THE PURSUIT OF AN INDEFINITE IDENTITY: FRAMING OUR CONVERSATIONS ABOUT AND UNDERSTANDING OF CLEOPATRA VII

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***Introduction***

Despite living over two thousand years ago, Cleopatra’s life and legacy is resonant in modern society. Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* as well as Elizabeth Taylor’s depiction of the Egyptian pharaoh in the 1963 film, *Cleopatra,* seem to have transformed her from a historical figure into a pop culture icon. As moderns, we know her name, but her life is mythologized and her story is warped, at best. A plethora of scholarship exists which attempts to offer a story of her life, yet each text seems to have some inconsistency with the last. Upon conducting preliminary research for this project, it became clear to me that the versions of this woman seem to know no bounds. Depending on which text you pick up you’ll learn she was “Macedonian Greek,”[[1]](#footnote-0) she was “black,”[[2]](#footnote-1) she was had “innate knowledge in the art of seduction,”[[3]](#footnote-2) she “deserved her pre-eminent position,”[[4]](#footnote-3) she was “consumed with perpetual ambition,”[[5]](#footnote-4) she was a “brilliant politician,”[[6]](#footnote-5) she was a “naval commander,”[[7]](#footnote-6) she was a “woman of surpassing beauty,”[[8]](#footnote-7) her beauty was “not of that incomparable kind,”[[9]](#footnote-8) the list goes on. In order to parse the variety of information and understand where fact ends and assumption begins, one must consider the positionality of the author–ancient and modern alike–to understand the assumptions made about her which craft our perceptions.

In an attempt to understand where her narrative was first shaped, I sought ancient Roman texts in which she is discussed. One might imagine there are many to choose from given her role during a pivotal time in Ancient Rome–the first triumvirate, the assassination of Julius Caesar, multiple civil wars, and ultimately the beginning of the Roman Empire. There are a good number of written works that inform us of the political climate, yet Cleopatra’s name comes up so rarely. Thus, Classicists and Egyptologists have worked to piece together bits of information about her based on the limited and oftentimes heavily biased ancient accounts. The reality then becomes that much is left to one’s own interpretation. This is the plight of anyone who sets out to do research on this fascinating woman; her story will always be incomplete. Thus, those who approach this topic often ponder, *who was she really?* In this paper, I aim to unpack this question, attempting to make sense of the inconsistencies, myth, and propaganda, while also exploring the value of the question itself. Examining the propaganda written about her by her contemporaries, it becomes clear that it is unlikely we get a true sense of who Cleopatra might have really been. I argue that we get a better sense of who she was *not*, given the fact that the poetry makes harshly biased claims meant to incite Roman hatred towards her. Ultimately, I believe she becomes a foil to Rome in that her image is manipulated in the poetry to elevate the Roman norms in order to imply the role of a virtuous Roman woman through this contrast, promote patriotism, and elevate Augustus–and Rome by extension.

***Biography of Cleopatra VII and Its Origins***

Most of the ancient texts in which her life is described come from the authors Plutarch and Dio Cassius who wrote over a century after her death. These texts depict Cleopatra as a seductress of powerful Roman men. Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra,* for example, was adapted directly from a 16th century translation of Plutarch’s *Life of Antony*.[[10]](#footnote-9) In this paper, however, I will be taking a closer look at poetry written by her Roman contemporaries to get a sense of the propaganda which shaped perceptions of Cleopatra in Rome during her lifetime. These poems likely laid the path which Plutarch and Dio Cassius followed but offer much less in terms of volume of text. Before embarking on a close reading of the Roman poetry and propaganda which mention Cleopatra, I will first offer a brief biography, in spite of the aforementioned limitations inherent to this endeavor. It is important to note that many of the following “facts” come from modern biographies written about Cleopatra which heavily cite Plutarch’s *Lives* and Dio Cassius’ *Roman History*.

Cleopatra was a descendant of Ptolemy I, a friend and military advisor of Alexander the Great, so above all, she sought the continuation of the Ptolemaic line.[[11]](#footnote-10) Of Macedonian descent, some scholars say she was likely part Egyptian from her mother, about whom little is known.[[12]](#footnote-11) Fletcher mentions that since Cleopatra’s mother was probably one of the minor wives of Ptolemy XII mentioned in Egyptian sources, she may have been a noblewoman of Memphis’ priestly dynasty.[[13]](#footnote-12) Other scholars assert that Cleopatra’s mother was the sister of her father and thus Macedonian as well; those presiding in this camp argue that had Cleopatra been mixed-race, Romans would have exploited this in their propaganda to fuel hatred for her, but no such mention exists[[14]](#footnote-13) (this debate and its value will be further discussed later in the paper). She took a strong interest in Egyptian culture, traveling about the country and spending time in the public, and it is said that she was the only Ptolemaic pharaoh to learn the Egyptian language.[[15]](#footnote-14) Cleopatra was extremely well-educated and was tutored by the leading scholars of Egypt.[[16]](#footnote-15) She spent much of her time in the Library of Alexandria as well as Mouseion, the palace’s research center, where she learned at least seven different languages and much about medicine.[[17]](#footnote-16) There are writings from Egypt in this time which some scholars attribute to Cleopatra, covering topics from farming to coinage to gynecology, but whether or not she actually wrote them remains debatable.[[18]](#footnote-17)

In early 51 BCE Ptolemy XII, Cleopatra’s father, died and named Cleopatra and her brother, Ptolemy XIII, as his successors.[[19]](#footnote-18) Cleopatra took to the role quicker than her brother, being about eight years her co-pharaoh’s senior, and was named sole ruler on several documents, the first instance dated August 29, 51 BCE.[[20]](#footnote-19) Since Ptolemy XIII was still quite young at the time he became co-pharaoh, his tutor, Theodotus, and former nurse, Pothinus, stepped in to promote their own agendas through the young king.[[21]](#footnote-20) To gain more control for themselves, Pothinus and Theodotus, along with the commander of the Egyptian military, Achillas, joined together and staged a coup to remove Cleopatra from sole rule while she was away from Alexandria in 50 BCE.[[22]](#footnote-21) As tensions grew in Egypt, they too grew in Rome between Pompey and Julius Caesar; Ptolemy XIII and Cleopatra made a seemingly joint decision to assist Gauis Pompeius by providing him with troops and ships, ultimately meant to chip away at their father’s debt to Pompey the Great.[[23]](#footnote-22) By 49 BCE, Cleopatra’s name was omitted from official documents, and Pompey urged the senate to recognize Ptolemy XIII as Egypt’s sole monarch.[[24]](#footnote-23) Shortly thereafter, due to the growing tension between Cleopatra and Ptolemy XIII, she left Alexandria and sought refuge in Thebes.[[25]](#footnote-24) Later on, when Cleopatra was gathering troops so she might return home, Pompey arrived in Alexandria and was killed by orders from Ptolemy XIII, whose advisors believed that the death of Pompey would solidify an allegiance with Caesar who was recently victorious over Pompey at Pharsalus.[[26]](#footnote-25) Caesar was not swayed by this act, and it is said that he was deeply upset and appalled when given Pompey’s remains.[[27]](#footnote-26) When Caesar arrived in Alexandria, he “decreed that Cleopatra and Ptolemy XIII should settle their differences by negotiation before him.”[[28]](#footnote-27) Cleopatra met with Caesar privately (most likely having snuck into the palace wearing a cape and face covering rather than smuggled inside within a carpet)[[29]](#footnote-28) and swayed him to act in her favor; following the famous meeting during which their affair may have begun, Caesar arrested Ptolemy XIII for trying to incite a riot and he declared that Arsinoe and Ptolemy XIV would take control of Cyprus.[[30]](#footnote-29)

Due to the ever-heightened tension between Ptolemy XIII and Cleopatra–as well as Caesar by extent–the Alexandrian War began in 48 BCE.[[31]](#footnote-30) Now that Caesar was engaged in a relationship with Cleopatra, they fought Ptolemy XIII and his forces together; and Caesar was integral to the war as he brought in essential reinforcements.[[32]](#footnote-31) Both Cleopatra and Ptolemy XIII wanted to oust the other so they might take sole control over Egypt. Infamously, the loss of the Library of Alexandria was among the casualties of the war, having burned down amidst fires that terrorized the city.[[33]](#footnote-32) After Caesar and Cleopatra won the Alexandrian War and Ptolemy XIII was dead, Caesar’s consulship ended and he became dictator for a year, but as he remained in Egypt, frustrations escalated among Roman politicians.[[34]](#footnote-33) He finally left Egypt to return to Rome in 47 BCE; scholars speculate that the timing of his return to Rome coincided with the imminent birth of Cleopatra’s child who is widely accepted to be fathered by Caesar.[[35]](#footnote-34) Cleopatra visited Rome on at least one occasion after the birth of Caesarion in the hopes Caesar would publicly legitimize him as his son.[[36]](#footnote-35) However, this never happened and hatred towards Cleopatra grew among Roman elites, like Cicero.[[37]](#footnote-36) To some degree, her connection to and influence on Caesar likely played a part in his assassination on the floor of the Senate in 44 BCE.[[38]](#footnote-37)

Cleopatra left Rome and returned to Egypt where she plotted the death of her brother-husband Ptolemy XIV to promote her son, Caesarion, to be her co-pharaoh.[[39]](#footnote-38) In 43 BCE, with the goals of restoring the republic and executing Caesar’s assassins, a new triumvirate was established: Antony, Octavian (named Caesar’s heir, later called Augustus) and Lepidus.[[40]](#footnote-39) Now that Cleopatra’s most significant political relationship with Rome was now over, she pursued a relationship with Antony which began when he summoned her to Tarsos in 41 BCE and agreed to execute her sister Arsinoe who remained a threat to Cleopatra’s throne.[[41]](#footnote-40) Antony went on to spend time in Egypt with Cleopatra and by his departure in 40 BCE, she was pregnant with his child.[[42]](#footnote-41) She gave birth to twins, and it was not until three years later that Antony returned to acknowledge his paternity.[[43]](#footnote-42) While back in Rome, Antony married Octavia, Octavian’s sister: a strategic political decision meant to connect the two men.[[44]](#footnote-43) This did not stop him from continuing his affair with Cleopatra, as upon his return to Egypt, she became pregnant again with their third child and stayed home while Antony went on to lead a campaign in Parthia.[[45]](#footnote-44) Antony returned to Alexandria after Parthia and became increasingly closer with Cleopatra; culminating in the ceremony of the donations of Alexandria in 34 BCE which recognized the expansion of Cleopatra’s territory and also may have included a wedding ceremony between Antony and Cleopatra.[[46]](#footnote-45)

Antony subsequently divorced Octavia, a choice which not only lost Antony respect among the Roman people as Octavia was known for her virtues but also angered Octavian and caused him to retaliate.[[47]](#footnote-46) He publicized Antony’s will which supposedly stated his desire to be buried in Alexandria with Cleopatra and to give control of Roman territories to their children.[[48]](#footnote-47) Antony’s divorce from Octavia, the donations of Alexandria, the marriage between Antony and Cleopatra, and Antony’s will being made public resulted in Cleopatra being further villainized by Octavian and the war against her officially began.[[49]](#footnote-48) Perhaps the most infamous day in the life of Cleopatra is the Battle of Actium, a devastating loss for the couple.[[50]](#footnote-49) Countless negotiations took place between the couple and Octavian, but ultimately nothing would fix the situation and Octavian came to Alexandria to defeat their remaining forces.[[51]](#footnote-50) When Octavian’s forces arrived on the shores of Alexandria, most of Antony and Cleopatra’s remaining naval fleet and cavalry defected.[[52]](#footnote-51) As a result, Antony was forced to surrender and he returned to the palace of Alexandria and after having been given misinformation that Cleopatra was dead, he inflicted himself with a fatal wound by his own sword (according to eyewitness accounts from Cleopatra’s physician).[[53]](#footnote-52) Plutarch tells us that once they realized the other was alive, Antony was brought to Cleopatra in her tomb, where she sought refuge, and Antony died in her arms.[[54]](#footnote-53)

Cleopatra’s decision to seek refuge in her tomb was a tactical one because much of her wealth was stored there and Octavian needed access to it in order that he could pay his troops, which he would not be able to do if, as threatened, she burned it down.[[55]](#footnote-54) In the days that followed, Cleopatra was persuaded to leave her tomb and she returned to her palace in exchange for Octavian’s word that Caesarion would rule Egypt.[[56]](#footnote-55) It became clear that Octavian was only keeping her alive so he could parade her in Rome at his triumph.[[57]](#footnote-56) To avoid such humiliation, Cleopatra and her close attendants, Eiras and Charmion, committed suicide together.[[58]](#footnote-57) The lore that Cleopatra died from the bite of an asp derives from Octavian’s triumph during which he paraded an effigy of a dead Cleopatra with an asp clung to her neck.[[59]](#footnote-58) Because of Cleopatra’s aforementioned knowledge of medicine and toxicology, it is unlikely that she committed suicide in this painful way which distorts the body, when it’s clear she desired an honorable death. If snake venom was the means to her end, it is much more likely that it was bottled venom of an Egyptian cobra which, when injected into the bloodstream, would be painless and not have such side-effects on the body.[[60]](#footnote-59) Yet, even ancient sources confirm that there is no way of knowing exactly what killed her.

Most of this biographical information comes from the aforementioned Greek texts which claim to convey “factual” information about Cleopatra’s life. Yet, there are clearly doubts about the validity of such “fact” as they are written over a century after her death. In order to understand the true origins of such a warped narrative, the rest of the paper will aim to explore the long-lasting effects of the Roman poetry that was written during Cleopatra’s lifetime and shortly after her death. I examine works written by her contemporaries: the Roman poets, Horace,[[61]](#footnote-60) Propertius,[[62]](#footnote-61) and Vergil.[[63]](#footnote-62)

While in some sense these texts offer great value because they are the only pieces we have written by her contemporaries, it is also important to understand how they might lose value as well on account of the positionality of these authors. These poets all found themselves in the literary circle of Gaius Maecenas, “literary patron” and close friend and advisor of Augustus.[[64]](#footnote-63) Amidst their poetry, one will find that the poets sometimes address Maecenas directly.[[65]](#footnote-64) Because of this connection, Horace, Vergil, and Propertius all exist in close proximity to Augustus, which has led many scholars to identify their work as propagandist. Nisbet asserts that “Maecenas subsidized Horace primarily for political reasons…[considering] the regime's reputation in future ages.”[[66]](#footnote-65) The writings of these poets offer clear support of the regime, although the true tone of their works has sparked debate among scholars.[[67]](#footnote-66) While it is unclear exactly how the Augustan poets felt about the *Princeps* privately, their poetry typically offers unwavering support for the regime and portrays Augustus in a divine light. Many of the poems which will be discussed in this paper focus on the Battle of Actium because that was a defining loss which could easily be portrayed to elevate Augustus’ power and status. In many ways, Cleopatra’s story serves as a vehicle to promote Augustus’ agenda and convince the audience of his power.

***Role of Women in the Late Republic and in the Elegiac Genre***

To understand the criticisms made about her in Roman poetry, I believe it’s important to contextualize such claims by exploring the traditional role of the Roman woman at that time. Entering the 1st century BCE, there is a backdrop of conservatism when it comes to the role of Roman women; in 169 BCE, the Voconian law was enacted which prevents a man in top property class from leaving more than half his fortune to a daughter to ensure women cannot control larger estates than men of the same class.[[68]](#footnote-67) Coming from a period which sought the limitation of a Roman woman’s public role we see some shifts as well as some continuation of such sentiment. By the 1st century BCE, Roman marriages were altered so that husbands no longer had absolute ownership over their wives. The rights of married women expanded as they became able to own property as well as initiate a divorce.[[69]](#footnote-68) Additionally, at the end of the republic, women started to get public eulogies because Roman men began to realize that a woman’s distinction reflected well on the family.[[70]](#footnote-69) Moreover, during this time of civil war, the heads of many noble families were killed and exiled; under these unfortunate circumstances, women were given the opportunity to increase their participation in society on account of male absence.[[71]](#footnote-70) Sallust tells us that noblewomen at this time were also engaging in extramarital affairs, a practice that Augustus would later enact laws to prevent among men and women.[[72]](#footnote-71)

While these changes did give married noble women more flexibility, Hallett reminds us that, “married by their fathers at the onset of puberty, Roman women faced the responsibilities of matronhood before they could cope with the romantic and sexual fantasies of adolescence.” [[73]](#footnote-72) During this time of civil war and political unrest, marriage became a social and political tool which led women to be married young and have multiple marriages due to divorce and death.[[74]](#footnote-73) Roman women, although amidst a small-scale liberation at the end of the republic, were still forced to adhere to a set way of life that was still defined by their fathers and subsequent husbands.

Cleopatra enters the scene among many of these shifts in society for women and her role as a powerful woman must be understood amid this context. The propaganda released about Cleopatra reflects the misguided and often misplaced hatred for Cleopatra which can be traced back to the start of her relationship with Caesar. He had enacted many changes in Rome that can be easily linked to her–and by extension, Egypt’s–influence. Caesar made changes to the Roman calendar, and he did so using the calculations of a member of Cleopatra’s court indicating Egyptian collaboration on what is now known as the Julian calendar.[[75]](#footnote-74) Additionally, after Cleopatra’s beloved library of Alexandria was severely damaged or possibly even destroyed in the strife with her brother, Caesar made plans for the first Roman public library.[[76]](#footnote-75) While these two changes are positive advancements to Rome, her influence was detected in further changes that were likely not as pleasing to the Roman people.

Traditionally, Egyptian pharaohs took on the role of certain gods and goddesses in their religion, and Cleopatra is no exception. She took on the identity of the goddess Isis, which was not a Roman practice at this time in the late Republic, although later, emperors were deified posthumously.[[77]](#footnote-76) Caesar pushed this boundary in Rome by erecting a golden statue of Cleopatra next to a statue of Venus at the Forum Julium, which not only implied Cleopatra’s divinity, but also equated her to the divine mother of Rome.[[78]](#footnote-77) Caesar then erected a statue of himself next to Cleopatra, and Jones notes that “in doing so, he was not claiming to be divine, but was associating himself closely with a ruler who had become a god.”[[79]](#footnote-78) There are also rumors that Caesar had plans to move the capital of Rome to Alexandria, creating the implication that Caesar was beginning to value Egyptian culture above Roman.[[80]](#footnote-79) The Roman elite quickly grew wary of Caesar’s claim to a dictatorship for the remainder of his life and the belief spread that he was interested in becoming a king to Cleopatra’s queen. There was even an infamous moment in which Antony put a diadem–believed to be the possession of Cleopatra–on Caesar’s head and Caesar refused claiming, “‘my name isn’t King, it’s Caesar.’”[[81]](#footnote-80) Caesar’s assassination was largely predicated on this belief that he was pursuing to become the king of Rome, a system of government Roman forebears had left behind after the infamous rape of Lucretia.

Cleopatra’s influence on Caesar in this way likely made Roman elites feel threatened. They were not used to a woman, let alone a foreign monarch, holding so much influence on their society. We get a sense of the qualities valued in a Roman woman later on when Plutarch contrasts Cleopatra with Octavia, Mark Antony’s wife and Octavian’s sister. Fantham et al. paraphrase Plutarch’s sentiments which indicate Octavia “was a model-wife, reenacting the peacemaking role of the original Sabine brides, bearing her husband children, and even, in the style of the late Republic, securing him military forces.” [[82]](#footnote-81) Cleopatra takes anything but a “peacemaking role” in her marriage and, on the surface at least, incites more change and ultimately, violence than peace. Roman wives were valued for their domestic loyalty to their husbands above all else, and Octavia is the epitome of this virtue. Along with this domestic loyalty was the implication that Roman wives take cues from their husbands and not stray too far into their own ventures or become outspoken. This is exactly what we see Cleopatra doing with Caesar and later Antony. It’s also interesting to consider the role that Octavia plays in securing military forces. This indicates women were able to support military operations in this manner, but again, as contrasted by Cleopatra, they were not meant to actually participate in the battles. This gender role inversion will drive the criticisms against Cleopatra in the Roman poetry.

The attacks against Cleopatra on account of her “masculine” behaviors are complicated by the nature of the elegiac genre at this time in Roman poetry. In elegy, the male poet becomes submissive to the woman with whom he is involved. It’s valuable to note that Propertius, Horace and Vergil have grown up with the backdrop of Catullus’ poetry in which he is a “slave” to Lesbia; Propertius, for example, sees Antony, the lover, as a “slave” to Cleopatra.[[83]](#footnote-82) This idea interacts interestingly with the larger genre of elegy and how it inverts the gender roles in romantic relationships. Hallett asserts that Roman elegy at this time acts as a call for change that is reminiscent of the counter cultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s.[[84]](#footnote-83) She cites the inversion of gender roles in elegy–the male poets become submissive to the woman whom they admire in this genre of poetry–and the transfer of loyalty from the *patria* to *puella* as the evidence for this claim.[[85]](#footnote-84) Of the Latin texts I’m examining, Propertius’ *Elegy* 3.11 explores this inversion of gender roles the most distinctly.

***Analysis of Roman Poetry and Propaganda about Cleopatra***

Propertius *Elegy* 3.11 is the most “informative” piece about Cleopatra written by her Roman contemporaries; by this I mean that she is discussed most directly rather than a vague mention, as in Horace *Epode* 9, for example. Propertius begins the poem by claiming he cannot be criticized for appearing weak on account of his love for Cynthia. Then he alludes to various myths by describing how strong men have been subservient to women–a relationship representative of the elegiac genre as a whole. He ends these allusions with asking: *nam quid ego heroas, quid raptem in crimina divos?/Iuppiter infamat seque suamque domum* (“why should I cite any other examples of gods and heroes guilty of subservience to women? Jupiter disgraces himself and his household in the same way,” Propertius, *Elegy* 3.11.27-28). It seems as if Propertius is aiming to justify his subservience to Cynthia by comparing himself to mythical men as well as Jupiter himself who have also succumbed to women. Thus, this creates a sense of normality or inevitability that men, even gods, will submit to women in some manner. One might expect, on account of the first section of the poem, the rest of the piece might focus on Antony and Cleopatra as another instance of this. Rather, Propertius shifts into harsh criticisms of Cleopatra to juxtapose her from the aforementioned women to whom men in mythology and history have been subservient.

He accuses Cleopatra of *famulos inter femina trita suos* (“the woman who has even been grinding [fornicating] among her own slaves,” Propertius, *Elegy* 3.11.30) and *coniugii obsceni pretium Romana poposcit/moenia et addictos in sua regna Patres* (“demanded as the price of her ill-omened marriage, the walls of Rome and the senate be made over to her kingdom as servants,” Propertius, *Elegy* 3.11.31-32). It seems as though Propertius is excusing a man, even a god, succumbing to a woman as an unavoidable reality, but for Rome to become subservient to a foreign queen is unacceptable. The implication here is twofold: Rome is held to a higher standard than the weaknesses of one man and Cleopatra’s foreign origin makes Rome’s subservience unacceptable. Moreover, the way in which Cleopatra is sexualized here undermines the respect she demands as a queen and, perhaps more notably here, a goddess in Egypt. Propertius deliberately ignites hatred towards her by describing Cleopatra in this light as well as being a *scilicet incesti meretrix regina Canopi* (“prostitute queen of incestuous Canopus,” Propertius, *Elegy* 3.11.39). These accusations are meant to sexualize her and portray her as immoral compared to the traditional Roman matron, and ultimately other her in a way that excludes her as a woman who Roman poets–and Romans in general–can be submissive to. Propertius begins this poem by portraying his own subservience to Cynthia to exacerbate the contrast between a Roman woman and Cleopatra, a foreign queen who, as Propertius implies, is of such a low moral class that Rome must not submit to her.

In his elegies, Propertius consistently makes himself out to be a slave to Cynthia, in the name of love; which Hallett asserts is in order to display “intellectual courage and originality as well as sheer infatuation.”[[86]](#footnote-85) Thus, this inversion becomes more a representation of the poet’s romantic desires and a way to delineate from the poetic status quo, rather than a larger social commentary about women in society. In the privacy of their own relationship, Propertius–and other elegists such as Catullus–may become subservient to a woman due to their own infatuations, but this does not extend to politics or greater Roman society. Propertius claims in *Elegy* 3.11 that Cleopatra wants Rome as her wedding present in order to portray her as an enemy to Rome. This indicates that there are bounds to the inversion of gender roles Propertius seemingly upheld just lines before. The disdain for Cleopatra–and her attempt to invert gender roles by taking on a man’s role in politics–emerges in this poem because Cleoaptra’s power affects the whole republic, not simply her romantic partners. It is also important to consider the power that Propertius has by succumbing to a woman on his own accord as a result of his own romantic desires. He is not portrayed as subservient by Cynthia, he portrays *himself* as subservient in *his own* poetry, thus maintaining some agency. In contrast, Cleopatra’s attempts to overtake Rome would effectively strip Roman male elites of their power unwillingly, unlike what occurs within the bounds of elegy.

Additionally, Propertius, along with other elegiac poets, upheld the value of fidelity, especially on the part of the man.[[87]](#footnote-86) It was no secret among Romans that Caesar and Antony were unfaithful to their wives, and Cleopatra was consequently portrayed as a temptress who instigated their infidelity. Romans were offended by Caesar’s outward infidelity when he allowed Cleopatra to stay in his home when she visited Rome,[[88]](#footnote-87) as were they when Antony so blatantly disregarded and ultimately ended his marriage to Octavia. The actions of Cleopatra and her Roman suitors were probably not pleasing to Propertius who promoted fidelity. This may have further contributed to Propertius’ attack on Cleopatra.

Finally, at the end of the poem, Propertius shifts his focus to Augustus and urges his readers to *cane, Roma, triumphum/et longum Augusto salva precare diem!* (“sing the triumph, Rome,/And saved! Pray for the long life of Augustus!” Propertius, *Elegy* 3.11.49-50). His call to celebrate Augustus solidifies this as an example of propaganda because we see Augustus elevated to a god-like status–*vix timeat salvo Caesare Roma Iovem* (“while Caesar lives one should not fear Jupiter,” Propertius, *Elegy* 3.11.66)–at the expense of Cleopatra and her reputation among Romans. He continues to praise Augustus in *Elegy* 4.6 when he claims, *Caesaris in nomen ducuntur carmina* (“the songs are conducted in the name of Caesar,” Propertius, *Elegy* 4.6.13).

Much of the other propaganda written at this time heavily focuses its attention on the Battle of Actium. This pivotal moment in Roman history, or as historians like Strauss would argue, a pivotal time in global history, is likely inaccurately depicted in contemporary Roman poetry. In *Elegy* 4.6, Propertius chronicles the Battle of Actium, and asserts that Cleopatra and Antony never had a chance of winning: *altera classis erat Teucro damnata Quirino,/pilaque femineae turpiter apta manu* (“On one side was a fleet condemned by Trojan Quirinus,/And javelins repulsively fitted in a woman's hand,” Propertius, *Elegy* 4.6.21-22). The image of javelins in Cleopatra’s hand portrays her as taking on a man’s role and Propertius attributes their loss to the fact that a woman was leading the army. In reality, Strauss tells us that Cleopatra’s influence on the strategic planning of their escape was likely the reason they were able to make it out of Actium with a good portion of their fleet intact.[[89]](#footnote-88) By focusing on Cleopatra’s gender above all else, Propertius is able to convince readers that they lost the battle because of her own foolishness, rather than other circumstances which historians now attribute their loss to today.

Antony and Cleopatra’s loss at Actium is further explored in the *Aeneid.* Vergil’s *Aeneid* “recounts the origins of the Roman people…[and] becomes a Roman classic, a national epic worthy of comparison to Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey.*”[[90]](#footnote-89) In the eighth book of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas is presented with a shield that depicts the history of Rome (which are the future actions of Aeneas’ descendants). In the center of the shield, the Battle of Actium is depicted. Augustus is represented quite favorably in which he is *agens Italos in proelia Caesar/cum patribus populoque, penatibus et magnis dis* (“leading the Italians into battle/With the senators and the people, household deities and great gods,” Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.677-678). Contrasted with this epic portrayal of Octavian, Antony is described as a *victor ab Aurorae populis et litore rubro* (“The victor from the people of Aurora and the Indian Ocean,” Vergil, Aeneid 8.686) which alienates him and dilutes his Roman identity. Cleopatra is mentioned in this passage as Antony’s *Aegyptia coniunx* (“Egyptian wife,” Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.688) –not even named. Vergil exclaims, *(nefas)* (“I cannot speak of it!” Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.688) when addressing her presence at the battle. Similar to Propertius’ *Elegy* 4.6, she is made out to be ridiculous for involving herself in military operations on account of her gender. Vergil then indicates that she is in over her head by describing her as *pallentem morte futura* (“pale at the coming death,” Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.709). These descriptors can only be meant to portray the queen in a humiliating manner to deny her intelligence.

The way Vergil describes the battle convinces readers that it was won before it even began. It’s clear that Cleopatra and Antony were on the defensive, and their goal going into the battle was likely to escape and return to Egypt.[[91]](#footnote-90) The pragmatic approach they took to the battle is undermined by Vergil’s description because their retreat was not a frantic decision made in the moment, as he would have readers believe, but rather it was likely a careful consideration made prior to the battle.[[92]](#footnote-91) Vergil addresses the stacked odds by describing the *parte alia ventis et dis Agrippa secundis/arduus agmen agens, cui, belli insigne superbum,/tempora navali fulgent rostrata corona* (“In another part, [eagerly leading the battle by means] of winds and favorable gods, Agrippa/arrogant mark of war,/For whom his head shines having been beaked with the naval crown,” Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.682-684). Antony is embarrassingly contrasted yet again when he is described with *hinc ope barbarica variisque Antonius armis* (“barbarian assistance and with varied arms,” Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.685). This stark contrast encourages readers to root for Octavian before Vergil even begins to describe the actual battle. Agrippa has the wind and the gods on his side, whereas Antony has wealth and barbaric troops–neither of which are portrayed in a virtuous light based on their descriptors. Aeneas, after examining this shield, though *rerumque ignarus imagine gaudet/attollens umero famamque et fata nepotum* (“ignorant of such events, he delights in their representation/Elevating on his shoulder the traditions and fate of his grandchildren,” Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.730-731). This patriotic propaganda further alienates Cleopatra, as well as Antony, by not only perpetuating them as enemies of Rome, but as enemies of Aeneas by extension, a character who represents the virtues of Rome. The audience of this text would only be further persuaded to see Cleopatra as a villain and Antony as a traitor to his country.

In Horace’s *Epode* 9, he continues the literary examination with the Battle of Actium yet in this text, he takes some of the focus away from Cleopatra by primarily attacking Antony. Horace celebrates in *victore laetus Caesar* (“in joy at Caesar’s victory,” Horace *Epode* 9.2), again solidifying this as Augustan propaganda. He describes Antony as a Roman *emancipatus feminae* (“handed authority over to a woman,” Horace *Epode* 9.12) and exclaims that *posteri negabitis* (“later you all will deny it,” Horace *Epode* 9.11), indicating a man who is subservient to a woman is a ridiculous concept that will be corrected by future generations. These sentiments are reminiscent of Propertius’ *Elegy* 3.11 yet, unlike Propertius, Horace does not acknowledge any man should be excused for being subservient to a woman. Horace here portrays Antony’s submission to Cleopatra as disgraceful and Antony is made out to be a shameful representation of a man. Antony is heavily contrasted with the strong and independent victor, Octavian. While Horace centers his attack on Antony, it is understood that Cleopatra’s control over him is the source of that shame. Antony is made out to be an example for Romans, an example one should think twice before following. By centering the focus on Antony and not mentioning Cleopatra, Horace perpetuates hatred towards her by alluding to her as more of an entity than a person. Her presence is known in the poem, but by not mentioning her, she becomes even more threatening as if lurking in the proverbial shadows.

Leading up to the Battle of Actium, high ranking officers in Antonius’ forces were outspoken in their belief that Cleopatra should “play no role in the forthcoming military operations,” despite the fact she wes the one who funded those operations.[[93]](#footnote-92) Roman men were not interested in taking orders from a woman and Antony lost respect from his men by following her leadership. These instances are representative of the widely held belief among elite Roman men that women should not have a palace outside of a domestic sphere.”[[94]](#footnote-93) Cleopatra’s authority being questioned during the war against Octavian, is yet another instance in which Cleopatra represents what Roman men were not used to encountering and what they did not approve of: a strong woman who resembles a man in position and action. In Rome, women did not serve in the military, let alone make strategic decisions, so it is possible this is part of the reason why many of Antony’s men joined Octavian's forces after Actium.[[95]](#footnote-94) During the Battle of Actium, it became clear quite quickly that they were losing to Octavian, so Cleopatra retreated and Antony followed her. Octavian saw this as “treachery on Cleopatra’s part and love-struck stupidity on Antonius’s.”[[96]](#footnote-95) Cleopatra’s retreat was likely a strategic move to save part of her fleet, but nonetheless, it was an action that went against the Roman norms, exacerbating her Otherness and fueling Octavian’s propaganda war.

In Horace’s *Ode* 1.37, he celebrates the defeat of Cleopatra, beginning the poem with a call for celebration, *Nunc est bibendum* (“now there must be drinking,” Horace *Ode* 1.37.1). As seen with most of the Augustan propaganda against Cleopatra, she is not solely depicted as an enemy of Octavian, but of Rome as a whole. This is displayed so explicitly when Horace asserts that *Capitolio/regina dementis ruinas/funus et imperio parabat/contaminato* (“while/The queen was preparing mad ruin/Against (the capitol) and a funeral for the empire,” Horace, *Ode* 1.37.6-9) portraying her as a threat to the continuation and the very existence of the Roman Empire and all the people within it. Horace further incites hatred for the defeated queen and her Egyptian subjects by claiming her troops are of *turpium/morbo virorum* (“disgustingly perverted men,” Horace *Ode* 1.37. 9-10). Cleopatra is later dehumanized in this poem when Horace writes that Octavian *daret ut catenis/fatale monstrum* (“put into chains/The monster of fate,” Horace *Ode* 1.37.20-21). Cleopatra is simply referred to as *regina* (“queen” Horace, *Ode* 1.37.7)–a word in Latin that had a negative connotation due to the Romans’ hatred for monarchy–and thus stripped of her humanity by being depicted not only as a monster, but a weak monster, in the face of Octavian. Octavian and Cleopatra are compared to *accipiter velut/mollis columbas* (“like a hawk/After a soft dove,” Horace *Ode* 1.37.17-18) which highlights Cleopatra’s weakness and elevate Octavian a savior who attacks any threat to Rome. Horace’s Ode 1.37 draws on the patriotism of the Romans to perpetuate the narrative that Cleopatra is evil, but Octavian subdued her with ease.

In the latter half of Horace’s *Ode 1.37,* he comments on her suicide and offers grudging respect for her choice of death over public humiliation. As discussed previously, Cleopatra’s choice of suicide was likely to avoid being paraded in, what Horace calls, Augustus’ *superbo/…triumpho* (“arrogant triumph,” Horace *Ode* 1.37.31-32). Of her death Horace writes, she *fortis et asperas/tractare serpentis* (“strongly dared to/Handle the perilous serpent,” Horace *Ode* 1.37.26-27). Horace’s acknowledgment of her strength in the face of danger offers an interesting juxtaposition to the other passages discussed. These lines do not quite qualify as sympathy, but it appears they, perhaps more interestingly, seem to acknowledge Cleoaptra’s final choice as noble. She is presented as weak for the first half of the poem, in an attempt to elevate Augustus, but here Horace draws our attention to the ways in which he might respect her actions and choices. This is perhaps a way to portray her as a worthy opponent of Augustus to signal to readers that her loss was an impressive feat for Augutsus. Moreover, suicide, in ancient Rome, was seen as a noble course of action in the face of dishonor; thus, we see that the moment Cleoatra aligns with Roman values, she is to some extent praised for it. This instance heavily contrasts the rest of the poetry in which she is attacked for actions which challenge Roman values.

This is the extent of the works that survive which mention Cleopatra that were written by her contemporaries. It makes sense that there would have been so few texts written about her because Octavian intentionally controlled this narrative by recruiting poets like Propertius and Vergil to attack her in their writing. This also goes to show just how limited the information might have been when Greek authors wrote histories of this time which included biographical information about Cleopatra. Of course, it is likely that more accounts were written which have since been lost, yet by the consistent tone of these poems, it seems fair to infer other works would have offered similar sentiments.

***Sexism, Xenophobia, and Othering***

Most of these poems do not even mention Cleopatra by name as if to reject her authority. The meaning of Cleopatra’s name is “a glory to her father,” and the absence of her name from ancient poetry strips her of her ancestral identity and her patriotism.[[97]](#footnote-96)  Moreover, it implies she was only relevant because of her relationship to Antony or Caesar, and she does not deserve an identity of her own, significantly disempowering her and her legacy. Additionally, the absence of her name makes the propaganda that much more effective since the people of Rome were only exposed to the identities these poets prescribed unto her– *regina, Aegyptia coniunx, una Philippeo sanguine adusta nota, femina*. They did not understand her nor recognize her as a complex individual. It is much easier to make an enemy of someone who appears more like a Homeric villain trying to corrupt the hero than it is to make an enemy of a real complex person. This did not only serve to fuel the hatred against Cleopatra on account of her Otherness as an Egyptian woman, but it likely also solidified the patriarchal values of the Roman republic by implying how a woman’s reputation can be destroyed when she steps outside the bounds of the domestic sphere and enters a Roman elite man’s domain: politics and military.

Moreover, the focus on her lineage and Egyptianness as signifiers for her identity serve to exoticize her in ways that promote her as a villain while also exacerbating her weaknesses–at least qualities which are deemed so from a Roman perspective. By focusing on her cultural differences she becomes distinctly foreign, a threat to all things Roman and virtuous. Yet the exoticization of Cleopatra serves both to portray her as a threat to Romans as well as inferior to them. In order to create and sustain such a massive republic and later empire, it was vital that the Romans could uphold a notion of superiority over other peoples, especially those whom they conquered. Cleopatra is a particularly fascinating and tragic example because her status as a Roman enemy is intensified so tremendously on account of her gender; yet the way she is exoticized is consistent with how Romans viewed many other cultures which were especially different. She is thus presented in the Roman poetry as a threat to Roman values, while also belittled on account of her Egyptian identity, cultural practices, and gender.

While there was no doubt a xenophobic element to the contemporary criticisms to which Cleopatra was subjected, it is valuable to keep in mind that a postcolonial black and white dichotomy did not yet exist. Modern historians falsely claim Cleopatra’s whiteness by arguing that it was not mentioned in ancient texts, therefore she must have been white, despite the fact that her lineage–especially on her mother’s side–is not fully known by modern scholars.[[98]](#footnote-97) The study of Cleopatra’s identity highlights what our values are as a society in modern times, just as her actions did in the ancient world. The debates that surround her racial identity directly represent the conversations about racism that are of particular importance to our society right now. Cleopatra in recent decades has been “transformed into a metaphorical site for a contemporary racial battle” on account of the ambiguity surrounding her racial identity.[[99]](#footnote-98)

Ella Shohat’s *Disorienting Cleopatra: A Modern Trope of Identity* is a refreshing perspective among these conversations. She asserts that by arguing Cleopatra was either black or she was white “simplistically equate(s) Egyptianness with blackness and Greekness with whiteness, projecting Greece and Egypt as racially pure spaces, essentializing cultural geographies, and assuming whiteness and blackness as unmistakable polarities devoid of in-between shades.”[[100]](#footnote-99) Shohat affirms that ancient societies such as Macedonia were racially mixed and that there is more evidence to suggest that Cleopatra was also racially mixed than there is to assert she was either black or white. Shohat goes on to assert that these conversations are a projection of our contemporary polarization of racial identities rooted in Eurocentric racism and they have no place in discussions about antiquity. In this way, we see Cleopatra’s image manipulated in order to falsely indicate superiority of one group over another, *yet again*.

Black feminist and classicist, Shelly Haley, goes a step further to assert that “many of the assumptions of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and even twentieth centuries about gender and race are reflected in the discipline of Classics.”[[101]](#footnote-100) Women in the ancient world, such as Cleopatra, who “distracted men from ‘manliness’ *virtus*” were falsely accused of being a temptress, and that misrepresentation has had a remarkably lasting impression on Classical scholarship. The discussions that surround Cleopatra are reflective of the evolution of this field over the last century as scholars once “structured the queen as an erotic object”[[102]](#footnote-101) but now she is finally recognized as the intelligent, strong and powerful woman and leader that she more likely was. Yet, reputations are never truly erased; exemplified by the asp image that has persisted in art since 30 BCE, although even ancient Romans knew the historical accuracy of such a story could not be confirmed.

***Conclusion***

Ultimately, we will never truly know the answer to that question, however; I think these texts give us far more insight into who she was *not* than who she really was. The texts are heavily biased pieces of propaganda in which her image is manipulated to serve Octavian’s agenda. Accepting that these narratives, which have had lasting consequences, are likely intentionally inaccurate representations of Cleopatra allows us to make sense of the modern perceptions which persist today. Additionally, recognizing that these representations are of highly questionable historical accuracy allows us to better parse the historical debate that leads historians to assert she was this or that. Informed by these ways of thinking, one way that I have come to understand this complex historical individual, is by considering her as a foil to ancient Roman society.

The nature of a foil is a person who contrasts with the norm and in doing so, they emphasize the qualities of the norm. This is the way I frame my understanding because the Roman poetic propaganda examined earlier manipulates her image to enhance features of Roman society for their benefit. Propertius’ focus on her gender gives reason for her loss at the Battle of Actium, emphasizing what a woman’s role “should” be. Villainizing her relationships to be a reflection of her immoral sexuality promotes Augustus’s agenda of restoring fidelity and morals in Rome. Focusing on her foreign origin in accounts of her defeat at Actium elevate Roman forces as superior to any nation’s that might challenge Rome. Each one of these attributes are manipulated in a way which ultimately serves Rome, emphasizing the “superior” quality of the norm–i.e. Roman values– when contrasted with Cleopatra. Additionally, returning to the previous discussion of positionality, we know that all these poets had reason to uphold the Roman agenda and attack a foreign woman who was rapidly gaining power and leverage over them, threatening their luxurious lifestyle and patriarchal values as a society.

The consequences of the propaganda, the questionable biographical information, and all the lost information lend for debate among scholars to offer near definite answers about her identity. As Shohat reminds us, these modern debates ultimately perpetuate Augustus’ use of her as a vehicle to promote an agenda. Studying this woman whose image has been grossly manipulated and warped should emphasize that her story has been manipulated over and over again to promote someone’s agenda. What I think is most fascinating, and oftentimes upsetting about her story, is how it has taken millennia to rewrite her narrative from the antiquated version of her as an immoral temptress. I believe we should focus more on the systems at play which have allowed the perpetuation of such a narrative more so than her exact maternal lineage or whether or not she was beautiful by modern standards. By honoring the unknowns rather than continuing to force an agenda onto her legacy, we can have more complex and fulfilling discussions about her life.

Cleopatra was a remarkable woman whose life and actions challenged the status quo of Roman society, and she was villainized for it. Although her story has gone through many iterations throughout history, it seems in the last few decades Cleopatra has emerged as a symbol of feminine power. Her persecution in Roman society indicates that she not only made elite Roman men feel threatened in their positions, but that she served as a foil for Roman societal norms. Being extremely well-educated, involved in the tactical decisions of war against Octavian, and an ambitious political leader, Cleopatra represented everything traditional Roman women were not. Oftentimes, she much more closely resembled a Roman man in her actions. Her involvement in Rome exemplified what was lacking in their society and showed them what they did not want to see–a powerful foreign woman influencing their politics– and it sparked a xenophobic hatred of her. The propaganda that was released by her contemporaries has left a lasting impression that has bled into modern scholarship. These one-dimensional narratives and portrayals of the last Ptolemaic queen as a seductress are only now being challenged in the last few decades, marking an essential shift in the field. Yet, one can only wonder how many other women in antiquity were villainized and their stories misrepresented or lost completely.

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Appendix 1.

Vergil *Aeneid* 8.675-731 Translation

It was able to be discerned in the middle of [the shield] was the bronze fleets, and the war at Actium,

and you could see everything with Mars having been drawn up [for battle]

And you could see all of it, the Leucan island boiling and you could see the waves flashing with gold

On this side, Augustus Caesar leading the Italians into battle

With the senators and the people, household deities and great gods,

680 Standing on the high stern, whose joyous head emits twin flames

And the star embodying his father is revealed on the top of his head.

In another part, eagerly leading the battle by means of winds and favorable gods, Agrippa

arrogant mark of war,

For whom his head shines having been beaked with the naval crown.

685 On this side, with the barbarian assistance and with varied arms, Antonius,

The victor from the people of Aurora and the Indian Ocean,

Carrying Egypt and the strength of the Orient and the farthest lands of

Bactria with him, pursues (I cannot speak of it!) the Egyptian wife

all rushed together and everything was frothing with the oars having been led back

690 the whole sea [having been battered with oars] and with the 3 pronged ship’s beak

They seek the heights; you would believe that the Cyclades were torn up and swimming into the ocean

And you would believe the tall mountains were running together with other mountains

Men in such a great mass were standing on the stern.

A flaming tow and flying iron spears are scattered from their hands,

695 A field of Neptune becomes red from the new slaughter

In the middle, the queen calls her ranks with the sistrum of her fatherland

And not yet does she look back at the twin snakes from behind. Star!

Monstrous gods of every kind and barking Anubis

Opposite of Neptune and Venus and opposite of Minerva

700 Holding spears in the middle, Mars rages in strife

Engraved in iron, the sad dirae rushes out of the sky,

And discord comes rejoicing with her mantle torn

Who bellona comes after with a bloody whip.

Actian Apollo was seeing this and extends his bow

705 From above; in terror at this all of Egypt and India,

All Arabians, all Sabaens turned to flee.

The queen herself was seen

To set sail with the winds having been summoned and now even now, to let loose the ropes.

Amid the slaughter the ruler of fire made her pale at the coming death

710 To be born the waves and northwest winds,

But in opposition, mourning Nile with its great body

And extending its bays and summoning with all its garments

The conquered to the blue bosom and sheltering streams

But Caesar, having been carried into the walls of Rome in triple triumph,

715 was devoting his immortal vow to the gods of Italy,

Three hundred great shrines throughout the whole city

The streets roared with happiness and games and applause

In all the temples was a group of matrons, in all were altars

Before the altars stretched out on the ground were slaughtered cattle

720 He himself sits at the snowy threshold of gleaming Phoebus

Acknowledges the gifts of the people and applies them to proud door posts

730 Ignorant of such events, he delights in their representation

731 Elevating on his shoulder the traditions and fate of his grandchildren.

Appendix 2.

Propertius *Elegy* 3.11 Translation

Why are you so amazed if a woman turns my spirit

And drags a directionless man under her law

Do you imagine all these shameful things are actually crimes to my body

Because I'm not able to break my chains after the yoke was broken?

5 The sailor perceived the way of the winds beforehand better;

The soldier learned to have fear by means of a wound

I scattered those words that had passed her by in youth.

Now you must learn to fear my example.

Medea, led the fire breathing bulls under an inflexible yolk

10 And sowed armor bearing battles in the earth for battle

And enclosed wild mouths of a guardian serpent

In order that the Golden Fleece go to the home of Jason

Penthesilea, fierce queen of maeotis, once having been so bold to fight

From horseback against the ships.

15 Soon after he stripped the helmet of gold from her brow,

her bright appearance conquered the victor and man.

Omphale went forth in such honor of appearance,

The girl having been bathed in the Lydian Gygaeo lake,

So that, that man who established columns in the pacified world would

20 drag soft wool with his hard hand

Semiramis set up the capital of Persia at Babylon,

So that it would rise up as a solid work with its cooked bricks

And two chariots might be sent in the opposite direction across the city walls

Not be able to graze their sides with touched axles

25 And led through the Euphrates in the middle of the stronghold which she constructed,

She commanded Bactria to submit it’s head to her command

Why should I cite any other examples of gods and heroes guilty of subservience to women?

Jupiter disgraces himself and his household in the same way.

What about this what about all those insults did she heap upon our armies a while ago

30 And the woman is even grinding among her own slaves

Demand as the price of her ill-omened marriage, the walls of Rome

and the senate be made over to her kingdom as servants?

Harmful Alexandria, the world reaches the highest pain

And so often Memphis, bloody from your mischief,

35 Where the sand took away three triumphs from Pompey

No day will ever remove the stain of cleopatra for you Rome

Better if your funerals had passed over fields of phlegraeo,

If you were destined to offer your neck to your father in law

It is obvious the prostitute queen of incestuous Canopus,

40 A scorched mark on Philip’s bloodline

She dared to oppose a raging Anubis with our Jupiter

And to force the Tiber to endure the threats of the Nile

To drive out the Roman trumpet with the rattling sistrum

And the Liburnian battering rams to be followed by the poles of the barge

45 Disgusting mosquito nets stretching out from the Tarpeian rock

And pass judgment amid both the statues and the arms of Marius.

Why now it is a benefit that the axes of the tarquin are broken,

Whom does the arrogant life mark with a resembling name

If the woman was to be suffered? Sing the triumph, Rome,

50 And saved! pray for the long life of Augustus!

Yet you fled into the wandering river of the timid Nile

Not that your chains seized the hands of Rome.

You watched your arm having been bitten by the sacred snake

And your limb having been covered you were dragged to go into slumber

55 "Having such a great citizen, Rome, you do not fear me"

Said a tongue buried in pure common talk.

The city joined together supported by seven, which protects the whole world,

58 stands not to be destroyed by human hand.

65 These walls the gods have established, these too the gods saved:

66 While Caesar lives one should not fear Jupiter

67 Now where the classes of Scippio, where the mark of camillus,

68 Or the measure of Pompey, mark of bospore, seized by the hand?

59 The spoils of Hannibal, the trophies of conquered Syphax,

60 The glory of Phyrrys broken at our feet?

Curtis erected a monument in a ditch having been filled up

Letting loose his horse, Decius broke the battle.

The way of Cocles invokes the breaking of the bridge

64 And the raven gave to hold the family name

Appendix 3.

Propertius *Elegy* 4.6 Translation

The temples make prophets. Let the mouths be silent at the rites

And let the young calf who has been struck down fall before my altar.

Let The Roman garland compete with the Philitian ivy

And let the pitcher serve water of Callimachus.

5 Give me delicate costum and the honor of enticing incense

And let the wool circle around the altar thrice

Sprinkle me with water

Let the ivory flute pour a song upon the recent altars amid Migdonian jugs

O deceit go far away. Let harms be in another sky.

10 The pure laurel tree softens a new way for the prophet.

Muse, we will bring back Apollo's dwelling to the palatine.

The matter is, calliope, worthy of your favor.

The songs are conducted in the name of Caesar:

While Caesar is sung, I beg, Jupiter, you yourself should attend .

15 There is a harbor of Phoebus which flees to the shores of Athamania,

Where the bay settles the murmuring of the Ionian water,

Actian Leucas sea monument keel,

A not difficult way for the sailor’s vows.

To this place, the hands of the world came together: At the surface stood a mass

20 Of pinewood ships, but the bird did not favor all the oars

On one side was a fleet condemned by Trojan Quirinus,

And javelins repulsively fitted in a woman's hand

On the holy ship of Augustus, full in Jupiter's foreboding winds

And the standards already instructed to conquer for their fatherland.

25 Finally a god of the sea had bent the edges in twin bows,

The water was trembling, struck by the rays of the arms,

When Phoebus, leaving Delos standing under his protection

(it was moving, unable to hold before the anger of the winds)

He stood on top of the stern of Augustus, and the new flames

30 Shone bright in three fires, curved in a slant.

He did not come with his hair loosened on his neck

Or the unarmed melody of the tortoise lyre

As the sort of god who looked at Agamemnon son of Pelops kindly,

And he discharged the Greek camp upon the eager pyre

35 Or the sort of god who released through its bent coils the Python

Serpent whom the peaceful goddesses feared

Soon he affirms, " o preserver of the world from alba longa

Augustus, having been better recognized than Trojan ancestors,

Conquer the seas: now the land is yours: my bow serves as a soldier for you

40 And all this burden from my shoulder protects you.

Release the fatherland from fear. The fatherland now trusting in you as the protector

(The fatherland) established the public vows on you prow.

Unless you defend it, Romulus as the augur

does not see the palatine birds going well

45 the enemies nearly dare too much buy means of their oars: it is a shameful thing for the Latin race

That with you as the princeps, the waves open up your royal sails

Do not let it scare you that their fleet rows with a great number of oars

Unwillingly the sea is moved there:

And all the centaurs carry rocks driving them at the prow

50 Will prove to be only hollowed Timbers and painted fears

shame breaks and lifts up the men in a military cause ;

Unless it is going to approach in a just way shame shakes out weapons

The time is at hand, come together vessels! I am the producer of time

I will lead the Julian fleet with a laurel hand

55 He had said, and used up the weight of his quiver in his bow:

Next behind the bow of Caesar was his staff.

Rome conquers in the trust of Phoebus . The woman pays the price

Her broken scepters are carried across the Ionian water.

But father Caesar looks on all the way from the idalian star

60 "I am god. That faith is of our blood."

Triton follows this song, and all of the sea

Goddesses clap around the mark of freedom

She seeks a the Nile relying on her evil fleeing boat, that hidden nile

65 The gods had a better plan! How much of a triumph the woman makes,

Through which streets Jugurtha was once led!

From this place Actian Apollo drew fourth a monument/temple, because he

Defeated ten ships with one arrow having been sent

I have sung enough of war; now victorious Apollo begs for his guitar

70 And takes off his armor for peaceful dancing

Now let there be bright feasts in the soft grove

And let a flattery of roses flow across my neck

Let wine be poured, squeezed out of Falernian presses

And let cilician spices bathe our hair

75 When the poets are reclined the muse excites their genius:

Bacchus, you are accustomed to be fruitful along with your brother Phoebus

Let him recount that the marshy Sygambri are enslaved

Let another sing of Cephean Meroe and his dark royalty

Let another recall the Parthian who admitted defeat with its tardy treaty

80 "Let him return to the mark of Remus, soon he will surrender himself,

Or if Augustus will spare anything for the Parthian quivers

Let him defer those trophies for his sons

Rejoice, Crassus, if you taste anything amid the black sands

It is allowed that you go through the Euphrates toward your pyre

85 Thus I will draw night with saucer and song, as long as

The day casts rays upon my wine

Appendix 4.

Horace *Ode* 1.37 Translation

Now there must be drinking, now with a free foot

We must beat the earth, now

Is the time to prepare the couches of the gods

For the Salian sacrificial feast, friends,

5 Before now it was a crime to bring out the Caecubum

From the ancestral cellars, while

The queen was preparing mad ruin

Against the capitol and a funeral for the empire

With the swarm that is infected by the

10 sickness of shameful men, she is weak

To hope for whatever she wants and drunk with sweet fortune.

By the survival of just one ship from the flames

Diminished her wrath

And her mind frantic from mareotic wine

15 He brought back (her mind) to genuine fear

When, Caesar pursues her in in flight from Italy

By means of oars, just like a hawk

After a soft dove or a hunter having been stirred

After a rabbit in the snowy fields

20 Of Haemonia, to put into chains

The monster of fate; who, looking to perish more nobly,

Fearing neither the sword in a womanly way

Nor did she get the hidden shores

With her swift fleet

25 She dared to see a falling palace

With serene face, and strongly dared to

Handle the perilous serpent, so that

She could drink the black venom with her body

With her death having been resolved she is more fierce

30 Certainly she is scorning the savage ships

Having been deprived to be lead out

In an arrogant triumph, she’s not a lowly woman

Appendix 5.

Horace *Epode* 9 (selected lines) Translation

1 When, having put down Caecuban wine for the merry feast

2 In joy at Caesar’s victory

11 Alas, Rome – later you all will deny it–  
12 Handed authority over to a woman

1. Kleiner, 2005, p. 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Haley, 1993, p. 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Ludwig, 1937, p. 47 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Lindsay, 1971, p. ix [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Grant, 1972, p. xiii [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Fletcher, 2008, p. 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Roller, 2010, p. 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Dio Cassius *History of Rome* 42.34 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Plutarch *Life of Antony* 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. Jones, 2006b, p. 223 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. Roller, 2010, p. 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. Roller, 2010, p. 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Fletcher, 2008, p. 73 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. Kershaw, 2020, p. 287 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. Kleiner, 2005, p. 21; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. Kleiner, 2005, p. 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. Roller, 2010, pp. 44-46; Plutarch *Life of Antony 27* [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. Kleiner, 2005, p. 28 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. Roller 2010, p. 53 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. Fletcher, 2008, p. 92 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. Roller, 2010, p. 56; Dio Cassius *History of Rome* 42.36; Caesar *Civil War* 3.108 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. Fletcher, 2008, p. 92 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. Roller 2010, p. 58; Dio Cassius *History of Rome* 42.9 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
24. Fletcher, 2008, p. 95; Livy *Summaries* 111; Caesar *Civil War* 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
25. Roller, 2010, pp. 58-59; Malalas 9.217 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
26. Roller, 2010, pp. 60-61; Propertius *Elegy* 3.11.35-38 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
27. Fletcher, 2008, p. 99; Caesar *Civil War* 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
28. Roller, 2010, p. 61; Plutarch *Life of Caesar* 49 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
29. Fletcher, 2008, p. 102 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
30. Roller, 2010, pp. 61-62; Plutarch *Life of Caesar* 49 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
31. Roller, 2010, p. 62; Caesar *De Bello Alexandrino* 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
32. Fletcher, 2008, pp. 118-119; Plutarch *Life of Caesar* 49 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
33. Roller, 2010, p. 63; Plutarch *Life of Caesar* 49 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
34. Roller, 2010, p. 64-65; Dio Cassius *History of Rome* 42.20-21 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
35. Roller, 2010, p. 67 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
36. Roller, 2010, pp. 70-71; Dio Cassius *History of Rome* 43.27.3; Suetonius *Divine Julius* 52.1 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
37. Roller, 2010, p. 72; Cicero *Letters to Atticus* #393 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
38. Roller, 2010, p. 74 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
39. Roller, 2010, p. 75; Ptolemy XIV is last mentioned 26 July [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
40. Roller, 2010, p. 75; Dio Cassius *History of Rome* 46.50-56 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
41. Roller, 2010, pp. 77-79; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 24-27 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
42. Roller, 2010, p. 83; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 30 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
43. Roller, 2010, p. 84; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 26, 54 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
44. Plutarch *Life of Antony* 53 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
45. Roller, 2010, pp. 96-97; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 30 [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
46. Roller, 2010, pp. 99-100; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 54 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
47. Kleiner, 2005, p. 39; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 54-55 [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
48. Kleiner, 2005, p. 39; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 55 [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
49. Roller, 2010, p. 136; Dio Cassius *History of Rome* 50.4-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
50. Roller, 2010, p. 139; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 65-69; Dio Cassius *History of Rome* 50.6-51.3 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
51. Roller, 2010, p. 144; Dio Cassius *History of Rome* 51.8 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
52. Fletcher, 2008, pp. 308-309; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 76 [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
53. Fletcher, 2008, p. 309; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 76 [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
54. Fletcher, 2008, p. 310; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 77 [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
55. Kleiner, 2005, p. 157 [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
56. Fletcher, 2008, p. 310; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 78-84 [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
57. Fletcher, 2008, p. 314; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 84 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
58. Roller, 2010, p. 147; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 85-86 [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
59. Kleiner, 2005, pp. 158-159; Plutarch *Life of Antony* 86 [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
60. Fletcher, 2008, pp. 316-317 [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
61. Quintus Horatius Flaccus (Horace) was a Roman poet who lived from 65-8 BCE. He was the son of a freedman and his father sent him to school in Rome then Athens to study. In the early thirties, Horace became friends with poets Vergil and Varius. Horace would then go on to become a trusted advisor of Octavian. (Mankin, 1995) [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
62. Sextus Propertius was a Roman poet who was born sometime between 58-54 BCE and died 16 BCE. After writing his first book he became a pupil of Maecenas. He wrote mostly love elegy and centers a lot of his work around his tumultuous relationship with Cynthia. (Hutchinson, 2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
63. Publius Vergilius Maro (Vergil) was a Roman poet who lived from 70-19 BCE. Vergil wrote works such as the *Eclogues, Georgics,* and perhaps most importantly, his final work, the Aeneid. The story goes that while abroad he was editing the *Aeneid* but fell fatally illand asked it be burned. Augustus had it published anyway, and it became a seminal epic in Rome. (O’Hara, 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
64. O’Hara, 2018, p. 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
65. Heyworth & Morwood, 2011, pp. 19-20 [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
66. Nisbet & Hubbard, 1970, pp. xvii-xviii [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
67. Heyworth & Morwood, 2011, p. 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
68. Fantham et al., 1994, p. 263 [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
69. Hallett, 2002, p. 331 [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
70. Fantham et al., 1994, p. 271 [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
71. Fantham et al., 1994, p. 271 [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
72. Fantham et al., 1994, pp. 284-285; Sallust *Catiline* 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
73. Hallett, 2002, p. 331 [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
74. Fantham et al., 1994, pp. 275-276 [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
75. Roller, 2010, p. 72 [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
76. Roller, 2010, p. 72 [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
77. Jones, 2006a, p. 47 [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
78. Roller, 2010, p. 72 [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
79. Jones, 2006a, p. 47 [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
80. Roller, 2010, p. 136 [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
81. Jones, 2006a, p. 51 [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
82. Fantham et al., 1994, pp. 274-275 - Plutarch *Life of Antony* 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
83. Fantham et al., 1994, p. 285 [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
84. Hallett, 2002, p. 334 [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
85. Hallett, 2002, p. 334 [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
86. Hallett, 2002, p. 336 [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
87. Hallett, 2002, p. 336 [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
88. Jones, 2006, p. 78 [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
89. Strauss, 2022, p. 195 [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
90. Jones, 2006b, p. 118 [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
91. Strauss, 2022, p. 171 [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
92. Strauss, 2022, p. 170 [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
93. Roller, 2010, p. 135 [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
94. Hallett, 2002, p. 331 [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
95. Roller, 2010, p. 138 [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
96. Roller, 2010, p. 140 [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
97. Wyke, 1992, pp. 101-104 [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
98. Shohat, 2021, pp.149-150 [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
99. Shohat, 2021, p. 150 [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
100. Shohat, 2021, p. 153 [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
101. Haley, 1993, p. 23 [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
102. Wyke, 1992, p. 99 [↑](#footnote-ref-101)