

Rosenmeyer, P. (2008) Greek Verse Inscriptions in Roman Egypt: Julia Balbilla's Sapphic Voice", *Classical Antiquity* 27, 333-57.

In 130 CE, Hadrian and Sabina traveled to Egyptian Thebes. Inscriptions on the Memnon colossus document the royal visit, including 54 lines of Greek verse by Julia Balbilla, an elite Roman woman of Syrian heritage. The poet's style and dialect (Aeolic) have been compared to those of Sappho, although the poems' meter (elegiac couplets) and content are quite different from those of her archaic predecessor. This paper explores Balbilla's Memnon inscriptions and their social context. Balbilla's archaic forms and obscure mythological variants showcase her erudition and allegiance to a Greek past, but while many of the Memnon inscriptions allude to Homer, Balbilla aligns herself closely with Sappho as a literary model. The main question raised here is what it means for Julia Balbilla to imitate Sappho while simultaneously honoring her royal patrons in the public context of dedicatory inscriptions.