Wellesley College professor Jessica L. Wise, who first called my attention to the connection in a 2017 Intermediate Latin course.

[66] The connections between Sulpicia's poem 3.16 and *Satires* 1.2 are further explored in Hallett 2006: 40-41.

social and legal systems that prevent her from 'being by her own judgement', separating her socially sanctioned actions from the desires which she passively harbors in her thoughts. Although Sulpicia's works belong to the elegiac tradition, the "typically contorted syntax"[67] of her conditional weighing of potential realities within her verses makes unique her generic position.

3.17

> Estne tibi, Cerinthe, tuae pia cura puellae,
> quod mea nunc vexat corpora fessa calor?
> A! ego non aliter tristes evincere morbos
> optarim, quam te si quoque velle putem.
> At mihi quid prosit morbos evincere, si tu
> nostra potes lento pectore ferre mala?
>
> Do you have, Cerinthus, dutiful concern for your girl,
> now that weary fever troubles my body?
> Oh! I would not have otherwise chosen to conquer
> melancholy ailments,
> than if I suspected that you [did not] also wish [it].
> But what use would it be for me to conquer sickness,
> if you are able to endure [my] troubles with a tenacious
> heart?

In the interrogative opening couplet of poem 3.17, Sulpicia begins her piece by leveling an accusation against Cerinthus, cleverly attacking his moral virtue with her insinuation that he might lack *pia cura* for her within a line of heavy hexameter, the meter of the *pietas*-driven genre of epic.[68] As she shifts in the second line to pentameter, Sulpicia reveals her inner woes, gracefully flowing from the impersonal third person *estne* to more personal third person *vexat* with the use of *quod*. Furthering her syntactic movement, just as, in the hexameter of line 1,

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[67] I borrow this characterization of Sulpician syntax from Lowe 1988: 200.

[68] Santirocco also draws a connection between Sulpicia's reportedly feverish state and the condition of lovesickness, noting that "the sustained medical imagery on which the lines turn is standard in Latin love poetry, the calculated ambiguity between real fever and the heat of passion, between real disease and the illness that is love" (Santirocco 1979: 233).

Sulpicia opens with the *external* sentiments of Cerinthus before, in the pentameter of line 2, revealing the fever that thwarts her *internal* state, she too begins the following couplet of lines 3 and 4 with the hexameter detailing her *external* wish to conquer her illness before illuminating in the pentameter that which truly *internally* pains her: the thought that her lover may not wish for her recovery.

As the poem progresses, Sulpicia cleverly continues to weave together her subjective, inner reality with the externalities that affect her current position, beginning with her internal state in line 3 with *tristes*, moving to the external possibility of recovery with the impersonal infinitive *evincere*, bringing in her own wishes concerning her illness with the first person singular perfect subjunctive *optarim* in line 4, shifting back to the external possibility of Cerinthus wishing or not wishing for her recovery with the infinitive in *te … velle*, before finally closing out the couplet with her internal response to Cerinthus' feelings with the first person singular present subjunctive *putem*. Within a single couplet, Sulpicia's language artfully glides through a complex network of perspectival shifts, juxtaposing her own state of internal turmoil with a multiplicity of potential external realities. The verbally layered condition upon which she comes to a decision concerning her bodily health may reflect the lack of agency of independent choice and of control over physical positionally held by women in Ancient Rome.

In the final couplet of 3.17, Sulpicia carefully reframes the statement of her previous two lines in the form of a question, echoing the interrogative opening of the poem now in the same language— *morbos*, *evincere*— as that through which she revealed her true fear of an unfeeling Cerinthus. In her constant shifting of perspective, from that of her own poetic desires to her behaviorally limited social position to the imagined attitude of her lover, Sulpicia points to the societal silencing of female internal realities. Weighed down by the expectations and restrictions

of others, Sulpicia's ability to express her own emotions as a woman is as embedded in the responses and actions of her society as are the conditional statements revealing her internal turmoil within her verses.

Taking on the narrative role of *amator* in her poetry, Sulpicia, herself an inversion of the typical elegiac *docta puella*, speaks to the social and legal constraints that she, as an elite Roman woman, faces. Alluding to guardianship and to the pressures of adhering to public opinions regarding a woman's sexual expression, Sulpicia expands the breadth of elegy by introducing female social plights to the genre. Demonstrating the divide between socially sanctioned female behavior and the internal desires that she privately harbors, Sulpicia syntactically distances her outer and inner realities, representing poetically the challenges she faces in conducting her love affair with Cerinthus. Sulpicia, in situating her poetic body within the socially oppositional genre of Roman love elegy, conforms to the traditional intentions of elegy by utilizing her unique female perspective to criticize the patriarchal norms of her society.

The Poet Melinno

Melinno's Sapphic Auctoritas

Before turning to the poetry of Melinno and Julia Balbilla, I would like now to briefly discuss the most famous female poet of antiquity: Sappho. As the poetics of Melinno and Julia Balbilla are ripe with Sapphic allusions, it serves us well to illuminate Sappho's role as a figure of poetic *auctoritas* in the Roman literary world before we look for her influence in the poetry of these two women. Sappho, according to our ancient sources, was born at the turn of the seventh to the sixth century B.C. in the city of Mytilene on the isle of Lesbos. By the imperial period,[69] Sappho was not only a well-known, frequently read poet, but she was also somewhat of a cultural phenomenon, her face adorning Mytilenian coinage in the first few centuries A.D.[70] and her fame renowned throughout Greece and Rome.

The ancient view on Sapphic authority is substantially evidenced by the celebration of the great lyric poet in the works of male authors. Lauded by many as the female Homer,[71] the philosopher and physician Galen[72] reports that, "you have only to say the Poet and the Poetess, and everyone knows you mean Homer and Sappho."[73] In her frequent identification as the 'tenth' or 'mortal' Muse,[74] Sappho became emblematic for ancient authors, male and female alike, of divinely inspired poetry itself. And indeed, as a Muse, she breathed life into the works of authors

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[69] During which time the poets Sulpicia and Julia Balbilla were certainly writing, and, perhaps, despite her ambiguous date, Melinno might have composed the "Hymn to Rome".
[70] Rosenmeyer 2008: 352.
[71] See, for example, Arist. *Rhet*. 2.23.11.
[72] Galen of Pergamon was the personal physician to the Roman emperors Marcus Aurelius (r. A.D. 161 - A.D. 180), Commodus (r. A.D. 177 - A.D. 192), and Septimius Severus (r. A.D. 193 - A.D. 211).
[73] I have taken this translation of Galen 4.771 Kühn. from Kivilo 2010: 184.
[74] For ancient author's describing Sappho as either among the company of the Muses or as the 'tenth' or 'mortal' Muse, see Antipater of Sidon (Gow and Page 1965: 11, 12), Plutarch (*Amat*. 18), Damocharis (*Anth. Plan*. 310), and Christodorus (*Anth. Pal*. 2.69.71). See also Catullus' description: *Sapphica puella* / *Musa doctior* (Catullus 35.16).

like Catullus, whose popular poem 51 is a creative adaption of Sappho's poem 31. Sappho also became a model for many female poets hoping to follow in her footsteps,[75] and, it would seem, a primary literary figure against whom many more women writers were evaluated.

The tendency of ancient authors to situate a woman's poetry, regardless of its content, within a Sapphic framework is evidenced by the numerous examples of connections drawn between the works of Sappho and those of later female poets. For instance, a Greco-Roman female poet might have been celebrated by her male contemporaries as a 'new Sappho', or as a poet who ought to be compared to Sappho, simply because of her distinct status as a woman poet within the literary canon.[76] In much the same way that metrically or thematically alluding to Homer within a poetic body may be intended by an author to signal high compositional prestige, comparing a female poet to Sappho may have generally signaled her status as a *woman who wrote*, or a woman who wrote *well* rather than pointing to any explicitly 'Sapphic' content within her verses.

Both Melinno, who wrote her "Hymn to Rome" in Sapphic stanzas, and Julia Balbilla, who composed her four epigrammata in Sapphic dialect, however, explicitly reference Sappho in their poetry. Regarding authorial intentionality, without relying on inference alone, we cannot conclusively ascribe to these two poets any specific motivation behind their Sapphic allusions. Just as an ancient poet, in simply deciding to write an epic, might have hoped to invite comparisons from his peers between his poem and the works of Homer, so too might authors like Melinno and Julia Balbilla, by adopting the meter and dialect of Sappho, have intended to merely convey their literary competence and authorial control. Thus, a female poet's own emulation of

[75] See the epigram of Nossis (active in the 280s or 270s B.C.) in which she expresses a hope to be compared to Sappho (11 G-P = *AP* 7.718).
[76] For ancient comparisons of female poets to Sappho, see *Anth. Pal*. 7.492 (on Anyte and Sappho); *Anth. Pal*. 9.190 (on Erinna and Sappho); *Anth. Pal*. 9.332 (on Nossis and Sappho).

Sappho might have been meant to communicate her poetic prestige as a new Sappho, or to better authorize her female presence in an androcentric literary culture by following in the footsteps of the most widely read woman poet in Rome. It is for this reason that I suggest we accept the ancient's parallelism between Sappho and Homer and view both as figures of poetic *auctoritas*, whose influence is so far reaching that it is difficult to determine what an author hopes to accomplish through emulating their generic voices.

Melinno's Positions

Melinno's metrical deference to the poetic *auctoritas* of Sappho is easily identifiable, as we shall see shortly, in the Sapphic stanzas of her "Hymn to Rome". Before I provide the text of her poem, I would like to briefly outline Melinno's social, poetic, and generic positions to illustrate how the poet might be utilizing Sapphic signaling to situate the 'masculine' thematic content of her hymn within a 'feminine' bodied framework. In looking at Melinno's generic position, I will explore how the poet's echoing of 'masculine' Homeric epic within her 'feminine' Sapphic hymn furthers her discussion of gender dynamics, demonstrating how Melinno, like her transgressive Roma, appropriates aspects of the 'masculine' literary sphere into her own 'female' tradition. To extrapolate her poetic position, I will focus on Melinno's characterization of the goddess Roma and on how her depiction communicates 'masculine' symbology through a 'female' subject. Given the lack of biographical information known about Melinno, I will look to her poetic position, her interpretation of Roma, to infer the ways in which her social position may have influenced her gendered conception of the goddess. Before delving into my own analysis of Melinno's hymn, I will first provide a translation of and context for the

piece, interspersed with summaries of relevant points made by C. M. Bowra in his orthodox 1957 interpretation of the “Hymn to Rome”, against which my own reading is situated.[77]

The Hymn to Rome

1 χαῖρέ μοι, Ῥώμα, θυγάτηρ Ἄρηος,
χρυσεομίτρα δαΐφρων ἄνασσα,
σεμνὸν ἃ ναίεις ἐπὶ γᾶς Ὄλυμπον
αἰὲν ἄθραυστον.

5 σοὶ μόνᾳ, πρέσβιστα, δέδωκε Μοῖρα
κῦδος ἀρρήκτω βασιλῆον ἀρχᾶς,
ὄφρα κοιρανῆον ἔχοισα κάρτος
ἀγεμονεύῃς.

σᾶ δ' ὑπὰ σδεύγλᾳ κρατερῶν λεπάδνων
10 στέρνα γαίας καὶ πολιᾶς θαλάσσας
σφίγγεται· σὺ δ' ἀσφαλέως κυβερνᾷς
ἄστεα λαῶν.

πάντα δὲ σφάλλων ὁ μέγιστος αἰὼν
καὶ μεταπλάσσων βίον ἄλλοτ' ἄλλως
15 σοὶ μόνᾳ πλησίστιον οὖρον ἀρχᾶς
οὐ μεταβάλλει.

ἦ γὰρ ἐκ πάντων σὺ μόνα κρατίστους
ἄνδρας αἰχματὰς μεγάλους λοχεύεις
εὔσταχυν Δάματρος ὅπως ἀνεῖσα
20 καρπὸν †ἀπ' ἀνδρῶν.

1 Hail from me, Rome, daughter of Ares,
Golden-girdled war queen,
You who, upon the earth, inhabit holy Olympus,
Forever unconquerable.

[77] Given the limited scholarship available on Melinno’s hymn, the main analysis of the poem is delivered to us by C. M. Bowra in his 1957 article “Melinno’s Hymn to Rome”. Providing a detailed commentary on Melinno’s verses, Bowra’s interest in the “Hymn to Rome” lies in what the poem may illuminate in regard to Greek sentiments towards the rise of Rome. Bowra, citing a lack of reference to the principate within her work, imagines Melinno as a Hellenistic poet, writing in the first half of the second century B.C., before the dawn of empire has broken over the Roman Republic. For this perspective, see also Lind 1972: 255; Plant 2004: 99; Joyce 2015: 12. for the placement of Melinno in the second century B.C. For Melinno’s dating to the imperial period, see Barbantani 2017: 345, and to the end of the first and beginning of the second century A.D., see Augoustakis 2010: 248.

5 To you alone, most honored one, Moira has given
Kingly, unbroken glory of rule,
In order that you may lead, holding master
Strength.

Indeed, under your yoke of mighty straps
10 The chests of the earth and the grey sea
Are bound tight; Indeed, you steer unerringly
The towns of men.

Indeed, all powerful time, even though it overthrows all
And changes one's life in one way or another,
15 For you alone the full blowing breeze of rule
Does not change.

For, in truth, out of all, you alone
Give birth to the mightiest great spearmen,
Just as if you were lifting up Demeter's fruitful
20 Harvest from men.

Contextualizing Melinno's "Hymn to Rome"

Melinno's poem above, both her only known and only surviving work, has been preserved to the modern day in a single quotation by the fifth century A.D. author Stobaeus within his *Eclogues*, in his passage *On Courage* (3.7.12). He credits the poem to a 'Melinno of Lesbos'. With little substantial evidence to be gleaned from the literary record as to her date or place of origin, the scholarly consensus places Melinno sometime within the third century B.C. to the Hadrianic era.[78] Her surviving poem, commonly referred to as Melinno's "Hymn to Rome", is a twenty line ὕμνος written in Sapphic stanzas in praise of the strength of Rome. Following the Sapphic metrical tradition, Melinno's four-line stanzas are comprised of three hendecasyllabic, or Sapphic, lines and an ending Adonic line, a five-syllable foot formed by a

[78] Gutzwiller 2016: 400.

dactyl followed by a trochee.[79] The "Hymn to Rome", its contents an assertion of the eternal, hegemonic dominion of Rome over the earth, may reflect Melinno's experience in the great civilization's imperial era, although there remains a significant chance that the poem's composition predated Rome's shift from republic to empire.

With little known of her context, Stobaeus'— likely erroneous— assignment of the birthplace of the poetically talented Melinno to the Isle of Lesbos *is* an understandable one; Melinno's metric style, the Sapphic stanza, and her inclusion of some Aeolic forms within her work serve to emulate the Lesbian poet, although she mainly writes in Doric, and thus "does not use the Lesbian dialect, and such faint echoes of it as can be detected like κάρτος in 7 and ὑπὰ σδεύγλᾳ in 9 are countered by demonstrably non-Lesbian forms like κρατερῶν in 9 and κρατίστους in 17."[80] Accordingly, although through her poetics Melinno mimics the Sapphic voice, her mixing of forms— her archaizing, her employment of the Aeolic dialect— does not reflect any real dialect of Lesbos in any era, suggesting that she herself is not from the island.[81]

It is useful for our discussion of Melinno's characterization of the goddess Roma to also note the context in which Stobaeus cites her poem. The "Hymn to Rome" appears in Stobaeus' *Eclogues*, a compilation of ancient text excerpts, in a section he titles *On Courage* (περὶ ἀνδρείας). Melinno's hymn is presented between the text of a Mimnermus poem (14.9) and a quote from Homer (Hom. *Il.* 22.283-284). Her poem, like all of the works quoted in Stobaeus' anthology, is not chosen because of the gender of its author, but for the merit of its verses. In the mind of this ancient author, at the very least, there is no reason to present differently the poem of a woman from the poem of a man.

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[79] See Becker 2010: 160.
[80] Bowra 1957: 21.
[81] Gutzwiller 2016: 400.

Turning to the poem itself may elucidate why Stobaeus felt this hymn significant enough to have earned its place next to Homer and Mimnermus, since Melinno's "Hymn to Rome", regardless of the gender identity of its author, *should* be a poem of particular interest to modern readers. While scholarship on the "Hymn to Rome" remains minimal, Melinno's "Greek hymn to Rome present[s] special problems, because the subject had very little tradition behind it and was not easily adapted to the usual technique of mythological illustration," necessitating that "[t]he old Greek ideas and images must be turned to this new purpose, and the result must be impressive and convincing."[82] In writing her hymn, Melinno paved her way into uncharted territory, the nature of her work inherently novel, adaptive, and inventive. This makes Melinno's choice to emulate Sappho in meter all the more enticing; although, at the time of the poem's composition, the "Hymn to Rome" seems to have been entirely unique in its pairing of subject matter and language, Melinno signals her connection to ancient generic traditions, significantly, by deferring to Sapphic authority. Crafting a novel hymn, she authorizes her presence not only in established literary traditions en masse, but specifically in the poetic heritage of the most celebrated female author of the ancient world.

Gender, the Goddess Roma, and Melinno

As we look now to Melinno's framing of her hymn, we will explore first how she chooses to depict the goddess Roma. Understanding Melinno's Roma compels us to reflect back upon Bowra's interpretation of Roma as an Amazon warrior in his article "Melinno's Hymn to Rome". When describing the warlike deity Roma, the daughter of martial Ares himself, Bowra

[82] Bowra 1957: 22-23.

suggests that Melinno intentionally draws attention to the goddess' feminine nature in her adjectival use of χρυσεομίτρα, highlighting the adornment of the golden girdle. Bowra focuses on the word as it "might indeed mean no more than 'with a diadem of gold'; for this is a use of μίτρα in Hellenistic times (Plut., Demetr. 4I ; Theocr. I7, I9 ; Call., Hymn 4, i66; Athen. I2, 536 a), but when it is applied to Amazons it seems to refer to their girdle or ζωστήρ." Thus, "[w]hen Rome is given a golden girdle, it is a sign of her unusual and special strength."[83] When paired with the adjective δαΐφρων, meaning 'warlike', this Amazonian connection seems all the more likely. In Melinno's positioning of Roma as a daughter of Ares, a god frequently identified as a father of Amazons, she may intentionally be inviting this comparison.

Indeed, Melinno's choice, especially given her gender, to compose her ode on the strength of Rome to the personified Roma in and of itself begs an examination of the gendered virtue dynamics of the poet's context, as the figure of the goddess Roma is conceived within a complex, dichotomous web of 'masculine-feminine' interplay. In the view of the scholar Stephen Moore, as a "female body overlaid with the trappings of Roman military discipline, Roma may be read as the uncritical celebration of a masculinity that constructs itself through the unceasing suppression of femininity," and her "iconography may be interpreted to say—indeed, to repeat incessantly—that masculinity is the defeat of femininity."[84]

Equally, we may be inclined to read the visual allegory of Roma as a depiction of balanced protectiveness. In her identity as a woman, Roma is imbued with the maternal nature of the 'feminine,' giving birth to Rome's greatest spearmen; as an embodiment of strength, her charioteering and war-like appearance connect her to the martial valor of the 'masculine'. Roma is a θυγάτηρ Ἄρηος and a δαΐφρων ἄνασσα, a daughter of Ares and a war queen, existing in a

[83] Bowra 1957: 23.
[84] Moore 2010: 85.

realm of liminality that defies sex-based evaluations of virtue. If we are to read into Melinno's reference to Roma's parentage and her χρυσεομίτρα, as Bowra does, a connection to the Amazons, we can see this parallel of gender-virtue dynamics with Roma in what Lysias, a famed late fifth century to early sixth century B.C. Attic logographer, reports about the public conception of the 'female' warriors: "[The Amazons] were considered men because of their spirit (εὐψυχία) rather than women because of their physiology (φύσις)" (Lysias 2.4).[85] Melinno's Roma, whose spirit seems to be the very soul of Rome, may thus be read in the same ideological light by which Lysias describes the Amazons, as a sort of Trojan horse of sexual identity, an assemblage of 'masculine' virtues encased within a 'female' body. Turning to the material record will prove fruitful for exploring a further parallel between depictions of the Amazon warriors and the goddess Roma.

Bowra's observation of Melinno's choice to adorn Roma with the χρυσεομίτρα, the seat of virginal Amazonian power, begs a discussion of *why* a goddess may be depicted as an Amazon. Why portray Rome as a *goddess*, 'defeminized' to display 'masculine' virtues, rather than as a god? A representation of the goddess Roma, frequently portrayed in the typical Amazonian fashion of military dress with a revealed breast,[86] can be seen below on an A.D. 154 - A.D. 155 Aureus[87] of Marcus Aurelius.[88]

[85] Translated in Dowden 1997: 97.
[86] See Joyce 2015 for a survey on breast revelation as a function of Amazonian dress.
[87] While I have picked this particular coin for the clarity and quality of its image, it is one of many such numismatic examples of Roma portrayed with a revealed breast. For an example of Roma's revealed breast on the coinage of Nero, see ANS 1948.0146.0004; On the coinage of Vespasian, see ANS 1944.0100.41566; On that of Trajan, see ANS 1944.100.43522; On that of Hadrian, see ANS 1995.0011.0240, 1956.0127.0269; On that of Antoninus Pius, see ANS 1944.0100.49022.
[88] ANS 1967.0050.0009, American Numismatic Society.

Fig. 1. Gold Aureus of Marcus Aurelius. Obverse: AVRELIVS CAESAR AVG PII FIL; Bust of Marcus Aurelius, draped, head r. Reverse: TR POT VIIII COS II; Roma, helmeted, in military dress, standing l., holding Victory on extended right hand and parazonium at shoulder in l. Rome mint, A.D. 154 - A.D. 155., weight 7.34 g. (Accession Number 1967.0050.0009, RIC III 464a).

The revealed breast here, though not present in Melinno's characterization of Roma, embodies the transgressive nature of the war-goddess or the warrior woman. Her identity as a woman makes her bellicose behavior— or, indeed, her revelation— improper, while also heightening the social acknowledgement of her 'masculine' martial power by signaling that her conduct is 'unwomanly'. Lillian Joyce, expounding the function of the revealed breast in depictions of Roma, concludes that "Roma's exposed breast provided a concise representation of the militaristic valor that she infused, through the power of nurture, into the very fiber of her symbolic offspring, the people of Rome."[89] Although the state of dress of Melinno's Roma is left unspecified, Joyce's analysis is helpful for unpacking the poet's negotiation of the 'masculine' martial and the 'feminine' maternal qualities that she attributes to the goddess in her "Hymn to Rome".

[89] Joyce 2015: 22.

This negotiation of 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities continues in the third verse of the "Hymn to Rome", as Melinno imagines Roma as a charioteer, holding fast the yoke of the sea and earth as she guides the lives of men. The familiar image of a goddess driving a war chariot, a primary symbol of martial dominance and triumph, grants Roma a profound likeness to the divine figure of Victory, one echoed by a multitude of ancient authors. Virgil adopts quite a similar image of Roma (see Virg. *Aen*. VI, 785-8), but, for the scholar Bowra, although "[b]oth for Melinno and for Virgil[,] Rome rides triumphantly in a chariot and dominates the world from it, [...] while Virgil suggests the role of Rome as the mother and the nurse of peoples, for Melinno she is first and foremost the conqueror and the ruler."[90]

Although Bowra sees a disconnect between the maternal Roma of Virgil and the conquering Roma of Melinno, in the final stanza of her "Hymn to Rome", Melinno seems to contradict this apparent removal of motherhood from her imagining of Roma. Comparing the harvesting of Demeter's fruitful crops to Roma's raising up of Roman warriors, Melinno highlights the pregnancy of the goddess with the verb λοχεύω, which can be used to mean 'to bring to the birth, deliver, beget.''[91] Melinno's usage of the verb λοχεύω seems to emphasize the goddess' physical birthing of, rather than her merely bringing forth of, the soldiers. Still, her writing of Roma is ripe with the language of masculine ideology, praising her *imperium* over her feminine fecundity. While the cultivation of crops may prove the fertility of Demeter, the bearing and cultivation of soldiers suggests the leadership and virtue with which Roma holds political and martial dominion. In championing the maternal nature of the goddess, Melinno's hymn establishes Roma's martial strength and command over great warriors.

[90] Bowra 1957: 26.
[91] Liddell & Scott: 1889.

So too does the choice to reference *Demeter* specifically in this comparison to Roma demand our attention. Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, holds dominion over a crop of particular interest to the Romans: wheat. A staple in the ancient Mediterranean diet, wheat was vital to the survival of Roman citizens. Despite the grain's substantial deficiency in vitamins, as the cheapest source of calories available to the majority of Rome's citizen body, wheat was relied upon as the primary form of sustenance for most Romans.[92] Given the monumental importance of grain in ensuring the prosperity of the Roman people, the Roman state was highly involved in both the importation of wheat to provide for its capital and the movement of wheat to feed its large and far-spread military. In connecting her depiction of Roma to Demeter, Melinno paints her subject as a figure of maternal providence, supplying her people with that which they need to survive. Equally, the poet reminds us of Demeter's role in martial affairs; wheat, an invaluable resource for the fueling of soldiers, is itself a tool of war. Thus, Melinno's Roma, in κρατίστους / ἄνδρας αἰχματὰς μεγάλους λοχεύεις ("giv[ing] birth to the mightiest great spearmen"), provides by her 'feminine' aspect those virtues which fuel her 'masculine' actions.

Epic and Melinno's Generic Position

Melinno's "Hymn to Rome" is also ripe with thematic and linguistic references to epic. In line 6 of the hymn, describing the "kingly, unbroken glory of rule" given to Roma by Fate, Melinno's use of Homeric language (κῦδος, βασιλῆον) calls to mind the honors awarded to kings in epic narratives, situating her work within a 'masculine' tradition. So too do the κρατίστους / ἄνδρας αἰχματὰς μεγάλους suggest Melinno's harkening back to the great soldiers of epic, but also her "refashioning the cosmos of martial epic poetry into a female space, where the city

[92] Rickman 1980: 262.

clearly plays the role of the mother, by means of images of fertility in the last stanza, reinforced by the maternal earth and sea in the exact middle of the poem (*στέρνα γαίας καὶ πολιᾶς θαλάσσας*, 10)."[93] Writing in Sapphic stanzas, perhaps Melinno takes Sappho over Homer as her primary figure of poetic *auctoritas*, harnessing her Homeric influence to bring the content of epic into the sphere of 'feminine' meter. Just as Melinno's Roma exists within the dichotomy of 'female' body and 'masculine' adornment, so too does the "Hymn to Rome" offer content belonging to the 'masculine' tradition within the metrical space of a 'female' stanzaic body.

Furthering this connection to and expansion of the epic genre, as I have previously discussed, Melinno draws parallels between Roma and the Amazons. The very presence of the Amazons, themselves belonging to the tradition of epic, in Melinno's poem suggests that she is repurposing traditional generic themes to fit the model of her work. Through her linguistic and mythological allusions to Homer and her Sapphically inspired metrical choice, the entirety of Melinno's "Hymn to Rome" occupies the same liminal space as does her portrayal of Roma, importing the 'masculine' tradition of epic into the 'feminine' realm.

[93] Augoustakis 2010: 248.

The Poetry of Julia Balbilla

In my reading of the four epigrammata of Julia Balbilla, written in praise of the emperor Hadrian and inscribed on one of the Colossi of Memnon during a visit accompanying the imperial family to Egyptian Thebes, I will discuss how the poet's self-presentation within her verses emphasizes the high social and poetic positions which she occupies through, like many court poets, celebrating her own status in her works and through emulating the high poetry of Sappho. Julia Balbilla establishes her high status in several ways. Most obviously, in her second poem, she dedicates a lengthy portion[94] to a description of her familial line. Balbilla, a member of Hadrian's court, suggests that her social prestige is a necessary precondition for the composition of her work. In fact, choosing to insert herself as a character within her poetry, Balbilla's presence as a traveling companion of the emperor and empress serves her poetic image twofold: she is both advertising her position as a literary client of the imperial family and reminding her general audience of her own high status and favor found with the emperor. As Balbilla is both the author of and a figure within her poetry, she is able to craft the public perception of herself through cycles of reinforcement, telling her audience of her own impressiveness and demonstrating that impressiveness through the highly connected status of her poetic self-representation.

In her choice to write in Aeolic, the dialect of Sappho, Julia Balbilla asks us, as Melinno does with her use of the Sapphic stanza, to draw a connection between the great Greek poetess and herself. Wisely, she is able to further ingratiate herself with her patron by utilizing the dialect

[94] In this section, I will refer to Julia Balbilla's poems by the number assigned to them in Bernand's collection of inscriptions from Memnon (Bernand 1960). Her four epigrammata, as presented by Bernand, are the 28th-31st works to appear in his collection. Thus, Balbilla's 'second poem', to which I refer here, will be labeled later in this paper as epigram 29.

of lyric poetry for her political encomia, signaling Balbilla's poetic skill and Sapphic talent with the implicit intent of pleasing her patrons. Thus, we may read Balbilla's self-presentation and generic styling in her epigrammata as a politically conscious attempt to maintain or elevate her status within Hadrian's court.

Epigram 31: Julia Balbilla and the Colossi

In order to provide sufficient context for the occasion upon which Julia Balbilla composed her epigrammata, the first of her poems that I will look at is, ironically, the last work in her epigrammatic sequence: epigram 31. Julia Balbilla's poem 31 is useful to discuss here, where I introduce her epigrams, because she uses the piece to tell us exactly why and when she is writing:

31.

1 ἔκλυον αὐδήσαντος ἔγω ’πυ λίθω Βάλβιλλα
φώνα(ς) τᾶς θεΐας Μέμνονος ἢ Φαμένωθ.
ἦλθον ὔμοι δ’ ἐράται βασιλήϊδι τυῖδε Σαβίννᾳ,
4 ὤρας δὲ πρώτας ἄλιος ἦχε δρόμος.
κοιράνω{ι} Ἀδριάνω πέμπτῳ δεκότῳ δ’ ἐνιαύτῳ,
(φῶτ)α δ’ ἔχεσκε(ν) Ἄθυρ εἴκοσι καὶ πέσυρα.
εἰκόστῳ πέμπτῳ δ’ ἄματι μῆνος Ἄθυρ.

1 I, Balbilla, heard upon the speaking stone
The divine sound of Memnon or Phamenoth.
And I came here together with the lovely queen Sabina,
4 The sun's[95] course had brought the first hour.
For the fifteenth anniversary for Emperor Hadrian,
Hathyr[96] was bringing light on twenty and four.
On the twenty-fifth day of the month of Hathyr.

[95] Despite my translation here, ἄλιος is a nominative rather than a genitive.
[96] Hathyr, the third month in the Egyptian civil calendar, falls roughly in November.

Epigram 31 provides the setting for an historical scene: In late November A.D. 130, the Emperor Hadrian and his wife, Sabina, arrived in Egyptian Thebes, a stop on their grand tour of eastern Roman provinces.[97] A much frequented tourist destination in antiquity, Thebes is home to the famous Colossi of Memnon, the towering remains of two giant statues carved in 1400 B.C. in honor of the Egyptian king Amenhotep III. By the Hadrianic era, one of the great statues had been reinterpreted in Greco-Roman cultural mythology as a representation of hero Memnon, a mythical king of Ethiopia who had been granted immortality by Zeus after being slain at Troy. During an earthquake in 26 B.C., the head of one of the Colossi was knocked off of its body. Following the damage, the remaining cracked base, permeable to wind, would, when heated to a certain temperature by the rising sun, emit a sort of humming noise. As Memnon, a son of Eos, bore a significant connection to the dawn, the sound was thought by many to be the voice of the immortal hero.[98]

As travelers flocked to visit the speaking monument, already well known for its impressive size, they brought with them their words; covering the statue's legs is a large collection of graffiti, inscribed by visitors between 24 B.C. and A.D. 205.[99] From the etchings on Memnon, 107 texts have been transcribed and edited by André and Etienne Bernand,[100] 61 in Greek, 45 in Latin, and one bilingual. 39 of the inscriptions are in verse, and 11 of those can be attributed to the efforts of six women (Julia Balbilla: 28–31; Sabina: 32; Julia Saturnina: 65; Dionysia: 66; Caecilia Trebulla: 92–94; Damo: 83). One of those six female poets was, as she tells us, Julia Balbilla, traveling with Hadrian and Sabina, who commemorated the royal visit with four inscriptions of Greek verse on Memnon's left leg.

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[97] Rosenmeyer 2008: 335.
[98] Ibid., 335-6.
[99] Bowersock 1984: 26.
[100] Bernand and Bernand 1960.

Julia Balbilla's Generic Position

The four poems inscribed on the Colossus by Julia Balilla in A.D. 130 total 55 lines, the first 54 of which are written in elegiac meter, the final an additional line of pentameter.[101] By writing her series of four epigrammata in elegiac couplets, Balbilla strays from the Sapphic tradition in meter, her stylistic choices and use of the Aeolic dialect are a clear reflection of her emulation of the archaic poetess. As scholar Patricia Rosenmeyer well points out, while "[e]legiac meter is a logical choice for inscriptional verse, [...] the dialect is definitely not, and calls out for our attention."[102] Here, we may note the conflicting Sapphic aspects of Melinno and Balbilla; while Melinno composed her "Hymn to Rome" in Sapphic meter, she writes primarily in Doric dialect and the content of her poem seems more akin to epic than to lyric. Balbilla, by contrast, chooses to write in the non-Sapphic meter of elegy, but adopts the Aeolic dialect in her political encomia. In both cases, the authors seem to defer to Sappho as their poetic *auctoritas*, but the way in which they respectively choose to evoke the ancient poet differs greatly. In reflecting Sapphic style, the two poets may have each sought to suggest their own similar literary prowess, and thereby better praise their subjects by linking their verses to those of a legendary lyricist. Neither Melinno nor Balbilla, therefore, imitate Sappho in the content of their poetry, but both structure their works by means of an invocation of Sapphic authority.

We find another likely influence on Julia Balbilla's generic position when we consider the primary figure for whom she writes: Emperor Hadrian. Hadrian's love for all things Hellenic is no secret. Over the course of his reign from A.D. 117 to 138, the emperor spent less than half

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[101] Brennan 1998: 215.
[102] Rosenmeyer 2008: 335.

of his time in Italy,[103] preferring to travel to personally oversee the resolution of territorial conflicts in the wide expanses of his empire and to frequently tour the Roman provinces rather than to settle down in the city of Rome. Given Hadrian's dedication to Hellenism and to literature, bringing along with him to Egyptian Thebes a Greek-speaking poet to commemorate his visit, Balbilla's inclusion of Sapphic stylings, mythological allusions, Homeric vocabulary, rare poetic forms, and archaic echoing in her poem of praise for the emperor serve to honor his intellectual aesthetic. Not only do "[t]hese archaisms [...] attest to her skill as a poet," they "would also have appealed to Hadrian's own intellectual predilections for the ancient and obscure," as "Hadrian sought to revive many archaic and forgotten authors"[104] and wrote poetry himself. Julia Balbilla's elegiac encomia to Hadrian thus demonstrate both her skill as a poet and her political savvy, apparent in her ability to tailor her work stylistically to the preferences of her patron.

In her use of Homeric vocabulary and of the Aeolic dialect, Julia Balbilla's verses, like those of Melinno, suggest a fusion of the greatest names in both epic and lyric poetry, namely Homer and Sappho. As she chooses to write in elegiac meter rather than Sapphic stanzas, "by imitating Sappho in her inscriptions, Julia Balbilla creates something dynamic and new; she claims the personal fame of Sappho as a successful female poet but adapts Sappho's rhetoric of erotic praise to a contemporary political context."[105] Julia Balbilla's generic position thus reflects her considerable poetic knowledge, allowing her to stylistically customize her work to her patrons' tastes while flaunting her literary gifts.

Julia Balbilla's Social Position

[103] See Syme 1988 for details on Hadrian's travels.
[104] Rosenmeyer 2018: 155.
[105] Ibid., 160.

While little is known of the personal life of Julia Balbilla or her relationship with Hadrian and Sabina, within her poetry, her status as belonging to the royal entourage that traveled with the imperial couple to the Colossi and her references to her personal familial ties grants us a clear view of her claims to and place as a member of the court elite. As we have already seen, Balbilla's affiliation with Hadrian is itself levied within her poetry as evidence for her high status. Additionally, in line 14 of her poem 29, Julia Balbilla names her grandfathers as Balbillus the wise and King Antiochus. Her maternal grandfather, referred to as Balbillus the wise by Balbilla, was Ti. Claudius Balbillus, a Prefect of Roman Egypt from A.D. 55-59 under Emperor Nero. His daughter, Claudia Capitolina, Balbilla's mother, was married to C. Julius Antiochus Epiphanes, Balbilla's father and the son of the last king of Commagene, Antiochus IV. Balbilla's paternal grandfather, Antiochus IV of Commagene, reigned from A.D. 37-72 as a client king of the Roman empire,[106] lending the poet a highly aristocratic status. Also among Balbilla's sociopolitically powerful relatives was her brother, C. Julius Antiochus Epiphanes Philopappus, one of the first men from the eastern empire to gain Roman consulship.[107] Through her expression of pride for her impressive family line, detailed in poem 29, Balbilla has in fact cemented her own place in history, alongside the visit she commemorates.

Julia Balbilla's Poetic Position

[106] See Brennan 1998: 217 for an abridged family tree of Julia Balbilla.
[107] Brennan 1998: 218.

Julia Balbilla's first epigram, poem 28, well demonstrates how the poet represents her own social status while praising Hadrian, as she presents herself, the emperor, and the animated statue of Memnon as central figures within the work.

28.

Ἰουλίας Βαλ(β)ίλλης·
ὅτε ἤκουσε τοῦ Μέμνο(νο)ς
ὁ Σεβαστὸς Ἀδριανός.

1 Μέμνονα πυνθανόμαν Αἰγύπτιον, ἀλίω αὔγαι
αἰθόμενον, φώνην Θηβαΐ(κ)ω ᾽πυ λίθω.
Ἀδρίανον δ᾽ ἐσίδων, τὸν παμβασίληα, πρὶν αὔγας
ἀελίω χαίρην εἶπέ (ϝ)οι ὡς δύνατον.
5 Τίταν δ᾽ ὄττ᾽ ἐλάων λεύκοισι δι᾽ αἴθερος ἴπποις
ἐ̣ν̣ὶ σκίαι ὡράων δεύτερον ἆχε μέτρον,
ὡς χάλκοιο τύπεντ[ο]ς ἴη Μέμνων πάλιν αὔδαν
ὀξύτονον· χαίρω[ν κ]αὶ τρίτον ἆχον ἴη.
κοίρανος Ἀδρίανο[ς τότ᾽ ἄ]λις δ᾽ ἀσπάσσατο καὖτος
10 Μέμνονα, κὰν [στά]λαι κάλ̣λ̣ι[π]εν ὀψ[ι]γόνοις
γρόππατα σαμαίνο[ν]τά τ᾽ ὄσ᾽ εὔϊδε κὤσσ᾽ ἐσάκουσε,
δῆλον παῖσι δ᾽ ἔγε[ν]τ᾽ ὤς (ϝ)ε φίλουσι θέοι.

By Julia Balbilla;
When the august Hadrian
heard Memnon.

1 I learned that the Egyptian Memnon, being scorched
by the light of the sun, speaks from Theban stone.
And, having looked upon Hadrian, the absolute monarch, before he greets the rays of the sun, he spoke to him as much as possible.
5 But Titan, about to drive through the ether with his white horses,
held the second measure of the day in the shadows,
as copper having been struck, Memnon was uttering
again a piercing cry; Rejoicing and bearing forth a third cry.
And then Emperor Hadrian himself greeted Memnon abundantly,
10 and on a stele, left behind for the future generations, the
inscriptions signifying the things which [his] eyes saw and the things which he heard,
And it was clear to all that the gods loved him.

Although Balbilla notionally centers epigram 28 around the emperor Hadrian, the poet opens her collection with a sphragis. Giving her own name as the two first words of her inscription, Balbilla first situates herself centrally in her own work. Her poetic personality is, thus, easy to read in her poetry: she, as an historical figure, is as present in her epigrammata as are her patrons. Balbilla's poetic position mirrors her social position, identifying herself within her verses by virtue of her familial line and high-status connection to the imperial family.

Alongside authorizing her own physical presence in the opening of her epigrammatic sequence, in epigram 28, Julia Balbilla has Ἀδρίανον... τὸν παμβασίληα (28.3) meet Μέμνονα... Αἰγύπτιον (28.1). The introduction of both figures with formal titles and the placement of each of their names as the opening word in lines 3 and 1 respectively creates a parallel between the deified power of the two figures, both of legendarily high status. Although the parallelism between Hadrian and Memnon seems to put the two on equal footing, "one could," argues Rosenmeyer, "read *Koiranos Hadrianos* in the same *sedes* in line 9 as marking a kind of competition: Hadrian wins the contest of masculine power that has been unfolding in front of the statue by re-inhabiting the subject position, shifting from listener to speaker, and 'talking back' to the colossal statue."[108] By emphasizing the imposing power of the famous, towering Memnon, perhaps Balbilla intends to paint the splendor of Hadrian as all the more impressive by comparison. Her poetry having received the endorsement of the great Hadrian, Balbilla, like any expert court poet, elevates her own status as a literary figure by depicting the emperor as unmatched in magnitude by even the deified hero Memnon.

In the second poem of her inscribed sequence, epigram 29, Balbilla most explicitly places herself as the central figure in her works, asserting that it is her high social prestige itself that

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[108] Rosenmeyer 2018: 150.

allows her to compose high poetry.

29.

ὅτε σὺν τῇ Σεβαστῇ Σαβείνη-
ι ἐγενόμην παρὰ τῷ Μέμνονι.

1 Αὔως καὶ γεράρω, Μέμνον, πάϊ Τιθώνοιο,
Θηβάας θάσσων ἄντα Δίος πόλιος,
ἢ Ἀμένωθ, βασίλευ Αἰγύπτιε, τὼς ἐνέποισιν
ἴρηες μύθων τῶν παλάων ἴδριες,
5 χαῖρε, καὶ αὐδάσαις πρόφρων ἀσπάσ̣δ̣ε[ο κ]αὔτ[αν]
τὰν σέμναν ἄλοχον κοιράνω Ἀδριάνω.
γλῶσσαν μέν τοι τμᾶξε [κ]αὶ ὤατα βάρβαρο̣ς̣ ἄνηρ,
Καμβύσαις ἄθεος· τῶ ῥα λύγρῳ θαν̣άτῳ
δῶκέν τοι ποίναν τὤτωι ἄκ[ρῳ] ἄορι πλάγεις
10 τῷ νήλας Ἆπιν κάκτανε τὸν θέϊον.
ἀλλ' ἔγω οὐ δοκίμωμι σέθεν τόδ' ὄ̣λ̣εσθ' ἂ̣ν ἄγαλμα,
ψύχαν δ' ἀθανάταν λοίπ̣ο̣ν ἔσωσ̣α̣ νόῳ.
εὐσέβεες γὰρ ἔμοι γένεται πάπποι τ' ἐγένο̣ντο,
Βάλβιλλός τ' ὀ σόφος κ' Ἀντίοχος βασίλευς,
15 Βάλβιλλος γενέταις μᾶτρος βασιλήϊδος ἄμμα̣ς̣,
τῶ πάτ̣ερος δὲ πάτηρ Ἀντίοχος βασίλευς·
κήνων ἐκ γενέας κἄγω λόχον αἶμα τὸ κᾶλον,
Βαλβίλλας δ' ἔμεθεν γρόπτα τάδ' εὐσέβεος.

When with August Sabina-
I was with Memnon.

1 Memnon, child of Aurora and revered Tithon,
Sitting before the Theban city of Zeus,
Or Amenoth, the Egyptian King, [as] indeed
The priests, knowledgeable of ancient tales, say,
5 Hale, and, by having spoken, willingly welcome also her,
The august wife of Emperor Hadrian.
Indeed, a barbarian man cut off your tongue and ears,
Godless Cambyses; And then, with his mournful death,
He paid the penalty, having been struck with the same sword point
10 with which, merciless, he killed the divine Apis.
But I do not think that this statue of yours could be lost,
and I preserved your immortal soul, remaining by my mind.
For my lineage and ancestors were pious,
Both Balbillus the wise and King Antiochus;
15 Balbillus, the father of my royal mother,
The father of my father, King Antiochus;
I also have obtained noble blood from their lineage,

And these are the writings of me, pious Balbilla.

In epigram 29, equating noble bloodlines with piety, Julia Balbilla argues that she is only able to ‘save’ Memnon’s soul in her ‘mind’, only able to capture the legendary hero in her poetry, because her ancestors are εὐσέβεες, a trait that she claims for herself in the final line. Framing her poetic persona as inherently pious, Balbilla suggests that the high-social status awarded to her by her family line is a necessary precondition for her writing of high poetry. Commissioned by the emperor to compose her epigrammata, Julia Balbilla asserts that she is equally prestigious because of her bloodline and imperial recognition, setting the framework for a reinforcing cycle in which her aristocratic status is detailed within her poetic body itself, and the erudite, highly stylized nature of her poetry serves as evidence for the elite social position which allows her to compose her complex verses.

In the same vein, despite the focus of epigram 29 on its titular Sabina, as we saw in 28, Balbilla claims direct ownership over the words of her verses in its final line. Although, through her skilled poetics, Julia Balbilla undoubtedly honored her patrons, as she etched her words— or, likely, as her words were etched for her— into the fabric of history, her personal positionality within her work remained dominant; she claims her verses, her voice, her narrative, for her own, because she feels that her high social status entitles her to take ownership over her high poetry.

In her third epigram, poem 30, Julia Balbilla continues to boast about her close affiliation with the imperial family by adopting Sapphic language to describe the empress Sabina, demonstrating her poetic talents and characterizing the amity of her relationship with the queen.

<u>30.</u>

ὅτε τῇ πρώτῃ ἡμέρᾳ οὐκ ἀ-
κούσαμεν τοῦ Μέμνονος.

1 χθίσδον μέν Μέμνων σίγαις ἀπε[δέξατ’ ἀκ]οίτα[ν],
ὡς πάλιν ἀ κάλα τυῖδε Σάβιννα μό[λοι].
τẹ́ρπει γάρ σ’ ἐράτα μόρφα βασιλήϊδος ἄμμας,
ἐλθοίσαι δ’ [α]ὖ̣ται θήϊον ἆ̣χον ἴη,
5 μὴ καί τοι βασίλευς κοτẹ́σῃ, τό νυ δᾶρον ἀτά[ρβης]
τὰν σέμναν κατẹ́χες κουριδίαν ἄλοχον.
κὠ Μέμνων τρέσσαις μεγάλω μένος Ἀδρι[άνοιο]
ἐξαπίνας αὔδασ’, ἀ δ’ ὄΐοισ’ ἐχάρη.

When, on the first day, we did not
hear Memnon.

1 Yesterday, on the one hand, Memnon accepted the spouse
in silence,
So that beautiful Sabina might come back here.
For the lovely form of our queen pleases you,
For she, having come, you must send forth a divine
cry,
5 Lest the king grows angry at you, now you, fearless,
for a long time detain the august wedded wife.
And Memnon, having trembled at the might of great
Hadrian,
Suddenly spoke, and she was gladdened to expect it.

If we look to the prose preface of poem 30, we see Julia Balbilla continuing to highlight her own physical presence with Empress Sabina before Memnon in her use of the third-person plural ἀκούσαμεν. Here, as a member of the royal court and traveling companion to the Emperor and Empress, Balbilla speaks to her own experience at the Colossi in narrative unity with the ‘august’ Sabina. Already having asserted in epigram 29 that the nobility of her lineage would allow her to preserve Memnon’s immortal soul within her poetic mind (29.12), Balbilla has established her right, granted by her elite status, to a personal relationship with Memnon. Now, in using Sapphic language to describe the empress Sabina, so too does Balbilla establish her right to a personal relationship with the queen.

In epigram 30, as a response to Memnon’s silence in the presence of royal Sabina, Julia Balbilla humanizes the colossal statue in order to praise her patrons. Accounting for the events of

the previous day, in which Memnon did not speak to Sabina, Balbilla suggests that Memnon was so awed by the empress' beauty that he kept his silence to ensure a second audience with the κάλα... Σάβιννα ("beautiful Sabina"), who is then described as having an ἐράτα μόρφα ("lovely form"). Her word choice, for Rosenmeyer, is significant here, as "[t]he word μόρφα is not commonly used for female beauty, and Balbilla's phrase ἐράτα μόρφα (30.3) has a unique precedent in Sappho's μόρφαν ἐπήρατον (96.22)."[109] Adopting the Sapphic voice in her praise of the empress, Balbilla both demonstrates her ability to incorporate linguistic patterns that may find her favor with her Hellenophilic emperor, coopting, as described above, the erotic mode of Sappho's love poetry for political purposes, and now additionally highlights the closeness of her personal relationship with Sabina through the highly unusual, intimate word choice ἐράτα. Although Balbilla does not describe the empress as her own object of desire, Sabina has certainly caught the attention of Memnon: it is the statue, rather than Balbilla, who risks the incursion of Hadrian's wrath for too long detaining the queen (30.5-6). While the poetics of Julia Balbilla do not suggest that the poet herself harbors erotic desire for the empress, her adoption of Sapphic language in her encomia allows her to appropriate the sexual flattery of the lyric genre for a politicized and intimate celebration of the empress Sabina.

Furthermore, as Rosenmeyer suggests, even Balbilla's *naming* of Sabina in the form Σάβιννα is an overt reference to Sappho. We can safely say this because, on that November visit to Egyptian Thebes in A.D. 130, Julia Balbilla was not the only female member, or, for that matter, the most significant member, of Hadrian's entourage to inscribe[110] a message on the Colossus. The empress Sabina too sought to commemorate the occasion with a line of verse, a physical attestation to her presence in the space. I have recorded Sabina's words below so that

[109] Rosenmeyer 2018: 161-62.
[110] Or indeed, again, to have had her words inscribed for her.

her own autograph may be compared to the form ‘Σάβιννα’ used by Julia Balbilla (30.2).

Sabina, 32

[Σα]βεῖνα Σεβαστὴ
[Αὐτ]οκράτορος Καίσαρος
[Αδρια]νοῦ, ἐντὸς ὥρας
[Μέμνονο]ς δὶς ἤκουσε…

Sabina Augusta
Of Emperor Caesar
Hadrian, within one hour
Heard Memnon twice...

As we can see in Sabina’s autograph above, the empress names herself as [Σα]βεῖνα. Balbilla, however, when referring to Sabina in the nominative in epigram 30.2, Σάβιννα, and in the dative in 31.3, Σαβίννᾳ, uses a slightly different form of the empress’ name.[111] In these two cases, as Rosenmeyer notes, “the orthography of Σάβιννα [...], used instead of the more regular Σαβεῖνα [...], reflects Balbilla’s adoption of an Aeolic form that calls to mind Sappho’s spelling of Gyrinno (82a Voigt: Γυριννώ), as well as the name of the archaic Greek poet Corinna, whose native Boeotian dialect was a form of the Aeolic.”[112] In tying her naming of Sabina to the poetry of Sappho and Corinna, Balbilla signals her own connection to the most celebrated female poets of antiquity, authorizing her exalted presence next to great woman writers in the Greco-Roman literary tradition.

Julia Balbilla, both by repeatedly referencing the imperial couple and by advertising her noble lineage, demonstrates her status as an aristocratic woman in her epigrammata. As a poet, Balbilla’s position as a literary client to Hadrian and Sabina and the Sapphic allusions of her verses serve to enhance her prestige as an author of high poetry. Refashioning the dialect of

[111] Although Balbilla *does* use Σαβεῖνα, the more common form, in her prose preface to poem 29 when she states that she was with τῇ Σεβαστῇ Σαβείνῃ.
[112] Rosenmeyer 2018: 160-61.

erotic lyric for imperial praise, Balbilla demonstrates her ability to tailor her work to the intellectual preferences of her client, reinforcing both the merit of her writing and the eminence of her person.

Conclusion

Over the course of this paper, I have presented an argument that places the poets Sulpicia, Melinno, and Julia Balbilla in the same elite-educated milieu as that of their male countertypes. It is my belief that the erudite-elite contributions of these three women to erudite-elite Roman literature represent a unique social and poetic position within the 'male' generic traditions which they occupy, the studying of which allows us access to an elite female perspective otherwise largely absent from the Classical literary canon. Indeed, in ancient Rome, all elite citizen women occupied a space laden with paradoxes; while the Cornelias of society were glorified in the public conscious for their erudite pastimes and participation in the education of their children, the Clodias of the same society were demonized for their political meddling and departure from the ideal of female domesticity. While women of means were not prohibited from receiving an education, the model of instruction to which they had access was intended to prepare a man for the public responsibilities that a woman was barred from undertaking. While women were expected to play an active role in raising their children in the Roman *familia*, they too were constantly at the mercy of their *paterfamilias* or guardian.

Sulpicia responds to this environment directly: in the typical fashion of a Roman love elegist, she uses her poetry to challenge the Roman social and legal conventions that limit her behavior. But, unlike her male contemporaries, Sulpicia's frustrations lie not in matters of war, politics, or civic participation, but in the issues faced by elite Roman women. Through her poetry, Sulpicia protests the system of guardianship that holds her hostage in the countryside (Sulpicia [3.14]), imploring her uncle Messalla to retire his unwavering, watchful gaze over her. Actively adopting the role of speaker in a genre in which women are principally represented as

objects of desire, she rejects the social mores that would characterize her love affair as illicit and, in so doing, valorizes expressions of female sexuality.[113]

Both Melinno, through her choice of meter, and Julia Balbilla, through her choice of dialect, emulate Sappho in their compositions, simultaneously emphasizing their high poetic abilities and exploiting their unique positions as female poets to better authorize their works presence within the 'male' literary tradition. Melinno's "Hymn to Rome", the first poem of its linguistic and thematic pairing to be written, offers interesting insight into one author's take on the rising power of Rome. Choosing to dedicate her hymn regarding this growing empire to the goddess Roma herself, we can see how Melinno negotiates gendered virtue dynamics through a 'masculine' female figure, and fashions Homeric themes and language into a Sapphic meter. Julia Balbilla, who was commissioned by Emperor Hadrian to produce her four epigrammata, serves as a testament to the heights an educated-elite Roman woman could reach with her intellect in the public sphere, and uses Sapphic signaling to the benefit of both her own poetic reputation and her imperial patron's tastes.

All three of these women, I would argue, advance the genres to which each of their poetic bodies respectively belongs through a perspectival expansion of narratives within 'male' literary traditions. Their poetry, accordingly, is worth reading as erudite-elite contributions to erudite-elite Roman literature, contributions which offer a unique view into the minds of educated ancient women. Let us not, then, simply relegate the studying of female-authored poetry to the field of Classical gender studies. Let us instead study female-authored Roman literature as Roman literature. Let us read woman, and let us read her as she writes herself.

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[113] Significantly, this flouting of Roman social conventions and glorification of oppositional behavior is emblematic of Roman love elegy. In characterizing the pursuit of the *docta puella* as *militia amoris*, they reject martial battles in favor of valorizing the battle for requited love. For examples of the *militia amoris* in elegy, see Ovid 1.9; Propertius 1.6; Tibullus 1.1. For scholarship on the *militia amoris* of Roman love elegists, see Murgatroyd 1975.

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