

**"Teaching Transgressive Roman Women:  
The *Persona* of Fulvia in Cicero's *Philippics*"  
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**The Historical Fulvia: a brief review**

**PRIMARY SOURCES**

Cicero (106-43 BCE) *Philippicae* (44-43) 2.11, 48, 77, 95, 113; 3.4, 10, 16; 5.11, 22; 6.4; 13.18; *pro Milone* (52) 28, 55; *ad Atticum* 14.12.1 (Dec. 44)

Nepos (c. 110-25 BCE) *De Latinis Historicis: Atticus* 9.2, 4 (before 32 BCE)

Octavian (63 BCE-14 CE) [Martial, *Epigrammata* 11.20.3-8]

Livy (64/59 BCE-17 CE) *Ab Urbe Condita: Periochae* 125, 127.2

Paterculus (c. 19 BCE-31 CE) *Historia Romana* 2.74.2-3, 2.76.2

Asconius (9 BCE-76 CE) *Pro Milone Ciceronis* 32, 40

Valerius Maximus (14-37 CE) *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* 3.5.3, 9.1.8

Plutarch (45-120 CE) *Antony* 10.3, 20.1, 28.1, 30.1-4, 32.1

Suetonius (c.69-122 CE) *De Rhetoribus* 5.1, *Divus Augustus* 62

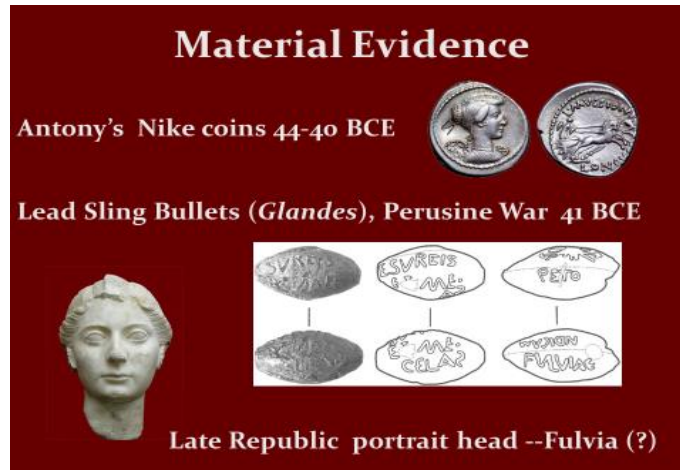
Florus (c. 74-130 CE) *Epitome* 2.16.5

Appian (c. 95-c.165 CE) *Bella Civilia* 3.51, 3.58, 4.29.1, 32.1 5.14.1-3, 19.1, 21.1, 33.1, 43.1, 50.1, 52.1, 54.1, 55.1, 59.1, 62.1, 66.1

Dio (155-235 CE) *Roman History* 45.13.2, 35.3, 47.8.2-5, 48.4-6, 10, 12-13, 15,

Fulvia is unique among Republican women for the number of ancient texts in which she appears, both contemporary and those written generations after her death. She played a significant if brief role in the struggle that contributed to the constitutional crisis of the late Republic and in the chaos that followed the assassination of Julius Caesar (March 15, 44 BCE).

Nevertheless, the historical Fulvia remains essentially unknowable, even in regard to the basic facts of her life. This is partly a result of her sex: as a woman in Republican Rome, she could participate in few activities that would make her worthy of record until she challenged male prerogatives. In addition, not a single word of her own has survived – not even her letters, of which there is evidence – which could provide insight into her thoughts and motivations for her behavior which others freely construct. Finally, and most importantly, the living Fulvia has been effaced by narratives written by Republicans hostile to Antony, like Cicero, by the victor of the civil wars, Octavian, and by later historians like Appian & Dio who relied on propaganda and Augustus' lost *Memoirs* to reconstruct the events of the civil war.



Not surprisingly, material evidence is scanty: it consists of possible portrait busts on Victory coins, crude insults on sling bullets from Perugia, and a possible marble head.

Those seeking to discover the historical Fulvia behind Paterculus' charge that there was nothing feminine about her except her body *nihil muliebre praeter corpus gerens* (*Roman History* 2.74) must engage feminist strategies for reading between the lines for what is left unsaid about her, set her conduct within the brutality of the civil wars, and question the bias of surviving evidence.




Lacking a firm date, scholars place Fulvia's birth between 84-80 BCE, making her only 40-44 years old at her death. Cicero (*Philippics* 3.16) sets her birthplace in southern Italy, naming with disparagement her recent lineage and noting her inherited wealth as an only child. The Flavii and Sempronii Tuditani, plebeian nobility on both sides, were no doubt part of a close network of powerful families. Given her aristocratic status and her rhetorical abilities, she may well have received an education beyond the basic training normally afforded girls.



## Fulvia Coniunx

- 62/59 BCE: Publius Clodius Pulcher (93-52 BCE),  
Tribune of the Plebs 58 BCE  
two children: P. Clodius Pulcher, Clodia Pulchra
- 52/51 BCE: Gaius Scribonius Curio (?-49 BCE),  
Tribune of the Plebs 50 BCE  
son: Gaius Scribonius Curio
- 47/46 BCE: Marcus Antonius (c.83-30 BCE),  
elected co-Consul with Caesar 44 BCE  
two sons: Marcus Antonius Antyllus, Iullus Antonius

Unlike the ideal Republican *univira*, Fulvia married three times successively, losing her first two husbands to violent death. In some ways a traditional *materfamilias*, she was a supportive wife, a concerned mother of 5 children -- four of them male citizens -- and an enterprising manager of money. There is no evidence of her agency in her first two marriages: did she choose her husbands? Were they *manus* marriages? The men she married were remarkably similar, perhaps even in reckless character: coevals and acquaintances, they promoted Caesar and had promising careers as *populares*. Given Fulvia's later management of Antony's interests, it is probable that she was politically active in her first two marriages as well, but behind the scenes, as was irreproachable.




## Fulvia *Matrona Publica*

- 52: display of Clodius' wounded body  
testimony in court against Titus Annius Milo
- 44: Present in Antony's camp in Brindisium (Cicero)  
Lobbies senators not to outlaw Antony
- April 43: Protected by Atticus from Antony's enemies  
November: Second Triumvirate & proscriptions

Fulvia attracted public attention in 52 BCE when she displayed Clodius' body and her grief outside her home. At Milo's trial for Clodius' murder she and her mother gave moving testimony that led to his exile.

Fulvia does not appear in public again until 44 BCE, after her marriage to Antony and the births of their sons, when Cicero places her in Antony's military camp where he challenges her presence as unseemly. From this time forward her financial and political advocacy for Antony made her a target of public abuse unlike any experienced before by a Roman noblewoman. Dressed in mourning with Antony's mother and her children, she begs senators at home and on the streets to oppose Cicero's motion to outlaw Antony. In Spring of 43 Antony's losses in battle against Republican forces leave her victim to legal and financial attacks in Rome, protected only by Cicero's friend Atticus. The formation of the Second Triumvirate, sealed by her betrothal of her daughter to Octavian, gives her a voice in the deadly proscriptions that follow.



*Fulvia Matrona Publica*

- 42: Rejects matrons appealing the war tax
- 42-40: Is Antony's unauthorized agent in Rome; Eumeneia (Phrygia) renames itself Fulvia (coins)
- 41-40: Opposes Octavian in Antony's absence; Collaborator in the Perusine War
- 40: Flees to Greece; rebuked by Antony in Athens; ill, dies in Sicyon

In 42 Fulvia rejects the deputation of wealthy *matronae* who seek her support against the war tax, forcing her cousin Hortensia to lead the protesting women before the Triumvirs. In the absence of Octavian and Antony, she becomes the most powerful person in Rome. Among other signs of her importance, the city of Eumeneia renames itself Fulvia and mints coins in her image.

In 41 she challenges Octavian's resettlements of the veterans, touring with her children to remind the soldiers of Antony's victories, negotiating terms and raising troops for Antony's brother Lucius to oppose Octavian. At Lucius' defeat in Perugia, she flees with her children to Athens where she meets a reproofing Antony; sick, she departs for exile in Sicyon, where she dies. Antony and Octavian almost immediately reconcile, their accord sealed only months after Fulvia's death by Antony's marriage to Octavia.

Despite the bias and exaggeration of surviving evidence, Fulvia shows herself a woman of courage, determination and insight into the political struggles of her time. For her, despite Cicero's criticism, there is no distinction between the affairs of Antony's *domus* and the business of state, a practice that Augustus soon adopts for his governance of the Empire. Ambitious on behalf of her husbands, Fulvia is unconcerned that the leadership of the Roman Republic will be hijacked by a single man, as she intended that man to be her husband, Antony.