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**ON CLEOPATRA VII:**  
**FROM HORACE AND SHAKESPEARE TO SELF-REPRESENTATION**

by

**Silja M. Hilton**

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of Bucknell University

For the Degree in Bachelor of Arts with Honors in


Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies

April 10, 2022

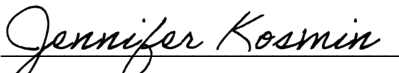
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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	v
<i>Introduction.....</i>	6
<i>Chapter 1: Horace’s Cleopatra: from inpotens to agency.....</i>	15
1. A battle of epic proportions.....	15
2. <i>Nunc...nunc...nunc...tempus erat.....</i>	22
3. Mad queen or mad plans? Contaminated men or contaminated empire?.....	29
4. Metamorphic transitions on a Northern plain: two doves and a hare? Monster or warning?.....	33
5. On <i>nec muliebriter; voltu sereno; serpentes</i> : Cleopatra’s manner of dying.....	37
6. <i>non humilis mulier.....</i>	42
7. A note on Horace’s <i>Epode 9: emancipatus feminae</i> ; problems in Plutarch.....	43
<i>Chapter 2: Shakespeare’s Cleopatra: ‘Infinite Variety’.....</i>	46
1. The Bard, his life, and his play.....	47
2. On tawny: the colorized other.....	53
3. On gypsy’s lust, Strumpet: the exoticized and sexualized ‘other’.....	61
4. No woman in me; on Isis.....	69
5. Where do we go from here.....	77
<i>Chapter 3: Return to Egypt and the ‘real’ Cleopatra.....</i>	78
1. Introduction: <i>γινέσθωι</i> (ginesthoi).....	78
2. Cleopatra’s royal models: Arsinoe II, Cleopatra II, and Cleopatra III.....	81
3. Cleopatra VII and Arsinoe II.....	93
4. <i>Thea</i> and King of Egypt. Triple uraeus?.....	96
5. Isis. Roman Isis?.....	101
<i>Conclusion.....</i>	107
<i>Bibliography.....</i>	109

## Abstract

This thesis explores and analyzes Horace’s *Ode* 1.37 and Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* in context of their poetic and theatrical narratives, word choice, and grammatical structures in an effort to form a clearer image of Cleopatra VII. While each work is placed within its historical settings, I do not pursue their historical ‘truths.’ Rather, I draw from the authors’ literary conceptions about the Ruler, from Horace’s *inpotens* (“a woman lacking in self-control”) to fierce agency in deciding death (“*deliberata morte ferocior*”), to Shakespeare’s ‘othering’ of Cleopatra as tawny, gypsy, and whore, to his portrayals of her as Goddess and Isis. Ultimately, both Horace and Shakespeare fashion Cleopatra according to ancient Roman and Early Modern ideological opposing constructs, such as male versus female, native versus foreign, sexually pure versus sexually indulgent, and more. In an attempt at both challenging and fusing Horace and Shakespeare’s literary narratives with an ancient Egyptian archeological framework, I return to Cleopatra’s representations on coinage as well as inscriptions, while contemplating her own perspectives as possibilities for historical reimagination of a woman and woman in power. By looking to her self-representations, we discover a Queen represented as Egyptian, Greek, female, queen and king, and more. In order to amplify her silenced voice, we must reimagine her narrative by returning to the primary sources she left behind. Only then can a just representation of Cleopatra be formed.

# Introduction

“WHO WAS CLEOPATRA? Who is Cleopatra?”

—Prudence J. Jones, xiii.

Queen of the Nile. Isis divine. Metaphorically sphinx-like. Teenager. Sister-brother marriage. ‘Seducer’ of Rome. Daughter, sister, mother. Fashion-icon. Winged eyeliner and blue eyeshadow. Actium. Death by asp. A woman. Infinite variety. These, among several others, are words and images that quickly come to mind when I think of Cleopatra VII. However, it wasn’t until I became a student of Classics that I would begin to seriously question why an ancient Ptolemaic female ruler, born in 69 B.C.E., still grasps the hearts and minds of modern conversations in classrooms, on TV screens, in books, in theaters, and on social media platforms and the like, millennia later. Look no further than the comment sections on Facebook and YouTube, on the feeds of Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, and we find that this legendary queen lives on in our imaginations and online debates. What is it, exactly, that continues to draw us to the girl, who, at the death of her father in 51 B.C.E., became the last Queen of Egypt at the age of 17?

When CNN’s TV series, *Jerusalem: City of Faith and Fury*, was released in July of 2021, an ad on the channel’s Facebook page posed the following question: “Cleopatra, the original feminist?” Ignoring my initial trepidation at what I might find, I began to study the hundreds of comments below it. What might the modern perception be? What was the common denominator? Where might commenters have obtained the information that formed said perceptions? While

some of my fears were realized—one comment read, for instance, that “she was an inbred whorish Greek”—I pleasantly discovered that a few others, note that they were *few*, pointed to the female Pharaohs before her (Hatshepsut among others) and that Cleopatra VII was the only one in her Ptolemaic line to ever learn and speak Egyptian (anonymous, Ashton 2008, 4). Add to that eight additional languages and we have an Egyptian Queen who allegedly spoke nine! According to Plutarch, a Greek biographer and philosopher, “her tongue, like an instrument of many strings,” could turn to whatever languages she needed to, whether Ethiopian, Hebrew, Troglodytic, Arabic, Aramaic, among others (xxviii.3-4). This is quite extraordinary. It is also pioneering, since none that we know of in her royal line had accomplished this before her (Ashton 2008, 4).

Continuing my exploration of current online debates, I discovered that another Facebook user claimed, “If a queen has to be seductive to wield power, she is no more powerful than the local brothel worker” (anonymous). This is problematic on several accounts, however, what must be redefined is the word *power*. Who is allowed to hold power and why? Does power go beyond societal status? Does power involve personal agency? What about power as freedom to choose and the right to intervene or take action on behalf of oneself or another? Embedded within this user’s statement is a dig at female sexuality in relationship to the status that women hold. Can a sexually engaged woman be considered a powerful leader? Certainly men who embrace sexuality have been and are still considered as such. Both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, each a partner with Cleopatra, had several relationships and scandals attached to their names. Mark Antony was smeared for his provocativeness both before and after Cleopatra, but even more so after. Shakespeare depicts Antony as a brilliant military general having fallen from Roman ways while



Plutarch paints him as having given way to an Egyptian woman. Essentially Mark Antony was ‘othered’ by his own countrymen. Octavian (before he became Augustus), was rumored to have been in a sexual relationship with Julius Caesar--his uncle through adoption--the rumor ironically charged by Antony (Suet. *Aug.* LXVIII.123). Despite this, the modern conversation remains centered on Cleopatra—‘the whorish female queen’--who used ‘seduction’ in order to maintain her power and still, according to Horace’s *Ode* 1.37, beheld her kingdom fall. Nonetheless, we do well to remember that such damaging narratives stem from ancient Roman and Greek sources in which Shakespeare embellished further when he wrote *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1606. In consequence, ancient and Shakespearean literary rhetoric has influenced the perception not only of the Egyptian queen, but of women and women in power alike, for centuries.

In fact, during a lecture on “Women in Power: from Medusa to Merkel” at the London Review of Books December of 2017, Mary Beard stated, “if we try to close our eyes and conjure up an image of a president or a professor, what most of us see is not a woman. And that is just as true, I promise you, even if you are a female professor” (Beard, “Mary Beard: Women in Power”). A scholar of Classics at Cambridge University in London since 1984, she specializes in Ancient History as well as Classical Art and Archeology. Dr. Beard proceeded to inform her audience that, almost 40 years later, imagining herself in her own role as a scholar and professor is an incessant struggle. In preparation for the lecture Beard searched for cartoon images of professors via Google and found only *one* of the first hundred was female: Holly, from the television show, *Pokemon* (Beard, “Mary Beard: Women in Power”). Humorous and expository simultaneously, Dr. Beard resumed to present on the intricate complexities of how we recognize female power and its ongoing confounding problems: from struggling to imagine women running

anything, to women being silenced, to their exclusion from power entirely, to how women are conceptualized, and have been, for millennia (Beard, "Mary Beard: Women in Power").

In an interview with the British online magazine, *Evening Standard*, Beard argued, "Part of the problem--and this goes back to antiquity--is that we don't have a model or a template for what a powerful woman looks like. We only have templates that make them men" (Curtis, Nick, "Mary Beard: We Are Living in an Age When Men Are Proud to Be Ignorant.") She reminds us that Athena, Greek goddess of war and wisdom, while often associated with feminist attributes, was, in fact, born from a man: she sprang forth from the brow of Zeus (Beard, "Mary Beard: Women in Power"). Athena is also a virgin in military gear at a time when the most pivotal role in ancient Greece for a woman was childbearing while battle was exclusively for males. A woman? No. A hybrid of sorts? Yes (Beard, "Mary Beard: Women in Power"). Furthermore, Beard points our attention to Queen Elizabeth I, who, during the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 famously stated, "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too" (Beard, "Mary Beard: Women in Power"). And then there's Cleopatra VII, ancient Egyptian ruler and main focus of this thesis, who, in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* exclaims, "I would I had thy inches, thou should'st know / There were a heart in Egypt" (1.3.41-42, Beard, "Mary Beard: Women in Power"). Whose inches is Cleopatra referring to? Mark Antony's. The persisting and at times unacknowledged ideology that women, in order to have as much agency or power as men, must become *more* like men simply to be taken seriously or to get things done, is a problematic and complex one.

As such, it is my goal in this thesis to first and foremost confront the silencing of historically excluded voices in antiquity, one being Cleopatra VII. While it could be argued Cleopatra is much too lionized to be considered historically excluded, it is worth noting that we are left with only *one* word--the Greek word *γινέσθωι* (ginesthoi), meaning “make it so” or “let it be,” that she herself allegedly signed as a Pharaonic decree on an ancient papyrus (Schuster, “Make It So! Sayeth Cleopatra”). Though Cleopatra must have signed thousands of such documents, the fact remains that this papyrus is the only one to survive and has yet to be verified fully by scholars, which has made the topic controversial (Ashton 2008, 23). Thus, the past and currently persisting, and mostly political narratives that created the Cleopatra we have come to ‘know’ were originally birthed by ancient Greco-Roman historiographers, poets, and authors, such as Horace, Propertius, Vergil, Cicero, Augustus, Cassius Dio, and Plutarch—all men writing about a woman and woman in power. Men who often vilified and rarely complimented her. Men who reduced her to a fictional carving on the shield of Aeneas in Virgil’s *Aeneid* or erased her altogether as reflected in Augustus’ autobiography, *Res Gestae*. Men who laid the groundwork for Shakespeare’s tragedy play, *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which, by complicating her image further, she is described as tawny, gypsy, and Strumpet within the first few lines. Men whose works inspired the embellished 1963 *Cleopatra* movie, immortalized Elizabeth Taylor in the role, and later directed HBO’s *Rome*, where Cleopatra plays a pivotal part. That Cleopatra is beyond ‘well-known’ is true. That she has been historically excluded is also true. Nonetheless, Plutarch’s fairly balanced account did devote almost an entire book to her in his historical work, *Lives*, and this I would argue acknowledges both her significance and power.

What then can we truly know about this female figure from the perspectives of such

authors when none that exist are her own? Which stories--past and present--continue to enforce patriarchal ideas as well as ideological constructs of what allegedly makes or breaks women and women in power? Is there room for reimagination? What space exists to reclaim voices that are lost in the narratives of recognized, and too often epitomized, socio-political, literary, poetic, and rhetorical work? And why is it important? First, it is important because minority groups everywhere, particularly women and women of color, are still struggling to be validated in their own right. A recent example of this is found in the treatment of 2022 U.S. Supreme Court nominee, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson. Though highly competent for her position as judge, republicans and democrats alike have taken advantage of Jackson's confirmation hearing to broadcast issues that have less to do with Jackson's qualifications and more to do with their respective parties, from asking Jackson whether babies are racist to how she defines a woman. While Justice Brett Kavanaugh, nominated and appointed as Supreme Court justice in 2018, was accused of sexual assault, broke down into tears over his love for beer, and exemplified emotionally charged responses from outrage to annoyance during his questioning, Judge Jackson's responses to her own interrogation—often ranging outside the scope of her future duties as Supreme Court Justice—can be observed as continuously calm and collected. To further illustrate the differences in both behavior and treatment of the two judges, Forbes Magazine published a March 2022 article that showcased the reasons why “Ketanji Brown Jackson Can't Dare Display A ‘Brett Kavanaugh Temperament.’” In it, the author points us to the undeniable truth that professional Black women in a “white-dominant space” are “often held to a higher standard, given far less grace and easily labeled ‘angry, difficult or unprofessional.’” Indeed, with every response, Jackson must thread the needle ever so carefully remaining likable, yet

authoritative, deferential, yet expert...and always non-threatening irrespective of what is thrown her way” (Brownlee, “Why Ketanji Brown Jackson Can’t Dare Display A ‘Brett Kavanaugh Temperament’”). By analyzing the interrogation led by Senator Ted Cruz, where Cruz asked Judge Jackson—a black woman—to deny or confirm whether she thought Ibram X. Kendi’s newly published children’s book, *Antiracist Baby*, argues that babies are racist, the author described Jackson’s response as “the epitome of grace and restraint” and “the result of many, many years of practice deflecting disrespectful comments, suppressing visceral emotions and choosing self-control” (Brownlee, “Why Ketanji Brown Jackson Can’t Dare Display A ‘Brett Kavanaugh Temperament’”). That Justice Kavanaugh, a white man, could freely express his own frustrations and anger during a Supreme Court nomination hearing while Judge Jackson must restrain her own justified authentic response is evident of the unjust misogyny and racism still so prevalent in our society and political landscapes today.

Another fairly recent example is also found in the meaning behind the expression, “Nevertheless, she persisted.” A mantra born by the feminist movement in 2017, Senator Elizabeth Warren was voted to “shut up and sit down” in the senate during the confirmation of Senator Jeff Sessions as U.S. Attorney General, preventing her from reading a letter by Coretta Scott King (Beard, “Mary Beard: Women in Power”). Regardless of senatorial process, political affiliations, or justifications, what makes it extraordinary is this: Senator Warren was not only excluded from the formal debate and curbed from using her voice; during the days that followed, several men *did* read King’s letter, including members of Warren’s own party. In simplicity, the same rules that applied to Warren did not apply to them (Beard, “Mary Beard: Women in Power”). Second, evidence of other ancient women who were historically significant in their

time, but whose voices have been lost aside from Cleopatra, also survive. One is Cicero's daughter, Tullia, whom we 'come to know' through letters exclusively written by her father and his correspondents. Note that no letters by Tullia herself exist. While she must have been deep in the mix of the politics of her time in the one way that women could be, she is still unknown to us (Treggiari 2002, 52-54). Another is Octavia the Younger, sister to Octavian. Considered the most prominent woman in ancient Rome and admired for her loyalty, nobility, and humanity, she is frequently seen in historical and literary narratives pitted against Cleopatra in an attempt at exalting Roman feminine ideals. Her mentions by ancient historiographers as well as by Shakespeare in his play often work to vilify Cleopatra, as a whorish 'alien' woman is juxtaposed with the virtuous native one. This is problematic for *all* women since patriarchal rhetoric and unbridled justifications have rendered female behavior into extremes: one that qualifies and one that disqualifies. Regardless, we do not know with what level of agency Octavia herself operated, since her personal writings and documents do not exist. Three more women come to mind, one Zenobia of Palmyra, deemed the ancient rebel queen of Syria, and also Boudica, Celtic queen who led a revolt against the Romans in 60/1 C.E. Moreover, Enheduanna (2286 B.C.E.-2251 B.C.E.)—Sumerian princess and priestess as well as considered the world's first poet and author—is a hidden woman of ancient history, though most of her work survives. Then there are, of course, the missing stories and silenced voices of millions of slaves and 'common' folk.

In order, then, to understand how our knowledge and perceptions of Cleopatra have been fashioned into being through time, I explore aspects of her portrayals in Horace's *Ode* 1.37 as well as Shakespeare's version in *Antony and Cleopatra*. While each work is placed within its

historical settings, I do not pursue their historical ‘truths.’ In Chapters 1 and 2, I draw from the authors’ literary conceptions about the Queen, from Horace’s *inpotens* (“a woman lacking in self-control”) to fierce agency in deciding death (“*deliberata morte ferocior*”), to Shakespeare’s ‘othering’ of Cleopatra as tawny, gypsy, and whore, to his portrayals of her as Goddess and Isis. Ultimately, both Horace and Shakespeare fashion Cleopatra according to ancient Roman and Early Modern ideological and opposing constructs in combination with their own, such as male versus female, native versus foreign, sexually pure versus sexually indulgent, and more. In chapter 3, in an attempt at both challenging and fusing Horace and Shakespeare’s literary narratives with an ancient Egyptian archeological framework, I return to Cleopatra’s representation on coinage as well as inscriptions, while contemplating her own perspectives as possibilities for historical reimagination as a woman and woman in power. By looking to her self-representation, we discover a Queen represented as Egyptian and Greek, female, queen *and* king, ruler, regent, Pharaoh, goddess, daughter, sister, and mother. In order to amplify her silenced voice, we must reimagine her narrative by returning to the primary sources she left behind. Only then can a just representation of Cleopatra be formed.

## Chapter 1: Horace's Cleopatra. From *inpotens* to agency

“deliberata morte ferocior;  
saevis Liburnis scilicet invidens  
privata deduci superbo,  
non humilis mulier triumpho.”

--Horace, *Ode* 1.37, 29-32.

### 1. A battle of epic proportions

The Roman civil wars that would culminate in the death of Cleopatra VII and Mark Antony, the rise of Octavian as sole ruler of Rome, and the composition of Horace's famous *Ode* 1.37, had begun decades earlier when, in 88 B.C.E., a Roman commander by the name of Lucius Cornelius Sulla attempted to take control of the Republic and marched on Rome. An unprecedented event--he was the first Roman general to march on his own city in four hundred years--it ended in severely damaged towns and cities followed by a series of proscriptions that sent many to their deaths. Plutarch's *Sulla* vividly and poignantly paints the atrocities that accompany such wars, stating that “husbands were butchered in the embraces of their wedded wives, and sons in the arms of their mothers” (XXXI.5-6).<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously, the young Gaius Julius Caesar--Rome's future *dictator perpetuus* (dictator in perpetuity)--became one of Sulla's

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<sup>1</sup> While other sources confirm Plutarch's narrative surrounding the battle of Actium, I have chosen to reference Plutarch's *Lives, Antony* in order to set the historical context for Horace's *Ode* 1.37 as well as for Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* on which Shakespeare's play is based. Plutarch's account was composed some 200 years after the battle of Actium and the deaths of Cleopatra and Mark Antony, and as such, I acknowledge the complexities of treating his work as a historical source while keeping in mind that ancient historical narratives often present with personal agendas, judgments, and biases. I address some of Plutarch's own troublesome and undermining takes on both Mark Antony and Cleopatra at the end of this chapter.



targets, but was saved by his relatives and eventually spared. Even so, Suetonius notes that Sulla did not let Julius Caesar go without regret and a warning, himself supposedly having proclaimed, “...in this Caesar there is more than one Marius” (*Div. Iul.* I.4).

Fast-forward to 44 B.C.E. and Rome receives news that the same Julius Caesar that Sulla had warned against was brutally assassinated by several members of the Roman Senate who despised his growing popularity with the people and feared the end of the Roman Republic once he had obtained the title of dictator for life in 45 B.C.E. Threatened by his power grabs, policies, and reforms, senate member Marcus Junius Brutus<sup>2</sup> et al. sealed Caesar’s fate and got rid of him. Problem solved? Not so much. Chaos erupted and the empire entered into another intense civil war 43-42 B.C.E. Led by senate members Brutus and Gaius Cassius Longinus near a city in Macedonia known as Philippi, it was fought by Mark Antony and Octavian<sup>3</sup> in order to avenge Julius Caesar’s murder. Ever since Sulla, however, no one desired a repeat of such an insurrection nor the destruction or deaths--least of all Octavian, yet, it ushered in proscriptions even more violent than Sulla’s and even Cicero was savagely killed. In order to end the conflict quickly, the Second Triumvirate was formed. This partnership consisted of Octavian himself, Mark Antony; another successful general (and then some), along with Lepidus; a Roman statesman. The empire was split among the three, with Mark Antony taking command of the eastern provinces. Still, continuous disputes, especially those between Octavian and Mark Antony, would eventually lead to the battle of Actium in 31 B.C.E.

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<sup>2</sup> Julius Caesar’s most famous assassin.

<sup>3</sup> Caesar’s great-nephew and heir through adoption.

After Caesar's death, Plutarch reports in his *Life of Antony* that through persuasion, Mark Antony was entrusted with Caesar's treasure (four thousand talents) and all of his documents and decrees. As consul, Antony is said to have appointed magistrates and senators as he pleased and brought men back from exile and released others from prison; he even had his brothers in office "as though Caesar had decided upon all this" (XV.2-3). Hearing of these things, Octavian, only 17 at the time and heir to Caesar's property, visited with the military general, reminding him of Caesar's promise to the people as stated in his will: to give every Roman seventy-five drachmas. Antony's response, as Plutarch relates, was insulting at best, calling Octavian "out of his senses...despising him as a mere stripling," to name a few, though his 'worst' was probably threatening to send Octavian to prison for wanting to erect a golden chair in Julius Caesar's honor. Octavian, however, having taken up cause with enemies of Antony, echoed Cicero's argument, Rome's most famous orator, that the senate should vote him a public enemy. When the senate agreed, Antony was struck with fear and the two eventually reconciled, though it was not to last (XVI.1-3).<sup>4</sup>

Plutarch continues to paint Mark Antony with complexity, describing him as a powerful yet simple-minded man, easily falling prey to his sexual appetites and to the influence of others while being the cause of much scandal. But out of all of these, Plutarch reports that his love for Cleopatra, "a crowning evil," was his most faulty attribute, or worse yet, his most 'faulty' obsession. In fact, Plutarch goes as far as to claim he was "taken captive in this manner," much like Julius Caesar before him. Cleopatra, the ruler of Egypt since 51 B.C.E., had been the lover of Caesar and, in 47 B.C.E., bore him their son Caesarion, meaning Little Caesar

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<sup>4</sup> It was desired for Mark Antony to marry Octavian's sister, Octavia, in order to strengthen their relationship and also to showcase unity within Rome itself. Mark Antony eventually did marry Octavia, but later divorced her.

(XXV.1-2). When Mark Antony arrived in Asia Minor, it was mainly to confront Cleopatra's support of Cassius, his enemy during the civil war, to whom she had evidently donated money. However, upon meeting her at the river of Tarsus, in which Plutarch describes in fairly theatrical ways--Cleopatra was dressed like "Venus in a painting," for one--he hurried off to Alexandria with her (XXVI.5). The two became increasingly more involved, so much so that Mark Antony divorced his then wife, Octavia, gave over certain Roman territories to Cleopatra, had children with her (twins), depicted himself as her co-ruler on Egyptian coinage, and, as Plutarch would have it, partook in many frivolities ignoring his war duties to the dismay of the Romans and the Senate (IX.3-5, L.4, Ashton 2008, 162-163).<sup>5</sup>

Even so, the biographer states he continued to be fierce on the battlefield (his victory in Armenia) despite a massive loss to Parthia, while Octavian worked hard at inflaming the people against him. In return, Mark Antony sent counter-attacks. However, Plutarch reports what might be considered the final two straws leading to Octavian's war-decree: (1) Mark Antony's will, supposedly having been obtained illegally by Octavian, demanding that he be buried in Egypt with Cleopatra, and (2) taking back the authority which Mark Antony had surrendered "to a woman" (LX.1). Since it would look badly for a Roman to wage war against another Roman, Octavian instead waged war against Cleopatra, conveniently intensifying her threat to Rome and to himself. With ships, infantry soldiers, and horsemen, Mark Antony prepared for battle. Of Octavian it was said he had as many horsemen as his enemy. The preparations grew to epic proportions as Mark Antony made the decision to fight Octavian on sea instead of on land. Plutarch describes Mark Antony's choice as "an appendage"--meaning, mere accessory--of

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<sup>5</sup> Octavia is Octavian's sister.

Cleopatra as he seemingly did it only to please her (LXII.1). While enemies of Octavian rallied to Mark Antony's side, Octavian's men reached Mark Antony's sooner than anticipated, and in September of 31 B.C.E. their ships clashed, although they were reported not to have ever physically touched while on sea. Plutarch writes, "The struggle was therefore like a land battle; or, to speak more truly, like the storming of a walled town" (LXVI.1). Despite this, however, Mark Antony was overpowered by three or four of his enemy's fleets simultaneously, Octavian's crews fighting with "wicker shields and spears and punting-poles and fiery missiles" (LXVI.2). Mark Antony's men are reported to have "shot with catapults from wooden towers," while Cleopatra, as a result, was seen leaving for Alexandria taking 60 of her ships with her. Mark Antony is said to have immediately followed after three hundred of his ships were captured and over five thousand of his men had died (LXVIII.1-2).

Still, it was a year until Octavian would reach Alexandria. In the meantime, the two lovers are said to have resumed their lavishness after a period of despondency (LXXI.2). Mark Antony, after being brought the news that his forces had been defeated, and that he had no remaining power in Egypt or anywhere else, prepared celebratory banquets for the city, encouraging drinking, distributing gifts, and more, in order to calm his own anxieties. Both were said to have established a new society, "Partners in Death," while Cleopatra collected venomous animals and tested them on her various subjects (LXXI.2-4). She tried to persuade Octavian to let her children rule Egypt and for Mark Antony to live out his life in Athens, however, Octavian refused. Instead, he encouraged her to kill him and that she would be greatly rewarded as a result (LXXIII.1). Mark Antony attempted to battle Octavian a second time, was sorely defeated, and watched his own fleets surrender over to Octavian which, according to Plutarch, seemed to have

been done willingly. Feeling betrayed by Cleopatra's men, Antony's anger grew towards the queen and in fearing him, she retreated to her mausoleum--where she had collected all of her treasures--and pretended to commit suicide (LXXIV.1-2). Mark Antony, upon receiving the news is reported to have stabbed himself with his sword. Before dying, however, he was told Cleopatra was in fact alive. He was brought to her, in a most peculiar way, and begged her to make peace with Octavian in which she later tries, but unsuccessfully persuades him to do. Because of this, she takes her own life by means of an asp, though whether it in fact was an asp has yet to be confirmed (LXXVII.1-4).<sup>6</sup> Regardless of its uncertainty, it is this epic battle, as well as its aftermath, on which Horace's *Ode* 1.37 is based.

We have Suetonius and Horace's own poetic work to thank for the vast information available to us regarding Horace's life. Otherwise known as Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65 B.C.E-8 B.C.E), Horace's father is assumed to be a freedman, an emancipated slave. While not lavishly rich, he owned a fairly small property, his means were vast enough that he managed to send Horace to both Athens and Rome so that he could receive a Roman upper-class education--an aim that helped Horace climb the social ladder (*Sat.* 1. 6. 6, 45-6). After a failed attempt to reach even greater heights by joining the army of Brutus, which ended up being defeated, Horace wrote his first poems after gaining status as a *scriba quaestorius* (a writer or public scrivener for the Roman treasury)--a highly respectable position.<sup>7</sup> This brought him into contact with Virgil and Varius Rufus, both prominent poets of the Augustan age (*Sat.* 1. 6. 52-62, 2. 6. 40-2). As a result of this introduction, Horace gained access to Maecenas, a friend and political advisor to

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<sup>6</sup> Cleopatra is said to have "let down ropes and cords" from her windows to pull "him up herself" (LXXVII.1-4).

<sup>7</sup> Horace fought for Brutus and Cassius against Mark Antony and Octavian during the battle of Philippi in 42 B.C.E. and is supposed to have fled when the army was defeated. It seems he eventually came to terms with the new regime.

Octavian and a minister of cultural arts who would eventually become his patron and close acquaintance. After reaching the level of *equites*, a position almost matching that of a senate member, Maecenas helped secure Horace's future poetically and financially further by giving Horace his Sabine farm, (*Sat.* 1. 6. 52–62, 2. 6. 40–2, cf. *Sat.* 2. 7. 53). He now had both the time and the means to solely focus on his work and he did so well. Even Augustus, who through affectionate letters attempted to form a closer friendship, offered him "an influential post on his personal staff, but Horace turned this down (Life) and as Epistle 1.7 demonstrates he showed a similar independence towards Maecenas."<sup>8</sup> Since it is widely known that poets often had patrons and depended on their financial support, it is fascinating that Horace refused such a position. Yet, perhaps not. He had already been provided with financial stability through Maecenas.

While rubbing shoulders with prominent figures throughout his career, *Satires* 1.6 demonstrates a poet commemorating his own father and a happy, carefree life. Further, he praises his *libertas* (freedom) from the pressures of a noble ancestry. He states, "Today, if I will, I may go on a bobtailed mule even to Tarentum... Wherever the fancy leads, I saunter forth alone. I ask the price of greens and flour;... I stroll round the cheating Circus and the Forum. I listen to the fortune-tellers; then homeward betake me to my dish of leeks and peas and fritters... In this and a thousand other ways I live in more comfort than you..." (104-14). At least, then, in his work, Horace goes where he goes and does as he wishes. This also included never to criticize his contemporaries--at least not in his satires. His was a mission to mind his business and to write his poetry (Miller 2005: 11). Between 23 B.C.E. and 13 B.C.E., Horace published the ode that, to many scholars, celebrates the fall of Cleopatra, hence the modern unofficial title: '*Cleopatra*

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<sup>8</sup> Suetonius, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, "Horace," from Loeb Classical Library, 38: 468-469.  
Syndikus, "Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus)," from *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

*Ode.* Yet, it is not obvious whether the poem pays tribute to Octavian or Cleopatra or both. Regardless of his intent, Horace has presented us with a stunning lyrical poem that is as frustratingly complex in its meaning as it is structurally dependable in its meter, making it difficult for any scholar to come to a uniform conclusion, whether presenting their analysis through new criticism (literary pedigree) or new historicism (understanding historical context) or a combination of both.

In this chapter I analyze *Ode* 1.37 in context of its poetic narrative, word choice, and grammatical structures in an effort to form a clearer image of Horace's Cleopatra. While the poem is placed within its historical setting, I do not pursue its historical 'truths.' Rather, I draw from Horace's literary conceptions about the queen, from *inpotens* (a woman lacking in self-control) to fierce agency in deciding death ("*deliberata morte ferocior*") and most things in between. In addition, I briefly discuss Cleopatra's representations on coinage as well as inscriptions, while contemplating her own perspectives as possibilities for historical reimagination in combination with Horace's literary ones. While *Ode* 1.37 omits Cleopatra's name, discredits her womanhood, and strips her title, she, nonetheless, through an act of personal choice, stands as *non humilis mulier* ("not a lowly woman").

## 2. *Nunc...nunc...nunc...tempus erat*<sup>9</sup>

Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero pulsanda tellus, nunc Saliaribus	1	Now it's time to drink, now with free foot beat the earth dancing, now--it was time--
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<sup>9</sup> Horace, and Garrison, H. Daniel. *Epodes and Odes - A New Annotated Latin Edition*. Garrison 1991, 68-69 and my own translation.

ornare pulvinar deorum tempus erat dapibus, sodales.		to furnish the couch of the gods with Salian feasts, my friends.
antehac nefas depromere Caecubum cellis avitis, dum Capitolio regina dementis ruinas, funus et imperio parabat	5	before now--sacrilege to bring out Caecuban from our forefathers' wine cellars while the queen was readying mad collapse for the Capitol and ruin for the empire
contaminato cum grege turpium morbo virorum, quidlibet impotens sperare fortunaque dulci ebria. sed minuit furorem	10	with her contaminated flock of foul men sick with vice, a woman so lacking in self-control that she could hope for anything, drunk with sweet fortune. But her madness reduced
vix una sospes navis ab ignibus, mentemque lymphatam Mareotico redegit in veros timores Caesar ab Italia volantem	15	when scarcely one ship escaped unharmed from the fire (at Actium), her mind--frenzied by Mareotic wine--Caesar, flying from Italy, brought her to true fear, chasing her away
remis adurgens, accipiter velut mollis columbas aut leporem citus venator in campis nivalis Haemoniae, daret ut catenis	20	with his oars, as a hawk (pursues) tender doves or a hunter stirred (chasing) a hare on the snowy fields of Thessaly, so that he might deliver into chains
fatale monstrum. Quae generosius perire quaerens nec muliebriter expavit ensem nec latentis classe cita reparavit oras;		the fated omen: and she, seeking to die more nobly was neither a woman frightened at the sword, nor did she with her swift fleet seek out hiding shores;
ausa et iacentem visere regiam vultu sereno, fortis et asperas tractare serpentes, ut atrum corpore combiberet venenum,	25	and she dared to behold, even with a clear countenance, her royal city lying prostrate and brave enough to handle the fierce snakes, so that she might drink the deadly venom with her body
deliberata morte ferocior; saevis Liburnis scilicet invidens privata deduci superbo, non humilis mulier triumpho.	30	with death decided she was more fierce: surely resenting, as one reduced to private citizen, being brought to lofty triumph in fierce Liburnian ships, not a lowly woman.



When reading the first stanza of *Ode* 1.37, my imagination runs wild with luxurious banquets, dancing, and the spilling of wine at the exultant clinking of goblets. A picture of a victorious Octavian, reclining on a magnificently furnished *pulvinar* forms (*O.* 1.37.3), as shields of the *Salii* beat the floors in celebratory commemoration of a fallen queen--the last foreign threat and hurdle to the future emperor of Rome.<sup>10</sup> Having captured Alexandria in 30 B.C.E. and with both the queen and Mark Antony dead to suicide along with the murder of Caesarion, the age of *pax* (peace), otherwise also known as *Pax Augusta* (the Augustan Peace), was now guaranteed. Since the battle resulted in horrific loss of life, Octavian's promises of political peace after years of civil war both at home and overseas heightened the 19-year old's popularity with the Roman people. In fact, he is supposed to have "seduced everyone with the sweetness of [it]" (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 1.2.1). Before this, even the thought of such festivities--or deliciously aged *Caecubum*--would be considered a direct offense against divine law, but *now* it was already time to drink--yesterday (*O.* 1.37.5)!<sup>11</sup> In fact, Horace himself, immediately after Octavian's victory, allegedly claimed to have broken out the Caecuban wine, which was considered the most stellar in all of Latium (*E.* 9.36, in Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 412). Structurally, the poem consists of a lyric Alcaic meter and its themes are considered as deep and complex as its own time.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *pulvinar*: "1 A cushioned couch, one of several on which images of gods were placed...b (applied to a couch occupied by an actual deity or person enjoying quasi-divine honors," from the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*.

*salii*: "Bailey, Cyril, and J. A. North. "Salii." "...processions by the Salii. When they processed they halted at certain spots and performed elaborate ritual dances (*tripudium*, cf. Plut. *Numa* 13), beating their shields with staves and singing the Carmen Saliare, of which fragments are preserved. The idea that their activities marked the opening and closing of a symbolic campaigning season is modern theorizing, open to question," from *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

<sup>11</sup> OLD 2005, v.s. *nefas*, 1167.

<sup>12</sup> Horace claims his main lyric literary model was based on poetry produced in Lesbos, inspired by ancient Greek poets, such as Alcaeus (famous for his drinking songs) and Sappho (*Carm.* 1. 1. 33 f., 1. 32, 3. 30. 13 f.; *Epist.* 1. 19. 32 f.). It's been evidenced that several of his odes reflect direct translations of Alcaeus, especially that of *Ode* 1.37, line one.

The ode opens with a corybantic mood, while its *tempus erat* in line four adds a sense of urgency to the stanza overall. The use of *erat* in line four, however, has been and still is debated by many scholars as it is difficult to conclude, grammatically, whether it is temporal in nature or simply a stylistic liberty. As an imperfect form of the verb “to be” in Latin, *erat* references the past while signifying continuity of an action. For instance, I was reading *Ode* 1.37. This imperfect form, then, after the thrice repeated *nunc* (now) signifies immediacy while giving the poem the greatest urgency: the Salian feast should have happened... yesterday! Challenging this interpretation, however, Nisbet and Hubbard in their 1970 commentary explain that Horace’s use of *tempus erat* (“it was time”) is “urbane” rather than temporal in nature (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 412). If it was temporal, they argue, Horace would have employed the more common *tempus est* (it is time). As such, *erat* is to be considered stylistically sophisticated, as in Liv. 8. 5.3 as well as Ov. *am.* 2. 9. 24, 3, among others, stating that “such an interpretation does not suit *nunc* (one would expect *iam*), and blurs the point of *antehac* [‘before now’] in the next stanza” (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 412, emphasis added).

As an adverb, *nunc* accounts for the present, pressing, and the immediate. The adverb *iam*, on the other hand, often denotes a transition between the past *and* the present and can be translated as either “at *this* time,” “all this time,” or “already” (*OLD* 2005, s.v. *iam*, 815-816, emphasis added). As such, *tempus erat* in Latin poetry would be more commonly seen with *iam* as opposed to Horace’s use, which combines *tempus erat* and *nunc*. According to this argument, Horace is not referring to a time in the past; he is simply breaking poetic convention (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 412). While that may be, I instead propose that Horace does both. In fact, *tempus erat* proves highly significant due to what follows next in line five: Horace warns us that

bringing out the best wine in Latium before now (*antehac*) would be an offense against divine law (*nefas*). Why? Because *before now* Cleopatra was still alive, but now she is dead! According to this interpretation, Horace takes poetic liberty *and* he does it for a reason. In order to clarify this further, we must explore the relationship between *tempus erat* and *antehac nefas*.

As an adverb, *antehac* means “before this time, up until now, previously, in the past or before now” while *nefas* refers to that which is “sacrilege” or “an offense against divine law” (*OLD* 2005, s.v. *nefas*, 1167). Because of this, *tempus erat* likely refers to freedom from the stress of Cleopatra as a foreign threat--the last of the Ptolemies. Garrison confirms this by also suggesting that *erat*, in fact, reinforces even further the urgency of *nunc* while strengthening its relationship with *nefas*, stating it points us to the time *before* the destruction of both Cleopatra and Mark Antony, “implying the time for this celebration came in the past and it is high time to get started” now that the destruction has been realized. As such, *nunc* serves as a contrast to *antehac* signifying the death of the queen as a final relief that gives reason to the call for celebration in stanza 1 (Garrison 1991, 255). Following this argument, it certainly explains the meaning of line 5: “before now--an offense against divine law to bring out Caecuban wine from our forefathers’ cellars.” However, one should also keep in mind that indulging oneself during wartime was already considered a crime. According to Pliny the Elder, “during the second Punic War a certain Fulvius was detected wearing a rose-garland for a party, and was incarcerated by the senate for the duration of hostilities” (*nat*, 21.8, in Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 412). Known also as a chaplet, Pliny refers to the garland as “worn by victors in sacred contests” during early times (21.3, in Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 412). Ironically, Horace himself would have committed such a crime if he indeed poured himself Caecuban immediately following Actium,

for it would take Octavian another year to conquer Alexandria. However, one is not to interpret such notions literally, as this is more than likely fiction (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 412).

Regardless, Horace tells us that, before now, it would be sacrilege to indulge prior to victory.

Also to be noted are the following contrasting ‘call to actions’ as we see here: “*Nunc* est bibendum, *nunc* pede libero / pulsanda tellus, *nunc* Saliaribus / ornare pulvinar deorum / tempus erat dapibus, sodales” (*O.* 1.37.1-4). What does the anaphora (the repetition of *nunc* at the beginning of each phrase) mean for each? Individually they introduce differential needs and necessities as reflected through two sets of gerundives and an infinitive: *bibendum* (“about/ needing to be drunk”), *pulsanda* (“about/needing to beat the earth”), and *ornare* (“to decorate”). Since the adverb *nunc* precedes each, it acts as the modifier as it informs us to do something, how to do it, and that the time to do it is now: “*Now* it’s time *to drink*, *now* with free foot / *beat the earth* dancing, *now*--it was time-- / *to furnish* the couch of the gods, my friends...” The use of such an adverb and its repetition heightens not only the stanza’s gravity but also its necessity as it puts forth a call to act and fast.

By pointing to the adjective *libero* (free) as well at the end of line 1 (“*nunc pede libero / pulsanda tellus: now with free foot / beat the earth dancing*”), it further reinforces such collective activity, stressing that this commemoration is for Rome and the Roman people by “referring alike to the nimbleness of the dance and to Rome’s freedom from Cleopatra’s chains” (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 411). *Libero* is also said to reflect “a play on the wine god Liber,” suggesting “wild dancing and freedom from fear” (Garrison 1991, 255). In addition, it hints at the theme of drinking that runs throughout the ode until it does not. As far as *pulsanda tellus*, both commentaries suggest dancing, however, Nisbet and Hubbard pull back by suggesting that

“one must not imagine Roman gentlemen behaved this way” (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 411). Instead, the call to beat the earth is purely poetic, even if ordinary among commoners (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 411).

As a rebuttal to this argument, the stanza’s energy from the start is very much reflected through lines 2-4 as it manifests specifically in *Saliaribus* (Salian) through *dapibus* (feast) and is reinforced through *sodales* (friends). In fact, *sodales* means either “Of or belonging to the *Salii*; (transf., of sumptuous banquets) like those of the *Salii*,” “A (fellow) member of a fraternity meeting for religious or social purposes...or associated with the cult of Augustus, Hadrian (or other emperors),” or “a member of an obscure priesthood” (*OLD* 2005, v.s. *sodalis*, 1780). While these definitions make it clear that several groups of *sodalitates* existed, it is uncertain if or how they overlapped or interacted.<sup>13</sup> Most important for this discussion, however, is Horace’s deliberate reference to the *Salii*, as they are recorded to have put on glorious parties and performed “elaborate ritual dances” using staves to beat their shields and singing the *Carmen Saliare*. In hopes of the *Carmen Saliare* shedding further light on the historical context within Horace’s *Saliaribus*, it was discovered that, while fragments of this archaic Latin song has been preserved, its inscriptions are unintelligible which led researchers to conclude its diction is likely obsolete (*tripudium*, cf. *Plut. Numa*. 13, *Hor. Epist.* 2.1.85–6; *Quint. Inst.* 1.6.40, *OLD* 2005, v.s. *Carmen Saliare*). Regardless, *sodales*, *Saliaribus*, and *dapibus* strongly suggest more than a mere poetic idea as Nisbet and Hubbard conclude. Instead, these very specific references to Roman ritual celebration and feasts, along with the stanza’s vigor, urge its readers with a compulsory call to dance now and to do it freely: the queen is dead at last!

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<sup>13</sup> See H. S. Versnel, ‘Historical Implications’, in C. M. Stibbe and others (eds.), *Lapis Satricanus* (1980), 108–27.

### 3. Mad queen or mad plans? Contaminated ‘men’ or contaminated empire?

Enter Cleopatra. In stanza one, it is clear that bringing out the Caecuban too soon would be criminal. Here in stanzas two and three Horace explains why: there is destruction underway for the Roman empire and capitol (*capitolio*) unless Cleopatra, ‘in her madness,’ is stopped. Horace’s reference to Rome’s capitol (also known as the Capitoline Hill) is pertinent to the poem, as it was held in high regard by the Roman people due to its religious significance as well as its role as citadel. One of Rome’s Seven hills, it “is best known as the site of the great temple begun by the Tarquins...and dedicated, in the first year of the republic according to tradition, to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Juno, and Minerva” (Tac. *Ann.* 12. 24; Livy 1. 7, etc.). As such, *capitolio*, both historically and poetically, symbolized the essence of Roman power as well as divine destiny. What makes it all the more significant is that Cleopatra is to have threatened “to dispense justice” alongside Mark Antony from this very sacred place as she is described by Dio Cassius as having “hoped to rule the Romans” (50.4.3-6, in Jones 1971, 148).

To further this theme of Capitoline peril, Horace has also omitted Cleopatra’s name and replaced it with *regina* (queen). As a queen, she was known to both the Romans and the Egyptians as having come from a long line of fierce Ptolemaic rulers. She was also known to the remaining Hellenistic world. In fact, she was so powerful that her authority made her dangerous, especially to the Romans. In this context, Horace’s direct reference to Cleopatra’s power through his use of *regina* makes sense. Though the word queen clearly refers to Cleopatra’s royal status, it is another matter entirely whether Horace uses it to compliment or discredit her. For instance, Horace may simply be alluding to her position. Or, he might be reminding his Roman reader of a

time when the concept of kingship and monarchy in Rome, probably more so to the Roman aristocratic ideology, had held negative associations. The last Roman king, Tarquinius Superbus, was said to have been cruel and tyrannical. The overthrow of the Roman monarchy was finalized when his son, Sextus, raped Lucretia--a noble woman and the wife of Tarquinius Collatinus--who with L. Iunius Brutus, ended up getting Superbus exiled and as a result, founded the Roman republic (Livy 2. 2. 11).<sup>14</sup> In this context, Horace's use of *regina* is likely not a favorable one if he likens Cleopatra as queen to the cruel tyrannies of a Roman king.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that the "idea of a woman in power" was generally thought of as a "perverted" concept (Garrison 1991, 255).

This perversion is emphasized in line 7, where *dementis* seems to be a transferred epithet. "Transferred epithet" is used to describe an adjective that you would expect to modify one word, but instead modifies a different word in the sentence. In this case, the epithet, which is ostensibly modifying *ruinas*, seems to be commenting on *regina*. As different translations will show, however, this shift often rests entirely in the hands of the translator. One interpretation reads: "It was wrong [to bring out the Caecuban] while Cleopatra *in her madness* was plotting Rome's ruin" (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 413, emphasis added). Suggesting that Horace, perhaps, was motivated politically in order to discredit Cleopatra as a ruler, the commentators point to Cicero, informing us that he often ascribed "madness to his enemies" (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 413). Furthermore, the transfer of the adjective is defensible "if Horace is saying that to destroy Rome

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<sup>14</sup> Fearing loss of power and alienation from the Senate, the Roman Republican ruling class would often fret at the rise of a new charismatic leader popular with the masses. This is why Julius Caesar and Augustus would avoid the title *rex* (king), "not because it was unpopular, but because it was unacceptable to the nobility" (Oxford Classical Dictionary: 2012).

<sup>15</sup> It is also worth pondering what word a Roman would use who DIDN'T want to discredit her. Is there a better one than *regina*?

would be a mad act. Yet one expects him to say ‘To think that one can destroy Rome is a sign of madness’; if that is what he means, the transference of *dementis* to *ruinas* is irrational” (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 413). This stands in direct opposition to Garrison’s translation in the English, even if he agrees that the epithet itself is transferred from *regina* to *ruinas* in the Latin (1991, 255). His interpretation reads: “before this it was a crime to celebrate, while a *mad queen* and her diseased eunuchs were plotting Rome’s destruction” (Garrison 1991, 255, emphasis added). Here in the English, *dementis* (mad) modifies *regina* (queen) instead of *ruinas* (collapse). As such, one is left to contemplate a crazy queen versus a queen with thought out strategies and whether the act or the person embodies the madness or both...or not at all. For instance, Cleopatra, rather than acting on ‘uncontrollable impulse’ or in a state of ‘royal insanity,’ may in fact have carefully calculated how to secure Egypt from Rome. This reimagination presents a very different woman and queen. Further, to what extent a Roman, who spoke Latin naturally, questioned whether *dementis* modified *regina* or *ruinas*, we cannot know. If anything, Horace presents us with opportunities for interpretation and as we decipher the poem from the perspective of the modern eye, we are left to extrapolate its exact meaning.<sup>16</sup>

The ode grows progressively more dire as it transitions from madness to contamination, then from contamination to outright physical disgust and perversion. Not only is she readying “mad collapse,” she is readying them with a “contaminated herd of foul men sick with vice.” Horace could not have picked a more despicable team: Cleopatra and her eunuchs. In fact, *contaminato* refers to what was judged to be immoral activity at Cleopatra’s court (cf. Prop 3.11, Sen. *epist.* 87.16, Luc. 10.60, Suid. 4.797, in Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 413). To Rome and

<sup>16</sup> Further research on syntactic patterns in Horace’s criticism of other figures could offer more insight into his treatment of Cleopatra here.



much of the ancient world, Egypt had a low moral reputation (Str. 17.I.II, Mart. 4.42.4, in Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 413). Thus, it makes sense that the word's meanings include "contaminated, polluted, adulterated," and even "second-hand" (*OLD* 2005, v.s. *contaminatum*, 426). In accordance with most commentaries, *contaminato* also modifies *grege*, meaning "flock or herd" but also an "assembly of animals, whether insinuated or implied" (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 413; *OLD* 2005, v.s. *grege*, 777). Made possible, then, based on context, *virorum* (men) in line 10 is a two-pronged insult. It is not only ironic in nature, given that eunuchs were castrated and therefore thought by Romans not to be genuine *vir*i, but Cleopatra's 'men' have been dehumanized altogether, no longer *homines* (human), an adulterated assembly of animals, effeminate (Garrison 1991, 255). Suggesting a different approach to the traditional readings, I raise the question of whether *contaminato* also reflects back on *imperio* (empire), even if just as a momentary thought.<sup>17</sup> If this is the case, the threat that Horace delineates grows stronger yet, as a perverted queen and her degenerates conspire the contamination of an entire empire. Further, *grege* is not introduced to the reader until one has already heard or read *imperio*. As Latin word order is fairly flexible, it means that an adjective can come before or after a noun that it modifies. If this is the case with *contaminato*, it allows room for this sort of interpretation. In addition, stanzas 2-6 demonstrate the introduction to a new stanza in the last line of the prior stanza, permitting the flow of grammar and themes between the two.

*Morbo* in line 9 reeks of further contemptuousness as the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* lists the noun as follows: "1 Disease... 3 A weakness, failing, vice. b w. ref. to sexual perversion" (s.v. *morbo*, 1133). Most notable here is number 3 referring to weakness, failing, or vice with

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<sup>17</sup> The commentaries do not explore this, so I am addressing it here.

reference to sexual perversion. These weaknesses or failings are modified by the adjective *turpium*, meaning offensive to the senses or physically disgusting, and more (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 414; Garrison 1991, 255). The combination of *morbo turpium* is no doubt highly insulting as it shames the sexually divergent body and assumes guilty and disgraceful behavior (*OLD* s.v. *turpium*, 2005). As such, Horace seems to have made the reputation of promiscuous sexuality in Cleopatra's court a moral issue and she is by no means exempt. Cleopatra is equally as perverse if not more so. In line 10, this perversion is heightened by *inpotens* (lacking in self-control) as it contrasts the concept of restraint--a characteristic quality that was highly regarded by the Romans (Garrison 1991, 255). Thus, Cleopatra is everything Rome is not, namely, a "woman *so* lacking in self-control that she could hope for *anything*, drunk with sweet fortune" (emphasis added). Indeed, *quidlibet inpotens sperare* means she was so out of control anything to her seemed possible, while *ebria* (drunk), alludes to its literal meaning, as Cleopatra's drunkenness is mentioned by both Propertius and Plutarch (cf. 3.11.55f, *Ant.* 29, in Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 414; Garrison 1991, 255).

#### 4. Metamorphic transitions on a northern plain: two doves and a hare? Monster or a warning?

In stanza 4, line 13, Cleopatra, frenzied by Egypt's wine, is quickly sobered up as Octavian (*Caesar*) arrives from Italy. A juxtaposition of Cleopatra's lesser *Mareotico* is made with Italy's *Caecubum* in stanza 2, further discrediting the queen.<sup>18</sup> However, stanza 5 stands out

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<sup>18</sup> *Maerotic* represents Egypt's finest wine and is used here as a juxtaposition to Italy's *Caecubum* in stanza one: "Horace tries to give the drink a sinister sound." (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 415).

as metamorphosis unfolds. First to be noted are the Iliadic similes beginning in line 17. A swift-like Octavian, reminiscent of Homer's Achilles chasing Hektor in *The Iliad*, finally arrives in epic heroic fashion (XXII.139-140, Lattimore 1951, 461). As a result, Cleopatra shape-shifts from drunken frenzy into non-threatening prey (*mollis columbas, leporem*). Thus, Cleopatra's metamorphosis from drunken frenzy to tender doves and a hare stands in sharp contrast to Octavian's bravery. He pursues her and she is afraid. However, is there more to the similes than meets the eye?

In "The Central Similes of Horace's Cleopatra Ode," DeForest critiques the long-standing argument that the likeness of Cleopatra to "frightened animals prepares us for the ennoblement of her character," thus, in the end, making her a worthy opponent of Octavian (DeForest 1989, 168). According to this argument, she claims, we lose the deeper meanings embedded within the simile as there is nothing spectacular about "bagging" two doves nor a hare (DeForest, 1989: 169). In addition, the author confronts the perceived misconception that Horace is painting the queen in a sympathetic light: he is not trying to make us feel sorry for her. Instead, she claims the similes foreshadow "the inevitable historical process by which empires arise in adversity, flourish, and come to nothing" as she connects Cleopatra's royal lineage to *mollis columbas* and *leporem*. (DeForest 1989, 168). She writes, "The founder of the Ptolemaic line bore the name Lagos, which is very similar to the Greek word for rabbit" (DeForest 1989, 169). This would explain why Octavian chases Cleopatra through the snowy fields of Thessaly (northern Greece), as Latin poetry often blurred *Haemoniae* with Macedonia, the Ptolemies' original homeland (DeForest 1989, 169). Further, DeForest notes that *columbas* point us to the Greek goddess Aphrodite (Venus to the Romans) with whom the Egyptian Ptolemaic queens were identified. In

fact, she reminds us that Aphrodite's birds are doves and often symbolize love in Greek and Roman mythology. On account of this, the simile hints at a double meaning, as Horace alludes to Cleopatra's deification as well as her affairs with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. Further, Cleopatra is said to have dressed as "Venus in a painting" while encountering Mark Antony in public for the first time (Plut. *Lives, Ant.* XXVI.5, emphasis added). Secondly, DeForest suggests Horace's intention behind Cleopatra as *fatale monstrum* is meant as warning to Octavian that pride comes before the fall: as Egypt fell, so will Rome. She states, "...we can understand why Cleopatra is called a *fatale monstrum*. Since she managed to ensnare two of Rome's greatest generals, monster is perhaps not too strong a term to express the disgust of a patriotic Roman...But the primary reading of *monstrum*...is 'warning'. *Fatale monstrum* in that case means a warning of what is fated to happen...Horace saw Rome's downfall in [Cleopatra's] present triumph" (DeForest 1989, 168, 173, emphasis added).

The above seems plausible enough--exciting even--if we are to interpret the simile as Horace's effort at honoring Cleopatra's royal lineage, thereby ennobled. Further, the double meaning of *fatale monstrum* is thought-provoking; however, there are several reasons why DeForest's interpretation doesn't stick. First, DeForest's version of *fatale monstrum* seems inconsistent with the ode's patriotic pride and the call for urgent celebration in stanza 1. Second, Horace is too consistent in his criticism of the queen thus far (stanzas 2-4). Third, the ode needs a hero: enter *Caesar* in line 16. Fourth, and as already mentioned, Horace explains to us in line 15 that it is *Caesar* who brings Cleopatra to "true fear" (*veros timores*) and who, "flying (*volantem*) from Italy," chases her away. Especially noteworthy are Horace's *veros timores* and *volantem*, as they foreshadow the continued theme of flying and pursuit in the simile: as a hawk, *Caesar*

swoops down and pursues tender doves. As a swift hunter, he chases a hare. In lines 20-21 it is revealed, however, that *Caesar's* intention is to “deliver a fated omen into chains (*daret ut catenis*),” not doves nor a hare.

So why the similes? First, analyzing *mollis columbas* and *leporem* in the context of the prior stanza is important as we remind ourselves of the recurring theme: a predator chasing its prey. Also keep in mind that it is Octavian who brings Cleopatra to ‘true fear.’ In the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, *mollis* means as follows: “5 (of persons) Physically weak, feeble. 14 (of animals) Mild in nature, gentle” (v.s. *mollis*, 1127-1128). As demonstrated in Juvenal and Varro, doves in the pre-Christian era were also “realistically associated with cowardice” (cf. 3.202, 4.4.31f., *rust* 3.7.4... in Otto 88, in Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 416). In addition, if we look to Homer’s lines in *The Iliad*, on which it’s likely Horace’s similes are based, we find a “trembling dove” (Hektor) that “slips away” from Achilles’ grasp momentarily (Homer. *Iliad*. XXII.139-144, Lattimore 1951, 461). Further, in a simile by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, we find a greyhound chasing a frightened hare, while in Vergil’s *Aeneid*, another timorous hare is referenced as Jove’s bird comes soaring from the upper air (Ov. *Met.* 1.534, Verg. *A.* 9.588). As demonstrated above, then, Horace’s dove and hare serve as the manifestation of the fear brought on by Octavian as he renders an otherwise drunken Cleopatra feeble.

In regards to *fatale monstrum*, I agree with DeForest’s suggestion that a Roman may have viewed Cleopatra as monstrous. I disagree, however, with the interpretation that Horace intended to use *fatale monstrum* as a foreshadowing to the future fall of Rome, thereby also warning Octavian of his own. In fact, this minimizes his heroic qualities in stanzas 4 and 5 and lessens the Roman patriotism and celebration in stanza 1. Further, based on the context in stanza

5, Octavian's intentions are to bring a fated omen into chains. While *fatale monstrum* indeed can be read as warning, scholars also interpret it as "bringing doom" rather than as being "sent by the fates" or even as "monstrous," though, of course, it is suggested (Cic. *Pis.* 9, in Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 417). Arguing for this interpretation is J.V. Luce in his 1963 article, "Cleopatra as Fatale Monstrum." Pulling from Horace's other odes, such as *Carm.* 1.2.6; 1.3.18; 3.4.74, he states, "In none of these passages is the word [monstrum] particularly abusive or deprecatory" (Luce, 1963, 253, emphasis added). More importantly, Luce points us to E. Fraenkel, who states, "[monstrum] probably contains less of what we hear in 'monster,' and more of...something outside the norm of nature, *something at which we look with wonder and often with horror*" (Luce, 1963, 253, emphasis added). If anything, *monstrum* assumes that nature is Roman with Cleopatra serving as its deviating force while *fatale* warns us that, unless Cleopatra is brought into chains, Rome--under Egyptian jurisdiction--will be doomed.

### 5. On *nec muliebriter; voltu sereno; serpentes*: Cleopatra's manner of dying

In concluding my analysis of stanza 5 and introduction of stanza 6, it is worth acknowledging a significant switch in mood that is marked by a change in diction. Long noted by critics, lines 21-24 presents a radically different Cleopatra. No longer plotting, no longer drunk, no longer lacking in self-control, no longer mere timid doves nor a hare, Horace's fated omen suddenly seeks to die more nobly (*quae generosius perire*). In consequence, Horace's "treatment of the unnamed Cleopatra as a lethal bogey-woman" ends (Garrison 1991, 256). As a point of reference, "*nec... nec*" in Latin translates into English most often as "neither... nor" as

it distinguishes one thing from that of another. Here, Cleopatra was “*neither a woman* frightened at the sword, nor did she... seek out hiding shores” (emphasis added). Citing Plutarch in *Life of Antony*, *ensem* in line 23 has led some scholars to conclude that Cleopatra may have first attempted suicide by sword (Garrison 1991, 256). This was considered noble and a privilege of those with power. Furthermore, it was a stoic response to an impossible situation, at least in the context of the Roman male-dominated society (Hooff 1990, 51). In addition, it was a political response of Roman aristocrats who were at risk of losing their honor (Hooff 1990, 51). However, some critics argue *ensem* refers instead to events prior to Octavian’s capture of Alexandria. In this case, it does not refer to Cleopatra’s suicide. Instead, the sword is Octavian’s and points to his fleet and armies on sea during the battle of Actium (Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 418). Regardless, of high importance is Horace’s *nec muliebritur* (“not a woman”) in what follows next. How does a woman so lacking in self-control make such a radical switch? She does it like a man.

Furthering this argument is *voltu sereno* (clear countenance) in line 26. Calm and unfazed, Cleopatra dares to behold her kingdom lying in ruins. Bravely (*fortis*), she handles the ‘rough-to-the-touch’ asps (*asperas serpentes*), preparing her body to drink (*conbiberet*) their deadly venom. In fact, it is reported that she hid her desperation from her guards, so much so that she even displayed a “cheerful disposition” (Garrison 1991, 256). Having come to terms with the surrender of Egypt over to Rome, *voltu sereno* speaks to the “philosophical equanimity that the Stoic Romans admired” while *fortis* enables her response to an otherwise impossible situation (Garrison 1991, 256). Surely in this, Cleopatra is *vir*’ized and like Camilla in Vergil’s *Aeneid*, she is only as honorable as she loses the female side of her nature and transforms into a *vir fortis*

(courageous man). In “Camilla: A Queen Undefeated, Even in Death,” Viparelli draws insightful parallels between Vergil’s Camilla and Horace’s Cleopatra. In the *Aeneid*, Camilla appears in book eleven and is portrayed as a warrior-virgin fulfilling a non-traditional role. Having no mother, she is raised like a man, devoted to the goddess Diana--not to marriage nor to the home--while her battle skills outshine that of a Roman warrior. In an attempted ambush against Aeneas (the main protagonist of Vergil’s epic), Camilla is seen as “a *uir fortis*, who shares at Rome a discipline and a system of valor with all his fellow soldiers. In the practice of her *fortitudo* she behaves rationally” (Viparelli 2008, 13). Yet, like Cleopatra, she is discredited when her feminine nature is revealed: “She takes a fancy to the gold of Chloereus’ armor (11. 778-82). [In that] crucial moment, [in] the lust for glory and booty...she become[s] the helpless prey of the man who threatens her life and can harm her” (Viparelli 2008, 11). While she carries her own weapons and is still swift on her feet, she is nonetheless womanly. Criticized by her opponents in war, she becomes a “terrifying creature and nearly a calamity, breaking nature’s sanctioned order” as she challenges her male counterparts abhorred at the thought of being defeated by a female (Viparelli 2008, 14). While Camilla wins all her duels, she is only honored in virile heroism--a virile ‘woman’ (Viparelli 2008, 14).

Further, male identity in accordance with Roman ideologies are threatened as Cleopatra battles Octavian and Camilla plots an attack against Aeneas (Viparelli 2008, 15). Juxtaposing Horace’s *Ode* 1.37 with Vergil’s *Aeneid*, then, Viparelli finds that Cleopatra’s *fatale monstrum* is similar to that of Camilla’s *dira pestis* (terrible plague). As they deviate from the classifications of their gender, each embodies unfamiliar norms and in turn must be transformed. In this transformation they connect in their non-feminine attitudes as Horace’s “not a woman frightened



at the sword” is likened to that of Camilla as a *vir fortis* (courageous man). In death they are equally unstoppable, refusing their enemy’s triumph. Yet, that’s where the similarities end. Whereas Cleopatra’s name is omitted, Camilla’s name achieves eternal fame. While Cleopatra is likened to tender doves and a hare, Camilla is likened to the hawk and the hunter. Whereas Cleopatra dies by suicide, Camilla is executed at the hand of her predator and her own carelessness. Camilla dies representing Italy’s “native heroine..an example of feminine patriotism” (Viparelli 2008, 23). Cleopatra dies a “private citizen, not a lowly woman.” Their differences and similarities are equally striking as the virgin is pitted against the whore, the native against the foreign, and the feminine against the masculine. In the end, however, it is only as *virii fortes* and in death that they are honorable.

Then, what do we make of Horace’s *serpentes*? If dying by sword is nobly Roman, isn’t dying by asps nobly Egyptian? In “Dying Like a Queen,” Gurval explores what Cleopatra’s suicide and Horace’s *serpentes* might have meant to the Greeks, Romans, and the Egyptians. Exploring historical, poetic, and literary fictions, Gurval first confronts the asp as a symbol. Arguing against its representation as a reflection of Cleopatra’s royal position and divine ancestry, he instead suggests, “Cleopatra associated herself closely with both Aphrodite and Isis and was even worshiped as goddess in her own lifetime... Like her father, Ptolemy Auletes, the ‘New Dionysos’ (*Neos Dionysos*) and her son, Caesarion, the ‘New Horos’ (*Neos Horos*), Cleopatra was the ‘New Isis’ (*Nea Isis*)” (Gurval 2011, 56). Further, she is represented as “Queen Cleopatra, the Goddess (*Thea*), the Younger (*Neotera*)” on dedicatory stelai and public inscriptions--both examples of fused Pharaonic tradition and Greek text (Gurval 2011, 57). On “one of the earliest extant specimens [on the side depicting imagery on coinage]... a bust of

Cleopatra nursing an infant, Caesarion... is suggestive of Isis and Horus, or Aphrodite and Eros” (Gurval 2011, 57, emphasis added). In sum, Gurval proposes that Cleopatra never needed an asp to “proclaim herself a goddess nor a queen” as she was already depicted as both (Gurval 2011, 57). If anything, it may be worth considering that the Cobra, otherwise known as *uraenus* and considered a royal symbol in Egypt, can be observed on the headdress’ of ancient Egyptian Pharaohs (Ashton 2008, 169).

When discussing what *serpentes* meant to ancient Greece and Rome, Gurval suggests that, broadly speaking, “snakes were a source of both reverence and mortal fear, often associated with the protection of sacred places, tombs, altars, and the home” (2011, 58). They also represented ill omens, sometimes death, and even immortality as they lurked underground and often appeared “suddenly” from “their lair” (Gurval 2011, 58). By pointing to Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* 5.78, Gurval notes that a snake also evoked “Egypt” and “supplied a handy example of ethnic perversity” (Gurval 2011, 60). For Pliny and Solinus, snakes were associated with death and sleep, while Propertius wrote poetically of a processional triumph, witnessing the queen’s arms bitten by “sacred snakes,” as “her limbs draw sleep’s hidden path” (*Nat.* 29.65, *A Collection of Memorable Facts* 27.31, *Eleg.* 3.11.53-54, in Gurval 2011, 60). Regarding the twin-snakes in Horace’s *Ode* 1.37, Gurval suggests that it is in death itself that the Romans find her noble and she does so by seeking to “die in a manner more befitting her race (*generosius*),” hence *serpentes* (2011, 65). In addition, the manner in which she decides death was embedded into a culture of suicide in the late Republic, thus, not unique to the queen (Gurval 2011, 65). Instead, suicide was a “popular literary topos,” in which a life was “redeemed and ennobled” and he concludes, “Whether the asp (or its venom) killed the queen or not, a myth in its richness and

multiplicity, political, literary, and cultural, served both the Roman victor and foreign queen well” (Gurval 2011, 65, 75, emphasis added). As such, the snake’s many representations in Roman literature prove it difficult to conclude Horace’s true intentions for including *serpentes* here. Further, it is simultaneously challenging to determine to what extent *serpentes*, to the Romans, was reflective of ethnic perversity, reverence, or fear. Regardless, it is agreed that the snakes showcase Cleopatra’s agency as she refuses a humiliating triumph.

### 6. *non humilis mulier*

While Horace’s *Ode* 1.37 opens with a note of Roman patriotic pride, it doesn’t end how it starts. In stanzas 2-6, Horace’s Cleopatra serves as an object for juxtaposition, as she stands in opposition to Roman exemplarity and patriarchal ideals. A deviating force, she is as powerful as she is dangerous, and in consequence, Horace discredits her status, slanders her womanhood, and reduces her to cowardice. Likened to that of a fated omen, Cleopatra embodies both wonder and horror, as she threatens inevitable doom. In an attempt at ‘redemption,’ Horace denies her gender as the queen’s feminine qualities are substituted for a stoic, masculine response: unfazed, she beholds her kingdom lying prostrate. Even so, Cleopatra is “more fierce” having decided on death as she bravely handles the snakes. Preparing her body to drink their deadly venom, she refuses Octavian’s triumph. Reduced to “private citizen,” she ends “not a lowly woman” and, in a moment of personal agency, she reclaims her own narrative and takes control of her life.

While we cannot know the real Cleopatra from Horace’s fictitious one, I suggest that we find a space for reimagination where his work allows. On the other side of Horace’s *inpotens* is a

queen resolute in her personal choice. In acknowledging Cleopatra's suicide, we acknowledge her agency. In acknowledging her agency, we acknowledge her power. That a woman in power was a perverted idea does not diminish the fact that she was powerful as a woman. If anything, it is a reminder that the perspective we receive is Roman. Yet, even in acknowledging Horace's critiques and insults, we do well to realize her significance as well as her impact. In fact, her presence in the works of Propertius, Cicero, Tacitus, Plutarch, Cassius, and others, prove just how significant she was. Thus, as we fuse Horace's *non humilis mulier* with Egypt's "Queen Cleopatra, Goddess," her reimagination begins in a narrative rewritten.

### 7. A note on Horace's *Epode 9: emancipatus feminae*; problems in Plutarch

In ending my analysis of Horace's *Ode 1.37*, I now draw attention to Horace's *Epode 9*, as well as a few problematic and undermining viewpoints regarding Antony and Cleopatra in Plutarch's *Lives, Antony*, as both of these works will further lead us to discover similar rhetorical parallels and patterns in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Horace's *Epode 9*, published in 30 B.C.E., celebrates the aftermath of the battle of Actium and the victory of Octavian.<sup>19</sup> Its setting, either onboard a ship or at least close to the scene, is described through the eyes of Horace:

<p>Quando repostum Caecubum ad festas dapes victore laetus Caesare tecum sub alta—sic Iovi gratum—domo,</p>	<p>When, happy Maecenas, shall I drink with you, in joy at Caesar's victory, in your high house (for that's what the god intends) the</p>
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<sup>19</sup> It is uncertain whether Horace wrote *Epode 9* before or after the battle of Actium. It is also unclear whether Horace himself went on a campaign to Actium with his patron, Maecenas, whom is featured in line 1 of the *Epode*. Translation used for *Epode 9*: Horace. *Odes and Epodes*. Loeb Classical Library 33.

beate Maecenas, bibam  
 sonante mixtum tibiis carmen lyra, 5  
 hac Dorium, illis barbarum,  
 ut nuper, actus cum freto Neptunius  
 dux fugit ustis navibus,  
 minatus Urbi vincla, quae detraxerat 10  
 servis amicus perfidis?  
 Romanus, eheu,—posteri negabitis—  
 emancipatus feminae  
 fert vallum et arma miles et spadonibus  
 servire rugosis potest,  
 interque signa turpe militaria 15  
 sol aspicit conopium.  
 at huc frementis verterunt bis mille equos  
 Galli, canentes Caesarem,  
 hostiliumque navium portu latent 20  
 puppes sinistrorsum citae.  
 io Triumphae, tu moraris aureos  
 currus et intactas boves?  
 io Triumphae, nec Iugurthino parem  
 bello reportasti ducem,  
 neque Africanum, cui super Carthaginem 25  
 virtus sepulcrum condidit.  
 terra marique victus hostis punico  
 lugubre mutavit sagum.  
 aut ille centum nobilem Cretam urbibus  
 ventis iturus non suis, 30  
 exercitatas aut petit Syrtis Noto,  
 aut fertur incerto mari.  
 capaciores adfer huc, puer, scyphos  
 et Chia vina aut Lesbia: 35  
 vel quod fluentem nauseam coerceat  
 metire nobis Caecubum:  
 curam metumque Caesaris rerum iuvat  
 dulci Lyaeo solvere.

Caecuban that has been laid by for a banquet  
 of celebration, while the lyre sounds forth its  
 Dorian music mingled with the foreign notes  
 of the pipe? That's what we did, not long ago,  
 when the ships of Neptune's general were  
 burnt, and he fled, driven from the sea—the  
 man who had threatened to fasten on the  
 capital the chains he had removed from the  
 treasonous slaves whom he had befriended.

The shame of it! A Roman enslaved to a  
 woman (you future generations will refuse to  
 believe it) carries a stake and weapons, and in  
 spite of being a soldier can bear to serve a lot  
 of shrivelled eunuchs, while the sun gazes  
 down on the degenerate mosquito net among  
 the army's standards.

But two thousand Galatians have turned  
 their snorting horses in our direction, chanting  
 Caesar's name; and the sterns of the enemy's  
 ships, after making off at speed to the left,  
 skulk in harbour. Hail, Triumph! Are you  
 holding back the golden chariots and the  
 heifers that have never known a yoke? Hail,  
 Triumph! You did not bring back such a  
 general from the Jugurthine War, nor was  
 Africanus such, whose valour built a tomb  
 over Carthage. Defeated on land and sea, the  
 enemy has put on a cloak of mourning instead  
 of his scarlet one. The man may reach Crete,  
 famous for her hundred cities, though the  
 winds are not in his favour, or he is making for  
 the Syrtes that are buffeted by the South Wind,  
 or else he is carried along over an uncertain  
 sea. Bring larger cups, boy, and pour us Chian  
 or Lesbian wine, or rather Caecuban so that it  
 may check our seasickness. It's a joy to get rid  
 of our worry and fear for Caesar's cause with  
 the sweet Loosener's help.

For our purposes, lines 10-16 are of particular importance as they indirectly reference Mark Antony, Cleopatra, and Cleopatra's eunuchs through harsh contemptuous criticism. Horace's *emancipatus feminae* ("a man enslaved to a woman") in line 12 introduce his readers to the utter disgrace and disbelief that a Roman man (Antony) was 'made' a slave to a woman (Cleopatra). Equally disgraceful is Antony as a Roman soldier bearing arms while having been 'made' to serve Cleopatra's "shrivelled eunuchs" (*rugosis spadonibus*). Here, Horace's use of the adjective *rugosis* ("shrivelled") is a reminder of *turpium* ("offensive to the senses, physically disgusting") in line 9 of *Ode* 1.37—both adjectives adding to the criticism of Cleopatra's court. That Mark Antony was 'enslaved' not only to Cleopatra but also 'served' her eunuchs, adds further insult to injury while simultaneously enforcing the idea that nothing is worse than a man subjugated to the female. Further, *turpe conopium* ("degenerate mosquito net") illustrates the disgust of a foreign immoral presence among Roman military standards. Whether Horace's *turpe conopium* refers to Cleopatra or Mark Antony specifically is unclear. While Cleopatra is of course Egyptian, Mark Antony was disowned and othered by his own countrymen for wanting to be buried in Egypt. Further, Antony is said to have conformed to Egyptian dress and 'ways.' Even more insulting was Antony's acknowledgment of his children by Cleopatra, giving his son and daughter Egyptian names, as well as Cleopatra and Mark Antony represented as a ruling couple on Egyptian coinage. In this context, Horace might specifically be criticizing a Roman man turned Egyptian slave, however, Horace is likely insulting both Roman soldier as well as queen. Regardless, the concept of Horace's *emancipatus feminae* is readily observed in some of Plutarch's personal judgments of Mark Antony and Cleopatra as evidenced in his *Lives, Antony*.

Though Plutarch's account was composed some 200 years after the battle of Actium, other sources do confirm his narrative surrounding the battle of Actium. As alluded to at the

beginning of this chapter, I fully acknowledge the complexities and problems of treating his work as an accurate and ‘truthful’ account. Since ancient narratives often present readers with personal agendas, judgments, and biases, it is my goal to address a few of Plutarch’s own troublesome and undermining takes on both Mark Antony and Cleopatra here in the context of Horace’s *emancipatus feminae*. In chapter XXV, for instance, Plutarch paints Cleopatra as the “crowning evil” of Mark Antony’s love, stating his many passions were aroused and driven to frenzy, so much so, that it “destroyed whatever good and saving qualities still offered resistance. And he was taken captive in this manner” (1-2). Here, Plutarch’s own judgments and rhetoric reinforces the idea that Mark Antony had been enslaved. Further, it suggests that his character had been destroyed. In chapter XXXVI, Plutarch continues this theme of destruction, as Mark Antony’s passion for Cleopatra, a “dire evil,” was “blazed up again with renewed power,” and, as if beholden to a “stubborn and unmanageable beast of the soul,” Mark Antony bestowed upon Cleopatra several Roman provinces (1-2). In XXXVII, Plutarch intensifies Cleopatra’s hold over the Roman general, as Mark Antony is described as so besotted with Cleopatra that, not only did he neglect war preparations and his other military duties, “He was not master of his own faculties... as if he were under the influence of certain drugs or of magic rites,…” (4-5). All of the above is problematic on several accounts. One, it presents Mark Antony as incapable of personal choice, hence ‘captured.’ Second, his infatuation is suggested as a direct result of Cleopatra’s bewitching and beguiling tendencies as a woman. Third, it reinforces the idea that a woman in power was a perverted concept. Fourth, it presents Mark Antony as a man destroyed. Fifth, it enhances Cleopatra as a foreign threat. Sixth, it agrees with Horace’s presentation of Mark Antony as having been enslaved to a woman. As we will later see, the idea of *emancipatus feminae* is also readily evident in Shakespeare.

## Chapter 2: Shakespeare's Cleopatra: Infinite Variety

“Age cannot wither her, nor custome stale  
Her infinite variety: other women cloy  
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry,  
Where most she satisfies.”

--Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.1.245-248

### 1. The Bard, his life, and his play

The famous English Bard, immortalized as “our Shakespeare” and “gentle Shakespeare” by his friends and colleagues seven years after his death, began his journey in the small-town of Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564, the eldest child of John and Mary Shakespeare (Honigmann 2001, 1). John Shakespeare's several occupations consisted of wool dealing and the selling of barley and timber, while also working as a glover and whitawer, “a curer and whitener of skin” (Honigmann 2001, 1). As a political businessman, Shakespeare's father was actively involved in public affairs and would eventually hold office as chamberlain. A member of the town's council, he would reach the status of high bailiff in 1568 (Honigmann 2001, 1). A signer of many official documents, some Early Modern sources show that John may have been illiterate--his signature consisted only of his marker, however, Ernst Honigmann in his introduction chapter in *Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, suggests that such notions should not be taken wholly literal, as John was responsible for several civic accounts (2001, 1). While he prospered for some twenty years, Shakespeare's father experienced difficulties, eventually abandoned his official



duties, and mortgaged part of his wife's inheritance to make do. While the evidence isn't clear, the timing of his troubles suggest he may have become a recusant at the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign, which initiated the persecution of members of the Catholic faith (Honigmann 2001, 1). John died in 1601 and Shakespeare's mother Mary not long after in 1608, of whom not much is known.

Despite having no evidence of what Shakespeare read or what his personal library consisted of in his lifetime as no such documents exist, scholars assume he was sent by his parents to attend King's New School at Stratford, otherwise known as a 'free school' (Rowe, in Honigmann 2001, 2). There he was most likely taught Latin grammar and was exposed to Classical literature, from Aesop's *Fables*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (often alluded to within his work), Plautus, Terence, Vergil, and Cicero, among several others. While Ben Jonson, English playwright and poet, critically wrote of Shakespeare's "small Latin and less Greek," it is now proposed he was as apt in the Latin language as any modern Latin Honors graduate by today's standards (Honigmann 2001, 2). While modern scholarship initially concluded that Shakespeare knew little Greek, if any at all, later findings now support his reading of some Greek tragedies likely in the original or in Seneca's adaptations (Honigmann 2001, 2). As was customary during Early Modern England, Shakespeare presumably ended his schooling at either 15 or 16 years of age, though it is unclear what he did next. Regardless, while he was still a minor, he married Anne Hathaway, 26, in 1582, pregnant at the time with their daughter, Susanna. Anne would later give birth to their twins, Hamnet<sup>20</sup> and Judith. Rare for its time, the two produced no more

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<sup>20</sup> A variation on the name Hamlet.

children after 1585, and it is presumed that Shakespeare left shortly after to launch his career in theater and as playwright (Honigmann 2001, 2).

1592 dates the first knowledge of Shakespeare as an actor and dramatist when Robert Greene, Shakespeare's contemporary and a dramatist himself, claimed in his work, *Groat's Worth of Wit*, that the newcomer, unfavorably depicted as a "'waspish little worm' and as 'having a 'tiger's heart,'" had overshadowed him due to his lionization (Honigmann 2001, 3). Furthermore, Greene's accusations may have shed light on the start of Shakespeare's career in theater, ca. 1586-1587, as he refers to Shakespeare in *Groat's Worth of Wit* as an "old acquaintance" (Honigmann 2001, 5). Similar to his father John, Shakespeare is also said to have had an affinity for business as he was exceptionally successful and gained more responsibilities as his career progressed, from being one of the 10 'sharers' in his company ("play-books, play clothes, properties") and a 'house-holder' ("one of the owners or lease-holders of the Globe and Blackfriars theatres") in addition to actor and dramatist (Honigmann 2001, 5). As such, he managed to write approximately two plays per year until ca. 1602 and only one subsequently, however, Shakespeare devoted most of his time to theater throughout his life until 1603. At the time of his retirement back to Stratford in 1613, he not only had acquired the Blackfriars Gatehouse--his last investment--he also helped write *Henry VIII*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and *Caredenio* (Honigmann 2001, 7). Shakespeare died April 23, 1616, deemed an "honourable man" with a "gentle disposition" by Jonson and his First Folio was published in 1623 by John Heminges and Henry Condell, who organized his works into three distinct categories--unprecedented for its time--as they are still known today: 'Comedies,' 'Histories,' and 'Tragedies' (Snyder 2001, 83).

The genres of Early Modern comedy and tragedy reach back to Classical times. In her chapter on “The genres of Shakespeare’s plays,” Susan Snyder states that “Elizabethan tragedy grows, like any other form, out of roots in earlier literature. Classical drama provided one source, although the work of the great Greek tragedians in Shakespeare’s time was known, if at all, mainly to the learned in the occasional Latin translation” (2001, 86). Shakespeare’s tragedy, *Antony and Cleopatra*, is no exception. Written between 1606-1607, this Roman play is based on Thomas North’s Elizabethan Latin translation of Plutarch’s *Lives, Antony*, and was published as part of Shakespeare’s First Folio in 1623 (Blits 2011, ix). Set during the time between 40-30 B.C.E., its setting rapidly shift between Rome and Egypt throughout. Its tone is tragic, however, it is also resplendent, poetic, stoic, and dissolute. For instance, the play overall is resplendent in its theatrical depiction of Cleopatra’s vibrant colorfulness while simultaneously stoic in its presentation of her suicide. Though the play’s protagonist is Mark Antony, Cleopatra plays a pivotal role, even if at times presented as an antagonist. Worth noting regarding her significance in Shakespeare, is the fact that she shares the play’s title with Mark Antony, which is not what we observe in the title of Plutarch’s *Lives, Antony*, although she is heavily included in his book.

Though Shakespeare may have borrowed characters and subject matter from ancient sources, it is often concluded that the playwright only understood such sources from the values and beliefs of Early Modern England (Blits 2019, viii). Jan Blits, however, in his 2019 commentary, *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra*, rebuts this claim, and argues for the importance of acknowledging Shakespeare’s understanding of Rome, its politics, and ideologies that are clearly embedded within the plot lines. One such instance, the Classicist writes, refers to Cleopatra’s lamentations over Mark Antony’s death, as she exclaims, “The soldier’s pole is

fallen” (4.15.67, Blits 2019, ix). Renaissance scholars have long struggled to ascertain its meaning, with David Bevington suggesting that “Shakespeare was thinking of the festivities of a medieval or early modern village in which children dance around a pole decked with garlands of flowers” (Blits 2019, ix). Instead, Blits proposes, that “the pole is an obvious referral to Roman military ensigns or standards (*signa militaria*), which regulated every movement of every body of troops” (Blits 2019, ix). Adding evidence to the argument, Blits further states that Shakespeare “...emphasizes in *Julius Caesar* (5.3.3–4), an ensign is at once a long pole, suspending a banner, with an eagle at the top, and the brave warrior who holds it and leads his cohort in battle. Originally devised by Romulus (Plutarch, *Romulus*, 8.6), the soldier’s pole was sacrosanct and revered in Rome (Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 40.18)” (2019, ix). In fact, Mark Antony himself, during the start of his Parthian campaigns in 36 B.C.E, first set out to recoup the standards that had been lost years earlier (Plut., *Lives, Antony*, 37.2, in Blits 2019, ix). If anything, Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* presents its readers with a combination of both Early Modern and ancient Roman perspectives. As such, it is crucial to keep in mind that the play reflects on the transition from a Roman Republic into an imperial one and that characters are portrayed according to this timeline, from Antony, Octavian, to Cleopatra.<sup>21</sup> However, it is also a tragedy of love and duty.

In short, the premise of Shakespeare’s play surrounds Mark Antony, one of Rome’s *triumvirs*, who is in love with Cleopatra, ruler of Egypt. Revealed through the characters of Philo and Demetrius in the beginning of Act 1, we find a dawdling Antony in Egypt neglecting his

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<sup>21</sup> For more on Classical Rome in *Antony and Cleopatra*, I highly suggest reading Blits’ commentary in its entirety, as this chapter focuses mainly on Shakespeare’s portrayal of Cleopatra, though I acknowledge ancient pieces of the Roman history throughout.

Roman duties while besotted with the Egyptian queen. Summoned back to Rome in Act 2, Antony attempts to reassert his Roman authority through a political marriage with Octavia, the sister of Octavius Caesar (his fellow triumvir), but clashes with Octavius before returning to Cleopatra and Egypt. In Acts 3 and 4, Cleopatra and Antony make a final stand against Octavius in the battle of Actium, a battle that is lost, when Cleopatra leaves the scene in an attempt to save her fleet. In Act 5, fatal miscommunication leads to the suicide of Antony who dies in Cleopatra's arms. Cleopatra in turn, attempts to assess her options, but realizes that surrendering to Rome will mean being paraded in triumph, a fate she refuses to accept. Shakespeare thus stages her suicide in a grande spectacle with costumes, props, and soaring poetry.

Since his time, Shakespeare's Egyptian queen, along with her 'infinite varieties,' have been decorated, re-decorated, told and re-told, imagined and reimagined, as *Antony and Cleopatra* remains the greatest inspiration for modern movies, books, theater, commercials, and online debates. While Shakespeare's embellishments of Cleopatra are as nuanced and ever-present as his own life and works, we do well to keep in mind that his version of Cleopatra is not "the real Cleopatra" (Ashton 2008, 5). Rather, the playwright's Queen is a fictional character and actor, played by a white boy in blackface, gracing an Early English Modern stage. Thus, as with Horace, so with Shakespeare. Instead of seeking historical truths, I pursue the potential for reimagination within a fictional narrative that has—intended or unintended—solidified a historical figure as whorish and unfit to rule.

Thus far, we've witnessed Cleopatra's poetic transformation from *inpotens* to agency in Horace's ode. Now, as introduced through the characters of Demetrius and Philo in Act 1 of Shakespeare's play, I aim to first address the playwright's othering of Cleopatra as

‘tawny’ (“dark” or “sunburnt”), ‘gypsy’ (“an unlawful race”), and ‘Strumpet’ (“whore”). A common literary pattern evident in most of Shakespeare’s plays, the first few lines of the playwright’s opening acts often serve to set the stage for the representation of his main characters. Through the in-depth analysis of such a pattern, I question how Shakespearean language and word-choice have, and still are, contributing to receptions, perceptions, and current (mis)representations of the Ptolemaic queen, while confronting its implications for women as real human beings in a lived world. Second, I explore Cleopatra’s infinite variety—a powerful potential for reimagination—presented through the perspectives of Charmian, Cleopatra’s loyal Egyptian attendant, and Enobarbus, a Roman soldier, who is equally dedicated to Mark Antony. While Charmian and Enobarbus offer complex and unique perspectives on Cleopatra as Isis and as a woman, Shakespeare’s vision of the Queen ultimately dominates. As he un genders the ruler in Act 5 (“no woman in me”), Shakespeare like Horace, removes Cleopatra’s female nature in an attempt at making her more noble, suggesting that in order to have agency, she must first become a hard, crystalline form. Unsexed, Cleopatra is transfigured from a “fleeting moon”—the embodiment of female and the goddess Isis—into Shakespeare’s “marble-constant,” and as a consequence, her infinite variety is darkened and ultimately forgotten. Despite this, however, we as readers *can* find a space for literary reimagination in Cleopatra’s suicide, as an Egyptian queen takes control of her own life, and as we do, we find a woman whose act of ultimate courage speaks to her own significance, agency, and power.

## 2. On tawny: the colorized ‘other’

## Act 1, Scene 1

[Alexandria, a room in Cleopatra's palace.]

**Enter Demetrius and Philo.**

Philo: Nay, but this dotage of our general's  
 O'erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes,  
 That o'er the files and musters of the war  
 Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn  
 The office and devotion of their view 5  
 Upon a *tawny* front. His captain's heart,  
 Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst  
 The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper  
 And is become the bellows and the fan  
 To cool a *gypsy's* lust.

*Flourish. Enter Antony, Cleopatra, her Ladies, the Train,  
 with Eunuchs fanning her.*

Look where they come.  
 Take but good note, and you shall see in him 10  
 The triple pillar of the world transformed  
 Into a *strumpet's* fool. Behold and see (emphasis added).<sup>22</sup>

Neither Horace nor Plutarch refer to Cleopatra's skin color in their work. In fact, no Classical sources do. Further, Cleopatra's tomb and body is yet to be found, but even then, her race and ethnicity would be difficult to conclude. Nonetheless, her Ptolemaic line has been linked to Macedonia, Greece (Ashton 2008, 1). Despite this linkage, it is impossible to determine with accuracy the queen's looks, though studying Egyptian relics and artifacts gives us ideas, even if not whole truths. Was she Black? Was she white? Was she pretty? Was she tall, short, or somewhere in between?<sup>23</sup> While Plutarch describes the queen as 'fairly average' as well as

<sup>22</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra*. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Incorporated, 2019. Accessed March 10, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>23</sup> The unknown identity of Cleopatra's grandmother, and more recently, her mother, opens doors of possibilities for Cleopatra to be received as a powerful, Black icon as she was, in fact, ruler of an African nation (Ashton 2008, 2-3).

beautiful, his biography *Lives, Antony*, was written almost 200 years after her death (XXVII.7-8). Horace's *Ode* 1.37, published around 7 years after the battle of Actium, does not mention her physical characteristics at all, nor does he describe her lineage or heritage. In Augustus' biography, *Res Gestae*, the queen is entirely erased, though the battle of Actium is hinted at in between the lines. Shakespeare is even farther removed, yet, he is the first to attribute skin color to his version of Cleopatra's representation in his play.

While we may not know what lay at the heart of such a categorization, for instance, Shakespeare may have purposely racialized Cleopatra in order to 'other her' or he may have referred to her as 'tawny' for theatrical embellishment and drama, it is crucial to acknowledge that such categorization indeed occurred while questioning the purpose it serves. Further, Shakespeare's racialized 'other' is recognized in several of his theatrical narratives, from *Titus Andronicus*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, to *The Tempest*.<sup>24</sup> For instance, Shakespeare's protagonist, Othello, is referred to as "an old black ram" as well as a "sooty bosom" in Act 1 (70-71, 89-90). In fact, his is often a theatrical construct consisting of light versus dark, purity versus pollution, man versus woman, native versus foreign--each serving as rhetorical, poetic, and literary opposites--yet, complexly crossing over into modern critical questioning of what, in fact, 'defines' human and according to whom. Who is included? Who is excluded? Moreover, distinct ideas and imaginations regarding women and women in power in *Antony and Cleopatra* are formed and reinforced as I will share below. More importantly, Early Modern anxieties are evident regarding historically disbarred and denigrated groups, seemingly treading beyond the boundaries of 'acceptable' anthropoid nature, as reflected through character behavior, speech,

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Virginia Mason Vaughan, Ania Loomba, Kim F. Hall.



sexuality, gender, race, and vivid imagery of the exterior body. Something to be questioned, however, is the lens through which these characters are scrutinized and thus portrayed.

Regardless of the playwright's intentions, readers are merely 11 lines into *Antony and Cleopatra*'s opening act when the Egyptian ruler is colorized, sexualized, and exoticized through a set of adjectival description and nouns. As we already know, we are first introduced to Cleopatra and Mark Antony through the characters of Demetrius and Philo, two Roman soldiers, as they discuss Antony having fallen in love with the queen. His infatuation ("dotage"), they remark, is 'out of control' ("O'erflows the measure") while they paint the general's eyes, once glowing with pride at his Roman army and battles, as having unduly shifted their devotion "Upon a *Tawny* front" (1.1.1-7, emphasis added). His chest, once beating valiantly under his breastplate in wars, has failed to honor Roman temperament: he "is become the Bellows and the Fan To cool a *gypsy's lust*" (1.1.10-11, emphasis added). While a trumpet's fanfare ensues as Antony and Cleopatra enter--the queen's ladies, fanning eunuchs, and train in tow--Demetrius and Philo enlist the audience to take a good look at what they see: one member of Rome's *triumvirate* (a group of three men holding power) has "transform'd into a *Strumpet's Fool*" (1.1.12-15, emphasis added).

First, of particular importance are the following single-word adjective and nouns: 'tawny,' 'gypsy,' and 'Strumpet.' While each individual word sets the stage for what forms the construction of Shakespeare's Cleopatra in the opening act, 'tawny front' paints her as a woman 'dark faced,' though no such reference occurs in Plutarch's *Lives, Antony* on which his play is based. This is an obvious embellishment made by Shakespeare and an example of how Classical works have often been adapted through time. Since Plutarch does not refer to Cleopatra's skin

color, Shakespeare could not have gotten the idea of her as dark-faced from Plutarch's work. In order, then, to try and understand why Shakespeare may have attributed such a physical characteristic, the adjective's timeline must be addressed, as the word 'tawny' commonly occurred in Middle English and Early Modern written works beginning with the 1300's and lasting through the late 17th century and beyond. Tawny, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is a borrowing from the Latin word *fulvus* ("reddish-yellow, tawny, brown, of uncertain origin") with an English element. It can also mean tan and is often described as "having or being of this color." Further, its etymology reads as follows, "Moor... and blackamoor. A name given to tawny or brown-skinned peoples, probably originally to peoples of northern Africa" (*OED Online* 2000, s.v. *tawny*). For instance, William Langland, in his 1377 *Piers Plowman*, uses the Middle English adjective, then spelled 'tauny,' to describe an overgarment sometimes worn by knights, otherwise known as a French 'tabarde' (*OED Online* 2000, s.v. *tawny*). F.J. Furnivall, in his 1395 *Fifty Earliest Eng. Wills*, ascribes it to a bed of silk (*OED Online* 2000, s.v. *tawny*). Fast-forward to Sir John Davies' 1599 *Nosce Teipsum* ("Of Human Knowledge" or "Know Thyself"), and tawny is used to describe groups of people: "As this worlds Sunne..Makes the More black, & th'European white, Th'American tawnie" (*OED Online* 2000, s.v. *tawny*). Even later works, such as V Le Blanc's *World Surveyed* (1660), reads of "Tawnies" wearing "rings of gold and silver" in their ears while the *London Gazette* (1681) once called for the return of a runaway depicted as "a Tall slender Indian Tawney" (*OED Online* 2000, s.v. *tawny*).

As evidenced above, then, Shakespeare's use of such an adjective during his time does not come as a surprise, even if potentially abject in nature, though it may simply have reflected a

cross-cultural reference. As previously mentioned, we cannot know Shakespeare's own intentions for including such a description. We can only acknowledge he did include it, while contemplating its implications. As a cross-cultural reference, Shakespeare may have assumed that peoples from the Near Eastern Mediterranean had naturally darker skin. In fact, Kim F. Hall argues that several culturally different characters in his plays and sonnets are often referred to as 'sunburned,' which perhaps explains Davies' illustration of the sun's ability to darken the skin.<sup>25</sup> She writes, "the Prince of Morocco wears 'the shadowed livery of the burnish'd sun' (2.1.2). The Moorish Eleazar of *Lust's Dominion; or, the Lascivious Queen* (1600) declares his complexion is 'ta'en from the kisses of the amorous sun' (3.4.14)" (Hall 1995, 97). Furthermore, "Shakespeare's Cleopatra echoes the bride in the Song of Songs when she proclaims, 'Think on me, I That am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black'" (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1.5.27-28; Hall 1995, 97). More significantly, Hall notes that in this context, Cleopatra's sunburn is synonymous with sensuality as much as it is an indicator of racial coloring (Hall 1995, 97). Further, Shakespeare's 'tawny' explicitly connects with 'Gypsies Lust' in line 10, and later in line 13 with 'Strumpet.' As such, his fictional Cleopatra embodies the sexualized, 'sunburned other,' as soon as the beginning of the opening act. Even so, it is to be noted that the use of tawny throughout Renaissance works overall is ambiguous and fluctuating, making Early Modern perception of what constitutes the 'Other' a convoluted topic, albeit a crucial one.

Highlighting this nuance further is Emily C. Bartels' 1990 scholarly article, "Making more of the Moor: Aaron, Othello, and Renaissance Refashionings of Race." In it, she first

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<sup>25</sup> Due to modern scientific discoveries, of course, we now know this is due to the body's capacity for the production of melanin--a natural skin pigment evident in *all* people--in conjunction with the absorption of UV light, albeit manifesting at different rates and levels.

acknowledges that racism as ideology only emerged within the twentieth century. Yet, racist ideologies in Early Modern England are evident as far as they reflect on the outsider as insider, namely, a population that threatens “by being too close to home, too powerful, too successful, or merely too present” (1990, 433). Further, England’s growing interest in cross-culture is evident in its production of “visions of ‘other’ worlds, some handed down from Classical descriptions, others generated by actual encounters and recorded travel narratives, others shaped by dramatic and literary conventions already in place” (Bartels 1990, 433). Regardless of the reasons such cross-cultural discourse flourished, whether due to the justification of colonization, English national supremacy, culture shock, a fascination with queerness, or implicit bias, Bartels suggests its “early visions began to outline space and close off borders, to discriminate under the guise of discerning, and to separate the Other from the self” (1990, 434). Such outline of space, discrimination, and separation is immediately evident in *Antony and Cleopatra*’s opening act through Demetrius and Philo, as their characterization of Mark Antony and Cleopatra embody the manifestation of nations at odds. For instance, “O’erflows the measure” in line 2 highlights Egyptian excess. Further, Act 1, Scene 2, reinforces such excess, as Shakespeare’s “o’erflowing Nilus” in line 51 describes a land teeming with lavishness, spilling over (Blits 2019, 1).<sup>26</sup> However, Blits misses its double meaning in his commentary, as Mark Antony’s overflowing dotage also signifies a Roman limit on indulgence. As such, Antony and Cleopatra in Shakespeare’s play serve as juxtaposition throughout--limit versus excess, duty versus love, and so forth. Such contrasts, in particular as they regard Cleopatra’s excess indulgences reflected in a non-dignifying narrative, are also strongly evident in Horace’s *Ode* 1.37, especially in the Latin

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<sup>26</sup> For more on this, Cf. Blitz 2019, 1. The Greek historian, Diodorus Siculus, has several mentions of Egypt’s extravagance in his work, *Library*.

*inpotens* (“a woman so lacking in self-control”). But there is more. Foreign lands during Early Modern England were often painted as feminine and exotic and this, in fact, was also an ancient Roman trope.<sup>27</sup> Such foreign ‘effeminization’ and ‘exotitization’ are particularly evident in *Antony and Cleopatra*, as Egypt and Rome are contrasted at a constant, with Egypt being represented as “warm, fertile, and sensuous,” while “Rome is masculine, cold, sterile, and hard” (Traub 2001, 136). Such ‘gendering’ of characters as well as lands is crucial to keep in mind as we question its implications through time, in particular, as it relates to women and women in power.

As noted previously, tawny is often also synonymous with Moor. Its use first became evident in print and on the stage, especially its description of Africa, as a response to the Moor as an ‘other,’ having entered early English society (Bartels 1990, 434). Bartels states,

While blackness and Mohammedism were stereotyped as evil, Renaissance representations of the Moor were vague, varied, inconsistent, and contradictory. As critics have established, the term ‘Moor’ was used interchangeably with such similarly ambiguous terms as ‘African,’ ‘Ethiopian,’ ‘Negro,’ and even ‘Indian’ to designate a figure from different parts or the whole of Africa (or beyond) who was either black or Moslem, neither, or both. To complicate the vision further, the Moor was characterized alternately and sometimes simultaneously in contradictory extremes, as noble or monstrous, civil or savage (1990, 434).

Such ambiguity also is evident in *Antony and Cleopatra*, as the Queen, dark-faced and outsider, is deemed a ‘lustful gypsy,’ ‘wrangling queen,’ ‘slave,’ an ‘Egyptian dish,” and ‘whore,’ only to later be classified as blue-veined in Scene 5 of Act 2, line 29 (1.1.50, 1.1.49, 1.4.19,

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<sup>27</sup> “Romans, whether in fascination or disgust, often emphasize and sometimes exaggerate the exoticness of foreigners. . . . Egypt is characterized by effeminacy and emasculation as well as by licentiousness. . . . Where Roman freedom has always rested on the Romans’ sense of their manliness (see, for example, JC , 1.3.80– 84), Egyptian submission and passivity are at once a cause and a consequence of Egyptian emasculation. . . .” (Blitz 2019, 2).

2.6.128, 3.6.68). While awaiting news of Mark Antony, who has been summoned back to Italy, a messenger arrives at Cleopatra's court and she exclaims, "Antonio's dead! If thou say so, villain, / Thou kill'st thy mistress. But well and free, / If thou so yield him, there is gold, and here / My bluest veins to kiss, a hand that kings / Have lipped and trembled kissing" (2.5.26-30). In this instance, Shakespeare comments on Cleopatra's nobility through an allusion to her royal line, thus referring to her as 'blue blooded' ("My bluest veins"). This interpretation aligns with Bartels' argument that the Moor was indeed characterized as sometimes savage, sometimes noble. In addition, a Moor was at times described as "civilized... white or tawny rather than black... [though] he was nonetheless circumscribed as Other" (Bartel 1990, 435, emphasis added). If this is true, Shakespeare's Cleopatra embodies the Moor--too like and unlike the English simultaneously--a threat to England's growing nationalism and sense of self. As Ania Loomba so brilliantly writes, "Shakespeare's depictions of outsiders draw upon and amplify... contradictions. Whether we think they worked to consolidate the nascent discourse of race, or to alert English audiences to its unfairness and instability, Shakespeare's 'others' remind us that we need expanded conceptual frameworks to analyze Renaissance culture, ... drama, and their modern-day legacies" (163). Perhaps looking to the real Cleopatra's own Egyptian legacies and self-representations, as well as understanding ideas regarding sexuality, power, and gender in ancient Egypt, may aid scholars in the fields of both Renaissance and Classics alike in exactly this endeavor, even if only to gain a clearer image of the historical Cleopatra herself. After all, Shakespeare was not her contemporary and the ancient Romans held their own narratives.

### 3. On gypsy's lust, Strumpet: the exoticized and sexualized 'other'

... His captain's heart,  
 Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst  
 The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper  
 And is become the bellows and the fan  
 To cool a *gypsy's* lust.

*Flourish. Enter Antony, Cleopatra, her Ladies, the Train,  
 with Eunuchs fanning her.*

Look where they come.  
 Take but good note, and you shall see in him                   10  
 The triple pillar of the world transformed  
 Into a *strumpet's* fool. Behold and see (emphasis added).

In the opening lines of Act 1, Mark Antony, once glowing with pride in his army, has shifted his devoting eyes from Rome upon a “tawny front.” Even worse, the general has abandoned Roman restraint and has “become the bellows and the fan / To cool a *gypsy's lust*” (1.1.7-9, emphasis added). Furthermore, Antony is painted by Demetrius and Philo, both Roman soldiers, as a man “transform'd into a *Strumpet's Fool*,” reminiscent of the Latin *emancipatus feminae*: a man enslaved to a woman in Horace's *Epode* 9 (1.1.12-15; 12-15, emphasis added). Keeping in mind Cleopatra's fanning eunuchs lines 11-12 at the beginning of Act 1, it was not uncommon in ancient Roman narrative to associate Egypt with effeminacy and emasculation (Blits 1990, 2). As such, this particular reference can be interpreted as a distinct parallel to Horace's *Ode* 1.37 as well, where Cleopatra's eunuchs are a reflection of such effeminacy and more. In addition, and as previously mentioned, Horace's *Epode* 9 lines 12-15 indirectly references Mark Antony as a Roman man enslaved to a woman (“*emancipatus feminae*”) and as servant of Cleopatra's shriveled eunuchs (“*spadonibus servire rugosis potest*”). That adverse criticism of a foreign woman ruler and of a Roman man ‘enslaved’ to one is embedded within

Shakespeare's narrative is to be expected. In fact, the role of bellows and fan in lines 6-7 in relationship to cooling a gypsy's lust highlights such criticism to an even greater extent. Such metaphors amplify Roman rumors of much sexual scandal at Cleopatra's court. In line with these rumors, then, Shakespeare utilizes bellow to signify sexual arousal and heat, while the fan is used to cool it (Blits 2019, 10). Though Mark Antony is blanketed within each, it is Cleopatra's lecherousness as well as her gypsy's lust he must stir and at once satisfy. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "Gypsy" is an alteration of "gyptian" which later became "Egyptian" (2000, s.v. "Gypsy"). Often referring to a Romani person, it was usually spelled with a capital initial, and was mistakenly used to refer to gypsies, members of a "widely dispersed, traditionally itinerant people originating in South Asia and now found mainly in Europe and North and South America" (2000, s.v. "Gypsy"). It was also believed, erroneously, that gypsies had come from Egypt (Blits 2019, 1). Further, the noun is said to also mean 'slut' during Shakespeare's time, which makes sense in context of the play's opening lines, as gypsy is strengthened and connected in meaning through the reinforcement in the playwright's use of 'Strumpet,' an Early English word for whore (1.1.13, Blits 2019, 10). Thus, analyzing both gypsy and strumpet in context of Roman depiction of Egypt as well as Early Modern England's understanding of gypsies will shed additional light on Shakespeare's othering of Cleopatra overall.

In "An Unlawful Race: Shakespeare's Cleopatra and the Crimes of early modern Gypsies," Carol Mejia LaPerle argues that Shakespeare evokes in Cleopatra's gypsy an unlawful race, thereby marginalizing the Queen by placing her in association with a group of people considered volatile and criminal during Early Modern England (2017, 226). In fact,



Shakespeare's Mark Antony, while obsessing over her "luxuriously... vulgar fame," manifests such regret having succumbed to Cleopatra's "lusty allures," that delusions regarding his lover's supposed immorality breeds harsh criticism, concluding that Cleopatra has no knowledge of "temperance" (3.13.119-23, in LaPerle 2017, 226). Luxuriously here is synonymous with the idleness we see manifested in Cleopatra as she awaits the return of Mark Antony from Italy. While asking her attendant Charmian to bring her a mandrake drink, a narcotic believed to aid with sleep and melancholy, Cleopatra exclaims, "That I might sleep out this great gap of time / My Antony is away" (1.5.5-6, in LaPerle 2017, 228; Blitz 2019, 39). Such a statement reflects a Queen indulgent and unfit to rule, reeking of overconsumption and laziness. Even Charmian protests her ways when she replies to the Queen, "You think of him too much" (1.5.5-7, in LaPerle 2017, 228).

Furthermore, within these lines also rests Renaissance commentary on the reception of gypsies. Mark Antony himself expresses derision toward gypsies in terms similar to those in Early English primary source material, from royal decrees to social documents: perceived idleness, lawlessness, and extravagance. Such documents further reveal "a racially marked discourse," as gypsies are criminalized "as a foreign, nomadic group's resistance to the priorities of the commonwealth" (LaPerle 2017, 227). For instance, gypsies during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were mainly accused of cunning, nomadism, and indolence--a direct resistance to early English ideals. As with England's gypsies, so with Shakespeare's Cleopatra. Antony, feeling betrayed by Cleopatra in Act 4, Scene 12, as she leaves with her fleet during the battle of Actium, declares, "O, this false soul of Egypt! This grave charm, / Whose eye becked forth my wars and called them home, / Whose bosom was my crownet, my chief end, / Like a

right gypsy hath at fast and loose / Beguiled me to the very heart of loss” (28-29). Like a ‘true’ gypsy, Cleopatra embodies lies, trickery, and beguiling ways that lead to ruin and destruction. Further, “fast and loose” alludes to a con game, “of which Egyptians (“gypsies”) were thought to be adept, in which a belt or handkerchief was tied apparently fast in a hard knot but really so that it could be loosened easily,” playing up Cleopatra’s devious skills (Blits 2019, 188). In short, by drawing parallels between Cleopatra’s deviation from Roman values in Shakespeare’s play to that of the gypsy’s “refusal to heed” the English state, each encapsulates that which intimidates and challenges a nation’s identity, social structure, and ideological frameworks, from monarchy, politics, to being a productive member of society, and more (LaPerle 2017, 228). Due to perceived uncustomary ways, then, both Egyptian and gypsy are othered.

Adding to the layers of this othering is the playwright’s complex take on gender and sexuality. Much like the ancient Roman world, Shakespeare’s time consisted of a patriarchal household. Within such a structure, the father held power over all members in a home, including servants and apprentices (Traub 2001, 129). Since women were considered less than rational, the man “was likened to the rule of the realm, and a well-ordered household was to run like a well-ordered state” (Traub 2001, 129). As such, the man was regarded as the woman’s protector, and despite her wealth or status, she was expected to follow and submit to a his lead. In fact, “Legally, a woman’s identity was subsumed under that of her male protector; as a ‘female covert’, she had few legal or economic rights” (Traub 2001, 130). Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew* depicts such subservience and submission through the character Katherine, when, as a newlywed, she informs her audience, “Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper / Thy head,

thy sovereign...” (5.2.150-151, in Traub 2001, 130).<sup>28</sup> In Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, Octavia is highly commended for her meekness, virtuousness, and obedience. In Act 2, Scene 2, she is referred to as “admired Octavia” by Agrippa when he suggests her as a fitting wife for Mark Antony (126). Important side-note is that she has no say in the matter. In fact, silent women were highly regarded (Traub 2001, 130). Later, Agrippa paints Octavia as a rare “beauty,” whose “virtue... and whose general graces speak / That which none else can utter” (135-138). In sum, Agrippa’s ideal woman.

On the opposite side of Octavia’s virtue, grace, and subservience is Shakespeare’s Cleopatra. In fact, the Egyptian Queen is referred to as ‘Strumpet,’ meaning whore, immediately after being labeled a lustful gypsy (1.1.12-15). A word derived from the Anglo-Norman and Middle French (“*stupre*”), Strumpet means “lechery” and “violation,” while its etymon in the Classical Latin (“*stuprum*”) means “sexually promiscuous or lascivious behaviour, violation, rape” (*OED Online* 2000, s.v. *Strumpet*). Primarily deprecatory in nature during Shakespeare’s days, it referred to “a female prostitute; (also) a mistress, a concubine” while more generally, it depicted “a sexually promiscuous or lascivious woman” (*OED Online* 2000, s.v. *Strumpet*). Cleopatra is indirectly and directly referred to as whore in *Antony and Cleopatra* at least nine times! In Act 2, Scene 2, Agrippa calls her a “Royal Wench!” since “She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed; / He ploughed her, and she cropped” (236).<sup>29</sup> Note that royal wench also implies a woman of low breeding, which makes this statement contradictory and degrading (Blits

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<sup>28</sup> Straub notes that Katherine encourages women to accept their ‘natural inferiority,’ which prescribed women “to strive for four virtues: obedience, chastity, silence, and piety” (130). Ironically, within Katherine also manifests a rebellious character, which suggests that not all women obeyed or were silent. In fact, a woman’s most “powerful weapon” was her “female speech” (130). However, women enacting such speeches were often depicted as shrewd or scolds (130). Cleopatra herself, in an argument with Antony, is referred to as a “wrangling queen,” meaning quarreling. The word quarrel implies the trivial pursuit of picking fights for no good reason (1.1.49, Blits 2019, 7).

<sup>29</sup> This refers to Cleopatra and Caesar’s son, Caesarion (Blits 2019, 67)

2019, 240). As a royal, Cleopatra is depicted as ‘wenching’ and acting below her status.<sup>30</sup> She cannot rule and be sexually indulgent simultaneously, as this disqualifies her as a leader. In Act 2, Scene 6, Pompey, in a conversation with Mark Antony, makes the following offensive remarks, “your fine Egyptian cookery / Shall have the fame. I have heard that Julius Caesar / Grew fat with feasting there,” while Enobarbus chimes, “A certain queen to Caesar in a mattress” (64-65, 70). First, Pompey comparing Cleopatra to ‘Egyptian cookery’ that ‘shall have the fame’ suggests that Cleopatra is known and will be eternally known as a whore. This is both fictional and literal in nature, as Shakespeare’s language has had, and still has, serious implications for women as real human beings in the lived world versus that of his dramatic fiction. Second, Julius Caesar “growing fat while feasting” refers to Caesarion, the product of his love affair with the Queen (Blits 2019, 86). Enobarbus mentioning Cleopatra in a mattress refers to Plutarch’s, *Caesar*, which retells the story of how Julius Caesar fell in love with her while also alluding to Cleopatra’s seductive tendencies.<sup>31</sup> Otherwise, Cleopatra is labeled “trull,” “ribaudred nag,” and “triple-turned whore” (3.6.97, 3.10.10, 3.13.93, 4.12.13).<sup>32</sup> Thus, denouncing women as whores, shrews, and scolds was not uncommon during Early Modern England. In fact, it was often an effective strategy for a man fearing the loss of his authority and dominance (Traub 2001, 130). We see this particularly demonstrated in Mark Antony when he blames Cleopatra—a now triple-turned whore—for losing the battle against Octavian at Actium. He cries,

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<sup>30</sup> Ironically, Shakespeare’s most sensual characters are also depicted as his “most independent women” (Traub 2001, 134).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Plutarch, *Caesar*, 49.1–2.

<sup>32</sup> “trull” is an Early Modern alternative for the word whore; “ribaudred nag” is actually “ribald-rid nag,” meaning, “a whore anyone can ride;” while “triple-turned whore” refers to Cleopatra’s affairs with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony as well as her ‘attempted’ affair with Octavian (Blits 2019).

Antony:                               All is lost!  
 This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me.  
 My fleet hath yielded to the foe, and yonder  
 They cast their caps up and carouse together  
 Like friends long lost. Triple-turned whore! 'Tis thou  
 Hast sold me to this novice, and my heart  
 Makes only wars on thee. Bid them all fly!  
 For when I am revenged upon my charm,  
 I have done all. Bid them all fly! Be gone! (4.12.9-17).

Here, Antony's self-image seems to reflect damage and is evident of male anxieties manifested through his accusations of Cleopatra as his downfall. Because of her charm, or in other words—her witcheries—victory is forfeited and “all is lost” (4.12.9, Blits 2019, 187). This is a common literary trope within Shakespeare's tragedies. Their antagonists, usually women, lead to a dire end for its protagonists. Cleopatra, thus, through her “alien femininity” and sensuality embodies both the enticing allure and the destruction that eventually sends Antony to his death (Traub 2001, 134). As the sole reason for Antony's troubles, she is deserving of his revenge. Being depicted as such is problematic as it insinuates that Cleopatra—easily obtained—is just as easily dismissed and disposed of as much as she is to blame.

Finally, a strong juxtaposition between the sexually ‘othered’ Cleopatra and the chaste and virtuous Octavia, is clearly demonstrated in the following interaction between Enobarbus, Antony's most loyal supporter, and Maecenas, a follower of Octavian. Of worthy attention, however, is Enobarbus' response as complimentary and demeaning simultaneously. If complimentary, it works as an offense against Octavia, ever the meek woman. If demeaning, it is only demeaning against Cleopatra and women like her as ‘other.’ In Act 2, Scene 2, Antony has

returned to Italy along with Enobarbus, the latter who is met by Maecenas' declaration that the Roman general must end his mixings with the Egyptian Queen.

Maecenas: Now Antony must leave her utterly.

Enobarbus: Never! He will not.

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety. Other women cloy  
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry  
Where most she satisfies. For vilest things  
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests  
Bless her when she is riggish.

Maecenas: If beauty, wisdom, modesty can settle

The heart of Antony, Octavia is  
A blessed lottery to him (244-253).

Here, Shakespeare's Cleopatra defies tradition and deviates from nature. Her infinite variety is never boring; not even age can wither or dry her up. The longer she graces one's view, the more desirable she becomes. So satisfying is she, that even her worst flaws are appealing, so much so, that when she acts licentiously, blessings pour down upon her. Other women pale in comparison—the more you know them—the less alluring they become. Yet Shakespeare's Octavia, epitome of woman, is Antony's prize, a "blessed lottery" in her "beauty, wisdom," and "modesty" (2.2.251-253). In this context, there is little wiggle room, if any at all. A woman is either pure or she is polluted. She is subservient or she is shrew. She excites a man or she bores him. She lifts a man up, or she tears him down. She is his prize or the bane of his existence. The common denominator? What a woman is or isn't to a man!

4. No woman in me; on Isis

## Act 5, Scene 2

*Cleopatra:* ... My resolution's placed, and I have nothing                    237  
 Of woman in me. Now from head to foot  
 I am marble-constant. Now the fleeting moon  
 No planet is of mine

If Shakespeare contemplates what a woman is, he also contemplates what she isn't. While part of this is Renaissance drama and craftsmanship, a larger complexity is found in its implication and consequence as it relates to the perception and reception of women and women in power. What happens, for instance, when Cleopatra, often depicted as whorish and shrew, is suddenly depicted as noble or worthy? Like Horace's ode, Shakespeare's play denies Cleopatra her gender in an effort to 'redeem' her qualities. This becomes clear as soon as Act 1, when the Queen tells Mark Antony, "I would I had thy inches, thou should'st know / There were a heart in Egypt" (1.3.41-42). Inches here refer to Mark Antony's manliness and stature (Blits 2019, 26). While manhood is of course the concern of men in Shakespeare's plays, it is also often a concern of his many female characters in his other dramas. For instance, Beatrice in *Much Ado*, when faced with dishonor, cries, "O God that I were a man!," as she challenges Benedick to duel Claudio (4.1.303-4, Traub 2001, 138). Lady Macbeth tries to be the 'better man' than her husband as she provokes him into violence (1.7.49-59, Traub 2001, 138). Further, Volumnia in *Coriolanus* claims her son's valor and manhood is a direct result of her physical breast when she states, "'Thy valiantness was mine, thou sucked't it from me,'" (3.2.129, Straub 2001, 138). The persisting and at times unacknowledged ideology that women, in order to have as much agency or power as men, must become *more* like men, is also just as evident in Shakespeare as it is in

Horace. Yet, contradiction becomes clear, as ‘manly women’ are demonized in battle while concomitantly deemed noble in suicide. For instance, a few of Shakespeare’s women take up arms, such as Joan and Queen Margaret in *Henry IV*. However, “their power is undermined by the way they are demonized by other characters and by the playwright, who ultimately represents them as witches and shrews” (Straub 2001, 138). Sound familiar? Cleopatra herself, during the battle of Actium, is demonized similarly by Shakespeare in Act 3, Scene 10:

Enobarbus: How appears the fight?  
 Scarus: On our side, like the *tokened pestilence*,  
           Where death is sure. Yon *ribaudred nag* of Egypt,  
           Whom *leprosy* o’ertake, i’th’ midst o’th’ fight,  
           When vantage like a pair of twins appeared  
           Both as the same— or, rather, ours the elder—  
           The breeze upon her like *a cow* in June  
           Hoists sails and flies (8-15, emphasis added).

From tokened pestilence, leprosy, to a cow fleeing a gadfly, to a whore anyone can ride, Cleopatra in her ‘manly womanhood’ and in battle is synonymous with plague, contagious diseases, cowardice, and sexual disease.<sup>33</sup> Why? Because the existence of ‘masculine’ women “places particular pressure on men” to outperform in strength and courage as protectors of the assumed ‘weaker and lesser sex’ (Straub 2001, 138).

Such pressures are evident in Shakespeare’s *Troilus*, when Patroclus tells Achilles, “A woman impudent and mannish grown / Is not more loathed than an effeminate man / In time of action” (3.3.210-12, Traub 2001, 138). In other words, a manly woman was as hated as a womanly man. This, of course, assumes that gender is linear and binary, not divergent. Thus,

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<sup>33</sup> During Shakespeare’s day, leprosy was thought of as a contagious, sexual ailment (Blits 2019, 136)



several of Shakespeare's men fear association with femininity as reflected in Lear to Macbeth (Traub 2001, 139). Lear, envisioning himself trapped in a woman's body "out of control," manifests "his own hysteria" when he exclaims, "O, how this mother swells up towards my heart! / *Hysteria passio*, down, thou climbing sorrow, / Thy element's below!" (2.4.54-6, Traub 2001, 139). Note that the word *hysteria* dates as far back as antiquity and is a direct reference to a woman's uterus. Such a reference renders female emotion and biology an illness and a plague.<sup>34</sup> Lear, upon acknowledging this 'illness' in himself, is desperate to escape its womanly trappings: "touch me with noble anger, / And let not women's weapons, water-drops, / Stain my man's cheeks!" (2.4.271-3, Traub 2001, 139). Arguably a form of emotional toxicity—at least through the perspective of the modern eye—feelings of anger and tears rests within the structures of a gendered dichotomy that still permeate societies and cultures today. For instance, anger, seemingly belonging to men, is defined by Lear as noble. On the contrary, Lear's definition of tears is defined as a female weapon, seemingly belonging to women, as he begs for the womanly "water-drops" not to stain his manly cheeks. As Lear fights his own divided self, however, Shakespeare's Macbeth, flees effeminacy altogether. As he dreams of ultimate "male identity uncontaminated by uterine birth," Macbeth is confident he will "die only at the hands of a man 'not born of woman'" (5.3.4, 5.7.3, Traub 2001, 139).

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<sup>34</sup> Straub states that *hysteria passio* refers to a woman's "gynaecological ailment," namely, her uterus. This implies that 'womanly hysteria' is a direct result of her own biology. A woman's uterus would have to be removed to remedy her 'illness.' The Oxford English Dictionary lists its etymology as follows: "< classical Latin *hystericus* (in post-classical Latin also *histericus*, *istericus*, *ystericus* (6th cent.)) suffering from discomfort in the womb, in post-classical Latin also of or belonging to the womb (6th cent.) < ancient Greek *ὑστερικός* of or belonging to the womb, suffering in the womb, hysterical < *ὑστέρα* womb (see *hystero-* *comb. form2*) + *-ικός* *-ic suffix*" (2000, s.v. *hysteric*). Ironically, Lear acts 'hysterical' himself without said uterus! In sum, regardless of how one might identify, feelings and emotions are part of human genetic makeup, womb or no womb, yet women are deemed the hysterical sex.

In turning to *Antony and Cleopatra*'s final act, then, it is important to keep Shakespeare's portrayals of gender in mind as it relates to Cleopatra's self-agency and identity as a woman in the play. As will be illustrated, she must undergo a literary erasure of her womanhood in order to transform into the courageous and worthy character that Shakespeare would have her be. Refusing the disgrace of a Roman triumph in Act 5, Shakespeare's Cleopatra would rather die than see herself parodied on stage by a boy with a shrill voice, her "greatness I'th' posture of a whore," which is ironic, since this is how, indeed, the character of Cleopatra was played (5.2.219, Blits 2019, 231).<sup>35</sup> She declares: "My resolution's placed, and I have nothing / Of woman in me. Now from head to foot / I am marble-constant. Now the fleeting moon / No planet is of mine" (237-240). In deciding death, she is more fierce, yet no longer woman nor "fleeting moon" (5.2.239).<sup>36</sup> In dying she finds 'liberty'—freedom from shame, slavery, and in the end, even her gender (5.2.236, Blits 2019, 232). Thus, like Cleopatra's *voltu sereno* in Horace's ode, so with Cleopatra's marble-constant in Shakespeare. Her resolution transforms an otherwise 'fleeting' woman into a hard crystalline metaphoric form. Looking back to Horace's *Ode* 1.37, a similar parallel is witnessed, as Cleopatra, vehemently slandered for her *inpotens* and womanly 'flaws,' is stripped of her feminine qualities altogether, transforming her into a 'worthy' opponent of Octavian. In that moment when Horace denies her gender, she is not a woman frightened at the sword nor is she lacking in self-control. Instead, she—a woman unsexed—stoically beholds

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*posture*: whorish demeanor (Blits 2019, 231)

In his commentary, Blits expounds on Roman triumph as follows, "Roman triumphs traditionally displayed the captives, particularly their leaders, publicly mocked them with pictures, puppets, songs, and skits, publicly abused them in innumerable ways, and led them to slavery and their leaders usually to death. Every part of the triumph was an extraordinary spectacle displaying Rome's majesty. 'It is impossible adequately to describe the multitude of those spectacles and their magnificence under every conceivable aspect, . . . [which] by their collective exhibition . . . displayed the majesty of the Roman empire' (Josephus, *Jewish War* , 7.132)" (2019, 231).

<sup>36</sup> Cleopatra suggests that women are like the moon—ever changing, never constant (Blits 2019, 233).

her kingdom lying in ruins, and in an act of personal agency, takes control of her fate. However, Shakespeare takes his Cleopatra one step further. In the same instance that she is ungendered (“I have nothing of woman in me”), she is also “undeified,” stripped of her own associations with the goddess Isis (Blits 2019, 233).

In order to understand how this undeification occurs, we must first look to Act 3, Scene 6, where Shakespeare’s Cleopatra is identified with Isis: “She / In th’ habiliments of the goddess Isis / That day appeared, and oft before gave audience, / As ’tis reported, so” (16-17, Blits 2019, 120). Shakespeare, through his character Caesar (Octavian), alludes to the day Mark Antony bestowed upon Cleopatra several spoils originally dedicated to Rome’s Capitoline Jupiter as reported in Plutarch’s *Isis and Osiris*. This offended the Romans greatly, as “[Antony] deprived his country of [its] due honor and glory, only to gratify the Egyptians” (Plutarch, *Antony*, 54,6; Spencer, 243, in Blits 2019, 120).<sup>37</sup> As Shakespeare illustrates, however, not only on that day did Cleopatra dress as Isis. Plutarch writes that the Queen allegedly went further than the queens before her: “[S]he did not only wear at that time, but at all other times else when she came abroad, the apparel of the goddess Isis, and so gave audience unto all her subjects as a *new Isis*” (Plutarch, *Antony*, 50.4; Spencer, 238-39, in Blits 2019, 120, emphasis added). Through the character of Shakespeare’s Charmian, Cleopatra is also depicted as “sweet Isis,” “good Isis,” and “dear Isis” (1.2.66-71-75). The goddess is also vengeful, as Cleopatra, “By Isis,” will give Charmian “bloody teeth” if she mentions the name Caesar again (1.5.74). Furthermore, she is also portrayed as protector through Charmian’s “Isis else defend” (3.4.42). In fact, according to Plutarch, the ancient Egyptians regarded Isis as not only “the female principle of nature,” but

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Dio, 49.40, 50.25.2-4, in Blits 2019, 120.

also as the guardian of women, marriage, fertility, and maternity (Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris*, 51, [372e], in Blits 2019, 13). Most notable here, however, is that Isis is also identified with the moon as evident through Shakespeare's Mark Antony: "Alack, our terrene moon is now eclipsed, / And it portends alone the fall of Antony" (3.13.158). Cleopatra on earth as Isis divine and extraterrestrial light has become darkened and obscured, ever a fated omen in Horace, ever the tragic fall of Antony in Shakespeare, simultaneously foreshadowing her own destruction to come. Having been made marble-constant and a moon eclipsed, Cleopatra is stripped of Isis and "the female part of nature," no longer "apt to receive all generation....," no longer [C]apable of all," nor "receive all forms and shapes" (Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, 53 [372e]; Holland, 1309, in Blits 2019, 159). Dressed in her finest royal attire, crown on head and disposition collected, an Egyptian Queen surrenders her life and Ptolemaic line—three millennia long—to poisonous asps, one to the breast and another to her arm (5.2.303-309, Blits 2019, 239).<sup>38</sup> Egypt becomes a Roman province, yet, Cleopatra's act of agency and manner of dying in Horace's ode and in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, honors her race as well as her lineage. As Charmian thus proclaims, "It is well done, and fitting for a princess / Descended of so many royal kings" (5.2.325-326). And I add: of many royal queens.

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<sup>38</sup> Note: none of the ancient sources used by Shakespeare account for this version of the asp taken to Cleopatra's breast. Blits argues in his commentary that this is entirely Shakespeare's own creation (Blits 2019, 238). It has been inspired by many artists and has often worked to over-sexualize Cleopatra to an even greater degree. Interestingly, the image below provided by Press Collection Digital Archive, with its original oil painting showcasing in Bucknell University's Samek Art Museum in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, depicts a version of Cleopatra VII with an asp to her breast (directly to the nipple, in fact) and another held in her hand. What's eye-opening regarding the discovery of this work is its dating: the Italian artist, Giampietrino, was active ca. 1495-1540 with the date of the painting ca. 1524. This was before Shakespeare was born and, thus, raises additional questions. If Shakespeare did not invent this version of Cleopatra's death, and none of the ancient primary sources account for it, what and who, if anything and anyone, besides his own visionary imaginations, laid the groundwork for Giampietrino's inspiration? This presentation of Cleopatra's death by asp deserves further research and inquiry.



Giampietrino, active c. 1495-1540, *Cleopatra*. “Marquess Constantino Guidi, Lucca. Italy, or Museo Guidi, Faenza. [1] Attilio Simonetti [1843-1925], Rome. [2] (Count Alessandro Contini Bonacossi [1878-1955], Rome-Florence); sold to Samuel H. Kress [1863-1955] on 10 July 1935; gift to the Samek Art Museum Bucknell University in 1961, no. BL-K12.,” <https://kress.nga.gov/Detail/objects/3443>.

## 5. Where do we go from here?

After close examination of *Antony and Cleopatra*, it is difficult to escape the literary trappings, embellishments, and ideologies with which Cleopatra has been and is still portrayed. From gypsy to marble-constant, Cleopatra's literary legacy lives on in Shakespearean slander and alleged infamy, shaping perceptions of who she was, while bearing consequences for women as real human beings in a lived world. Though Cleopatra's infinite variety as woman and queen is evident, Shakespeare's tawny, Strumpet, and triple-turned-whore, ultimately overshadow even his best of intentions. Nonetheless, Shakespeare's Egyptian queen deviates from nature and challenges ideals as she takes control of her own life. Thus, it is in her agency that we find the reimagination of a woman whose act of ultimate courage speaks to her own significance.

Yet, is there more to Cleopatra than Horace and Shakespeare? Ultimately, both authors fashion Cleopatra according to ancient Roman and Early Modern ideological and opposing constructs in combination with their own. In an attempt at both challenging and fusing Horace and Shakespeare's literary narratives with an ancient Egyptian archeological framework, I now return to Cleopatra's representation on coinage as well as inscriptions, while contemplating her own perspectives as possibilities for historical reimagination as a woman and woman in power. By looking to her self-representation, we discover a Queen represented as Egyptian, male *and* female, queen *and* king, ruler, regent, Pharaoh, goddess, daughter, sister, and mother. In order to amplify her silenced voice, we must reimagine her narrative by returning to the primary sources she left behind.

## Chapter 3: Return to Egypt and the ‘real’ Cleopatra

“γινέσθωι / make it so.”



An ancient Egyptian papyrus, dated February 23, 33 B.C.E., may reflect a Pharaonic decree--“make it so”--by Cleopatra VII.<sup>39</sup>

### 1. Introduction: γινέσθωι (ginesthoi)

Since the burning of the Great Alexandria Library prior to and during Cleopatra’s reign, Egyptian written source material have been and still is widely lacking regarding her role as Queen (Ashton 2008, p. 122). The introduction to this thesis as well as this chapter, for instance, highlights the *only* surviving Pharaonic decree presumed to be issued by Cleopatra as reflected

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<sup>39</sup> Courtesy of Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, from <https://archive.archaeology.org/0101/newsbriefs/cleopatra.html>

on an ancient Egyptian papyrus as demonstrated above. This text, reused “in the construction of a cartonnage mummy case”—a material made of linen/papyrus covered with plaster and first used in ancient Egyptian funerary masks during the Third Intermediate Period (ca. 1070 B.C.E.-664 B.C.E.)—was discovered by an expedition in Germany in 1904 (Schuster, “Make It So! Sayeth Cleopatra”). It depicts a royal ordinance that permitted the tax exemption for Publius Canidius, the Roman commander of Mark Antony’s land army during the battle of Actium (Schuster, “Make It So! Sayeth Cleopatra”).<sup>40</sup> While controversial in nature, it remains, however, a crucial piece to our understanding of who Cleopatra was and should be accepted as such.<sup>41</sup> The document states the following:

We have granted to Publius Canidius and his heirs the annual exportation of 10,000 artabas [300 tons] of wheat and the annual importation of 5,000 Coan amphoras [ca. 34,500 gallons] of wine without anyone exacting anything in taxes from him or any other expense whatsoever. We have also granted tax exemption on all the land he owns in Egypt on the understanding that he shall not pay any taxes, either to the state account or to the account of me and my children, in any way in perpetuity. We have also granted that all his tenants are exempt from personal liabilities and from taxes without anyone exacting anything from them, not even contributing to the occasional assessments in the nomes or paying for expenses for soldiers or officers. We have also granted that the animals used for plowing and sowing as well as the beasts of burden and the ships used for the transportation [down the Nile] of the wheat are likewise exempt from 'personal' liabilities and from taxes and cannot be commandeered [by the army]. Let it be written to those to whom it may concern, so that knowing it they can act accordingly. Make it so! (Schuster, “Make It So! Sayeth Cleopatra”).

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Cadoux, Theodore John, and Ernst Badian. "Canidius (RE 2) Crassus, Publius." In *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. : Oxford University Press, 2012. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199545568.001.0001/acref-9780199545568-e-1336>.

<sup>41</sup> Scholars have yet to verify that it reflects Cleopatra’s signature and not that of a court scribe, however, seeing the document lacks “formal introduction of Cleopatra herself” as well as the “absence of a title after the name of the official to whom it was addressed (the name cannot be read)...[and] given the nature of this particular papyrus, Cleopatra herself would have been the only one who would have had the authority to approve such edicts.” (Lorelei Corcoran, in Schuster, “Make It So! Sayeth Cleopatra”).



While not poetically enthralling like Horace's ode or as theatrically thrilling as Shakespeare's play, nevertheless, such an official document allows for a clearer and more accurate perception of Cleopatra's power and duties as Pharaoh during her time. The document overall is said to have been written "in an upright hand" by one of Cleopatra's court scribes, with the "text of the ordinance... written first, Cleopatra's written approval second, and the date of the document's receipt in Alexandria third" (Schuster, "Make It So! Sayeth Cleopatra"). Schuster further concludes that the document's Pharaonic decree has a parallel, namely, one similar to that of Ptolemy X Alexander I, who "signed a document 'take care' in Greek in 99 B.C.E." (Schuster, "Make It So! Sayeth Cleopatra").<sup>42</sup> While we may have been left with only one word, it is, nonetheless, a powerful one.

Whereas many scholars look to the sources of Greco-Roman authors for information regarding the Ptolemaic kings and queens, it is acknowledged that such sources often present with bias. While these historical writings should not at all be discarded, one should keep in mind that they do not serve as primary source material regarding Cleopatra VII. The same is to be said of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. This thesis both acknowledges the silenced voice of Cleopatra as an excluded historical figure while it also confirms her significant presence in both Horace and Shakespeare. Even so, such writings have been and still are heavily relied upon as if an alternative does not exist (Ashton 2008, 14). In consequence, I decided to explore Cleopatra's own representations on ancient Egyptian iconography and how she herself wished to be seen and remembered. This, I discovered, could only be done by placing the Ptolemaic Queen in an Egyptian context while looking to the ancient artifacts and images she left behind. Often

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<sup>42</sup> Ptolemy X Alexander I: King of Egypt from 107 B.C.E. until 88 B.C.E.

overlooked in scholarly work, such images and artifacts in many instances depict Cleopatra portrayed as Egyptian (Ashton 2008, 1). What does this look like? What other information about the queen can we learn that might help form a clearer understanding of the legacy she intended to build? While my attempt, of course, is not to argue for the idealization of a woman who ruled autocratically, held slaves, and more than likely treated a lot of people in very inhumane ways, my goal is rather to address the complexity that Cleopatra's own self-image proposes. For instance, what sort of political influence and propaganda might rest behind her representation on coinage and shrines? In addition, Egyptian reliefs (painted scenes) on the walls of temples probably depict how Cleopatra *wanted* to be seen versus actual reality, though this is difficult to conclude (Ashton 2008, 31). While our understanding of her role as ruler of Egypt might become more clear, this does not mean we will fully come to know who she was. Regardless, Cleopatra's own perspectives should be considered as possibilities for historical reimagination.

## 2. Cleopatra's Royal Models: Arsinoe II, Cleopatra II, and Cleopatra III

Though scholars have linked Cleopatra's lineage to Macedonia, Greece, archeological evidence suggests she also portrayed herself as an Egyptian. By the time she came to power in 51 B.C.E., her entire family had already lived in Egypt for 272 years. As already mentioned, she was also the first in her family to learn and speak Egyptian. In her book, *Cleopatra and Egypt*, Sally Ann Ashton argues that Cleopatra was established as Egyptian in her lifetime as reflected through writings by Strabo and Lucius Annaeus Florus, among others, who referred to her as "the Egyptian" and "the Egyptian woman" immediately following her death (*Geo.* 13.1.30, *Wars*

2.21.1; Jones 2006, 106, in Ashton 2008, 2-3).<sup>43</sup> Further, she states that her personality was perceived by Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians alike to be so strong that she “came to represent Egypt itself” (Miles 2010, xi). Yet, caution remains to be raised as identity in antiquity was manifold. Greek was certainly the dominant language of Egypt’s Macedonian rulers, and *ginesthoi*, which is indeed a Greek decree, reflects as much. If anything, Cleopatra as ruler was capable of activating linguistic strategies based on different contexts. Whether Cleopatra *identified* as an Egyptian is difficult to conclude as she also remains enigmatic even in her self-representations (Miles 2010, 15). That there is clear evidence suggesting that early Macedonian pharaonic rulers merged Greek and Egyptian cultures adds to the complexities. In addition, many of Cleopatra’s portrayals follow similar patterns of the Ptolemaic kings and queens before her. In “Cleopatra in Egypt, Europe, and New York,” Margaret Miles states, “Cleopatra used imagery modeled on her Ptolemaic ancestors, especially Arsinoe II, as well as traditional Egyptian imagery, ritual, and pharaonic practices to enhance and consolidate her claim to the throne, Cleopatra had the skill and knowledge to further the policy of her predecessors, to integrate Egyptian and Greek customs” (2010, 15).<sup>44</sup> Without a doubt, these images served to solidify her role as Pharaoh as well as Isis among other depictions. In particular, her “posthumous images as Isis were revered in Egypt for many centuries” (Miles 2010, 15).

In her article, “Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt,” Sally Ann Ashton explores the merge of Greek and Egyptian cultures through the representation of Cleopatra in name and images. In particular, she examines Cleopatra’s portrayals as presented to both “human and divine

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<sup>43</sup> Strabo: Greek geographer, philosopher, and historian (63 B.C.E.-23 C.E.) Florus: Second-century Roman historian and poet (ca. 74-130 C.E.)

<sup>44</sup> Arsinoe II (ca. 316-270 B.C.E.). Egyptian Pharaoh and Queen.

audiences: native Egyptians, the multi-ethnic and polyglot Alexandrians, the priestly hierarchy that still controlled the essential infrastructure of Egypt, the larger world of eastern Mediterranean kingdoms, and the deities of Egypt” (2011, 21). Through her analysis, it is discovered that Cleopatra in large part was inspired by the portrayals of her predecessors, as well as depended on religious traditions and nomenclature as an expression of her authority, while she expanded the representations by past Ptolemaic queens (2011, 21). In fact, Egypt’s Ptolemaic queens played a pivotal role religiously and politically early on in the dynasty. Arsinoe II and Ptolemy II, full brother and sister, were royal partners as husband and wife. Both were deified during their lifetime as *Theoi Adelphoi*, meaning “sibling gods” (Ashton 2011, 22).



“FIGURE 1. Pylon of the temple of Khonsu at Karnak, with relief showing Ptolemy III making an offering to the *Theoi Adelphoi* (Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II). Photo by Sally Ann Ashton.” (Ashton 2011, 22).

The deification and sister-brother marriage of Arsinoe II and Ptolemy II was an effort at fostering their acceptance as outside rulers—Macedonian Greeks—among the Egyptians.<sup>45</sup> The merging of Greek religious conventions with Egyptian ones strengthened their hierarchal authority, since a “salient feature of the old pharaonic system had been inter-family marriage,” continuing an already long-standing tradition (Ashton 2011, 22). Written sources also depict the deification of Arsinoe in her own right following her death. Her temples in the Faiyum, for instance, are “distinct from those of the *Theoi Adelphoi*” (Ashton 2011, 22).<sup>46</sup> In fact, the significance of the *Theoi Adelphoi* was such that Ptolemy III referred to both Arsinoe and Ptolemy II as his parents, though his mother was Arsinoe I. Ashton explains, “He [Ptolemy III] advertised his respect and close associations with Arsinoe II by images carved on the great portals of the temple at Karnak, where he is shown as pharaoh making an offering to her and Ptolemy II as the *Theoi Adelphoi*” (2011, 22, emphasis added).<sup>47</sup> We will come to discover that Cleopatra VII also made similar offerings. Furthermore, she modeled and expanded many of her own deifications after Arsinoe II, whose own deification “stood as a powerful antecedent” as she became a fierce model and inspiration for later royal queens (Ashton 2011, 23).

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<sup>45</sup> Alexander the Great invaded Egypt in 332/1 B.C.E. After a long period under the Persians, Egypt is said to have surrendered peacefully. Until the death of Cleopatra VII and the takeover by Octavian in 30 B.C.E., Egypt was ruled by the Macedonians (Lloyd, Alan Brian, Dorothy J. Thompson, and Dominic W. Rathbone. “Egypt,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. J. Quaegebeur, “Cleopatra VII and the Cults of the Ptolemaic Queens,” in R. S. Bianchi, R. A. Fazzini, and J. Quaegebeur, eds., *Cleopatra’s Egypt: Age of the Ptolemies* (1988): 43–44 and P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, (1972) 1: 228. For a general overview of Hellenistic ruler cults, see P. Green, *From Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age* (1990): 396–419; of its imagery, J.J. Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age* (1986): 271–75, and R.R.R. Smith, *Hellenistic Royal Portraits* (1988); for the essential antecedent Alexander, see A. F. Stewart, *Faces of Power: Alexander’s Image and Hellenistic Politics* (1993)—Ashton 2011, 35.

<sup>47</sup> Ashton explains that the promotion of the *Theoi Adelphoi* “gained added impetus from a direct link with the cult of the deified Alexander the Great, who had conquered Egypt when it was under the Persians and had been declared the son of Amun-Ra by the oracle of Zeus Ammon at Siwah in 331 B.C.E.” (2008, 22). If anything, the impetus of this promotion worked to solidify Macedonian autocratic authority in Egypt.

In order to understand the representation of Arsinoe II as shown in figure 1, we must first look to earlier Egyptian iconography. Such visual images and symbols date back to the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties (“sixteenth-thirteenth centuries B.C.E.”) where royal women such as Hatshepsut and Nefertiti, often prominently featured with their consorts or in their own right, laid the groundwork for other royal queens (Ashton 2011, 23).<sup>48</sup> Especially influential were portrayals of the goddess Hathor. Her images particularly inspired royal portraits reflecting “headdress with double plumes, a sun disk and cow’s horns,” and queens associating with Hathor would embed such qualities within their own portrayals (Ashton 2011, 23; see figure 4).<sup>49</sup> Egyptian Queens associating with divinity was a common trope. Later, a vulture crown, which was used to indicate a divine afterlife, emerged on iconography of queens promoting the characteristics of the goddess Nekhbet, “vulture goddess and protectress of Upper Egypt,” and the first to wear such a crown (Ashton 2011, 23).

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<sup>48</sup> Hatshepsut was considered the female king of Egypt (1473-58 B.C.E.) and reigned in her own right. She is said to have established a building program and that she extended the Imperial temple. The temple of the dead in ad-Dair al-Bahrī is particularly unique. She “regarded herself as an ideological successor to the Middle Kingdom kings and as the true liberator from the foreign rule of the Hyksos. Hatshepsut’s rule appears to have remained unchallenged during [their] lifetime,” in *Brill’s New Pauly* (emphasis added). Why Hatshepsut is portrayed as a female king is unclear as far as gender identity in ancient Egypt, though it suggests an androgynous concept. However, it is said she identified herself with the god Atum, who engendered himself and the gods in Egypt’s origin story. If anything, she was a queen trying to inhabit a masculine role in a patriarchal society. A relief was discovered in 1936 that features both Hatshepsut and Atum together (ca. 1479–1458 B.C.E.), <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/547685>. This is worth further research.

Nefertiti is described as having been the chief wife of Akhenaton (Amenophis IV, 1553-1536 BC) as well as the mother of six of his daughters. She is featured on many relief depictions where she is featured next to Akhenaton “in the worship of the sun god Aten; she only appears alone in an early building in Thebes. In the pharaohs’ artistic agendas there are no parallels for such prominence being given to a chief wife. After Akhenaton’s death, N. disappeared from history...,” but “she was included in the *damnatio memoriae*, which was directed at Akhenaton a few years after his death,” in *Brill’s New Pauly*. Her grave has yet to be found.

<sup>49</sup> Hathor, meaning house of Horus, was an Egyptian goddess. She was mostly seen on images and objects in human or cow shape. She is considered the daughter of Re and is often seen as the partner of the god Horus. She is also thought to be the “mother of the music god Ihy. [Hathor’s] areas of competence cover love, music, as well as the realm of the dead... She is also often connected to Isis, for instance in the inscriptions of Dendara. It is to Isis also that she hands her typical crown of cow horns and a disc,” in *Brill’s New Pauly*



FIGURE 2. Hatshepsut depicted as a female king in full Egyptian pharaonic regalia. © ang17a/Fotolia, from *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

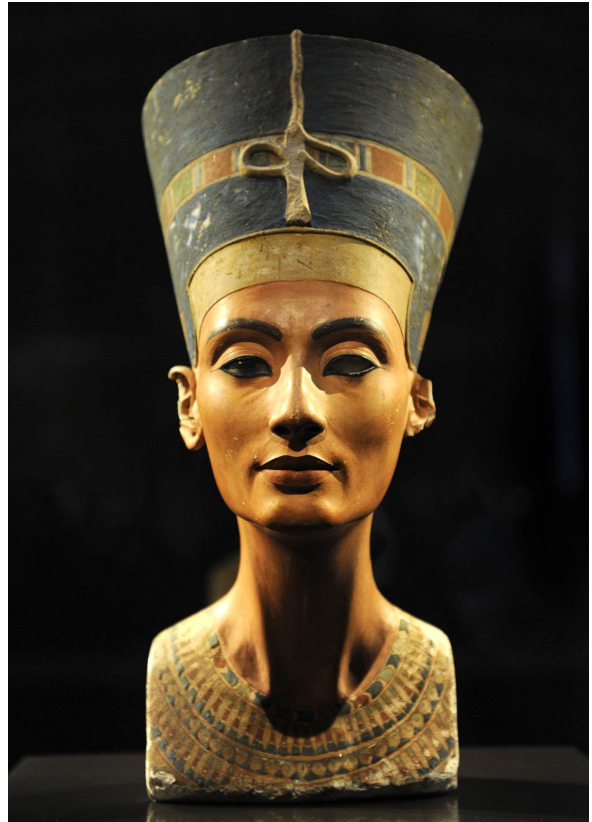


FIGURE 3. Nefertiti is depicted on a painted limestone bust, ca. 1350 BCE; in the New Museum, Berlin. Rainer Jensen—EPA/REX/Shutterstock.com, from *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

Further, Ashton writes,

From the time of Cleopatra III, when the queen was deified in her own right during her lifetime, the Ptolemaic queens wore vulture headdresses even in contemporary images. Finally the uraeus was added: originally this was a symbol of solar kingship, but for royal women, a uraeus also signified the cobra goddess Wadjet, protectress of Lower Egypt, and more generally, status as Hathor, the daughter and eye of Ra... (2011, 23).<sup>50</sup>

A double uraeus is also seen featured on several royal queens during Egypt's eighteenth dynasty

<sup>50</sup> Wadjet, Egypt's cobra goddess, is also known as Buto. Buto was a city in the Lower part of Egypt in the west delta area reaching to the north of Sais. The name itself has its origin in the house of Uto. Uto, in snake-form, was known as the local crown goddess of Lower Egypt and is considered the most important local deity along with Horus. Buto "is the home of the crown and protective goddess of Lower Egypt as well as the relevant sanctuary (just as Hieraconpolis is the one for Upper Egypt), and thus plays an outstanding role in myths and festive rituals," in *Brill's New Pauly*.

(ca. 1550/1549-1292 B.C.E., Ashton 2011, 23). Arsinoe II is said to have been the first of the Ptolemaic queens to expand on her own representation in a distinct way, especially through her posthumous portrayals, which would have aided in determining differences between rulers, especially as they shared spaces with dedications also to deities. In other words, a more distinct representation would aid in the ability to recognize one ruler from that of another. The need for such distinction is evident in ancient texts, such as the Canopus as well as the Rosetta decrees, and it is helpful in the identification of individuals on reliefs, such as the one featuring Arsinoe II, Ptolemy II, and Ptolemy III in figure 1 (Ashton 2011, 23).<sup>51</sup>



FIGURE 4. Statue of Hathor, fourteenth century B.C.E. during the reign of Amenophis III. Luxor Museum Statue. @ Olaf Tausch, from *Wikimedia*.



FIGURE 5. Hathor is depicted on a relief on capitals at Philae island, southern Egypt. © Jeff Schultes/Shutterstock.com, from *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Ashton, *Ptolemaic Sculpture from Egypt* (2001).





FIGURE 6. Statuette of Mut or Nekhbet wearing the vulture crown. ca. 1070–664 B.C. Third Intermediate Period–Kushite Period. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/550784>



FIGURE 7. Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (centre) with the goddesses Wadjet and Nekhbet (both wearing vulture crowns), relief in the temple of Horus, Idfu, Egypt. © Olaf Tausch. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Wadjet/images-videos#Images>



FIGURE 8. Head Attributed to Arsinoe II featuring the uraeus (278–270 B.C.E.). “The delicate arc created by her brow bone over narrow slightly slanted eyes with long thin extensions is a style very closely related to that of Dynasty 30” —<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/547699>

An example of Arsinoe II’s distinct posthumous dedication is shown below in Figure 9 reflecting both Egyptian and Hellenistic traditions. In other portrayals, Arsinoe II can be seen featuring the double uraeus—a representation of both Lower and Upper Egypt—along with a double cornucopia, which may or may not have held the same meaning. The double uraeus symbolized Egypt’s unification, “a constant theme in Egyptian royal imagery... Details such as the cobras and their crowns formed part of a visual language in an era when literacy—especially in Egyptian language—was limited to a few” (Ashton 2011, 23).

Like Cleopatra VII, Cleopatra II is said to have suffered many political, dynastic, and familial struggles during her reign. After the death of her mother, Cleopatra I (176 B.C.E.), however, we see Cleopatra II showcasing tremendous authority and the strategic skills necessary in her response to the survival of the dynasty. In what may have been an effort at avoiding family



FIGURE 9. The following posthumous statuette of Arsinoe II reflects an inscription on the back that depicts the queen as goddess, suggesting it was made ca. 270 B.C.E. after her death when she was deified. The statuette itself would have been dedicated by her brother and husband, Ptolemy II. The frontal pose and limbs are suggestive of Egyptian traditions while the cornucopia featured in Arsinoe's left hand is indicative of Greek divine qualities. Her corkscrew "are strongly associated with Hellenistic traditions in Egypt. Features of the depiction—the small Cupid's bow mouth and the large rounded eyes—are also elements from Greek style. Stylistic comparisons indicate this statue was created in the second half of the second century B.C.E.," <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/545764>.

disputes, she married her older brother, Ptolemy VI, in 176 B.C.E., and the pair took the title *Philometores*, meaning, "Mother-loving Gods," thus honoring Cleopatra I and establishing continuity with her" (Ashton 2011, 24). After her younger brother, Ptolemy VIII, had joined the pair as joint rulers, Ptolemy VI was removed, and Cleopatra II and Ptolemy VIII became co-rulers of Egypt.<sup>52</sup> While Cleopatra II is said to have brought about peace, a second attempt at the three-sibling rule ultimately failed due to internal turmoil, which activated engagement by

<sup>52</sup> The removal of Ptolemy VI was due to outside intervention by Seleucid king Antiochus IV, however, Ashton does not elaborate on the reasons for his removal (Ashton 2011, 24). Cf. G. Hölbl (2001): 183-186 for more information.

Roman generals as well as the Seleucids and resulted in tension between the siblings and their factions as well as between Alexandrines and Egyptians (Livy 45.116, Ashton 2011, 24).<sup>53</sup>

Despite these tensions, Cleopatra II's response shows a talent for diplomacy as she was able to align herself with either party, suggestive of her "flexibility and power" at a higher level than that of her brothers and joint rulers (Ashton 2011, 25).



FIGURE 10. This wall relief (of Kom Ombo) depicts Cleopatra III, Cleopatra II and Ptolemy VIII before the god Horus—right to left, in the Egyptian city of Cleop. @ I, Rémi, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cleopatra\\_II#/media/File:Wall\\_relief\\_Kom\\_Ombo15.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cleopatra_II#/media/File:Wall_relief_Kom_Ombo15.JPG). While Ptolemy VIII is first in line among the rulers, it is notable that each royal seem fairly equal in status and height, with Ptolemy VIII's headdress a tad lower than the queens. The males have a wider stance and have broader shoulders, which may simply be a physical indication of biology, yet, the relief overall is suggestive of the supposed joint rule that the three siblings are to have had. If anything, this depiction reinforces the idea that iconography often depicted rulers as they wished to be seen, not a representation of actual real life. Of worthy note, as well, is the lack of over-sexualization.

53 "The kings who are most often referred to as Seleucids are Antiochus [2-14] and Seleucus [2-8], less often, Demetrius [17-9] and Philippos [24-25]. The Seleucids, who were frequently related by marriage to other royal families, were the descendents of Seleucus [2], the founder of the Macedonian kingdom and dynasty in Asia Minor, the Middle East and Central Asia; they ruled over the largest kingdom (a maximum of c. 3,500,000 km<sup>2</sup>) of those that emerged after Alexander [4] the Great's death (Diadochi; Wars of the Diadochi)" ('Seleucids'. In Brill's New Pauly, edited by Hubert Cancik and, Helmuth Schneider, English Edition by: Christine F. Salazar, Classical Tradition volumes edited by: Manfred Landfester, and English Edition by: Francis G. Gentry. Accessed April 7, 2022. doi:[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347\\_bnp\\_e1107280](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e1107280).)

More conflicts ensued, however, and in 132/1 B.C.E., Cleopatra II staged a revolt and proclaimed herself queen of Upper Egypt after the death of Ptolemy VI. She took the titles “*Philometor* (‘mother-loving’) goddess, and *Soteira* (‘savior’), which reinstated the title she had while ruling alongside Ptolemy VI, and became co-ruler with Ptolemy VIII. Ashton writes, “Diodorus (34-5.14) and Justin (38.12-13) record her brother’s response: he murdered their son, and sent the body to his sister” (Ashton 2011, 25). Such was the alleged familial and political tension that the dynasty entered into a civil war. Despite this hostility and injustice, Cleopatra II is said to have continued her rule alongside her brother, even though “he had her son Ptolemy VII executed, and despite his rape of and subsequent marriage to her daughter, Cleopatra III” (Ashton 2011, 25). Cleopatra II’s response to Ptolemy VIII’s unjust actions either is suggestive of her ambition to rule, of her care for Egypt, or rape was a common reality for women. If anything, it could be all of the three at once, which is representative of complex human nature in response to leadership and even abuse.<sup>54</sup> Regardless, it led to a “second triple rule, equally fraught with troubles and power struggles” (Ashton 2011, 25).

After the death of Ptolemy VIII, who “even from his grave seemed... capable of wreaking havoc,” Cleopatra III was given jurisdiction over Egypt and is said to have ruled alongside her mother for a year. According to Ptolemy VIII’s will, she was granted the permission to choose which of her two sons should be her co-ruler, which placed her in a powerful yet vulnerable position. Ashton explains, “In reality, [Cleopatra III] was forced to alternate her allegiance between the two, and she depended initially on her mother’s favorite and then on whomever was most popular with the Alexandrians” (Ashton 2011, 25). This would have

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<sup>54</sup> Rape and trauma, physical and psychological, in ancient Egypt as well as antiquity at large is worth further research in order to form a clearer understanding of gender and self-agency.

proved an extremely difficult decision and it ultimately led to her death in 101 B.C.E. by Ptolemy X (Ashton 2011, 25). Ashton writes, “The queen herself is generally depicted by historians in a sympathetic light, as a victim of her uncle Ptolemy VIII’s lust in her early years, which resulted in the unhappy rule of her mother Cleopatra II, herself, and one of her sons” (Justin 38.8; 2011, 25). Despite this literary depiction, however, Cleopatra III can be seen as a woman dedicated to advance her own power and position on papyri and many other iconography. Ashton writes,

Papyri indicate that Cleopatra III believed herself to be Isis and that she adopted the priestly roles, such as priest of the cult of Alexander the Great, typically held by the male ruler. She promoted her own cult as herself, in addition to herself as Isis, Cybele, and Aphrodite. The queen also claimed five out of the nine Alexandrian eponymous priesthoods for her own cults. Her visual images also reveal an ambitious response to her individual power: Cleopatra III can be found to take the dominant position on relief scenes, such as standing in front of Ptolemy IX, her son, in an offering scene at Karnak temple. Interestingly, [she] adopted a more masculine image in both her Greek and Egyptian-style sculptural representations.

Like Hatshepsut before her, it is unclear why Cleopatra III depicted herself as more masculine in her portrayals, whether to reassert her own authority as a woman inhabiting a masculine role, or as a response to much injustice. While it may have been both, it might also reflect inspiration drawn from the portrayals of her predecessor, such as Hatshepsut.



FIGURE 11. Cleopatra II or III, Ptolemaic Period, ca. 200-100 B.C.E., Rijksmuseum van Ouheden, Leiden. © Richard Mortel, [https://www.flickr.com/photos/prof\\_richard/46452799605/in/photostream/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/prof_richard/46452799605/in/photostream/)

Regardless, iconography presents us with a line of powerful queens who were deified in their own right and often in their lifetime. The significance of Arsinoe II, Cleopatra II, and Cleopatra III is highly evident, and the combination of religious traditions with ruler cults, sculptures and temple reliefs clearly demonstrate the importance of self-expression among them (Ashton 2011, 26). Cleopatra VII herself would later draw inspiration from both Cleopatra II and Cleopatra III for her own portrayals, however, it was Arsinoe II whose royal model she would emulate and expand the most.<sup>55</sup>

### 3. Cleopatra VII and Arsinoe II

Cleopatra VII is said to have escaped the tumultuous familial and marital problems that her predecessors faced through her alliance with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. While Julius Caesar freed her from Ptolemy XIII, she was already at an advantage over her brother, Ptolemy XIV, due to his young age. Through her son, Ptolemy XV (Caesarion), her royal position was strengthened even further. Nonetheless, she could not escape the necessity and obligation of having a male consort, a long-standing Egyptian tradition of male and female pairing (Ashton 2011, 26). Consequently, when observing images of Cleopatra offering to the gods, she is often seen with her male consort “in a parallel position doing the same” (Ashton 2011, 26).

However, due to her alliance with the Roman generals, complexities arose in regard to official nomenclature. How was she to be displayed and what was she to represent alongside Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, two Romans, who were also the fathers of royal children? While

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<sup>55</sup>Cf. Goelet, Ogden’s “Nudity in Ancient Egypt” for an informative article on the subject.

it was fairly common for the Greek Hellenistic tradition to include extended family, this certainly would have been a new concept for priests and artists alike, since no such unique pairings could be traced or paralleled through prior Egyptian imagery (Ashton 2011, 26). Ashton writes, “This truly mattered, because of the deep symbolism attached to visual representation in Egyptian religion: the visual stood directly for the actual and had to be conveyed by a formulaic, conservative tradition then at least 3,000 years old” (2011, 26).

Unlike Hatshepsut and Cleopatra III, Cleopatra VII’s portrayals on iconography do not reflect masculine qualities. She also does not appear in pharaonic regalia. Instead, her portrayals represent a youthful, idealized vision conveying both the Greek and Egyptian styles deviating from the representations of Cleopatra II and Cleopatra III while emulating those of Arsinoe II “in both reliefs and sculpture in the round” (Ashton 2011, 26). Choosing Arsinoe II as her role model may have been for ideological purposes, however, Cleopatra’s life was vastly different from that of Arsinoe’s. Ashton explains, “Arsinoe’s secure reign and close relationship with her brother and consort in no way resembled that of Cleopatra with Ptolemy XIII or XIV but it does accord with the presentation of the queen with her son Caesarion, Ptolemy XV” (Ashton 2011, 27). Cleopatra may have wished to depict a secure reign herself by drawing parallels to her predecessor on such images. Despite this, Cleopatra’s representations were bold as she is often seen standing alone in scenes “on the temple of Armant that may designate her divine status as much as her role as ruler” (Ashton 2011, 27). This is a step bolder than Cleopatra III, who can be found standing in front of her son, Ptolemy IX, on reliefs. However, neither Cleopatra III or Arsinoe II appears alone, another marker of Cleopatra’s deviation and perhaps desire, to align

with the new while reinforcing her own authority. This is also evident in her depiction as New Isis.



FIGURE 12. “The Geb shrine, Koptos. Cleopatra stands alone offering to the gods. Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London” (Ashton 2008, 46). Another bold stance.

Another parallel to Arsinoe is evidenced, however, as depicted on official nomenclature.

While most queens associated themselves closely with Ra, Cleopatra took the title, “Daughter of Geb,” which was used only by herself and Arsinoe in their lifetime.<sup>56</sup> Ashton writes, “For

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<sup>56</sup> Geb was considered the god of the earth and was central to Egypt’s creation story. He was also the grandson of Ra. Further, “Geb was also believed to be the father of four important Egyptian deities: Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Nephthys. In addition, the pharaohs believed themselves to be descendants of Geb. In fact, the throne of the pharaoh was referred to as ‘The Throne of Geb,’ in <https://egyptianmuseum.org/deities-geb>.



Arsinoe II, this meant she held the title before she was deified in her own right, since the epithet appears on her statue now in the Vatican Museum” (Ashton 2011, 27). This suggests Arsinoe’s pioneering efforts to be depicted as a descendant of a god on earth, as Geb was believed to be the grandson of Ra and the father of both Isis and Osiris. That Cleopatra declared herself a daughter of Geb reinforces Arsinoe as role model for Cleopatra’s own portrayals and associations with deities in her own right as well as in her lifetime.

Further, Arsinoe II more than likely ushered in the iconographic transformations and expansions that would later take place in the first century B.C.E. when “the royal family was considered to be divine in its own right, as illustrated by the adoption of the title *Thea* (“goddess”) by Cleopatra at the start of her reign and the title *New Isis* (Plutarch, *Life of Antony*, 54)” (Ashton 2011, 27).

#### 4. *Thea* and King of Egypt. Triple uraeus?

While Cleopatra can be seen adopting the traditional roles as ruler by making offerings to the gods on iconography like the queens before her, she however, continuously expanded and deviated from such traditions during her lifetime. Not only did she pose as ruler and protector of her son, Cleopatra can also be found making offerings to the gods as an individual apart from her co-ruler, Ptolemy XIV, as seen on the bark shrine at Koptos—another bold stance. Such a stance by Cleopatra on imagery is highly suggestive of the “equality and independent roles” that both Cleopatra and her consort had apart from each other, a rare occurrence in a heavily male-

dominated society (Ashton 2011, 27).<sup>57</sup> Other traditional roles adopted by the queen is observed by her taking the titles *Philopator*, referring to her father Ptolemy Auletes, as well as *Thea* (“goddess”), which simply may refer to her status as divine or she promoted herself as actual goddess on earth. Such a descriptive phrase had also been employed by Cleopatra Thea, sister of Cleopatra III. In addition, Ptolemy XII, Cleopatra’s father, took the title Theos—the masculine equivalent of *Thea*—while Cleopatra’s son Caesarion, in an attempt at honoring his parents, took the titles *Philopator* and *Philometor* (Ashton 2011, 27). Cleopatra’s role as protector was further reinforced on “demotic script” as evidenced through the description, ‘Glorification of Cleopatra Philopator,’ during her time as ruler as well as through the portrayals of her son, Caesarion, as “rightful heir and successor, at the possible expense of her own power” (Ashton 2011, 28).<sup>58</sup> Their alleged close relationship clearly demonstrated on iconography “seems novel in comparison with preceding turbulent years of Ptolemaic rule” (Ashton 2011, 28). Cleopatra also took the title “King of Egypt” though such a title is only referred to once as recorded by C.R. Lepsius at Armant. However, it is of particular importance and interest as a result of the scene in the relief that complements and accompanies it (Ashton 2011, 28). Ashton states, “Despite the

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<sup>57</sup> Where we see Hatshepsut pioneering the way for royal women by asserting her own authority in full pharaonic regalia while also posing as a female king—sometimes even fully male—Cleopatra VII did not choose to portray such masculine qualities in order to reinforce her own position as ruler. Instead, she emulates the femininity qualities, along with the secure reign of Arsinoe II, while simultaneously demonstrating her own power in bold ways as evidenced here. Cleopatra’s strategic decisions to also partner with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony further speaks to her independence and capabilities as queen. If anything, her choices reflect her deviating nature as well as her talent for political propaganda. In her own self-representations, her boldness is evident in her own right both during her lifetime and in later posthumous portrayals as Isis.

<sup>58</sup> “Term coined by Hdt. (2,36) for an Egyptian urseive script attested from the 7th cent. BC; initially used exclusively for recording everyday texts (documents, letters, receipts, lists and the like) and thus distinct as a ‘common’ script from ‘holy’ script (Hieroglyphs, Hieratic),” in Brill’s New Pauly (Zauzich, Karl-Theodor (Sommershausen). ‘Demotic’. In Brill’s New Pauly, edited by Hubert Cancik and, Helmuth Schneider, English Edition by: Christine F. Salazar, Classical Tradition volumes edited by: Manfred Landfester, and English Edition by: Francis G. Gentry. Accessed April 9, 2022. doi:[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347\\_bnp\\_e315600](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e315600)).

title, Cleopatra does not appear in the guise of a male ruler or even with the crown of a pharaoh; instead, she wears a crown that is modeled on the headdress associated with Geb and worn earlier in representations by Arsinoe II” (2011, 28).<sup>59</sup> The close association with Geb appears to have been considered carefully as it is also repeated elsewhere: “Cleopatra VII appears with the same crown on a stele new in Turin and on the walls of the temple Hathor at Denderah (Ashton 2011, 28). It is clear that Cleopatra had no need to portray herself as masculine since Arsinoe II had already modeled her authority and secure reign by adhering to her feminine representations:

The popularity of Arsinoe II’s cult over that of the *Theoi Adelphoi* is testimony to the importance of the Ptolemaic royal women. While earlier Egyptian artists perhaps had struggled to convey this change in roles, their successors in the Ptolemaic period were, it seems, able to deal with the many challenges that the royal family gave them in accurately representing their specific roles. Within Egypt Cleopatra VII was presented as the Egyptian queen, mother and protectress and goddess, who promotes her son as her consort and rightful heir, but the queen’s representation in the Greek world offers a different insight into her aspirations... There is no preserved evidence for the presentation of Cleopatra’s Macedonian Greek inheritance in Egypt, perhaps a result of the Roman conquest, since the victors would purvey their own view of her. Yet possibly the absence of the Macedonian connection reflects the queen’s desire to be seen as an Egyptian, and ironically it is this particular face that has been emphasized in more recent times (Ashton 2011, 28).

Since such historical erasure of Cleopatra VII is also evidenced throughout Roman historical narrative as seen through the works of both Horace and Augustus, it makes sense that iconography representing Cleopatra’s Macedonian heritage would also have been erased after

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<sup>59</sup> Lepsius (1810-1884) led the Prussian expedition to Egypt and Northern Sudan 1849 and 1859 that discovered this relief (Schenkel, Wolfgang (Tübingen RWG). ‘Egyptology’. In Brill’s New Pauly, edited by Hubert Cancik and, Helmuth Schneider, English Edition by: Christine F. Salazar, Classical Tradition volumes edited by: Manfred Landfester, and English Edition by: Francis G. Gentry. Accessed April 9, 2022. doi:[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347\\_bnp\\_e1300240](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e1300240).)

Octavian's conquest of Alexandria following the battle of Actium. However, it certainly also aligns with the queen's identification as an Egyptian by many, complimentary or not. If anything, it is more than likely a combination of both, though the former would not explain why the queen's Egyptian representations then were kept. Illuminating, however, is a representation of Augustus found on the outside of the Geb shrine at Koptos since images of the conqueror were later added, undoubtedly due to political agendas rather than religious ones (Ashton 2008, 46). If Octavian didn't order the erasure of Cleopatra's Egyptian representations, he more than likely kept them while embedding his own in order to emphasize Roman victory and power over Egypt now a province under its jurisdiction.

Another unique iconographic quality particular to Cleopatra VII is demonstrated below in Figure 13. Here, Cleopatra can be seen demonstrating a traditional Egyptian pose wearing a triple uraeus with a single borrowed Greek feature, a double cornucopia. Ashton states, "the cornucopia was associated with Arsinoe II as a direct parallel to the double uraeus. The Hermitage statue, in contrast, has three cobras decorating its brow. It seems unlikely that artists would use both the double and triple uraeus to represent Cleopatra VII on account of the careful measures to ensure continuity that are indicated in decrees and...models... used in workshops" (Ashton 2008, 85). As such, Cleopatra's triple uraeus has caused some confusion as its meaning is unclear, while the double cornucopia has been ascertained as a direct emulation of Arsinoe II as well as a traditional representation of Lower and Upper Egypt (Ashton 2008, 84). Regardless of this confusion, Cleopatra's triple uraeus is featured on six statues of the queen and is wholly unique to her self-image as all other queens "wore the single cobra on their brow" (Ashton 2011, 29). If anything, the triple uraeus suggests that Cleopatra "early in her reign... wished to

distinguish herself from her immediate predecessors, and to offer an image that referred to Arsinoe II but was made distinctive by the third cobra” (Ashton 2011, 30). Such deviations are consistently evident throughout Cleopatra’s representations overall, from her youthfulness to standing alone giving offerings and later associating herself with and declaring herself as Isis.

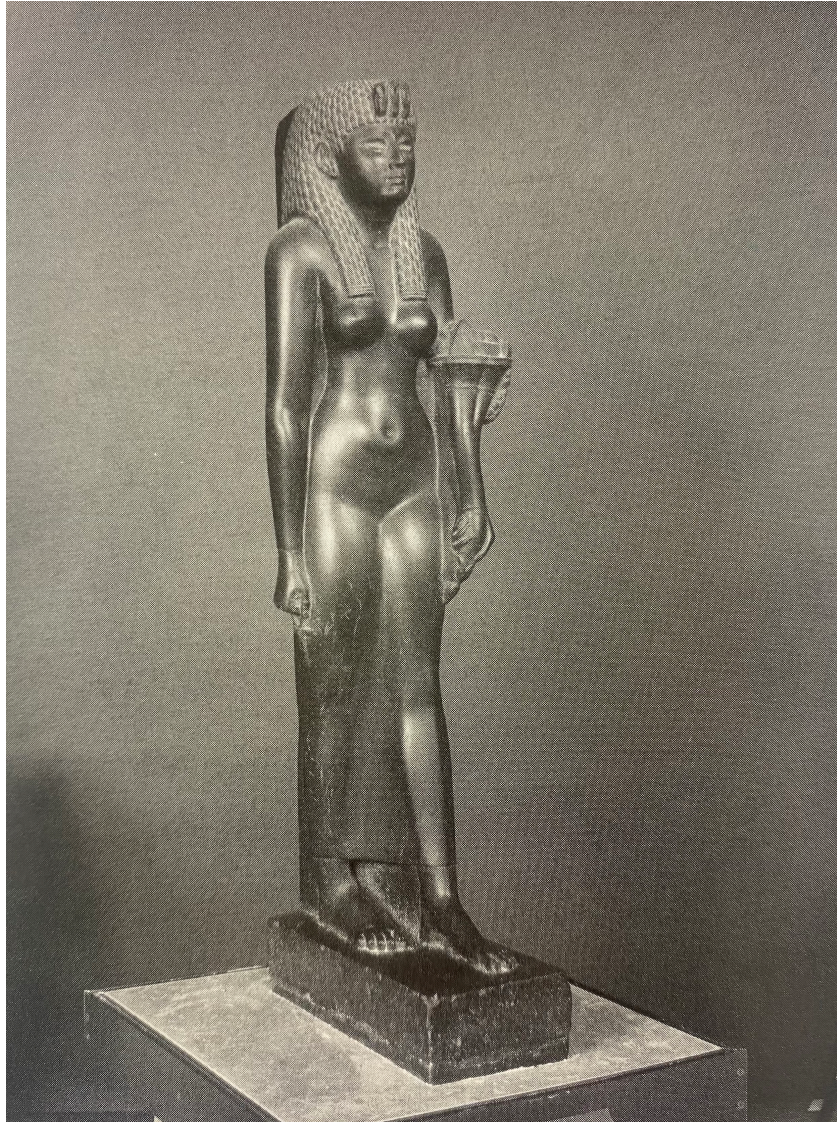


FIGURE 13. A basalt statue featuring a young Cleopatra VII wearing a triple uraeus, which might date back to the death of Ptolemy XIII or the birth of Caesarion. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. “The Hermitage queen wears a tripartite, echeloned wig and the back pillar is unusually raised to a point that is almost parallel to the top of the head, a feature shared with other statues in the triple uraeus group. The swollen abdomen and rounded thighs are... a reference to fertility... the cornucopia [a] reference to the queen’s role as provider” (Ashton 2008, 84).



FIGURE 14. “Copper Alloy coin showing Cleopatra VII and Ptolemy Caesar as a child. The Fitzwilliam museum Cambridge CM.” Here she features the double cornucopia in celebration of the birth of Caesarion (Ashton 2008, 84).

## 5. Isis. Roman Isis?

Though Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* paints the queen’s associations with Isis through a fictional and embellished lens, her identification with such a goddess is clearly demonstrated based on historical fact and iconographic findings. As previously noted in Chapter



FIGURE 15. Ptolemy XV Caesar (right) and Cleopatra VII, relief in the temple of Hathor, Dandarah, Egypt. © Olaf Tausch. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cleopatra-queen-of-Egypt/images-videos#/media/1/121230/188052>

2, Cleopatra allegedly dressed as Isis in front of various audiences as demonstrated by Plutarch. Further, “the close association between the queen and the goddess is illustrated on the back wall of the temple of Hathor at Alexandria, where Cleopatra and her son make offerings to the goddess. Mother and son were also likely represented in a colossal pair of statues from the Hadra region of the city” (Ashton 2011, 32).

Cleopatra’s colossal statue represents her as long-established goddess in the embodiment of Isis and

protector while the two figures are seen to hold hands, “stressing a close personal bond” between mother and son (Ashton 2011, 32). A clear distinction between the representations of royal queens and queens as goddesses can be distinguished based on headdress. For example, a queen portrayed as a goddess will feature a vulture crown versus that of the uraeus. The facial features also serve as indicators as they are commonly depicted as “rounded and stylized with drill holes at the corners of the mouth: all features found on early Ptolemaic sculpture” (Ashton 2011, 32). Such a portrayal of Cleopatra is illustrated in Figure 16 below with Cleopatra depicted as goddess wearing the vulture crown on a relief in the temple of Hathor. An image of Hathor is featured on a pillar to the left.



FIGURE 16. Relief of Cleopatra as goddess, featuring the vulture crown, ca. 69–30, Temple of Hathor, Dandarah, Egypt. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cleopatra-queen-of-Egypt/images-videos#/media/1/121230/163181>.

Another colossal statue is on display in the Greco-Roman Museum at Alexandria originally discovered in Canopus, and is said to depict Cleopatra VII providing “further evidence for how the queen was represented around Alexandria” (Ashton 2011, 32). Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine whether she bore a single, double, or triple uraeus as the face was removed on purpose for unknown reasons, however, it is an over-scale size of 2.35 meters closely matching the colossal statue at Hadra, which scales at 3 meters tall (Ashton 2011, 32). As such, “The two images in Alexandria and Hadra represent the two divine roles of the queen, as goddess in her own right and as Isis, supporter of Caesarion as pharaoh” and yet, in an illuminating twist “it was the Canopus type in Alexandria that was later adopted to represent the goddess by the Romans...” (Ashton 2011, 32).

Figure 17 represents a Greek portrayal of Cleopatra VII as an Egyptian goddess and may even represent her as Isis. On display in Rome’s sanctuary of Isis and Serapis, “the statue’s head (for many years identified as Isis) has portrait features that are similar to the Vatican Cleopatra but shows [her] with an Egyptian tripartite wig and vulture headdress... [the] inlaid eyes is a characteristic more commonly found in Egyptian stone representations of the first century B.C.E... [which] may indicate the sculptor had knowledge of the Egyptian artistic traditions” (Ashton 2011,

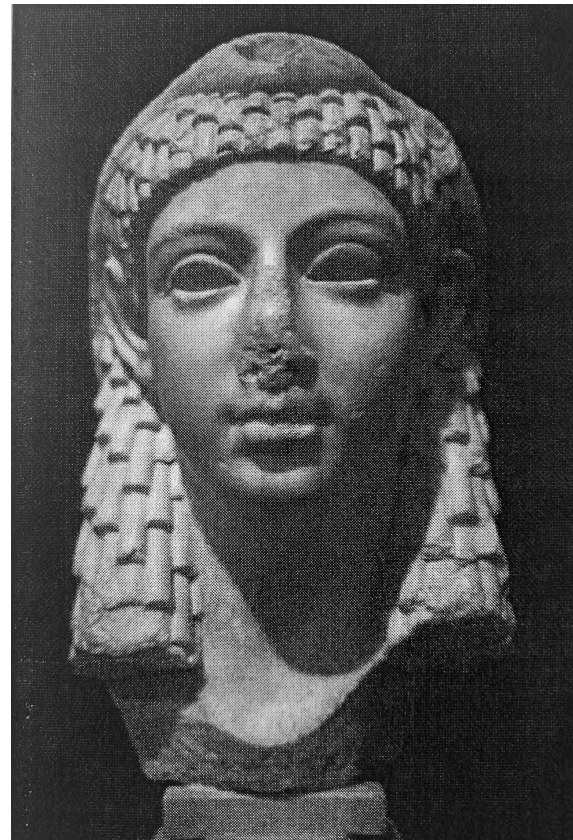


FIGURE 17. “Ptolemaic Queen with vulture headdress, probably Cleopatra as Isis. Musei Capitolini, Rome. Photo Alinari/Art Resource, NY” (Ashton 2011, 33).



33). This particular portrayal further emphasizes the fact that Cleopatra in no way depended on a masculine representation of herself. Her appearance as Isis is emphasized here and in combination with both Plutarch and Shakespeare's narratives, is more than likely what set the stage for the iconic representations of the ruler in movies and theater productions. Although this may be true,

Her "presence" upon which Plutarch comments was manifested in various celebratory and ritual roles and related images, and these indicate a strategic policy of presentation that surpassed any perceived need to represent this particular queen in the guise of a male pharaoh. Cleopatra VII effectively elevated herself beyond this, by becoming the goddess Isis, thus protecting her son and consort, but at the same time retaining her own personal power and status (Ashton 2011, 34).

Cleopatra's images being representative of her strategic, political and religious choices are highly contrasting to the literary narratives of both Horace and Shakespeare. Horace's *inpotens* is unrecognizable in her portrayals. His depictions of her as more 'fierce' as well as 'noble,' whether intended to or not, do match her own representations fairly reasonably, but emasculating her while removing her feminine qualities is far from how Cleopatra presented herself, even if she is to have taken the title, "King of Egypt." Shakespeare's descriptions of Cleopatra as whore is also unrecognizable. In fact, Cleopatra's images are sophisticated in nature without any over-sexualization.<sup>60</sup> While the playwright's characterizations of her as Isis may have been dramatized and decorated, he was not far off in his "Isis defend" or that she was referred to as Isis in her own

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<sup>60</sup> While I do not address gender and sexuality in this chapter, I acknowledge that further research is necessary, which might explain Cleopatra's portrayals to an even greater degree. Cleopatra being sexually confident or sexually active should not disqualify her as a leader.

lifetime. However, stripping her of such associations is a disservice to her own representations. Her portrayals as ruler and Isis in combination with the portrayals of her predecessors showcases a woman capable, a protector and provider, king of Egypt, mother-loving and father-loving, a woman in power. Evidenced through inscriptions on a crown we come to know that she wished to be remembered as “king’s/great royal wife,” “king’s mother,” “king’s sister” like the queens before her, but also that she took royal titles, such as “The Female Horus,” “Ruler of the Land,” “Noble woman,” “Mistress of the two lands,” and “great of praises” (Ashton 2008, 61, 80-81).<sup>61</sup> Cleopatra’s consistent emulation of Arsinoe II may also have been reflective of her desire to reign securely; her choice to partner with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony may be reflective of this, though it is impossible to conclude her true intents.

While I am not arguing for the idealization of an autocratic queen, I do, however, argue for the acknowledgement of her own self-representations as a woman and woman in power. If anything, Figure 17 is evident of her lasting significance throughout the Mediterranean world and influence upon “Egyptianizing cults”—even “the Roman imperial world”—and should be realized as such (Ashton 2011, 34). In returning to Egypt, then, we discover queens portrayed as Greco-Egyptians, wholly Egyptians, male *and* female, queens *and* kings, rulers, regents, Pharaohs, goddesses, daughters, sisters, and mothers and as Ashton so brilliantly concludes, “While [Cleopatra’s] Roman reputation lives on and has taken many forms, her original, intended images have survived, and give us a far more accurate idea of how the queen herself wished to be portrayed, in several guises for her many audiences” (Ashton 2011, 34, emphasis

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Ashton’s *Cleopatra and Egypt* pp. 80-81 for more information on each of these titles. “Great of praises” refers to Cleopatra’s role in religious ceremonies as chantress/priestess while “Mistress of the two lands” emphasizes her role as queen as equal to that of an Egyptian king.

added). While our understanding of Cleopatra's role as ruler of Egypt might be more clear after taking her self- image and iconographic representations into account, this does not mean that we have fully come to know who she was. In fact, her portrayals may not be realistic, accurate, or in accordance with the living person behind closed doors, yet this we will never be able to conclude. As we work to amplify her silenced voice lost in Early modern theatricals and ancient historical narratives, Cleopatra's own perspectives should be considered as possibilities for historical reimagination. And we should remember *γινέσθωι*.

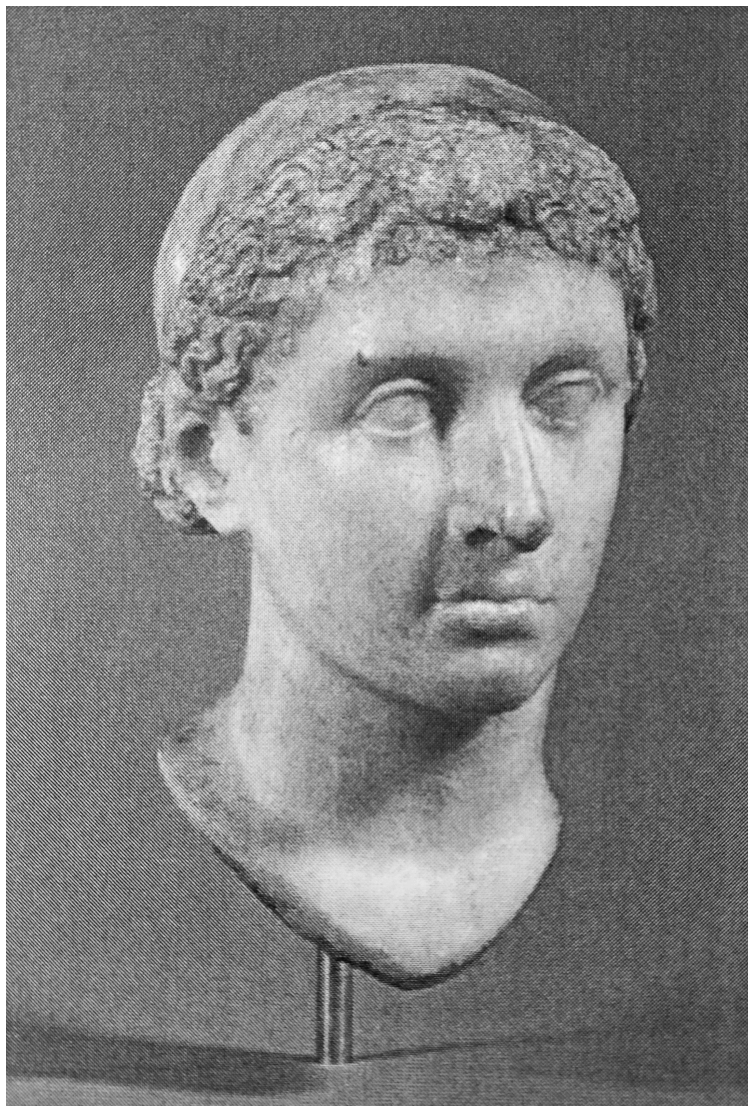


FIGURE 18. "Marble statue of Cleopatra VII. Bildarchiv PreuBischer Kulturbesitz (bpk)," in Ashton 2008, 60.

## Conclusion

“Briseis is just one among thousands of women living behind the scenes... the slaves and prostitutes, the nurses, the women who laid out the dead—all of them erased by history.”

--Pat Barker, *The Silence of the Girls--A Novel*

Deeply embedded within my attempt at gaining a clearer image of Cleopatra through the eyes of both Horace and Shakespeare remained a larger, looming reality: what I had been searching for did not exist in poet or playwright. Through the lens of Horace--wholly and uniquely Roman--I was presented with a version of the Egyptian Queen depicted as a powerful yet dangerous threat cloaked heavily in Augustan propaganda, slander, and degradation. While Horace extends a few redeeming qualities in the last two stanzas of his ode, such as *voltu sereno* (“clear countenance”) and *deliberata morte ferocior* (“with death having been decided, she was more fierce”), the Cleopatra I wished to know remained obscure and entrenched within the literary tropes of an Augustan poet. Regardless, however, I discovered that Horace’s lyrical version of the Queen offered a critical opportunity to reimagine a woman with agency. Of this agency I decided not to rob her. In refusing a humiliating triumph, Horace’s Cleopatra chooses death and a manner of dying more befitting her own representations (*serpentes*), and thus, is enveloped in both poetic and literary freedom as she escapes the grip of Rome and Octavian.

Shakespeare’s version presented me with a complex combination of both ancient Roman and Early Modern portrayals embellishing the historical ruler further, ranging from dark-faced,

gypsy, triple-turned-whore to engendered and stripped of her associations as Isis. Yet, Shakespeare's infinite variety is reminiscent of her own vast and varied portrayals. While she may be referred to as whore on multiple occasions, we should ask ourselves where there is room in our thoughts for *Antony and Cleopatra*. Can we read Shakespeare against the grain? Can we read it ironically? Perhaps the characters of Demetrius and Philo are to be interpreted in this way. If they serve us irony from the start, perhaps their opinions are not to be trusted, and instead, the flip-side should be recognized in consequence since their words teach us more about the Romans than a royal queen.

Returning to Egypt, we can balance the ancient and Early Modern narratives by honoring how Cleopatra VII herself wished to be seen and remembered. Through the acknowledgment of her own representations, we can begin to reimagine a woman and woman in power, and while we bring a perspective of our own in this reimagination, it should be our goal, however complex, to amplify her voice as seen through the primary lens of the objects she left behind. Who is Cleopatra? Who was Cleopatra? This we will never know. Nonetheless, *γινέσθωι* is a reminder of her significance and her self-image is a reminder of her authority and role as queen in her own right.

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