

# Sulpicia, a Latin Sappho?

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This talk aims to shed light on the historical and literary contexts of Sulpicia, “Servius’ daughter,” known to us only from a cycle of poems, celebrating her amatory trysts and tribulations with a man named Cerinthus, included in the third book of Tibullus’ works ([Tib.] 3.8–18). Unlike other famous aristocratic women from classical antiquity, the poet/lover Sulpicia is not mentioned anywhere else in ancient literature or material documents, and so our knowledge of her historical existence and literary activity derives solely from the poems in which she speaks and is named. This constitutes a distinct challenge for constructing her biography, and one not shared either by the famous Greek poet Sappho or by such notorious historical women as Cleopatra or Livia, both of whom were the targets of copious, often critical, commentary in the male-authored literature of classical antiquity but who have left no first-person accounts of their lives and loves. If other scholars of women in antiquity have asked how it is possible to write biographies of women whose life-histories are known to us only in refraction, filtered through ancient preconceptions of gender and sexuality (and in Sappho’s case, through tattered fragments of first-person verse), this talk explores the possibility of direct contact with a historical Roman woman.