"Queen of Kings": Masculinity and Femininity in the Visual Rhetoric of Cleopatra VII and Augustan Distortions Thereof

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ABSTRACT

"Queen of Kings": Masculinity and Femininity in the Visual Rhetoric of Cleopatra VII and Augustan Distortions Thereof

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To address every aspect in which Cleopatra VII asserted her right to rule and maintain the favor of her own subjects and of Rome would be far too large a task for anything less than a book-length treatment. Rather than attempt to address multiple issues, this thesis addresses just one aspect of Cleopatra’s political strategy to visualize her legitimacy as ruler: namely a combination of masculine and feminine elements in her iconography. This thesis will then follow the same themes in elements of Cleopatra’s visual rhetoric was seized upon by the poets of Augustan Rome, who used it to the opposite effect, making her out to be unfit to rule.

In the case of Cleopatra’s visual rhetoric, the emphasis shifts in different periods, as Cleopatra adapted her rhetorical strategy to her personal circumstances and her intended audience, at times emphasizing certain masculine elements and at other times focusing on feminine. The Roman authors, on the other hand, see Cleopatra’s status in ruler as a usurpation of the masculine rule and therefore monstrous and unspeakable. In order to take the queen and fit her into a Roman world view, they make use of various types of women customary to Classical literature to confine her to a role appropriate—from their perspective—for a woman. In every case, however, gender is used to demonstrate Cleopatra’s legitimacy, or perceived lack thereof.

Keywords: Cleopatra VII, gender, iconography, Vergil, Horace, Propertius
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Introduction

During her life, Cleopatra VII, last of the Ptolemies, manipulated her iconography to emphasize to her subjects her right to sit on the throne of Egypt. Representations of the queen created after her death were similarly manipulated by their creators to serve their own rhetorical purposes. Several such manipulated representations can be found quite soon after Cleopatra’s death in the poetry of Augustan Rome. Much can be discerned about the motives of the creators of these representations by examining the means by which they fashioned their depictions. In the case of both Cleopatra herself and the Roman poets who represented her shortly after her death, depictions of the queen are clearly manipulated in terms of gender and gender roles.

That Cleopatra manipulated her own images is not at all surprising; rulers ancient and modern have always used the arts as a way of influencing public opinion. Marketing one’s rule can be a challenge for any ruler, but in Cleopatra’s case there were more challenges than usual. A typical (male) king might desire to represent himself in a positive manner to his subjects, but he would not need to justify himself and his position in the way a woman would. It was unusual in the ancient world for a woman to rule independently, as Cleopatra effectively did. In the context of the Hellenistic kingdoms in general and Ptolemaic Egypt specifically, a female ruler, while not the norm, was not as strange as in the earlier Classical Greek world or in contemporary Rome. Nevertheless, even within this slightly more accepting context, a woman ruling a kingdom faced certain issues, stemming from the lesser status of women in general in the Classical world. Powerful women were something of an anomaly, and the manipulated representations of Cleopatra engaged with this issue.

The most effective way for Cleopatra herself to deal with such issues was to pursue policies that benefited her people, thereby demonstrating her ability to govern well, which she
did. However, these practical measures could be, and were, supported with more rhetorical methods. Cleopatra used images and iconography as a supplemental way of demonstrating to her subjects her ability to rule. At times using notably masculine imagery to boldly assert her independence, at other times using particularly feminine imagery to invoke divine precedent, Cleopatra manipulated gendered iconography to make her rule palatable to her subjects.

But she was not the only one to use this strategy. The Augustan poets writing after Cleopatra’s death also recast her in terms of gender roles, specifically in their literary depictions of the Battle of Actium. They did so, however, from an entirely different perspective. While Cleopatra may have been able to make her rule palatable to her subjects by assuming certain iconographical elements that played on gender roles, the Roman poets manipulated gender tropes in their depictions to mold her for a Roman audience. This manipulation did not, of course, not serve the same purposes. It was of no concern to a Roman whether Cleopatra was viewed as a legitimate ruler of an Eastern kingdom. To them, Cleopatra was an enemy who not only defied description in Roman terms, but whose prominence challenged Roman concepts of masculinity. In the Roman world ruling nations and leading armies, and in fact most aspects of public life, were the prerogatives of men. And so rather than make her appear as an acceptable ruler, they fashioned her into a manageable enemy, usually by constraining her to fit Roman gender roles.

Though Cleopatra’s iconography and Roman poetic descriptions of her were created for vastly different audiences, both were manipulated by similar means. In each case, a combination of masculine and feminine gender roles was manipulated to either legitimize or delegitimize her. The differences in the approach, the particular combination of manipulated gendered elements used in each version of the queen, can be explained by the differences in the audiences of the
representations’ creators and the impact the “author” of the image hoped to have on those audiences.

**Gender**

Biologically speaking, gender or sex in the Classical world was viewed on a spectrum, ranging from fully masculine to fully feminine, with everything in between.\(^1\) Aristotle describes this spectrum from male to female as depending on temperature, masculine bodies being warmer, feminine bodies being colder.\(^2\) This is similarly articulated in the Hippocratic corpus:

> Τῶν δὲ πάντων τὰ μὲν ἄρσενα θερμότερα καὶ ξηρότερα, τὰ δὲ θήλεα ύγρότερα καὶ ψυχρότερα διὰ τάδε, ὅτι τε ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ἐν τοιούτοις ἐκάτερα ἐσγένετο καὶ ὕπο τοιούτων αὐξεται, γενόμενα τε τὰ μὲν ἄρσενα τῇσι διάτησιν ἐπιπονωτέρησι χρῆται, ὡστε ἐκθερμαίνεσθαι καὶ ἀποξηραίνεσθαι, τὰ δὲ θήλεα ύγροτέρῃσι καὶ ῥᾳθυμοτέρῃσι τῇσι διαίτῃσι χρέονται, καὶ κάθαρσιν τοῦ θερμοῦ ἐκ τοῦσώματος ἑκάστου μηνὸς ποιέονται.

The males of every species are warmer and drier, and females are wetter and colder for these reasons: at first each was born in such things, and grew on account of them, but males, once born, use a more rigorous regimen, with the result that they grow warmer and drier, but females use a wetter and lighter regimen and purge heat from themselves each month.\(^3\)

Beyond addressing the causes of the differences between male and female, Aristotle states: “τὸ γὰρ θῆλυ ὥσπερ ἄρρεν ἐστὶ πεπηρωμένον,” (the woman is like a deformed male).\(^4\)

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\(^1\) For a more thorough treatment on Greek views on gender and anatomy see Lesley Dean-Jones, “Medicine: the ‘Proof’ of Anatomy,” in *Women in the Classical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 183-205;  
\(^4\) Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 737a28
female was merely an incomplete or less fully developed male. Herophilus, and later Galen, viewed male and female genitalia as essentially analogous.5 Galen asserts:

\[
\text{ἔστι δὲ τὸ θῆλυ τοῦ ἄῤῥενος ἀτελέστερον ἑνὶ μὲν καὶ πρώτῳ λόγῳ, διότι ψυχρότερον. }
\]
\[
\text{εἴπερ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς ζῴοις δραστικῶτερὸν ἐστὶ τὸ θερμόν ἀτελέστερον ἂν εἴη τὸ }
\]
\[
\text{ψυχρότερον τοῦ θερμοτέρου...πάντ' οὖν, ὅσα τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ὑπάρχει μόρια, ταῦτα κἀν }
\]
\[
\text{ταῖς γυναιξίν ἰδεῖν ἐστιν, ἐν ἑνὶ μόνῳ τῇς διαφορὰς οὐσίας αὐτοῖς, οὓ' παρὰ πάντα χρὴ }
\]
\[
\text{μεμνῆσθαι τὸν λόγον, ὡς ἐν δὲ τῶν γυναικῶν ἐστι μόρια, τὰ δὲ τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἔξω,}
\]

The female is less perfect than the male for one particular reason, because she is colder; for if among animals the warmer is the more active, then a colder one would be less perfect than a warmer…All the parts, therefore, which exist in men, are possible to see in women; one must remember that they are different only in this way, that the parts of women are on the inside, while the parts of men are outside.6

The differences between male and female, or between masculine and feminine, were thought to be caused by variable circumstances.

Thus, gender did not have to fall into a strict male-female binary, and an individual could fall somewhere between fully masculine and fully feminine. This spectrum of masculinity and femininity is not limited to the biological sphere but can also be translated into terms of masculine and feminine roles. Just as an individual could biologically be considered somewhere between male and female, an individual, male or female, could place themselves outside the normal sphere of their sex. Such was the case of those exceptional women who, like Cleopatra, did not consign themselves to the domestic, feminine, sphere but participated in public life, which was usually the domain of men.

5 Galen, On the Seed 2.1
6 Galen, On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body 14.6
It is in this sense that masculinity plays a role in the iconography and literary depictions of Cleopatra VII. With the exception of one stele—one with several interpretative difficulties to be discussed below—there was no real attempt to depict Cleopatra wholly as a man, yet certain images and descriptors, while not hiding the fact that Cleopatra was a woman, presented a more masculine image of the queen.

For a woman in Ptolemaic Egypt, life was considerably less controlled than it had been for women in Classical Greece. Unlike Classical Athens, where it could be asserted that the best reputation for a woman to have was to have no reputation at all, women in the Hellenistic period could much more easily participate in public life, if not nearly to the same extent as a man. More women gained prominence in the Hellenistic period than they rarely, if ever, had in the Classical period. Higher levels of education were available to elite women, as were prominent positions as priestesses. Female poets achieved great renown, including the epigrammatists Erinna, Nossis, Anyte, and Corinna. Women were less controlled by men; marriage contracts preserved in papyri guarantee wives significant protections they did not have in earlier periods. Some women were even able to take advantage of the Egyptian, rather than the Greek, legal system. Under Egyptian law, a woman did not need a kyrios, which allowed them to enter contracts and make legal decisions on their own, without a husband or father making such decisions for them or on their behalf. They could own and lease property, and even those who

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7 Thucydides 2.45.2.
8 This discussion can only be limited to the briefest sketch. For a full treatment on the lives of women in Hellenistic Egypt, see Sarah B. Pomeroy, Women in Hellenistic Egypt: From Alexander to Cleopatra (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), in which each chapter discusses women in various social classes, from queens down to slaves
9 Pomeroy 55-72
10 P. Elephantine 1; P. Elephantine 3; P. Tebtunis I 104; P. Tebtunis IV 974; P. Tebtunis III 815; P. Petrie III 19c; P. Giessen 12; P. Geneva I 21; Pomeroy, 83-98.
11 Pomeroy 172
12 P. Pt. I 9726, 9724, 9764.
could not afford land could more easily access the workplace, even if these jobs were most often among occupations traditionally seen as feminine, such as midwifery and textile production.\footnote{See Pomeroy 160-171 and the sources cited therein.}

Cleopatra, however, was no ordinary woman. A woman in the royal family held a higher place in society than women in any other social class. This does not, however, mean holding the throne was easy. Despite women’s comparatively less controlled lives in Ptolemaic Egypt, women had rarely ruled Egypt on their own. Even in pharaonic Egypt, independent queens were few and far between, though they did exist. The most famous of these, Hatshepsut, effectively held the throne alone, though she started her reign as regent to her son. However, she suffered an almost complete damnatio memoriae afterward, even though Egypt had prospered under her reign. And she still clearly felt pressure for being a woman, because she progressively portrayed herself more and more like a man, until her iconography and titles were wholly masculine. There were others as well, and certainly Egyptian queens held more power than their counterpart queens in the Greek world, who were rarely more than wives of a king. Even these powerful Egyptian queens, when seen over a tradition spanning well over 2,000 years, were relatively few. It was even less common for a woman to reign independently in the Ptolemaic period. A queen might wield great power and influence, far exceeding that of elite Greek women of the Classical period, and many in fact did. They possessed vast wealth and property without being dependent upon male guardians, but they rarely ruled in their own right as a king could. As Grace Macurdy has noted, “There was never the possibility of a woman’s succeeding to the throne if she had brothers, and a woman’s power has heretofore in the history of these houses always come from
overpowering strength of character, combined with the weakness in her husband’s personality…or from the position of regent for a minor son.”

Even the great Arsinoe II, who became the model for most Ptolemaic queens who followed after her, never ruled on her own. She certainly wielded significant influence, having considerable wealth and property in her own right, but she was still dependent upon her husband. It is impossible to tell from Greek sources exactly how much power she, or other early Ptolemaic queens, held, but their power almost always came via their marriages, sons, and wealth, not through sitting on the throne. Egyptian sources seem to emphasize the queens’ status, and Jan Quaegebeur has argued that, in view of titles given to Arsinoe in demotic documents, she shared sovereignty with her brother and was equal to him in authority. This may well be true. Exactly how much influence Arsinoe held over her husband has been debated, but even if we accept as true the argument that she was equal in power to her husband, or even that she surpassed him as a force, nevertheless, she still did not rule on her own, independently of her husband. As powerful as she was, she was queen because she was married to a king.

Berenice II was a paradigmatically powerful queen as well, but her authority came through a combination of marriage and wealth, like Arsinoe II before her. Although she became the sovereign of Cyrene at the death of her father in 249, this independent status did not last long. She very quickly married Demetrius the Fair of Macedonia. If she ruled on her own for a time, it

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14 Grace Macurdy, *Hellenistic Queens: A Study of Woman-Power in Macedonia, Seleucid Syria, and Ptolemaic Egypt* (Baltimore: John’s Hopkins University Press, 1932), 147. Though this work is somewhat outdated, and at times inaccurate in its chronology, it remains a standard reference for the lives and careers of the many Macedonian, Seleucid, and Ptolemaic Queens, supplemented, in the case of the Ptolemaic queens, by Pomeroy, 1-40.
15 See Pomeroy, 19.
was while waiting for her impending marriage. Demetrius was soon killed as he was having an affair with Berenice’s mother Apame, but rather than remain in Cyrene, Berenice married Ptolemy III, reuniting Cyrene with Egypt as her dowry.\textsuperscript{18} She may have reigned in Cyrene alone while waiting for a marriage, but a marriage was always expected. After becoming Ptolemy III’s wife she was called “the female Pharaoh” in Demotic papyri as Arsinoe II had been,\textsuperscript{19} and she was clearly very influential: it seems to be for her great influence that she was murdered by her son Ptolemy IV.\textsuperscript{20} She even governed the kingdom while her husband was campaigning in Syria from 246-241.\textsuperscript{21} During this time she may have ruled for a time in her husband’s stead while he was off on campaign, but she was still dependent upon her status as wife of the king for her authority.

A few generations later, Cleopatra I acted as a regent for her son after the death of her husband, Ptolemy V Epiphanes. The son, Ptolemy VI Philometor, was the only male heir, but was a mere five years old at the time of his accession, and so was incapable of ruling on his own. Cleopatra kept her role as regent until her own death. She was the first Ptolemaic queen to act as regent for a son, and in this role she wielded great power and influence. While regent, her name appeared before her son’s in the dating of official documents, evidence that she was seen as the true power behind the throne.\textsuperscript{22} But even with the independence that ruling as regent gave her,

\textsuperscript{20} Polybius 5.34, 36, 15.25; Justin 39.1.7.
\textsuperscript{21} It may, however, be possible that she accompanied her husband, during the war. Bevan interprets “the Sister” of the Gorub papyrus (W.Chr. 1 = FGrH 160) as Berenice II, rather than Bernice Syra, which would suggest the queen’s presence in camp with her husband, and Hyginus \textit{Astr.} 2.24.11-18 portrays Bernice II in battle. Bevan’s theory has largely been dismissed, as other evidence, including Callimachus’ “Lock of Bernice,” suggests she remained in Alexandria. See Stuart Bevan, \textit{The House of Ptolemy: A History of Egypt under the Ptolemaic Dynasty} (Chicago: Ares, 1968), 201-203. Some support Bevan’s theory, notably Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones and Stephanie Winder, “A Key to Berenike’s Lock? The Hathoric Model of Queenship in Early Ptolemaic Egypt,” in \textit{Creating a Hellenistic World}, ed. A. Erskine and L. Llewellyn-Jones (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2010), 253-254. See also Dee L. Clayman, \textit{Berenice II and the Golden Age of Ptolemaic Egypt} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 125-131.
\textsuperscript{22} Pestman, 46. See also John Whitehorne, \textit{Cleopatras} (New York, Routledge, 1994), 50.
she was still ruling through her connection to a man—in this case her son, rather than her husband.

Cleopatra II was likewise named pharaoh in several papyri. In addition to being recognized thus in Egyptian documents, the Romans apparently recognized that she held power equal to her husband Ptolemy VI, or at least Livy did, as he gave her the title rex along with her husband.23 She was temporarily regent for her son Ptolemy VII until the boy was murdered by Ptolemy VIII.24 When Ptolemy VIII was driven out of the city in 130 BCE, Cleopatra II held power alone in Alexandria, and she appears in a few papyri by herself during this brief period. Her independent reign was short-lived, however, as Cleopatra fled Alexandria when Ptolemy returned to the city shortly after his expulsion, and he had fully regained power by 127 BCE. She attempted to gain support in Syria, but when she failed to do so, she returned to Alexandria and was again associated with her Ptolemy VIII and daughter Cleopatra III as queen. For a short period after the death of Ptolemy VIII, she continued to hold power jointly with her daughter, Cleopatra III (also wife of Ptolemy VIII) and her daughter’s son Ptolemy IX Soter II. Except for during a brief period of civil war, she always reigned in conjunction with a man, either a husband or son.

Cleopatra III was plagued by dynastic issues. According to the will of her late husband Ptolemy VIII she was to rule with one of her sons, but the people, along with her mother Cleopatra II, preferred her elder son, Ptolemy IX Soter II, and they forced her to renounce Alexander I for Soter.25 Conflict between the two brothers resulted in the throne passing back and forth between them. During these conflicts, Cleopatra, like several queens before her (and

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23 Livy 44.19; 45.13.
24 Justin 38.8.4, though the Justin’s dramatic scene of murder in his mother’s arms is likely exaggerated.
25 Pausanias 1.9.2
after her), in fact, was featured prominently in official documents, often preceding her sons’ names in official dating protocols. While this does indicate that Cleopatra was the more powerful figure while ruling with her sons, she was still part of a royal pair, dominant or not. She was always associated with a male figure, however unequal the pairing. Moreover, Alexander had his mother murdered, undoubtable fearing her influence popularity among the people.

Except for the brief span when Ptolemy VIII had been driven out, the only times a queen ruled alone were while she was waiting for marriage, as was perhaps the case with Berenice II. Similarly, Berenice III held power on her own following the death of her husband Ptolemy IX Soter II in 81, but this was temporary, for she was married to and associated with her son Ptolemy XI Alexander II in the following year. According to Appian, this was partially because the women of the royal house wished to have a male ruler. Porphyry claims that Alexander came back to marry Berenice because the Alexandrians called him, though the veracity of this claim is uncertain. It seems evident, however, that the people considered it necessary for a queen to be associated with a king, since they sought out a husband for Berenice despite her immense popularity, for “sole female rule was clearly an abnormality, too unnatural to be tolerated for long.”

The same occurred during the expulsion of Ptolemy XII Auletes. At first his daughter, Berenice IV, was associated with her mother (or possibly sister) Cleopatra Tryphaena, but at

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26 Wilhelm Dittenberger, *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*, two volumes, (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1960) no. 167, 738, 739 (pgs. 240-241 vol. 1, 481-483 vol. 2); For examples of this with other queens, see Pomeroy, 23-24.
27 Justin 39.4-5, Pausanias 1.9.2-3
28 Appian *BC* 1.102
29 *FHG* III, 772.
31 Porphyry *FGH* III p. 723 is the only source to claim that this is Auletes’ daughter, but Strabo asserts that Auletes had three daughters, who would have to be Berenice IV, Cleopatra VII, and the Arsinoe who was banished after the Alexandrian War. There are some issues in Strabo’s account over all, so we cannot be completely certain. A rule of
Cleopatra Tryphaena’s death the people saw fit to seek out a husband for Berenice to legitimize her reign. The people’s first choice, one of the sons of Cleopatra Selene who had requested the throne of Egypt from Rome in 75, died before an arrangement could be made. A second choice, Philip II, great-grandson of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II and son of the last Seleucid king was objected to by Gabinius, and Philip rejected the offer out of fear of slighting a Roman pro-consult.32 Next the people chose a certain Seleucus, another son of Cleopatra Selene from one of her Seleucid husbands, and invited him to Alexandria. The marriage was short-lived, for he was so hateful to Berenice that he was killed within a matter of days.33 The people once again sought out another husband, this time a certain Archelaus, whose origins are obscure, though Pompey had appointed him as priest and ruler of Comana in Pontus. He claimed, at least, to be a son of Mithridates Eupator. He was brought to Alexandria and married to Berenice, and the marriage lasted until Auletes was put back on the throne, when both wife and husband were killed.34 During all of these arrangements, it is possible that Berenice actually reigned in Egypt independently for as long as two years, but there were always intentions for her to be married as soon as a suitable candidate could be found. It simply took longer than expected to locate such a husband.

It is clear then, that it was not seen as acceptable for a woman to rule by herself for more than the briefest time. Though a queen could—and often did—hold the real power behind the throne, there must nevertheless be a king associated with her, even if his role was merely nominal and symbolic. And yet, there was certainly precedent for a woman to dominate a

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32 Porphyry FHG III, 716.
33 Strabo 17, [796].
34 Strabo 12.3.34 [558]; 17.1.11 [769].
husband or, more commonly, a son. The only times a woman ruled without a husband was when she exercised power in connection with a child, and this would provide Cleopatra VII the opportunity she needed to effectively maintain the throne of Egypt alone after the birth of Caesarion.

**Masculinity and Femininity in Cleopatra’s Visual Rhetoric**

In the ancient world rulers had no modern media or technologies to carry messages to their subjects, but they possessed other means of transmitting such messages. To those nearby, a ruler could appear in person, and craft their personal appearance to convey a certain message. Such displays could also travel by word of mouth and spread to a larger audience. Building projects provided an opportunity for a ruler to attach his or her name to a visible monument, which attested to his or her generosity to those who read it. Artistic representations could reach a wider audience, as they were accessible to the illiterate. On patronized monuments, a ruler could commission artwork to promote a desired representation of him- or herself, which would be visible to all who passed by. Coins were an ideal vessel for such visual rhetoric, as they were portable and designed to be dispersed widely. Cleopatra VII used all of these methods and more to present herself to her people. Adrian Goldsworthy has noted the effectiveness of such methods, referring to them as “statements of power.”

Though Goldsworthy was speaking of coins in particular, his statement is relevant to all of Cleopatra’s visual rhetoric.

This visual rhetoric, in its varied forms, emphasized Cleopatra’s status as ruler and legitimate heir to the throne of the Ptolemies. The way it did so, however, varied from one image to another. Gender played a prominent role in the images Cleopatra commissioned to represent herself, though the gendered elements at times vary significantly. Though this might seem to

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indicate an inconsistency in representation, Cleopatra was far too intelligent for these differences to be unintentional. On the contrary, they seem to represent a change in the political strategy that Cleopatra used as she progressed from the early years of her reign to later years. Particularly after the birth of Ptolemy Caesar (hereafter referred to as Caesarion), there seems to be a shift in political strategy. Earlier images of Cleopatra feature particularly masculine imagery which highlights Cleopatra’s continuity with the preceding kings of the Ptolemaic dynasty. Later images, while not necessarily discarding all the elements of these early images, emphasize Cleopatra’s femininity, especially drawing attention to her status as mother and fertility goddess.36 This shift hinges upon the birth of an heir, which simultaneously gave Cleopatra a royal consort and the ability to draw upon religious and mythical traditions to her benefit. But as Cleopatra becomes more entangled in Roman affairs and appears in images intended for a Roman audience, the earlier masculine elements reassert themselves. Sally-Ann Ashton has written of the role of feminine, and particularly maternal, imagery in Cleopatra’s visual rhetoric, but asserts that this was the whole of the queen’s visual policy and does not take into account those elements of the visual rhetoric that do not emphasize the closeness of Cleopatra and Caesarion or emphasize her feminine, maternal role.37 Cecilia Peek has made the most comprehensive study of the visual rhetoric of Cleopatra’s early coin iconography. She examines in detail the connections between the representations of Cleopatra during her early career (until

36 The masculine elements of the earliest coinage, along with the shift to feminine iconography after the birth of Caesarion, particularly as it appears in coinage, are the main argument of the third chapter of Cecilia Peek, “She, Like a Good King: A Reconstruction of the Career of Kleopatra VII,” (doctoral dissertation, University of California-Berkeley, 2000), 95-122, which will be discussed in more detail below. This argument is significantly expanded in an article currently under review, which the reader should consult once published. As cited below, in multiple instances I am following her analysis.
the beginning of her affair with Mark Antony) and, among other matters, discusses at length the role of gendered characteristics in the queen’s images, especially in her coinage.38

It must be acknowledged, of course, that not all of Cleopatra’s images were intended for the same audience. Statues and reliefs in the traditional Egyptian style in Upper Egypt would be unlikely to be seen by the Greek population of Alexandria. Coins minted in Cyprus and Ascalon, though they might have made their way to Alexandria, would be far less likely to be seen by Cleopatra’s native Egyptian subjects living south of the Delta. And some images may not have even been intended for Cleopatra’s subjects at all, especially those coins minted in conjunction with Antony for his legions. And yet, though some of the rhetoric might not translate from one audience to another, many aspects, especially those touching religious iconography which had undergone syncretism in the Greco-Egyptian world would speak well to multiple audiences.

Before discussing Cleopatra’s iconography, it will be beneficial to look at the precarious position in which she found herself during the first years of her reign, in part due to her father’s mismanagement of affairs, much of which Cleopatra lived through and which would have made an impression upon her.39 At the death of Ptolemy XI Alexander II in 80 BCE, no legitimate heir to the throne remained alive, and so the people crowned Ptolemy XII Auletes, bastard son of Ptolemy IX Soter II, king of Egypt. This was problematic, for the late Alexander’s will stated that on his death the kingdom was to go to Rome, and this left the state of Egypt in question.

38 Peek, (2000), 95-122
39 The issues faced by Ptolemy XII Auletes were by no means new. There was a lengthy history of conflict between the Ptolemaic kings and the crowds of Alexandria and the Rome gradually encroaching in Ptolemaic affairs. Both the Alexandrian mob and Roman officials intervened repeatedly in dynastic affairs, expelling and sometimes killing a king and placing another on the throne. Given the focus of this thesis on Cleopatra VII, we will focus merely on the problems faced by Cleopatra herself and her father. For full treatment of these issues, see Peter M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 3 vols. Oxford 1972 I, 115-131; Erich Gruen, *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 672-719. Various articles in the *Cambridge Ancient History* also deal with these themes. For more on the impressions that Auletes’ embattled history made on Cleopatra, see Peek (2000), 1-18.
Sensing this instability, two sons of the last Seleucid king, Antiochus X, claimed the right to the Ptolemaic throne through their mother Cleopatra Selene, daughter of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II. The senate did not hear their bid, but their boldness demonstrated Auletes’ vulnerable position.40 Not only this, but Rome began eying Egypt more than it had previously. On the basis of Ptolemy X’s will, Crassus wished to make a move on Ptolemaic resources. He was opposed, and Egypt was left alone for the moment, but the question would continue to arise.41 Meanwhile, Pompey’s reorganization of the Roman provinces in the Eastern Mediterranean had brought Roman power to the very threshold of Egypt.

Because of this uncertainty, Auletes was, understandably, committed to Rome, but this came at the cost of incurring the hostility of his own subjects. After receiving massive bribes, Julius Caesar named Auletes a friend of the Roman people, 42 and Auletes either handed over Cyprus to Roman control or else was content to let them take full possession of it without protest.43 Cyprus had been under Ptolemaic control since 295/4, so this was a major blow. Outraged, the people demanded that Auletes either reclaim Cyprus or give up his Roman amicitia. Presumably because he judged his position too precarious to oppose Roman interest, Auletes fled to Rome in 58, either having been expelled or in fear that he would be, where he asked for Roman aid to regain his throne.44 In Auletes’ absence, the people put his daughter Berenice IV, and his wife Cleopatra Tryphaena VI (or possibly another of Auletes’ daughters by the same name)45 on the throne, though Cleopatra Tryphaena died after a year, leaving Berenice

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40 Cicero, *In Verr.* 4.27.
41 Cic., *leg. Agr.* 1.1; 2.41-44; *De Reg. Alex.* Fr. 1-2, 6-7; Plut., *Crass.* 13.1-2; Suet., *Iul.* 11
43 Appian *BC* 2.23; Dio 38.30.5, 39.22.2-4; Cicero *Pro Sest.* 57, 59; Strabo 14.6.6; Plutarch *Cato Min.* 34-38. See also S. I. Oost, “Cato Uticensis and the Annexation of Cyprus,” *CP* 50 (1955), 99; Peek (2000), 14-16.
44 Cassius Dio 39.12. See also Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 32.70, Strabo 17.1.11; Livy, *Per.* 104.
45 See note 31 above.
as sole ruler until a husband could be found for her.\textsuperscript{46} Auletes, failing to acquire military backing from Rome, went to the temple of Artemis at Ephesus where he encountered the Roman general Gabinius, whom he was able to bribe into reinstating him despite the senate’s disapproval. Pompey, though he himself was too entangled in other matters, approved of intervening in Egypt, and encouraged Gabinius to take part on his behalf.\textsuperscript{47}

In 55, Gabinius marched on Egypt and defeated the resistance of Berenice’s forces. In the aftermath, Auletes had his usurper daughter Berenice put to death. He also murdered a number of Egyptians at Pelusium, though Mark Antony, serving under Gabinius, was able to put a stop to this and spare the people. By doing this and ensuring that Berenice’s husband Archelaus received proper burial rites, Antony became one of the few Romans the Alexandrians did not detest.\textsuperscript{48} After his reinstatement, Auletes remained in power until his death in 51, though the people did drive out one of his officials, the Roman Rabirius Postumus who had been appointed \textit{dioecetes}, a financial administrator, to get back some of the debt that Auletes owed to Romans.\textsuperscript{49}

From an early age, Cleopatra VII would have been acutely aware of the need to maintain the people’s favor to retain power. It is uncertain whether Cleopatra accompanied her father to Rome or if he left her somewhere while he fled, but regardless, Cleopatra would have been witness to the events surrounding her father’s bid to regain control of Egypt. Though young, it seems impossible that she would not have taken this into account. Moreover, her own first years as queen did not go smoothly.

\textsuperscript{47} Cassius Dio 39.55.1-4  
\textsuperscript{48} Plutarch, \textit{Vit. Ant.}, 3.  
\textsuperscript{49} Cicero, \textit{Pro Rab. Post.}, 22, 28, 39-40. Given that Rabirius was back in Rome for the trial in which Cicero defended him in 54, Rabirius must have left Alexandria less than a year after being appointed by Auletes.
When Auletes died in 51 he left the kingdom to Cleopatra VII and her younger brother Ptolemy XIII, who was surrounded by advisors grasping for power by taking advantage of the king’s youth. Within a few years her brother’s advisors managed to drive Cleopatra out of Egypt. By 48 Cleopatra had raised an army in Syria and had begun her push to reenter Egypt. In the midst of this strife, the Roman general Pompey appeared and was murdered by Ptolemy’s advisors, seeking to win the favor of Julius Caesar by handing him his enemy’s head. The plan backfired, as the betrayal did not endear them to the Roman general.

Seeing her chance in this, Cleopatra managed to sneak herself into Caesar’s presence and convince him to enforce Ptolemy Auletes’ will and reestablish her joint reign with her brother. Whatever peace this decision may have brought was short-lived, as under the provocation of Ptolemy’s advisors, particularly Pothinus, riots broke out in protest of Roman involvement in Egyptian affairs. These riots escalated into the conflict known as the Alexandrian War.

Ptolemy’s chief minister Pothinus convinced the general Achillas, who was joined by Ptolemy’s and Cleopatra’s sister Arsinoe, to attack the Roman forces. As the fighting dragged on Ptolemy XIII was killed, but Caesar managed to restore peace. In the aftermath, Caesar had Cleopatra’s remaining brother Ptolemy XIV made her co-ruler. He also banished their sister Arsinoe to Ephesus in order to prevent further sibling rivalry disrupting the peace. This conflict, and especially the hostility that the people expressed towards Cleopatra had a noticeable impact on her and her political strategy.

The problems her father faced, and more importantly the problems Cleopatra herself faced, shaped the policy of her visual rhetoric. Since a ruler’s place on the throne could easily be

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50 Caesar Bell. Civ. 3.103; App., Bell. Civ. 2.84. For a comprehensive argument that this expulsion was not due to general unpopularity but rather to the political machinations of Ptolemy’s advisors, see Cecilia M. Peek, “The Expulsion of Cleopatra VII: Context, Causes, and Chronology,” Ancient Society 38 (2008), 103-135.
lost, Cleopatra used her iconography to demonstrate that she was the legitimate ruler, the rightful heir to the throne. She began this by emphasizing certain masculine iconographical images in representation of herself.

**Masculine Imagery**

The earliest surviving, datable depiction of Cleopatra is a limestone stele dated to the first of Epiphi in the first year of the reign of Cleopatra Thea Philopator, who, from these titles, must be Cleopatra VII. (Figure 1). As such, this dates the inscription to the first year of Cleopatra’s reign in 51 BCE. The inscription itself has little of import, other than the date, and merely states that the president of the association of Isis dedicates the stele on behalf of Cleopatra. The image above the inscription, however, is quite interesting. It represents Cleopatra standing in front of an offering table, bringing two containers of some sort to Isis, who is herself enthroned on the left with the infant Horus suckling in her lap. Cleopatra appears on the right bringing offerings, but she is represented as a male pharaoh, wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. The image of this stele has largely been overlooked; commentary has been brief, where it is mentioned at all. Even Diana Kleiner’s work on Cleopatra’s art merely mentions its existence and general appearance.51

Since the stele is from the very earliest days of Cleopatra’s reign, it is quite possible that the male figure was originally meant to represent her father. The last two lines of the inscription show some evidence of recarving: the lines are less deeply incised into the rock, and the letters do not follow the preparation grid of the earlier lines. It has, however, been alternatively suggested that the differences in the last lines could be explained by a miscalculation of the size

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of the inscription on the part of the stone carver, a common enough mistake. Moreover, the lines that may have been most clearly recarved contain the stele’s date, but not Cleopatra’s titles, which occur in the first two lines, which show less evidence of recarving. It is still possible that the whole original inscription was chiseled out and replaced, and that the earlier lines were merely done more neatly, but it is also possible that the stele was actually meant for Cleopatra. Nevertheless, because of the uncertainties involved with the stele, any conclusions drawn from it must be taken as provisional, rather than certain. Ashton has argued that since the text of the inscription states the stele was dedicated on behalf of Cleopatra rather than by her, it must represent the ideology of the private donor, rather than Cleopatra’s own policy. However, Ashton also uses this same stele as evidence of the importance of divinity to the queen and of her desire to be associated with her father. Such assertions are paradoxical. One cannot assert that the stele is not representative of Cleopatra’s policy in one respect yet use the same stele as evidence of another aspect of the queen’s policy.

Furthermore, though it is impossible to account for personal taste, the commissioner could just as easily have dedicated the stele on behalf of Cleopatra’s brother, which would have required little to no reworking of the inscription, had he so desired. Duane Roller has suggested that the masculine iconography may have been intentional, either on the part of Cleopatra or the Egyptian artist, and that the reasoning behind this masculine image is the ill ease Cleopatra’s Egyptian subjects may have felt having a woman rule: “In the first months of her reign, the Egyptian aristocracy may not yet have adjusted to the idea of a female ruler—recent previous

queens had ended their reigns in disaster—but this male characterization lasted to the end of her life...formal usage in Egypt could create a masculine Cleopatra, perhaps high praise for her status and quality of rule.” There was certainly precedent for such masculine representation of female rulers, dating at least as far back as Hatshepsut. Her images on the Red Chapel at Karnak seem to have particular resonances with this image of Cleopatra. Other Ptolemaic queens were likewise portrayed in such fashion as pharaohs. Berenice IV had quite recently been depicted in a bust wearing the pharaonic beard. Furthermore, the Bucheum stele which tells of the installation of the Buchis bull in March of 51 first refers to Cleopatra as king, and only later as queen. If the first indication of Cleopatra as “king” was intentional, then there may have been an attempt to masculinize Cleopatra in Egyptian artifacts and documents during the first year of her reign independent of her father.

Such attempts at masculinization in Egyptian sources and artifacts would make sense, for both the Egyptian populace and for Cleopatra herself. After the death of Ptolemy XII Auletes, the throne was nominally held by both Cleopatra and her brother, Ptolemy XIII, but Cleopatra clearly wished to be seen as the true ruler, and in fact she was the dominant figure until her brother’s advisors managed to drive her out of Alexandria. Ptolemy XIII (and the later brother-

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55 Eggebrecht et al. *Das alte Ägypten: 3000 Jahre Geschichte und Kultur des Pharaonenreiches.* (Munich: Orbis, 1984), 244-245.
58 In some of the earliest documents, including the Bucheum stele, the absence of Ptolemy XIII is almost certainly because Ptolemy XII Auletes was still alive and had taken Cleopatra VII as his co-ruler, as Cecilia Peek has argued: Peek (2008), 105-110, though Linda Maurine Ricketts, “The Administration of Ptolemaic Egypt under Cleopatra VII,” (doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1980), 12-20 argues that this co-rulership may have been feigned.. Cf. Grant, 47-50; Peter Green, *Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1990), 664. Peek (2008), 107 argues that this assumption is unfounded. Cf. T. S. Skeat, “Notes on Ptolemaic Chronology I: ‘The Last Year Which Is Also the First,’” *JEA* 46 (1960).
consort, Ptolemy XIV, for that matter) does not once appear in any visual representation with
Cleopatra. And in the first years, his name was not even mentioned in official documents, which
instead mention Cleopatra alone. In some cases, this is almost certainly because they papyri in
fact date to before the death of Auletes,59 but the omissions continue even after Auletes’ death.60
Ptolemy XIII would eventually creep his way into official documents, but for the first few years,
there was a concerted attempt to assert Cleopatra’s independence.61 Such attempted
independence could very well explain the portrayal of Cleopatra as a male pharaoh. Egypt was
not accustomed to the rule of a woman, but there was precedent for a woman to be presented as a
male pharaoh, for the sake of appearances in maintaining the cosmic order of *maʿat*, for in
Egyptian religion the presence of a king on the throne was vital to maintaining the proper order
of the universe.

Unlike the Egyptian stele, if we assume it was meant to represent Cleopatra, and not just
a hasty reworking of Ptolemy XII, Hellenistic portraits of the queen do not, at any point,
represent the queen as a male king. The Greek *basileus* did not have the same ritual function as
the Egyptian pharaoh, and so a representation of Cleopatra as a male king in the Greek style
would have served little purpose. That does not mean, however, that these portraits were purely
feminine. The earliest Hellenistic-style images of Cleopatra—mostly appearing on coins—depict
the queen with notably masculine iconography.

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Chronology* (Munich: Münchener Beiträge zur Papyrusforschung und antiken Rechtsgeschichte, Heft 43), 1962,
154-158. These are discussed at length in Peek (2008), 105-109.
60 *BGU* 1830, *PSI Z* 1098b, though for difficulties in the interpretations of these, and the argument that omitting
Ptolemy XIII may not have been intended to usurp his authority, see Peek (2008), 108-119. Whatever the reasoning,
the effect was to emphasize Cleopatra’s authority.
61 Ricketts, 21-30; T. S. Skeat, “Notes on Ptolemaic Chronology: III ‘The First Year Which Is Also the Third:’ A
Date in the Reign of Cleopatra VII,” *JEA* (1962), 100-105.
Though a number of different series of coins were minted over the course of Cleopatra’s reign, they have been subdivided into two major categories, the Alexandrian type and the Syro-Roman type. A third type, occurring less frequently in one single series minted on Cyprus, constitutes a third category. A number of masculine elements occur in both the Alexandrian and Syro-Roman types, though each had a different audience and purpose and began appearing at different times in Cleopatra’s reign. The Alexandrian type is the earliest of these. The coin type appears in bronze eighty and forty drachma coins as well as silver drachmas and tetradrachms which, though minted at Ascalon, bear the same type. The most well-known and best preserved is one of the bronzes. (Figure 2). It is impossible to precisely date the bronze coins, though the silver drachmas date to 47/46 and 42/41, and the tetradrachms date to 50/49 and 39/38. The type, then, was originally created in the early years of Cleopatra’s reign, possibly as soon as she inherited the principal rule, but certainly by the second year of her reign.

The coins depict the queen’s head and shoulders. She has large eyes, a prominent nose, full lips—features that recall images of her father, Ptolemy XII. (Figure 3). Her skin is taut, and her face presents an image of the queen in her youth. She sports the so-called melon coiffure tied into a bun at the base. Most strikingly, Cleopatra is wearing the royal diadem, usually the symbol of male royalty. The reverse displays the Ptolemaic eagle, and the entirety of the coin proclaims

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63 The busts of Cleopatra known as the Vatican Cleopatra and the Berlin Cleopatra are clearly based on the Alexandrian type. I refrain from discussing these busts due to the uncertainty of their provenance. The Vatican Kleopatra was found in Rome, and the provenance of the Berlin Kleopatra is unknown. As such, it is impossible to determine if they played a part of Cleopatra’s official policy, or whether they were later materials made in Rome. If they were not later creations, however, they represent the same image type as the coins, and so analysis of the busts in terms of masculinity and femininity would be substantially the same as analysis of the Alexandrian coin type. Cf. Peek (2000), 95-98; Smith, 169. This same type is also attested in a number of royal portrait seals, for which see Peek (2000), 95-96; H. Kyrieleis, *Bildnisse der Ptolemäer* (Berlin: Mann, 1975), 64-69, plates 54-55.

64 Walker and Higgs, 177, 234.
Cleopatra’s rule over the kingdom. 65 This image diverges quite significantly from numismatic representations of earlier queens, despite Kleiner’s assertions that “Cleopatra’s portraits were similarly rooted in prototypical images of Egypt’s earlier Ptolemaic queens and princesses.” 66 Kleiner is correct that some of Cleopatra’s coins follow the prototypes of earlier queens, but the elements in this coin are notably different, except perhaps from some of the coins of Berenice II, who is more the exception than the rule.67

Various elements of these coins emphasize Cleopatra’s status as independent ruler of Egypt, even if she was nominally sharing that rule with her brothers. First of all, it was quite rare for a queen to appear alone on a Ptolemaic coin at all; only five queens can be securely identified on coins.68 Cleopatra always appears alone on coins minted in Egypt; not once do either of her younger brothers appear with her. This demonstrates an independence, real or aspired to, that few other Ptolemaic queens ever asserted so boldly. Beyond this independence, Cleopatra’s image in these coins is markedly similar to coin portraits of her father, Ptolemy XII.69 While it is quite likely that she did in fact resemble her father, the similarities are more prominent in these coins than in other coin types, indicating that the similarities are intentionally emphasized in this image. Father and daughter share a prominent hooked nose, full lips, and small chin. Though Cleopatra sports her typical melon coiffure tied back into a bun, several curls escape and fall down the side of her face, which are reminiscent of Auletes’ curls on his own coins. These visual

65 For more detailed description of the features of the coin, see Kleiner, 143-144; and Peek (2000), 104-105.
66 Kleiner (2005), 137.
67 Peek (2000), 104-115. Cecilia Peek has also made available to me an article she has recently submitted for review treating the coinage of Cleopatra’s early years, in the first half of which she examines the Alexandrian type. She takes up these themes, as well as several of those cited below, in greater detail than in her dissertation.
68 Peek (2000), 101-102; she also notes that a few more might be pictured on coins that cannot be confidently identified. Cf. Grant, 47-48.
69 This similarity, as well as the implications for Cleopatra’s asserted dynastic continuity, are discussed in Peek (2000), 113. See also Kyrieleis, 125.
references to the previous king emphasize dynastic continuity. Cleopatra may be a woman, but she is continuing the Ptolemaic line and is the rightful successor to her father.

The most prominent feature of the Alexandrian coin type is the diadem on Cleopatra’s head. The diadem was the traditional symbol of Hellenistic royalty, and it was recognized anciently as the main exclusive symbol of Hellenistic kingship. Cleopatra’s diadem on the coin stands out clearly. It is broader than we see in portraits of earlier rulers, though over the course of the late second and early first centuries BCE diadems had gradually become wider than in earlier portraits. The width of Cleopatra’s diadem draws attention to itself, emphasizing that she has assumed the kingship. The diadem was usually a masculine image. Hellenistic queens, even the most powerful of the Ptolemaic queens before Cleopatra VII, were typically represented wearing the *stephane* crown, the Egyptian triple *uraeus* crown, or the vulture headdress combined with the horns of Hathor and sun disk. There are a few notable exceptions to this, including posthumous coins of Berenice I, certain coins featuring Arsinoe II during her lifetime, and numerous coins of Berenice II, particularly when she ruled Cyrene independently and when her husband was absent during the Third Syrian War. But these are outside of the norm. The diadem’s presence, as a masculine image, shifts Cleopatra to the masculine realm, declaring her fit to rule on her own without her brother legitimizing her status. By adopting this exclusively masculine royal symbol, Cleopatra asserts her right to rule her kingdom as a man would. She is

70 The significance of Cleopatra’s use of the diadem is treated at length in Peek (2000), 105-113.
72 Smith. 35. Cf. Stanwick, 35.
73 Stanwick, 36-37.
74 Peek (2000), 105-106.
not a man herself; her features are clearly those of a woman, unlike the portrait in the Egyptian stele discussed above. She is, nevertheless, pictured in a masculine way: the diadem declares that she is still the king, even though she is a woman.

The coins minted at Ascalon in 50/49, 49/48, and likely also 48/47 are of the same type as those minted in Alexandria, and they would have been meant to promote the same general policy. Admittedly they were not minted by Cleopatra herself and were intended for a different audience. When these coins were minted, Cleopatra had been driven out of Egypt and was amassing an army in Syria. Ascalon was an independent city-state that owed its freedom from Judaea to Ptolemy IX and was therefore loyal to the Ptolemies. If Cleopatra could capitalize on this friendship by demonstrating that she was the rightful heir of the Ptolemaic kingdom and that those supporting her brother in Alexandria were usurpers, she might be able to count on Ascalon for aid. She likely found some of the military aid she needed here against her brother, for it seems the local mints promoted her as the rightful heir to the throne of Egypt. She certainly received support, for she was able to march towards Egypt with the army she had raised.

The masculine elements in the Alexandrian type, both those coins minted in Alexandria and those minted elsewhere, are less striking than the representation of Cleopatra as a male pharaoh; nevertheless, they seem to be part of the same political policy, albeit aimed at a different audience. On the one hand, they emphasize Cleopatra’s continuity with her father and therefore the entire Ptolemaic dynasty. On the other hand, the masculine images assert Cleopatra’s status as the true ruler of Egypt. She is not just a royal consort, not just the queen to a

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75 This is the central argument of the discussion of the coin in Peek (2000) 104-115, especially 112-115, which is expanded in her recently submitted article on Cleopatra’s early coinage.
76 See Grant, 53.
king, depending on a male co-ruler to derive her authority; she is independent. She may be a
woman, but she is no queen, she reigns as king.

_Feminine Imagery_

The quasi-masculine representation of Cleopatra, the only depiction of the queen we have
from her earliest years of her career, ceased to be the default image following the birth of her son
and heir Caesarion. At this point, pointedly feminine elements began to abound in new images.
This more feminine visual rhetoric did not entirely supplant the earlier masculine elements, as
the Alexandrian coin type continued to be minted. Nevertheless, the feminine elements
emphasized in these new portraits became more prominent than the masculine elements of the
Alexandrian type. Furthermore, they were emphasized in a wider array of artforms, beyond just
coins. The birth of Caesarion, which was proclaimed as soon as possible, allowed Cleopatra to
step into the new role of mother. As ruler of Egypt, this transition had larger implications for her
than it would have had for any other woman, for the liminal status of the royal family allowed
Cleopatra to ascend beyond the realm of mere mortals and become a divine mother goddess.77
Cleopatra’s motherhood allowed her to draw upon mythological precedents to levels no queen
had done before. It has already been observed that shifts in Cleopatra’s visual rhetoric occur at
major points in her life. Ashton has pointed out that these shifts occur when there is a change in
the queen’s royal consort: “A survey of the stages of the development of Cleopatra’s image
shows that emphasis shifts according to her consort or associate.”78 This is partially true. When
Caesarion was born and especially when he was proclaimed king alongside Cleopatra, there was
a major shift from quasi-masculine to overtly feminine portrayals of the queen. And when

77 This is argued in detail in Peek (2000), 95-122.
78 Ashton, 26.
images of Cleopatra were associated with Antony, another sort of image emerged. Yet the reasons for the changes have as much to do with the intended message and audience as with the person with whom Cleopatra is appearing.

A particular series of bronze coins minted on Cyprus depicts Cleopatra VII and Caesarion together on the obverse. (Figure 4). The coins we have are relatively poorly preserved, yet the most important elements, especially their differences from all the other coins minted with Cleopatra’s image on them, are clear enough. The coins do not give a date, and so they could have been minted anywhere between Caesarion’s birth in 47 and Cleopatra’s (and Caesarion’s) death in 30. Given the nature of the image, however, a date earlier in that range seems likely, as a few scholars have suggested. Cleopatra bears the same melon hairstyle she is always depicted with on Hellenistic style portraits. Rather than the diadem she wears in the Alexandrian type, however, she wears the *stephane* crown. Behind her, to the left, is a scepter. She holds an infant in front of her, who must be Caesarion, though he is not named. On the reverse there are two cornucopiae and the legend *Kleopatras Basilissēs*.

The shift from diadem to *stephane* is significant. As noted above, the diadem was a symbol of masculine royal authority. The *stephane* was also a symbol associated with Hellenistic royalty, though the significance goes beyond this. During the Classical period, the *stephane* was generally an attribute of images of goddesses. During the Hellenistic period, it became common to be used on images of female royalty, especially when a queen was deified or

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79 Roller, 182. Kleiner (2005), 85, 144 asserts that the coins began to be minted in 46, though she gives no evidence for this claim, other than the image itself. If Cyprus was indeed handed back to Ptolemaic control by Caesar in 48 BCE as Dio states (Dio 42.35.4-6), the earlier date is all the more likely, as it would celebrate both the birth of Caesarion and the return of the island to Cleopatra’s control. The most thorough argument for an earlier dating is found in Peek (2000), 115-117, where the argument is made that the most likely date is 47 or early 46 BCE, with 44 as a less likely, but possible date.

80 This shift is discussed at length in Peek (2000), 118-121.

assimilated with a goddess. The *stephane* first appears in Ptolemaic coinage in the images of Arsinoe II, especially those minted after her deification and the inauguration of her cult worship. (Figure 5). The Cypriot coin as a whole, in fact, recalls coin images of Arsinoe II. Roller suggests that the *stephane* is commemorative of the return of Cyprus to Ptolemaic control, and while this was certainly a cause for celebration and reason for Cleopatra to assert divine pretensions and may have been part of the reason for the coins’ minting, does not by itself fully explain all the coin’s constituent elements. When Arsinoe II’s images adopted the *stephane*, it was a mark of her deification and assimilation with Aphrodite and Isis. Cleopatra’s assumption of the same symbols marks the same assimilation: Cleopatra has become Aphrodite and Isis, a goddess on earth.

The connection to the goddesses, especially to Isis, is made possible, or at least more convincing, by the birth of Caesarion. In the traditional account, Isis was the wife of Osiris, king of the gods, who was killed by their brother, Set, who then usurped the throne. This murder left Isis alone and pregnant with Osiris’ son, Horus. After she gave birth, Isis raised Horus as a single mother, and he grew up to avenge his father’s death. He defeated his uncle and took back the throne of Egypt and of the gods for himself. Isis was often worshiped as the divine widow and single mother, and she was frequently depicted seated with the infant Horus on her lap. With the birth of Caesarion, Cleopatra was able to fill the role of Isis to a greater degree than any of

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82 Smith, 43.
83 The cult worship of Arsinoe II, though the first time a Ptolemaic queen was worshiped in such a way, there were a number of precedents of cult worship of women in the late fourth century: Elizabeth Donnelly Carney *Arsinoë of Egypt and Macedon: A Royal Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 95-100.
84 This connection is noted, and it is argued that Cleopatra’s audience would note this connection, in Peek (2000), 118.
85 Roller, 187. This is also discussed in Peek (2000), 119-120.
86 The iconography of Arsinoe II’s portraits, especially those appearing on coins after her death and deification, along with the interpretations of the various elements of the coinage, is discussed at length in Peek (2000), 107-110.
87 That the Cypriot coin is meant to commemorate both the return of Cyprus to Ptolemaic control and Cleopatra’s new status as mother is argued in Peek (2000), 119-121.
her predecessors. The absence of the boy’s father, who was in Rome at Caesarion’s birth and
died not long afterwards, might call to mind Isis’ husband Osiris. As Stacy Schiff has noted, she
would assume the role “more fully and literally than had any previous Ptolemy.”

Moreover, the Isis and Horus imagery was conveniently bilingual. The Egyptian Isis had
long since been assimilated to the Greek Aphrodite, and Arsinoe II had been associated with both
goddesses. This tradition of syncretism persisted in Ptolemaic Egypt, and as a result, what an
Egyptian audience would see as Isis and Horus, a Greek audience could easily reinterpret as
Aphrodite and Eros. Moreover, Hellenized versions of the cult of Isis had spread throughout the
Greek world, and even a Greek audience would likely recognize the iconography of Isis.

Regardless, Isis and Aphrodite were both fertility goddesses in Ptolemaic Egypt, and as such
they were associated with prosperity and abundance, which is emphasized in the other elements
of the coin. And since Cleopatra had given birth to a son, she can claim the fertility required of
such a goddess, and thereby imply her divine ability to provide that same fertility to her people
and to the land of Egypt itself. The twin cornucopiae—another element featured on the coins of
Arsinoe II—on the coin’s reverse imply this fertility and the abundance of a plentiful harvest.
These represent the plenty that Cleopatra will bring as ruler of Egypt. As ruler and goddess,
Cleopatra was responsible for maintaining the divine order of *ma’at*, including the flooding of
the Nile which enriched and vivified the soil and allowed for the land’s massive production of
grain.

Cleopatra did not wait to proclaim to her subjects that she had an heir and claim her
divine status. Even before Caesarion’s birth, she embarked on a journey down the Nile,

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89 For more on these associations, see Sylvia Barabantani, “Goddess of Love and Mistress of the Sea: Notes on a
90 Cf. Smith, 102-103.
accompanied by Julius Caesar, which allowed her to announce her pregnancy to the people. I follow Cecilia Peek’s argument that this trip, undertaken shortly after the conclusion of the Alexandrian War and the cessation of civil conflict, was of political significance for Cleopatra, and not just for Julius Caesar, and that she used the trip to reinforce her authority over her kingdom after a troubled period. By demonstrating her ability to produce an heir to the throne, Cleopatra set herself up as more than just ruler: she has become the mother of the next pharaoh. By producing an heir, she has ensured that the line of pharaohs will continue and that ma’at, will be maintained.

A pregnancy, however, is not the same as the birth of a healthy son, and once Caesarion was born, Cleopatra proclaimed his birth throughout her kingdom, both in Cyprus via the series of coins minted there and through art and architecture throughout Egypt. One of her commissions was a birth temple (called a mammisi) at Hermonthis (modern Armant/Erment), near Thebes. The mammisi is no longer available to us, as it was destroyed in 1861 to build a sugar refinery, but the scenes were recorded by the explorers of the Napoleonic expedition. These scenes were later studied by Richard Lepsius, who had a knowledge of the Egyptian language, and his copies are considered reliable. Copies of Lepsius’ plates have been

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92 Cf. Peek (2000), 120-121, where the author argues that this is one of the primary messages of the Cypriot coin, an argument that is expanded in her discussion of Cleopatra’s early coinage that she shared with me.
93 A photograph taken in 1857 by Francis Frith is preserved in Guy Weill Goudchaux, “Cleopatra’s Subtle Religious Strategy,” in Walker and Higgs, Cleopatra of Egypt: From History to Myth (London: The British Museum Press), 136. The same photograph, as well as a computer reconstruction by Barry Girsh, are reproduced in Dieter Arnold, Temples of the Last Pharaohs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 222-223.
reproduced, with English commentary, by Jean-Claude Goyon. At the site of Hermonthis, the chief god was Montu, a falcon-headed war god, whose son was usually known as Harpocrates (Horus the Child), a variant of Horus, son of Isis and Osiris. Cleopatra dedicated a temple celebrating the birth of Harpocrates which was far larger than the subsidiary chapels typical for a mammisi. Both Cleopatra and Caesarion feature prominently on the temple.

The inner sanctum of the temple depicts scenes of Harpocrates’ birth in the presence of a god, a goddess, and Cleopatra herself. (Figure 6). The child is identified as “Horus the sun, the child, eldest one of DN.” This last title, an epithet of the Egyptian creator god Amun, is unusual, as normally Harpocrates would be expected to the son of Montu, rather than the son of Amun. As John Ray points out, however, this unusual birth calls to mind a long tradition of the god Amun (associated with the Greek Ammon) assuming the form of the king to become the father of the heir to the throne, ensuring the divine status of the pharaoh. In the theology of Hermonthis, the wife of Montu, and therefore the mother of Harpocrates, was Re’t-tawy, literally ‘The Female Sun of the Two Lands.’ She is an obscure and quite unusual goddess, but she would have had particular resonance with Cleopatra, whose hieroglyphic titles, such as Female Ruler, Lady of the Two Lands (hq3.t nb.t t3wy) and Ruler of Rulers (hq3 hq3.w) parallel the name of the goddess. With this connection in mind, it would not be too great a logical leap to think of Amun as the true father of Caesarion, for the god’s birth seems to be assimilated to the birth of the royal heir who would be the next incarnation of the divine kingship, ruling Egypt as

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96 Ray, 10-11.
97 Ray, 11.
98 Ray, 11. The last title, interestingly, anticipates the title of “Queen of Kings,” later bestowed upon the queen by Mark Antony.
pharaoh.99 This divine birth would conveniently leave Julius Caesar out of the picture, allowing Cleopatra to avoid advertising the boy’s connections to Rome.100

Cleopatra’s presence in the birth scene and Caesarion’s presence in the temple draw clear connections between the birth of the god and the birth of Caesarion himself. As a result, Cleopatra is assimilated to the role of the god’s mother, just as Caesarion is assimilated with the god.101 This strengthens the connections between the royal pair Cleopatra and Caesarion as the gods Isis and Horus. As Diana Kleiner has noted, “the theology of the divine delivery incorporated that of the royal birth in a way that made them essentially indistinguishable,” and the temple likely served as something of an official proclamation of Caesarion’s birth.102 With the birth of Caesarion, a god was born on earth as the next pharaoh, making Cleopatra the mother of a god.

Cleopatra’s divine connections are further stressed on the Temple of Hathor at Dendera. Here Cleopatra does not appear with an infant, but as the mother of the grown pharaoh. Construction of the temple had been started by Ptolemy XII Auletes, but much of it was left to be finished when he died, and Cleopatra oversaw the completion of the temple and commissioned the artwork on the temple walls. Cleopatra appears twice on the southern façade of the outer wall alongside Caesarion, who in both representations is fully grown. The exact date of the reliefs is uncertain. They were certainly made between 42, when Cleopatra officially declared Caesarion her co-ruler, and Cleopatra’s death in 30, but more precision is difficult. An earlier date is more likely than later one, as Cleopatra would have wanted Caesarion’s assumption of the throne

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100 Peek (2000), 84-86.
101 Smith, 102.
102 Kleiner (2005), 91-92; Peek (2000), 86.
proclaimed as soon as possible, however nominal the boy’s role as king was. By his death in 30, Caesarion was only 17 years old, and unless the reliefs were done quite late, he would still have been a child, and the representation of him as a grown pharaoh can only have been symbolic. However, this is all that was needed for Cleopatra to proclaim herself as mother of the next king.

The two scenes in which Cleopatra and Caesarion appear on the south wall effectively mirror each other. On the western end of the wall, Cleopatra follows Caesarion in a ritual procession. (Figure 7). Caesarion, conveniently named by the cartouche in front of his head, wears the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt and he holds out offerings of incense before an assembly of gods, including Isis, Harsomtus, Osiris, and Horus, and Isis again. His image is clearly depicting him as a reigning pharaoh. Cleopatra, also named by the cartouche in front of her, follows behind, wearing the sun and cow horn crown of Hathor. She is shaking the *sistrum* and *mnet*, ritual instruments traditional to the worship of Hathor. Both she and her son bear the *uraeus*—the guardian serpent of Egyptian pharaohs—on their foreheads, emphasizing their royal status. On the eastern end of the wall (Figure 8), the pair appear in more or less mirror image of their portraits on the western end. Here, they bring incense before Hathor, Horus, Harsomtus, Ihy, and a second Hathor.

In these images, Caesarion takes the leading role. Cleopatra no longer wears the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt as she did in the Egyptian stele from her first year as ruler. Though Caesarion was likely little more than a child when the images were carved, and certainly still a child when proclaimed Cleopatra’s royal co-ruler, he fulfills the role of the pharaoh, while Cleopatra’s takes on the role of pharaoh’s mother. Cleopatra no longer needed to emphasize

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various masculine elements to tie her back to the Ptolemaic dynasty and assure her legitimate place on the throne, for by providing an heir she had solidified her claim to legitimacy like nothing else could. While there was no precedent of a Ptolemaic queen holding the throne successfully on her own, there was plenty of precedent for one to rule with a son as her nominal co-ruler. Thus, Cleopatra’s claims to legitimacy could rest on her status as mother of the king, as her depiction in a feminine rather than masculine role on the temple emphasizes.

Though Cleopatra follows behind Caesarion in these images, there is plenty to indicate that she is in fact the dominant figure. First, the relief is on a temple of Hathor, rather than a temple dedicated to Horus. This is especially important because the situation of the goddess Hathor closely parallels that of Cleopatra herself. Unlike most Egyptian deities, who were normally worshipped as part of a triad of husband, wife, and child, Hathor did not dwell with her husband, Horus, who was not worshipped at Dendera. His sanctuary was some 60 miles upriver at Edfu, and husband and wife met for their *hieros gamos* once a year in a festival procession in which the statue of Hathor was brought by barge to the Temple of Horus. Other than this festival, Hathor dwelled alone with their son Ihy at Dendera, just as Cleopatra dwelt in Egypt with her son, far from the boy’s father. Moreover, Hathor was often assimilated with Isis, and the reliefs of Caesarion and Cleopatra on the south wall directly faced the temple of Isis. Such proximity would likely have called to mind the connection between that goddess and Cleopatra, if that connection was not already clear. It is also notable that the scenes at Dendera are completely peaceful. The rulers are not smiting their enemies but taking part in religious ritual. This strengthens the image of Cleopatra as a bringer of peace and prosperity, as we would expect with

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104 Cf. Kleiner (2005), 85-86.
Isis in charge rather than Horus, who is associated with war and conquest. The tranquility of the scene seems to indicate that Cleopatra’s authority is supreme.

Cleopatra did not limit portraying herself as a goddess to coins and temple carvings. She made several pointed public appearances at ceremonial occasions dressed as Isis-Aphrodite. We have already mentioned her public appearance as she cruised down the Nile following the Alexandrian War, in which she was able to announce her pregnancy and the imminent arrival of an heir. We do not know if she appeared dressed as Isis or Aphrodite on the cruise, but her pregnancy would have proclaimed that she would soon be a mother. In other such processions, Cleopatra appeared in the guise of Aphrodite or Isis.

Shortly after the Battle of Pharsalus, Mark Antony summoned Cleopatra to come to him to account for having promised aid to the defeated Cassius. As the Roman magistrate overseeing the eastern provinces, Antony could not be ignored. Cleopatra needed to keep his goodwill, for though she had ruled Egypt for some time, her sister lived in exile at Ephesus, and could replace her if Antony judged her more likely to serve Roman interests than Cleopatra. And so, Cleopatra acquiesced and sailed to meet him, but she made sure to set the stage for the visit in her own terms.106 Plutarch describes her grand entry as follows:

Πολλὰ δὲ καὶ παρ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ παρὰ τῶν φίλων δεχομένη γράμματα καλούντων, οὕτω κατεφρόνησε καὶ κατεγέλασε τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ὥστε πλεῖν ἀνὰ τὸν Κύδνον ποταμὸν ἐν πορθμείῳ χρυσοπρύμνῳ, τῶν μὲν ἱστίων ἁλουργῶν ἐκπεπετασμένων, τῆς δὲ εἰρεσίας ἀργυραῖς κώπαις πρὸς αὐλὸν ἅμα σύριγξι καὶ κιθάραις συνηρμοσμένοι. αὐτὴ δὲ κατέκειτο μὲν ὑπὸ σκιάδι χρυσοπάστῳ κεκοσμημένη γραφικῶς ὡσπερ Ἀφροδίτη, παιδεὶς δὲ τοῖς γραφικοῖς Ἐρωσιν εἰκασμένοι παρ’ ἑκάτερον ἕστωτες

106 For more discussion of Cleopatra setting this scene, see Peek (2000), 183-187.
Having received many letters both from him and from his friends summoning her, she so
disdained and scorned the man that she sailed up the Cydnus river in a ferry with a gilded
poop, with purple sails spread out, with the rowers bringing it up with silver oars to the
sound of the aulos, harmonized by syrinxes and the citharas. She herself sat under a
golden awning, adorned like a painted Aphrodite; her servants, standing on either side
arrayed like painted Erotes, fanned her. Likewise, her handmaids who were the most
beautiful wore the costumes of Nereids and Graces, some were at the tiller, others at the
hawsers. Wonderful scents filled the banks from the great amounts of incense. Some of
the men straightway accompanied the ship on both sides directly at the river, others left
the city at the sight. With the crowd flowing to the agora, at last Antony himself alone
was left, sitting on the rostrum. And a certain rumor went forth everywhere that

Aphrodite should revel with Dionysus for the good of Asia.107

The extravagance of the display paraded the fabled wealth of Egypt which Cleopatra
controlled—a reminder that she could provide for Antony, should she keep his favor. This might
be the most important message of the grandiose display for the Roman governor and any

Romans with him, but he would not be the only one to see it, and so the procession would have had a larger purpose. The people of Tarsus, of course, bore witness to the event, and the whole affair would have resonated with the peoples of the Near East, whether they were Cleopatra’s subjects or not.\textsuperscript{108} She would have expected word of such a display to travel far and wide, as indeed it did, if we can believe Plutarch’s comment that word spread about Aphrodite and Dionysus were reveling for the good of Asia.

This message was almost certainly part of the message Cleopatra wanted spread about. Antony’s associations with Dionysus provided a convenient opportunity to present herself to him as the goddess she had become, upstaging him entirely.\textsuperscript{109} She came to him as Aphrodite, and her presence brought her influence, all the power of a goddess of fertility and abundance, with her. And yet there was more to the significance of her procession. There was a long history in Egyptian religion of festival processions in which the cult statues of a temple were conveyed through crowds by means of sacred boats. These barks permitted the common people to have contact with the gods and receive answers to petitions through the intermediary of interpreting priests. In this tradition, Cleopatra’s voyage across the sea and up the Cydnus river was transformed into a ritual procession. As Cecilia Peek has noted, in this procession the boat has become a temple, but rather than house a statue of the goddess Aphrodite, Cleopatra herself stands in for the goddess. “No mere idol for her – her entire boat has become the naos and she the goddess there enshrined.”\textsuperscript{110} Cleopatra became a goddess enthroned on her celestial bark, gracing the people with her beneficent presence.\textsuperscript{111}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{108} Grant, 117.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Plut. \textit{Vit. Ant.} 24.3.
\item \textsuperscript{110} Peek (2000), 187.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Cf. Goudchaux, 137; Kleiner (2005), 103-104; Grant, 117.
\end{itemize}
Beyond demonstrating the wealth that Cleopatra possessed, the procession emphasized the feminine role she had assumed. It was a reiteration of the message the queen had promulgated in Egypt: she was a goddess of fertility and prosperity. That Cleopatra was in Ephesus and not in her own kingdom did not change this. The Greek cities were used to welcoming mortals as gods; they had recently done so for Antony himself, hailing him as the New Dionysus. As the queen began a new chapter in her involvement in international politics, portraying this image to those outside her realm would be beneficial. If others saw her as a mother goddess figure, then they would have reason to remain on peaceful terms with her and her kingdom. Furthermore, by representing her kingdom on the international stage, she was fulfilling this role for her own people, watching and advocating for their interests with Rome. Thus, the feminine role she had first adopted in Egypt became appropriate to continue elsewhere.

Cleopatra also made such ceremonial appearances in Egypt, at no occasion more conspicuously so than at the so-called Donations of Alexandria in 34 BCE. Following Antony’s failed Parthian invasion in 37, Antony took Artavasdes, the Armenian king captive and paraded him through the streets of Alexandria in golden chains. Artavasdes had failed to provide the aid he had promised for the invasion of Parthia, and this was his punishment. After making an example of the treacherous king, Antony made a show of gratitude towards Cleopatra, an ally who had been faithful in supporting him, by bestowing territories upon her and her children in a grand ceremony. During the event, Cleopatra appeared as the goddess Isis: “Κλεοπάτρα μὲν γὰρ καὶ τότε καὶ τὸν ἄλλον χρόνον εἰς πλῆθος ἱερὰς στολὴν ἔλαμβανε Κλεοπάτρα μὲν γὰρ καὶ τότε καὶ τὸν ἄλλον χρόνον εἰς πλῆθος ἱερὰς στολὴν ἔλαμβανε

112 Plut., Vit. Ant., 24.3.
113 The practicalities of these donations are questionable, as much of the territory already belonged to Cleopatra, and other areas, such as Parthia itself, were completely beyond his control at all. However, the grand show of the ceremony and the power it portrayed were more important than the reality of the situation. Cecilia Peek currently has an article under review in which she argues that this was the point, from Antony’s perspective, of the Alexandrian Donations: to make a show of his power by punishing a treacherous client king and bestowing favors on a faithful one. Cf. Green, 678.
’Ἰσις ἐχρημάτιζε,” (Then, as at other times when she made public appearances, she assumed the sacred raiment of Isis and was styled the New Isis). 114 She watched from a golden throne on a silver dais as Antony affirmed her status as Queen of Egypt, sharing her rule with Caesarion, and proclaimed her “Queen of Kings.” 115 The whole ceremony spoke to Cleopatra’s power and elevated status. In much the same way that the Cypriot coins celebrated her status as divine mother, and likely also the return of Cyprus to the Ptolemaic empire, Cleopatra’s guise as Isis at the Donations emphasized her position as queen and mother of the next king, with whom her reign was confirmed, and the bestowal and confirmation of additional territory, real or promised, upon her and her children. She appeared with Caesarion and her children by Antony, further evidence of her fertility and ability to produce heirs to watch over Egypt after her. She was thus once again confirmed as a mother goddess, bringer of prosperity and land to her kingdom.

As the ceremony included donations of territory, it makes sense that Cleopatra chose to appear dressed as Isis. As far as we can tell, she had first assimilated herself to the goddess at the birth of Caesarion, which coincided with the return of Cyprus to her control. Her ability to regain territory, in addition to her status as mother, elevated her from mortal to goddess, and the Donations demonstrated yet again that she could reclaim territory that had once been part of her kingdom. She had once again fulfilled her promise to bring prosperity.

Plutarch asserts that Cleopatra appeared as Isis on more than just this occasion, so the people would likely have grown accustomed to seeing their queen as a goddess. From the birth of Caesarion, Cleopatra ceased to rely on presenting herself as a masculine king, as the birth of an heir allowed her to associate herself with the divine mother goddesses Isis and Aphrodite. As such, she could rely on her own femininity to legitimize her place on the throne, and so feminine

114 Plut. Vit. Ant. 54.9.
115 Plut. Vit. Ant. 54.6-9.
elements, especially those associated with Isis and Aphrodite, appear almost ubiquitously in her visual rhetoric. With this policy, Cleopatra became Isis-Aphrodite, goddess of fertility and bringer of prosperity to her people. As mother of the next pharaoh, Cleopatra no longer needed to be king, for she had ascended beyond the realm of mortals into the realm of the divine, and this became the source of her authority. In Egypt, her feminine authority as goddess was greater than any masculine authority she could claim as a mere king.

The “Return” of Masculine Elements in the Syro-Roman Coins

Despite the preponderance of maternal and otherwise feminine imagery in artwork and coins after the birth of Caesarion, certain masculine elements were still used after the heir’s birth. Some of these we see in the continued minting of coins of the Alexandrian type, which persisted throughout Cleopatra’s reign. However, a new series of coins minted together with Mark Antony feature some of the same masculine elements, though with the addition of certain feminine touches not found in earlier minting. Unlike other coins, the coins of the Syro-Roman type do not seem to have been intended for circulation in Egypt at all. At the very least, they were not minted in Egypt, and so Cleopatra’s subjects would not have been the principle audience.

These coins of the Syro-Roman type depict both Cleopatra and Antony. (Figure 9). They first appeared in 37 BCE, and they continued to be produced until the deaths of Cleopatra and Antony in 30 BCE. These coins feature Cleopatra on one side and Antony on the other—it is unclear which side is meant to be the obverse and which the reverse. On the one hand, the Roman-centricity of the coins might suggest that Antony is supposed to be the obverse and Cleopatra the reverse. On the other hand, Cleopatra’s titles on the coins are arguably more impressive. While Antony appears with his Roman titles of Consul and Triumvir, Cleopatra is proclaimed Queen of Kings and Goddess. This makes it likely that her face is meant to be the
obverse. Without the titles, there would be little indication, but this seems to be intentional. The correspondence of the two, aside from the titles, makes the two appear equals. If the coins are supposed to represent the two this way, then the ambiguity highlights their political alliance.

Cleopatra’s image in many ways resembles the images of the Alexandrian type: she sports the same melon coiffure tied in a bun at the back, she proudly displays the royal diadem, she still has a prominent hooked nose. She is older in these coins, though she is still clearly full of vim and vigor, and her features do not seem to resemble her father’s quite so much—it has in fact been noted that, if anything, her features seem to resemble those of Antony on the other side of the coin.116 Her jaw is stronger, her neck thinner, and she wears a string of pearls. The image clearly radiates power and authority. As Diana Kleiner has stated, “The portrait is less flattering, but it is unflinchingly powerful and exudes a kind of masculine authority that is shared by Antony in his likeness on the coin’s other side.”117 Like in the Alexandrian type, the diadem that Cleopatra wears declares her status as ruler. The diadem is not quite as prominent as in the Alexandrian type, where it seems to have been the most important feature, but its presence is still quite clear, and its message is still the same: Cleopatra is the rightful ruler of the Ptolemaic kingdom. The legends in these proclaim her Basilissa Kleopatra Thea Neotera in Greek, or Regina Regum Filiorum Regum in Latin, and while these titles do not hide the queen’s femininity—in fact they highlight that she is a woman—they nevertheless emphasize her status as ruler. There is therefore tension between Cleopatra as a woman and her presence in the public sphere. Cleopatra had been in the public sphere so long that it many may have become accustomed to her presence.

116 Kleiner (2005), 144. While there is a certain similarity between the features of Cleopatra and Antony on these coins, it is just as likely, perhaps more likely, that Antony has been made to look like Cleopatra than the other way around.

117 Kleiner (2005), 144.
It is important to note that the audience of these coins would not have been the same as the audience of other coins Cleopatra minted. While some of the coins are Greek drachmas, others are Roman denarii. None of them, as far as we can tell, were minted in Egypt, but in Syria for Antony’s legions, hence their designation as Syro-Roman. Antony’s appearance on the other side bears his Roman titles, his status as consul and triumvir. If the assertion that these coins were made at a mint that travelled along with Antony and his legions is correct, then these would have been intended specifically for the Roman soldiers fighting in the east. This is not the same as an aristocratic Roman audience, as much of Antony’s forces would be made up of individuals from the Eastern provinces, and likely few of them were aristocrats. This audience would not need to be assured of Cleopatra’s legitimacy as ruler in the same way her subjects did, but the legions still needed to trust in her as the ruler of their most important client-kingdom in the eastern Mediterranean. They would not, however, be as opposed to a powerful woman as a truly Roman audience might have been, which may go to explain the mixture of feminine along with the masculine features of Cleopatra’s appearance on the coins.

These coins first appeared the same year as Antony’s invasion of Parthia, which had long been in preparation. This invasion required a vast outlay of resources, much of which Egypt provided. Furthermore, Roman operations in the eastern Mediterranean over the previous several decades had required the cooperation of client-kingdoms, both in terms of supplementing Roman forces an in contributing financially to military endeavors. Cleopatra had been called upon before to offer such aid in the civil war between the forces of Antony and Octavian and those of the Brutus and Cassius. She had, however, been called upon by Cassius, and although she never delivered the ships she had promised, she still had to face a reckoning with Antony. She

maneuvered her way back into Roman favor at least partially by flaunting her wealth as she sailed to meet Antony at Tarsus.119 From then on, Cleopatra continued to fund Antony’s military campaigns, making her indispensable to Roman interests. Her wealth was her biggest asset in maintaining Roman favor, and the necklace she is wearing on the coin emphasizes this wealth. What is more, the necklace appears to be made up of pearls, which may have called to mind another demonstration of Cleopatra’s wealth, when she supposedly dissolved a pearl earring in vinegar and drank it.120 However true the story may be, it was the stuff of legend, and the necklace in the Syro-Roman type may have called this tale to mind.121 Whether it was meant to recall this event, or if the similarity is coincidental, the coin still emphasizes the wealth Cleopatra could continue to provide. Regardless, such a display of wealth itself might denote Cleopatra’s femininity. Furthermore, it adds a markedly feminine touch. It is certainly not the kind of accessory one would find on the depiction of a man. The necklace declares her femininity.

Though the necklace is a feminine detail, the rest of Cleopatra’s features seem decidedly masculine. In terms of typical Roman depictions, Diana Kleiner has pointed out that “Cleopatra is portrayed in the Roman mode more suitable for Roman men than for women—a frank style favored by Roman Republican generals and senators of note, rather than the softer, more idealized style that was normally reserved for their spouses.”122 It was, of course, highly unusual for women to appear on coinage in the Roman Republic. In fact, Cleopatra was only the second—or possibly third—woman to be pictured on a Roman coin, the first being Antony’s fourth wife Octavia, though it is possible that an earlier coin is meant to represent Antony’s third

119 Plutarch Vit. Ant. 26, discussed above.
120 Pliny NH 9.119-121.
122 Kleiner (2005), 144.
Moreover, Cleopatra’s presence is all the more extraordinary because she is a foreign woman. The peculiarity of the situation may partially explain why Cleopatra is represented in a way typically used for Roman men. By doing so, Cleopatra is elevated to Antony’s level, and the two are portrayed as equals. The obverse/reverse portraits are elsewhere used by Antony to represent his alliance with Octavian, so these coins represent the unity between the Roman magistrate and his chief ally in the East. Beyond this, Cleopatra is once again wearing the diadem, symbol of masculine royal authority. And if the resemblance to her father is a bit less noticeable on these coins, the similarity is still there. With all of these masculine details, Cleopatra is portrayed as a faithful client king.

The Syro-Roman coin type reintroduces some of masculine elements of the Alexandrian type, combined with a few new feminine elements, and presents them to a new audience. The feminine associations which Cleopatra emphasized when assimilating herself to Isis and Aphrodite might have been less effective with a Roman audience. The legions would have largely been made up of individuals from the eastern provinces, for whom such divine pretensions would have been less unusual than for an aristocratic Italian audience. Nevertheless, Cleopatra’s divine feminine rhetoric might not have been as rhetorically effective among soldiers who were not her own subjects. For her subjects, this feminine imagery highlighted the blessings she brought to Egypt, but Cleopatra would have had no reason to portray herself as a divine source of prosperity to Roman subjects. But the soldiers serving in the East would be familiar with client kings. The policy behind the image is similar to that of the Alexandrian type:

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123 Diana Kleiner, “Politics and Gender in the Pictorial Propaganda of Antony and Octavian,” *Echos du Monde Classique* 36 (1992), 359-360. Octavia is the first woman we can confidently identify, but a series of Roman coins of various denominations feature a bust of a woman usually identified as Victory on the obverse, whose features are remarkably similar to those of Fulvia, but it is uncertain whether the coins are meant to be allegorical or actually represent Fulvia. None of the coins name Fulvia, and it is possible that the allegorical figure of Victory may have simply been based on portraits of Fulvia. Cf. Goldsworthy, 277.
Cleopatra is the legitimate ruler of Egypt. Rather than emphasize her continuity with the Ptolemaic dynasty—which would hardly be the most important image to a Roman audience—it represents her unity with and utility to Rome and Roman interests. She is a strong client king, of the same sort that Rome is accustomed to deal with, despite being a woman, and she can provide financial resources to Rome. She is united with Rome’s eastern magistrate, so much so that she even resembles him to a rather significant degree. She resembles powerful Roman generals, rather than their soft wives, and the resultant masculinity rendered her someone worth dealing with and worth keeping on the throne.

And yet there are pointed reminders of her femininity. Her titles proclaim her queen and goddess, and the necklace serves as a visual reminder. These added feminine elements temper the masculinity of Cleopatra’s appearance. This, perhaps, is an attempt to make her more palatable to the sensibilities of the men of Antony’s legions. She is still a powerful client king, but this power is softened by the visible reminders that she is still a woman. The mixture of masculine and feminine elements in these coins seems to be aimed at maintaining Roman favor in order to secure her place on the throne of Egypt. She was worthy of her station, yet not as threatening.

**Rewriting Cleopatra in Augustan Poetry**

As effective as Cleopatra’s visual rhetoric may have been, she could only control it while she was still alive. Images of the queen remained, and some were made after her death. More memorable than these post-mortem visual images, however, are the poetic representations of the queen created by the Augustan poets. Following the defeat of the combined forces of Cleopatra and Mark Antony at Actium in 31 BCE and their deaths the following year, Roman poets began to write about the events of this last civil war. It does not seem that Augustus, whose friends
patronized these poets, gave any official injunction for written material concerning the defeated couple to be censored. If he did so, no record of it survived. Yet the Cleopatra who appears in Augustan literature is a far-cry from the historical Cleopatra, as far as we can piece her together. Cleopatra did not fit the mold of a woman as constructed in Roman society. She was, of course, not Roman at all, but her presence in the politics of the Mediterranean world in general and more particularly her involvement in Roman civil wars forced the Romans to deal with her, even though she did not fit comfortably into their cultural world view without modification. The representations of Cleopatra created by the Augustan poets were manipulated in terms of gender roles, much as were the visual images Cleopatra created. However, the effect is quite different.

Though there were powerful, influential women in the Roman Republic, they were usually valued and esteemed because of their status as mothers and for the influence they wielded over their children, as was Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi brothers. There were exceptions: Fulvia raised an army against Octavian, but she did not linger sufficiently long in Roman politics to inspire the type of fear of upheaval supposedly caused by Cleopatra. Moreover, as a domestic threat, Fulvia made a considerably less easy target for invective than Cleopatra, a foreign enemy. Whether or not Cleopatra was actually capable of inspiring widespread panic, it was possible for the historian Cassius Dio to assert that the Romans “ἐπίστευσαν ὅτι καὶ τὰλλα τὰ θρυλούμενα ἀληθῆ εἰη, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν ὅτι, ἂν κρατήσῃ, τὴν τε πόλιν σφῶν τῇ Κλεοπάτρᾳ χαριεῖται καὶ τὸ κράτος ἐς τὴν Αἴγυπτον μεταθήσει” (believed that those rumors babbled about were true, that is, if he [Antony] should prevail, he would grant Cleopatra their city and would move the seat of power to Egypt).124 That a woman could cause the Romans to fear for their own sovereignty was something unprecedented. Moreover, Cleopatra was not

124 Dio 50.4.1.
just any woman, but a Hellenistic queen ruling a kingdom in her own right, whose power was at least imagined to threaten Rome. Whether or not this was in reality what the Romans of the time thought, this is how the writers have framed history.

The Cleopatra who appears in Augustan literature, however, holds none of the power, intelligence, or personality of the “real queen,” insofar as we can reconstruct her. She is always recast in terms of Roman stereotypes of women, and these stereotypes usurp any personality or individuality Cleopatra possessed. At times she is a noble woman committing suicide to protect her honor.125 Elsewhere she is the eastern whore-queen full of oriental vice and excess.126 At times she is not even cast as a person, but as the symbolic embodiment of the East clashing with the Roman West.127 She is not once named by any of the Augustan poets. She is the Aegyptia coniunx, the regina, or merely femina, mulier, or illa, but never Cleopatra. She is never herself, but rather a stereotyped version of the woman seen, manipulated so as to be less threatening. Though this rewriting of Cleopatra was not, as far as we can tell, directly ordered by Augustus, it nevertheless represents an attempt to rewrite history in Augustan terms. This revision worked as a form of self-definition, in which Cleopatra was made less menacing and traditional Roman masculinity was reaffirmed. All this was accomplished by manipulating representations of her in terms of gender, the same strategy she herself had used to proclaim her authority.

The historical Cleopatra defied description in traditional Roman terms. Not that this would have mattered to her, as she was not Roman. When imagined by Roman poets, however, she was cast in terms of the abominable or obscene. She was nefas, as Vergil exclaims, a sacrilege or offense against divine law, an unspeakable horror.128 Jonathan Wallis, describing the

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125 Horace C. 1.37.21-32.
127 Vergil, Aeneid, 8.685-713.
128 Vergil, Aeneid 8.688.
reaction of the Augustan poets to Cleopatra, has said: “In Augustan literature, the Egyptian queen is portrayed persistently as a transgressive female outrageously wielding male authority; to name her would grant her the masculine dignity of her title ‘glory of the father.’” By suppressing Cleopatra’s name, the Augustan poets give voice to the unspeakable horror she seems to be and begin the process of bringing her back into the sphere of Roman, male domination. By removing the queen’s personality and forcing her into female archetypes, the Augustan poets reframe her in a way that is palatable to a Roman audience. Thus, from the Augustan perspective, they have tamed Cleopatra and made her harmless, removing the threat she earlier posed. Octavian, as the poetic instrument of Cleopatra’s suppression and taming, is thus portrayed as the restorer of order and balance to the male Roman world view.

This restoration of order is something of a revision of history. By controlling the narrative of events at Actium, the Roman authors reiterate their own cultural values in a form of cultural self-definition, which might be termed a form of weak censorship. Though censorship is usually viewed as government sanctioned destruction or prohibition of texts and images, the idea of censorship carries much more meaning. As Michael Holquist has pointed out, censorship is a kind of self-definition, a statement of what does or does not belong in a community. Holquist further states that “censorship necessarily includes the other it seeks to exclude” since censorship is used to establish a community, it inherently also establishes what is not part of a community, and therefore is the “other.” This establishment of the other as a way of reinforcing the Roman community is an attempt to control words and ideas, and therefore perceptions of reality. As

131 Holquist, 15.
Hans Hillerbrand has noted, “words allow us humans to reflect, to rejoice, and to grieve. Words make possible an awareness of a past, and a present, and a future, a sense of wonder about what there was before we were and what there will be when we are no more.”  

If someone can control what words are used to describe the past, then in theory one can control how the past is interpreted, or, indeed, control the long-term memory of what happened—real or not—and effectively rewrite it to one’s advantage. This seems to be what the Augustan poets were attempting to do when writing of Cleopatra. As the saying goes, it is the victors who write history. The poets who describe Cleopatra—Vergil, Horace, and Propertius—were all part of the artistic circle patronized by Maecenas, close friend and confidante of Augustus. As such, all three poets were beholden to Augustus to some degree. There is no evidence that Augustus or Maecenas actively decided what the poets could or could not write or how to portray their subjects, but the poets’ patronage certainly depended on keeping Maecenas’, and therefore Augustus’, favor. It is impossible to determine with any degree of certainty whether this fact shaped their depictions of Cleopatra, whether they were forced to support Augustus to secure their safety or ongoing patronage, or whether the fact that they fell in line with the Augustan version of events was a coincidence. They very well may have simply held the same ideologies. Nevertheless, the Augustan line is what defines the poetic Cleopatra.

Or perhaps the poetic Cleopatra defines the Augustan version. Given the lack of other contemporary accounts of the conflict between Octavian and Antony and Cleopatra, we might even assert that the poetic versions of Actium created the Augustan version. The Augustan

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version of the War of Actium generally asserts that Antony, bewitched by Cleopatra, had turned his back on Rome.133

Of the events, Augustus himself merely stated, “Iuravit in mea verba tota Italia sponte sua et me belli, quo vici ad Actium, ducem depoposci” (All Italy of its own free will swore allegiance to me and demanded that I be their leader in the war which I won at Actium).134 Though the text does not mention either Cleopatra or Antony, it does hint that Augustus viewed the war, or wished that others view the war, as a national struggle. It would certainly not have been viewed in such stark terms before Actium. As Ronald Syme notes, “It is evident that the most confident as well as the most vocal assertions of Italian nationalism followed rather than preceded the War of Actium.”135 There was in fact a bitter war of propaganda in the years leading up to the eventual fighting, one which Antony lost just as surely as he lost the naval battle at Actium.136 It was only after the fact that the battle took on the significance we ascribe to it.

Later historians—following earlier sources promoting Augustus’ version of history—assert that fear of Cleopatra was running rampant in Rome. Cassius Dio in particular conveys the popular history of the events. He claimed that it was believed that Antony was planning to give the Roman state to Cleopatra. To quote the passage again:

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133 My discussion of the Augustan line of events must needs be brief, as it is not the main topic of this paper. As such, I present here the bare bones of the Augustan version of events. Fuller discussion may be found in Ronald Syme, The Roman Revolution (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 276-300; Grant, 185-215; Goldsworthy 340-369.
134 Augustus, Res Gestae, 25.
135 Syme, 287.
Being aggrieved because of these things, they [the Romans] believed that those rumors babbled about were true, that is, if he [Antony] should prevail, he would grant Cleopatra their city and would move the seat of power to Egypt.137

Soon after this he claims that Cleopatra had designs to rule over Rome:

She bewitched and bound not only him, but the others who held any sway over him that she hoped to rule over the Romans, and made her greatest prayer, whenever she would swear anything, to give justice on the Capitoline.138

These claims are of course preposterous; the leader of the last rather small Hellenistic kingdom could have no realistic pretensions of rivaling Roman power, as events showed. But claiming these were her goals makes rallying support against Cleopatra easier. Dio also gives a version of a speech that Octavian supposedly gave to his soldiers before the Battle of Actium, in which he defamed and slandered Antony to the best of his ability:

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137 Dio 50.4.1
138 Dio 50.4.5
παῖδας αυτῆς Ἡλιον καὶ καὶ Σελήνην ὄνομάζοντα, καὶ τὸ τελευταῖον καὶ ἑαυτὸν Ὄσιριν και Διόνυσον επικεκληκότα.

Now he has cast aside all the ancestral customs of life, and emulates every foreign and barbarian custom, honors neither our laws or the gods of his ancestors, and worships that woman as if she were some Isis or Selene, and calls her children Helios and Selene, and he names himself Osiris and Dionysus.139

Antony had supposedly abandoned all loyalty to his homeland because he was absolutely besotted with his lover. Cleopatra had supposedly so bewitched him that he betrayed Rome for Egypt. In all this, Cleopatra was the seductress who led a Roman astray. She was reduced from the powerful ruler she was to the worst caricatures of her sex. There is of course little actual evidence of this being at all true, but it is the view that took hold and endured.

The Augustan poets either corroborated this version of events or helped create it. All this allowed Augustus to lay the blame on Cleopatra. Elevating Cleopatra to the status of enemy by declaring war against her rather than Antony allowed Augustus to hide, or at least deemphasize, the fact that Antony was the real enemy being fought. By making Cleopatra out to be a threat to national security, Augustus recast what was really a civil war as a war against a foreign enemy, one who was degenerate and corrupt, who might destroy Rome as she had destroyed Antony. And yet while making Cleopatra an enemy, Augustus simultaneously denied her the real power she held. Any power she is allowed to have is sexual and a perversion of gender roles. This is what justifies war against her, from the Roman perspective, breaking gender roles has made her an affront that needs to be corrected.

139 Dio 50.25.3-4.
Poetic Suppression

The Augustan poets began their revision of Cleopatra by removing her personality. As noted earlier, she is not once named by Vergil, Horace, or Propertius.140 The suppression of names, especially of female ones, in Augustan poetry has been observed, but not fully investigated. Joan Booth has pointed out several examples of suppressed names, arguing, as one might expect, that they “have interpretative implications for the passages in which they occur.”141 Booth’s work is far from an exhaustive study of suppressed names in Latin literature, but it does offer a starting point for a discussion of the suppression of Cleopatra’s name and identity. In speaking of the unnamed Cynthia in Propertius 1.2, Booth asserts that “her suppressed name…is essential to her full integration.”142 This will be the same for Cleopatra. The fact that she is not named is key to our interpretation of her place in these poems. In this case, the suppression of her name and individual characteristics allows her to be rehabilitated, for the sake of the male Roman audience, into an appropriate place in the minds of that audience. This suppression leads to Cleopatra being assimilated and integrated into Roman culture. This is accomplished by forcing her into various female tropes.

The classification of women into restrictive categories was by no means an innovation of Augustan literature. As early as the Greek lyric poet Semonides, Classical poetry

140 Cleopatra also appears in the fragments of the Carmen de Bello Actiaco preserved on P. Herc. 817. The fragmentary poem deals with the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at Actium and the final hours of their lives. From the glimpses we see, the poem likely portrayed a Cleopatra who was much less one-dimensional than is present in the other Latin poets. We might suppose from the evidence that we have that the Cleopatra of P. Herc. 817 might substantially resemble Vergil’s Dido. Any assertions about the Cleopatra’s characterization in the poem, however, can only be speculative, as only some 50 lines scattered across several different scenes are recoverable. As such, I will refrain from discussing the poem in this paper. For more information, see Herbert W. Benario, “The ‘Carmen de bello Actiaco’ and Early Imperial Epic,” ANRW 30 no. 3 (1983): 1656-62.


142 Booth, 55.
compartmentalized women according to various caricatures. Per Semonides’ poem, there were ten types of women formed from various animals or nature: the pig, the fox, the dog, the ground, the sea, the donkey, the weasel, the horse, the monkey, and the bee, each fitting some negative stereotype. It is only the industrious bee-woman who is of any worth, whereas all the others bring various ills.143 The Classical tradition has hardly been less restrictive to women since then. Roman literature, which of course developed out of Greek literature, featured various stereotypes and archetypes. As early as the comedies of Plautus and Terence, we see certain stock characters, brought in from Greek New Comedy. The individual characters in a given comedy could be expected to behave in certain ways according to what type of stock character they were, though they were variable to a certain extent.144 These stock figures were not, of course, restricted to female characters; male characters also fell into such roles. There were, however, considerably more options for a male character than a female one. A female character could be expected to fit a particular mold, the most common being the maid or nurse (ancilla, anus, nutrix), the prostitute (meretrix), the brothel-keeper (lena), the wife (matrona), and the young girl (virgo, puella).145

In later Roman literature, such rigid types are less common, yet certain types of women are still found commonly enough to be deemed archetypes. These archetypes can be seen both in fictional or mythological women and in literary accounts of historical Roman women. Roman literature is particularly fond of certain types: the dutiful mother, the chaste wife, the unfaithful lover, and the loose woman, among others. One of the most common, and most positive, from the point of view of the Roman male author, is the noble mother and dutiful wife. This archetype

143 Semonides 7.1-93.
145 Duckworth, 253-261.
predates Roman literature, going back at least as far as the Homeric Penelope, dutifully waiting for Odysseus to return to Ithaca, but Roman examples abound. The most notable of these is Cornelia, mother of Gaius and Tiberius Gracchus, who was so honored that a statue was set up in her honor. She was so highly esteemed that she became the standard to whom all other mothers were compared. The prized value of this type of woman was loyalty to her husband. Valerius Maximus extoled the loyalty of a wife to her husband, giving three paradigmatic examples. Several such women distinguish themselves in accounts of the proscriptions, either fleeing dutifully with their husbands or else protecting them from the wrath of the triumvirs, including the wives of Acilius, Lentulus, Apuleius, Antius, Rheginus, and Coponius.

A similar type, or perhaps a subset of the dutiful wife archetype, is that of the noble suicide. These are women who are so devoted to a principle—usually faithfulness to their husbands—that they are willing to die rather than have their reputation tarnished. The most famous example of this is Livy’s Lucretia, who preferred to die rather than allow later women to claim her as an example of infidelity:

> Vos, inquit, videritis, quid illi debeatur: ego me etsi peccato absolvo, supplicio non libero; nec utta deinde inpudica Lucretiae exemplo vivet. Cultrum, quem sub veste abditum habebat, eum in corde defigit prolapsaque in vulnus moribunda cecidit.

“You,” she said, “will see to what is due to this man; I, even though I absolve myself from the sin, do not acquit myself of the penalty; no shameless woman will ever live by

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146 Plutarch, Life of Gaius Gracchus 4.3.
148 Valerius Maximus 6.7.1-3.
149 Appian, Civil War 4.39-40. These women are rarely named but are defined by their relationship to their husbands.
the example of Lucretia.” Then she plunged into her heart a knife hidden under her robe and, collapsing onto the wound, she fell dead.\textsuperscript{150}

The virtuous woman killing herself rather than suffer disgrace is a common archetype. In an anecdote preserved by Plutarch, a Spartan woman sold as a slave refused to follow orders that were not appropriate for a woman and committed suicide.\textsuperscript{151} If the attribution to Sparta is correct, then it even predates Roman literature. The theme of the noble death became popular in the Roman world, thanks to the spread of Stoicism, and so such examples are prominent in Latin literature and history. Later Latin authors praised such women as Arria the Elder who committed suicide rather than live as a widow in reduced circumstances after her husband’s disgrace.\textsuperscript{152}

Vergil’s Dido might be a variation on this theme. She commits suicide partially to regain some honor because her reputation has been damaged.\textsuperscript{153} These women, real or imagined, were seen as \textit{exempla} of the ideal Roman woman: one who put honor and faithfulness before life itself.

Roman literature, and the Greek literature that inspired it, tends toward negative stereotypes of female characters. Semonides’ types of women have already been noted above. Hesiod’s description of Pandora lambasts women generally.\textsuperscript{154} Similar, general deprecations of the character of women occur in Roman literature,\textsuperscript{155} but specific negative archetypes appear as well, especially that of the unfaithful wife. Mythological examples can be found in both Greek and Roman literature: Medea, Phaedra Helen of Troy, and Clytemnestra, all bring disaster and ruin. The promiscuous woman who violated cultural norms was seen as particularly threatening,
all the more so when these transgressive women had political power. Horace linked sexual misconduct with financial ruin. Cicero’s defense of Marcus Caelius Rufus devolved into an invective against Clodia, whose debaucheries made her, in Cicero’s mind, unworthy of her status as matron. Such transgression of gender norms were seen to bring about other transgressions. In Sallust’s account of the Catilinarian Conspiracy of 62 BCE, for example, he describes the “masculine boldness” (virilis audaciae) of Sempronia as the source of her debased faults.

As a literary creation, Cleopatra, in particular, is confined within particular roles such as these, and these roles are generally used to deny Cleopatra masculine glory and recast her as the inevitable result of a woman—and a foreign one at that—trying to rise above her station. As Maria Wyke has summarized: “The sympotic, epic, and elegiac Cleopatras of Augustan poetry all constrain the queen within the limits of her role as a vanquished opponent of the Roman state.” By casting her in these terms, the Augustan poets effectively rewrite history from the perspective of the Roman male.

Vergil’s Cleopatra is more internally consistent than the versions crafted by other Augustan poets. She appears only briefly in the Aeneid in the depiction of the Battle of Actium on the shield of Aeneas in Book 8. Here she does not truly appear as herself, but rather embodies the concept of the Other. She is first mentioned in the retinue accompanying Antony:

\begin{quote}
\textit{hinc ope barbarica variisque Antonius armis,}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textit{victor ab Aurorae populis et litore rubro,}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
158 Cicero, \textit{Pro Caelio} 13-16.
159 Sallust, \textit{Bellum Catilinae} 24.3-25.
160 Wyke, 106.
161 There are certainly echoes of the historical Cleopatra in Vergil’s Dido, but this study deals only with overt descriptions of the “historical” Cleopatra.
\end{footnotes}
Aegyptum virisque Orientis et ultima secum

Bactra vehit, sequiturque (nefas) Aegyptia coniunx.

Here Antony with barbarian aid and the weapons of manifold peoples, the victor over the peoples of the Dawn and the ruddy sea, carries with him Egypt, Oriental powers, and the furthest regions of Bactria, and (the sacrilege!) his Egyptian wife follows him.162

Here, Cleopatra remains emphatically unnamed. As Pramit Chaudhuri points out, “the word nefas draws attention to the periphrastic function of Aegyptia coniunx and suggests the avoidance of Cleopatra’s name.”163 Vergil draws special attention to the fact that he is not naming Cleopatra by labelling her as something that is unspeakable—the etymological meaning of the word nefas. What exactly is nefas here is uncertain; it could be the very fact that Antony has an Aegyptia coniunx, a foreign bride, or the fact that this Egyptian wife is following him into battle. Perhaps it is even Cleopatra herself, rather than anything she is doing and regardless of her relationship to Antony. Or perhaps the statement is not so much a dismissal of Cleopatra’s personness but rather a critique of Antony’s desecration of Roman mores by marrying her. Likely all are implied. What is significant is that in the very mention of Cleopatra, Vergil simultaneously reminds us that she is unspeakable.

Of particular note, the first time that Cleopatra is mentioned, it is in terms of her relationship to Antony. Though she will later be called queen, when she first enters the narrative she is merely “wife.” This statement will overshadow her presence through the rest of the scene. Though she will be made into a personification of the East, she is still defined in terms of her relationship to a man. She is not the powerful, independent ruler she presented herself as in life,

162 Vergil, Aeneid 8.685-688.
163 Chaudhuri, 224.
but is instead defined by her relationship to a man, something Cleopatra emphatically avoided doing until her motherhood granted her divine authority.

The intense horror of the scene is not limited to the presence of Cleopatra herself, but also to the entire Eastern host which has dared to pit itself against Rome. The description of the Battle of Actium on the shield arrays, on the one hand, Augustus and the gods of Rome against the chaotic and barbaric forces of the East:

\[ omingenumque deum monstra et latrator Anubis \]
\[ contra Neptunum et Venerem contraque Minervam \]
\[ tela tenent. \]

Monsters of the gods of every far-flung people and barking Anubis bear spears against Neptune and Venus, and against Minerva.\(^{164}\) Cleopatra and her bestial deities fight against the civilized gods of the Roman pantheon. It is a clash between East and West on a cosmic scale, in which the western forces of order triumph over the eastern forces of chaos and barbarism. This reading of Vergil’s battle of Actium, which sees the battle as symbolic of the clashing East and West, has long been a favored interpretation of the scene. For example, while Robert Gurval notes that the scene is more complicated than a simple dichotomy of East versus West, he nevertheless observes that “The poet’s almost mythic interpretation of the past results in the mighty clash of cultures, a Roman victory over barbarian foes, supported and achieved by the assistance of the Olympian gods.”\(^{165}\) Philip Hardie observes, in particular, that Vergil’s Actium abounds in Gigantomachic images and themes, and that Actium serves as a final iteration of this struggle between forces of order and chaos: “In

\[^{164}\text{Vergil, } \textit{Aeneid} \textit{8.698-700.}\]
\[^{165}\text{Robert Alan Gurval, } \textit{Actium and Augustus: The Politics and Emotions of Civil War} \textit{(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 246.}\]
particular, the Battle of Actium is viewed as the last repetition of Gigantomachy and finally constitutive of a Roman cosmos complete in all its members, which the forces of chaos will henceforth be powerless to assault.”166 Thus, Vergil’s Actium is the culminating battle between civilization and chaos. It is the clash between West and East, and Cleopatra becomes assimilated into this larger, cosmic theme.

In the *Aeneid*, therefore, Cleopatra seems to be not so much herself, or even an individual person, but rather an embodiment of all that represents the (barbaric) East. Her presence itself is *nefas*, and the gods accompanying her are more animalistic than divine. Even the phrase given to refer to Cleopatra, *Aegyptia coniunx*, embodies all that is wrong and inappropriate with the eastern host. A Roman citizen could not legally marry a foreign woman.167 Thus the Latin phrase *Aegyptia coniunx* is itself a paradox, a violation, something that could not and should not be, something that represents chaos attempting to overcome law and order. Cleopatra is not given individual characteristics, positive or negative. She is not brave, daring, or proud. But she is not drunk, ignorant, or seductive either. She is not portrayed as an individual, but as a collective. She is not named. Of course, she is not named in any Latin poetry, so this is not unique to Vergil, but here her name seems purposely avoided not simply because she is an enemy, but because naming her would diminish the scope of the conflict. She is not really even a person, but an allegoric representation of the East.

Even when she is mentioned as taking part in the battle, she is depicted with inaccurate eastern stereotypes:

*regina in mediis patrio vocat agmina sistro,*

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necdum etiam geminos a tergo respicit anguis.

omingenumque deum monstra et latrator Anubis

contra Neptunum et Venerem contraque Minervam
tela tenent

In the middle the queen calls the battle lines with her ancestral *sistrum* and does not yet even see the serpents behind her back. Monsters of the gods of ever far-flung people and barking Anubis bear spears against Neptune and Venus, and against Minerva.168

Vergil describes Cleopatra as calling upon her troops with her *sistrum*, either ignorant of its function or else willfully ignoring the fact. The *sistrum* is a ritual instrument which was shaken to produce a rattling noise.169 Originally an independent sacral instrument, it early became connected with the worship of the goddess Hathor. In Egyptian religion, it was often used in ritual processions as a musical offering to appease the goddess.170 The metal rattle had no military use whatsoever and was certainly never used as a tool of encouragement in battle, as Vergil depicts it. Rather, Vergil takes the *sistrum* as a recognizably Egyptian symbol and puts it into the hands of the queen to make her appear stereotypically Egyptian. That Cleopatra is accompanied by the *latrator Anubis* and *omingenumque deum monstra* only further caricatures her. As opposed to the “dignified” Roman gods Neptune, Venus, and Minerva, the East has the bestial Anubis and other creatures not even worthy of a name—a characteristic example of Roman disdain for and oversimplification of Egyptian religion as mere animal worship.171 These

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169 This is the instrument Cleopatra is using in figures 7 and 8.
170 C. J. Bleeker, *Hathor and Thoth: Two Key Figures of the Ancient Egyptian Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 59-60. See also Figure 1.
details create a Cleopatra who is more of a composite view of the Roman conception of Egypt than an actual individual.

And yet, as much as the scene is a clash between East and West, it can also be read as a clash between male and female. Though Antony is named at the beginning of the scene, he never reappears after he is introduced, and for the rest of the sequence the forces arrayed against Octavian are led by the unnamed Cleopatra. As such, the fight can be reduced to Cleopatra against Octavian, and though they might well represent East against West, they also represent male against female. This gendered conflict highlights the conflict of cultures. To the Roman mind, Octavian represents their own, proper civilization. Meanwhile, as far as a Roman would be concerned, a woman leading an army would embody all that is wrong in eastern culture. If the eastern understanding of gender roles is so utterly different, how can anything else about them be called culture? Thus, gender and otherness blend into one in Cleopatra. Maria Wyke has noted such a connection between femininity and otherness: “This kind of invective against the militant woman forms part of a larger discourse of sex difference that duplicates the gender patterns of Orientalism: the ideal good ordering of the state is linked to the ideal behaviour of its women.”172 In this case, the degenerate state of the East is demonstrated by the transgressive nature of its women. Wyke also notes that this equation of degenerate culture and transgressive woman is present in Augustan representations of Cleopatra: “The Horatian, Virgilian, and Propertian Cleopatras can seem to operate within precisely such invective patterns as these. Their Egyptian queen transgresses all the social and political constraints which Roman society imposed (ideally) upon its woman.”173 In Vergil’s scene, woman and barbarism become synonymous.

172 Wyke, 111.
173 Wyke, 112.
This is perhaps an extension of Sherry Ortner’s argument that the universal subjugation of women stems from their perceived status as closer to nature and further from culture and civilization:

Returning now to the issue of women, their pan-cultural second-class status could be accounted for, quite simply, by postulating that women are being identified or symbolically associated with nature, as opposed to men, who are identified with culture. Since it is always culture’s project to subsume and transcend nature, if women were considered part of nature, then culture would find it ‘natural’ to subordinate, not to say oppress, them.174

This is all the more appropriate when reading an equation of woman with barbarism, a state which, to the so-called “civilized” culture, is less human and more closely related to nature. Ortner argues that women are not seen as equal, but as closer to nature: “women are seen ‘merely’ as being closer to nature than men. That is, culture (still equated relatively unambiguously with men) recognizes that women are active participants in its special processes, but at the same time sees them as being more rooted in, or having more direct affinity with, nature.”175 If, then, the Romans viewed the East as less civilized, somewhere between true (Roman) civilization and the anarchic state of nature, it would match Ortner’s observations perfectly. Woman is represented as somewhere between the cultural, self-transcendent male and the grit of untamed nature, just as degenerate culture is less than Roman civilization, but still a form of civilization. By this equivalence, the East is Rome’s conception of woman, something less than the West or male.

175 Ortner, 73.
Beyond this, an eastern king would be unlikely to have been rendered into a mere allegory in the way Vergil renders Cleopatra. It was common, in representations of conquered and subjugated peoples, for the Romans to use female figures as allegories. Wyke notes that in commemorative Roman coinage women never appear as recognizable individuals, but either as generalized prisoners or as a personification of the nation conquered by Rome. Men, on the other hand, are often linked to real individuals. She notes that in coins commemorating Caesar’s capture of Gaul, “while the male is associated with the ferocious military agents in Caesar’s Gallic wars, the female is linked more impersonally to the symbol of an acquiescent Gallic city.” Such images are ubiquitous in Roman iconography, whether the conquered nation is western or eastern. Caesar’s victories over Gaul, the ending of Sicily’s second slave war, Augustus’ retrieval of the Roman standards taken by Parthia, represented in the statue from Prima Porta, are all commemorated with female personifications.

Conquered kings, however, were represented on Roman coins. King Aretas of Nabataea and Jugurtha of Mauretania are both depicted bowing down to Roman power and are clearly recognizable as themselves. Cleopatra’s defeat is never depicted on Roman coins, but Vergil’s poetic depiction parallels the trend. Rather than be represented as an individual, like an eastern king likely would be, she is confined into a personification of the East, a treatment that a man certainly would not have received. And while no poetic descriptions of the defeat of an eastern king exist in extant Roman poetry, to which we might compare the Augustan representations of Cleopatra, we can extrapolate from the iconographical trends that likely they would not have been rendered as impersonally as Cleopatra. We cannot assert this with complete certainty, but

176 Wyke, 121-126f.
177 Wyke, 122.
178 BMCR 1.471.3824; RRC 426/1; RRC 468/1; BMC 1.513.3994 and 3996; RRC 448/2e and 3; RRC 401/1.
179 BMCR 2.591.16, RRC 422/1b; BMCR 1.471.3824 or RRC 426/1.
no man was ever rendered into an allegory as Cleopatra was, and that trend would probably have continued were Vergil depicting a king’s defeat, rather than a queen’s.

Propertius’ description of Cleopatra, perhaps the most hostile of the Augustan poets, includes much of the same stereotyping as Vergil’s. Not only do some of the same images appear, but the terminology is quite similar:

\[
\textit{scilicet incesti meretrix regina Canopi,}
\]

\[
\textit{una Philippeo sanguine adusta nota}
\]

\[
\textit{ausa Iovi nostro latrantem opponere Anubim,}
\]

\[
\textit{et Tiberim Nili cogere ferre minas,}
\]

\[
\textit{Romanamque tubam crepitanti pellere sistro}
\]

Certainly, the whore queen of defiled Canopus, the sole mark branded upon Philip’s blood, dared to pit barking Anubis against our Jupiter, and to compel the Tiber to endure the threats of the Nile, and to drive out the Roman trumpet with the rattling \textit{sistrum}.\textsuperscript{180}

Once again, Cleopatra embodies Egyptian stereotypes. She is brandishing her \textit{sistrum} against the Roman trumpet—again, a blatant disregard for the instrument’s actual use—and pitting the barking Anubis against the gods of Rome.

Propertius, however, unlike Vergil, does allow his Cleopatra to be more than just an embodiment of the East. He manipulates Cleopatra’s gender in negative terms. She is not a fully developed individual, but she does take on one of the feminine archetypes, rather than remain merely a personification of the East. She is the \textit{meretrix regina}, or the whore queen, the dangerously transgressive woman. This is, perhaps, a reversal of the feminine iconography Cleopatra herself used. Both Cleopatra’s own feminine representations and Propertius’ revolve

\textsuperscript{180} Propertius 3.11.39-43.
around her procreative abilities. Rather than use her sexuality to transform her into a mother
goddess, Propertius uses it to slander her as a whore. Propertius begins this elegy by asking:

Quid mirare, meam si versat femina vitam
et trahit addictum sub sua iura virum?

Why do you marvel, if a woman twists my life and drags a subdued man under her
laws?\textsuperscript{181}

This then, is the topic of the elegy: women who rule over men, which is unnatural in traditional
Roman terms. Propertius gives several examples of mythical women who dominated men:
Medea who overcame Jason, Penthesilea whose beauty conquered Achilles, Omphale who tamed
Hercules, and Semiramis, who built Babylon and subdued Bactria. Each of them exhibit some
similarity to the queen, as Newman has pointed out.\textsuperscript{182} Like Medea, Cleopatra had her own
brother killed, and largely saw to the affairs of her lover. Like Penthesilea, she dared to stand up
to a male enemy in battle. Like Omphale, she bent the New Hercules to her will and, as the
propaganda would have it, emasculated him.\textsuperscript{183} Like Semiramis, she had imperial ambitions.
These exempla merely introduce the didactic point of the poem: the dangerous power of women.
They constitute only the introduction; Propertius culminates with Cleopatra, who is the poem’s
focus. Propertius does not mention Antony at all in the poem, but the opening lines on female
power intimate that Cleopatra rules over him. In fact, his very absence emphasizes his
submissiveness to her. It is as if he has been completely emasculated, even erased.

Cleopatra seems to be an example of excess, drunkenness, and profligacy. She is a
seductress. She uses and abuses those around her and has presumably corrupted Antony with her

\textsuperscript{181} Propertius 3.11.1-2.
\textsuperscript{182} John Kevin Newman, \textit{Augustan Propertius: The Recapitulation of a Genre} (Hildersheim and New York: Olms
Verlag, 1997), 262.
\textsuperscript{183} This motif was used frequently in the propaganda war between Antony and Octavian. See Zanker, 59-60
wanton ways. She is promiscuous and retains power by means of sex. She is thus the archetype of the whore: “famulos inter femina trita suos,” (a woman who fornicated among her own slaves).184 It is of little import to Propertius that Cleopatra was, if anything, quite restrained in her sexual life. He reduces her to her sexual power, and this sexual power is the source of the threat she poses to Rome.

Propertius, like Vergil, emphatically leaves Cleopatra unnamed. Unlike the mostly named mythological characters, Cleopatra is merely the meretrix regina. Propertius connects his suppression of the queen’s name with the unspeakableness of her crimes against Rome:

*quid, modo quae nostris opprobria vexerit armis*  
*et famulos inter femina trita suos,*  
*coniugis obsceni pretium Romana poposcit*  
*moenia et addictos in sua regna patres?*  

What about her who laid insults on our weapons, and who used her favors among her slaves, who demanded the walls of Rome and the Senate as the price from her repulsive husband?185

Propertius does not explicitly label Cleopatra’s presence as nefas as Vergil does, but he does draw attention to the fact that she does not deserve to be named. In these lines she is not even given a title but is indicated merely as femina or with the relative pronoun quae. Most importantly, the reason that Propertius implicitly gives for not mentioning her is that she was demanding Rome be handed over to her. This and the fact that se was casting insults on Roman power and was spreading her sexual favors freely. In all of this, she overstepped the bounds of

184 Propertius 3.11.30.  
185 Propertius 3.11.29-32.
appropriate desires, and so, even if Propertius does not use the term *nefas*, this is effectively what he renders her in recompense for her actions.

Rather than label her as *nefas*, he describes her as *una Philippeo sanguine adusta nota* (the sole mark branded upon Philip’s blood).¹⁸⁶ If it is correct to read of the text as saying that Cleopatra is the one disgrace on the line of Philip (40), we must understand her to be outside the norm. We can, of course, point to any number of problematic Hellenistic monarchs, and the entire Ptolemaic line was filled with incest, murder, luxurious excess, and other vices. Therefore, if Cleopatra is to be singled out as the most infamous of her bloodline, she must be worse than all of those who came before her. And what is unique about Cleopatra, if not that she was a woman who ruled and held power as a man would? She, unlike any other Hellenistic queen, was powerful enough to be interpreted as a threat to Roman power.¹⁸⁷ It cannot even be merely that she was considered a threat that marks her out as the brand on Philip’s descendants, for the Romans fought multiple wars with the Hellenistic kings of Macedonia and the Seleucid Empire. In fact, quite possibly the greatest threat Rome ever faced from a Hellenistic ruler was Philip of Macedonia’s alliance with Hannibal during the Second Punic War, which resulted in Roman forces being diverted to Illyria rather than remaining to fighting Hannibal in Italy.¹⁸⁸ This was far more a more real threat to Roman sovereignty than anything Cleopatra ever did.

The threat Cleopatra posed was not to the Roman state, but to Roman masculinity. If a woman could use her sexuality to subordinate men to her, then the Roman way of life would be in jeopardy. The mythological precedents of the opening lines of the poem show us what could

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¹⁸⁶ Propertius 3.11.40. D. R. Shackleton Baily, *Propertiana* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1967), 171-172 asserts that this is the only way the text can be read sensibly, and that the assertion points Cleopatra out as the most infamous of the Ptolemies, rather than the only degenerate Ptolemy.

¹⁸⁷ Although historically Cleopatra could have posed no real threat to Roman sovereignty, Propertius characterizes her as such in lines 57-70.

¹⁸⁸ Livy 23.38, 24.10-11, 20, 40.
have happened to Rome had Cleopatra not been subdued by Augustus. The poem “positions the Propertian lover’s disgraced servility as an explanatory paradigm for the submission Rome nearly offered to the Egyptian queen Cleopatra, had it not been for the virile intervention of Octavian.” And if Augustus saved Rome from becoming enthralled to Cleopatra, then, as Stahl has observed, in the poem Rome becomes—or narrowly avoids becoming—to Cleopatra as Propertius has become to Cynthia, wholly subservient. As a result, Rome no longer needs to fear such a woman overpowering it, for it “stat non humana deicienda manu,” (stands not to be destroyed by a human hand.”

We see the most fully developed poetic Cleopatra in Horace’s depiction of the Battle of Actium in C. 1.37, the so-called Cleopatra Ode. Unlike the other Augustan poets, Horace seems to give two distinct characterizations of the queen. The first, in lines 1-15 is a type of the Eastern “whore-queen,” like the one we see in Propertius, similarly characterized by excess. This Cleopatra is drunk on both wine and hubris. She breathes out threats against Rome, while still spreading around her sexual favors. However, a shift occurs in lines 12-21, especially in the similes comparing Caesar pursuing Cleopatra to a hunter chasing doves or a hare in lines 16-21. After this, the characterization of Cleopatra becomes much more positive as she becomes brave and defiant.

The first half of the poem describes Cleopatra in ways that fit Augustan propaganda before Actium:

_Capitolio_

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189 Wallis, 17; see also 83-86.
191 Propertius 3.11.58.
192 This is in stark contrast to the historical Cleopatra, who seems to have been quite restrained in this regard. As far as we know, she only ever had two lovers, Caesar and Antony. This has not, however, prevented her from gaining an unearned reputation for promiscuity. Peter Green makes a point of Cleopatra’s sexual restraint: Green, 661-664.
regina dementis ruinas,
funus et imperio parabat

The queen prepares deranged ruin for the Capitol and a funerary procession for the empire.\(^{193}\)

This Cleopatra, like that of Propertius, threatens to establish her dominion over Rome, and the later version in Cassius Dio’s history who swears to dispense justice on the Capitol.\(^{194}\) However, she is overcome by her ambition for power:

\[ quidlibet impotens \]

\[ aperare fortunaque dulci \]

\[ ebria \]

Incapable [of reason], drunk on sweet success so as to hope for anything she wishes.\(^{195}\) She has been blinded by what she has seen as success. She is drunk on her own confidence, but also on wine (\textit{mentemque lymphatam Mareotico}). She is the personification of eastern arrogance, the other, that which is not Roman. She is a drunkard whose ambitions go beyond appropriate bounds. We see, as well, the same depraved whore-queen, as Propertius also portrayed her, who goes around in her mad designs,

\[ contaminato cum grege turpium, \]

\[ morbo virorum \]

With her contaminated flock of disgraceful men, her infection of men.\(^{196}\)

Thus, the Cleopatra of the opening lines of C. 1.37 is comparable to the versions we have seen in Vergil and Propertius.

\(^{193}\) Horace, C. 1.37.6-8.
\(^{194}\) Dio, 50.5.4.
\(^{195}\) Horace, C. 1.37.10-12.
\(^{196}\) Horace, C. 1.37.9-10.
This changes dramatically in the second half of the poem. The depraved monstrosity vanishes, revealing a new Cleopatra who is brave and admirable, rather than drunken and monstrous. She is not afraid of death, but rather chooses to die nobly:

\begin{center}
\textit{quae generosius}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{perire quaerens nec muliebriter}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{expavit ensem nec latentis}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{classe cita reparavit oras;}
\end{center}

Seeking to die nobly, she did not fear the sword, nor did she sail to foreign shores with her swift fleet.\textsuperscript{197}

She is capable of bravery:

\begin{center}
\textit{ausa et iacentem visere regiam}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{vultu sereno}
\end{center}

daring to look upon her prostrate kingdom with a calm face,\textsuperscript{198}

and of committing suicide to protect her reputation:

\begin{center}
\textit{deliberata morte ferocior;}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{saevis Liburnis scilicet invidens}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{privata deduci superbo}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{non humilis mulier triumpho.}
\end{center}

fiercer with deliberated death, certainly begrudging the fierce Liburnians that she be led, stripped of her power, in a proud triumph, no humble woman [would she be].\textsuperscript{199}

\textsuperscript{197} Horace, C. 1.37.21-24.
\textsuperscript{198} Horace, C. 1.37.25-26.
\textsuperscript{199} Horace, C. 1.37.29-32.
This is not the same, depraved Cleopatra who goes beyond her station or who embodies eastern luxury and excess. It is a Cleopatra who has recognized and accepted the inevitability of her defeat at the hands of Rome, but who has nevertheless determined to hold on to her dignity by any means possible. If anything, this Cleopatra represents courage and nobility. The description calls to mind Livy’s Lucretia, who would rather die than bear the opprobrium of having been raped. Horace’s Cleopatra, unlike Livy’s Lucretia, does not fear the shame of a reputation of promiscuity, but instead fears being demeaned by being paraded through the streets of Rome in triumph. She therefore denies the possibility of such humiliation by committing suicide.

Despite the differences in the portrayals of Cleopatra in all these poems, however, certain factors are common to all of them. As noted above, not once in Latin poetry is Cleopatra ever given a name but is merely referred to as regina, Aegyptia coniunx, or some other such designation. This, in part, is because the portrayals of Cleopatra in Latin literature are meant to represent archetypes rather than the actual Cleopatra. She is the embodiment of the East and its vices and excesses. She is the whore-queen. She is the brave and noble woman who commits suicide. But she is not herself. They all manipulate her to deny her the power she had in life.

**Constraining Cleopatra**

There is, however, more to the suppression of Cleopatra’s name and personality than just a tendency of Roman poetry to caricature women. It is also an attempt to express her as an embodiment of the concept of nefas, that which is taboo or unspeakable, until she can be rehabilitated into an acceptable role. It is an attempt to rewrite the historical Cleopatra in terms of Roman (male) cultural values. The female stereotypes of Classical literature are a role into which Cleopatra can be confined and therefore understood in Roman terms. By doing so, the

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200 Livy 1.58.5-11, discussed above.
Augustan poets “rehabilitate” Cleopatra into the Roman value system and effectively rewrite her place in history. This rehabilitation of Cleopatra is conveyed in terms of her defeat at the hands of Octavian and is accomplished by manipulating Cleopatra in terms of gender roles.

The shift in the characterization of Cleopatra half-way through Horace’s Cleopatra Ode has been observed and explained in various ways. Mary DeForest has pointed out that “The crux of the poem, as critics have noticed, is the dichotomy between the two Cleopatras. That same dichotomy is revealed in the central transitional passage by the juxtaposition of the two Cleopatras being likened to pathetic animals and to the *fatale monstrum.*”²⁰¹ DeForest labels the two hunting similes of lines 16-20 as the trigger of the shift in characterization. J. V. Luce centers the shift in tone around the phrase *fatale monstrum* in line 21 as an ambiguous term that can be read in multiple directions, thereby triggering the two characterizations, saying that “Before it Cleopatra is being hissed from the stage of history with cries of disapproval; after it she is recalled to receive plaudit after plaudit for her courage and resolution.”²⁰² Roland Mayer places the change in tone and direction at *generosius* in line 21.²⁰³ Regardless of where exactly the change in tone originates, there is clearly a shift between lines 12 and 21 from the drunk whore-queen to the noble suicide.

I contend that this shift is not found in any one of the elements pointed to above, but in a combination of the elements in lines 12-21, and that these lines are demonstrative of the larger pattern of treating Cleopatra in Augustan literature. The change begins with Cleopatra’s defeat at Actium which inspires her fear and flight, and continues as Octavian pursues her:

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The one ship, barely escaped from the fires, decreases her madness, and Caesar, pursuing her with oars from behind as she flies from Italy, brings back her mind, drunk on Mareotic wine, to true fears, like a hawk after soft doves or a hunter after a swift hare on the snowy fields of Haemonia, in order to put the fateful monster in chains.204

It is the loss at Actium and the flight away from Octavian that sobers Horace’s Cleopatra and prompts her to plan to die more nobly. The loss shatters the mad hopes she had had before and brings her back to reality and sobriety: she cannot challenge Rome. This realization triggers her flight back to Egypt and the hunting similes that accompany it. The defeated Cleopatra is reduced to the status of a hunted animal, and it is this humiliation that gives her the urge to die nobly (generosius, line 21).

More than simply recalling Horace’s Cleopatra back to reality, this section also relegates her to the sphere appropriate for a woman as the masculine Octavian forces her to take up a

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204 Horace, C. 1.37.12-20.
feminine role. The first half of the poem refers to her as a *monstrum fatale*, but what makes her monstrous is never stated. In fact, as Jean Bingen has stated, “The only parameter the poet gives us to judge this *monstrum fatale* is Cleopatra’s femininity.” Beyond merely being a woman, Cleopatra is acting in a station that a Roman would say belonged to a man, “because there was no place for a woman in the strictly patriarchal Roman system of power.” Octavian’s Roman masculinity forces Cleopatra back into a feminine role. That Octavian pursues Cleopatra with oars (line 17) brings us into the realm of the sexual. As Adams observes, there is a long tradition of rowing and sailing as sexual metaphors in Greek literature, which is certainly picked up by Horace’s contemporary Ovid, and is possibly intended here. Though of course the subject of the poem, a naval battle, might by itself explain the mention of oars, one cannot help but think of Octavian pursuing Cleopatra by brandishing his oars as a euphemism for an attempt at sexual violence.

The hunting similes demonstrate that order, from the Roman perspective, is being restored. Octavian is the hawk chasing soft doves, the hunter chasing the hare, the masculine chasing the feminine. Both the images of prey and the adjective *mollis*, often used to describe female lovers, indicate the scene’s sexual undertones. From the Roman point of view, Cleopatra, as a woman and a foreigner, has been put back in her rightful place: she is prey to the more powerful Roman man. It is this subjugation, ironically, which allows Cleopatra to die with dignity, for as a Roman man would see it, she is dying in her rightful place.

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206 Bingen, 45.
However sincere Horace’s final praise of Cleopatra may be, Cleopatra’s noble death is made possible because Octavian’s victory has brought her back to her senses. Cleopatra can only be rehabilitated in this sense when her last ship barely escapes the flames of Actium, when defeat has forced her to abandon her mad hopes for destroying the Capitol. As Octavian turns the mad queen into a hunted animal, she is able to reclaim the little glory allotted to her sex—that of a noble death—but this is on Roman terms. Nevertheless, Horace’s Cleopatra is defiant to the last. Maria Wyke has argued that “If any dignity accrues to the queen in the poetic description of her death at the end of Horace’s’ Ode it is, from the Roman perspective because in her final moments she transcended the condition of Woman – nec muliebriter / expavit (Ode 1.37.22-3).” Earlier in the poem she does not transcend the nature of her sex, from a Roman point of view, but is rather forced out of the masculine role she had usurped and consigned back into the feminine. In the end, however, Cleopatra is defiant and dies on her own terms, denying Octavian the chance to drag her through the streets of Rome in a triumph. The scene reads something like Livy’s Lucretia, a particularly feminine precedent, but Horace states that it is nec muliebriter, not womanly. Perhaps this is because Cleopatra is not defending her sexual purity but refusing to be completely debased. Horace has her last moment be an act of defiance, as the historical Cleopatra’s was. Yet, as Horace portrays it, this moment of defiance was only possible because of the clarity brought about by Octavian’s victory at Actium. As a result, the representation falls somewhere between masculine and feminine. She is denied the masculine glory of victory, but still manages to defy her status as a woman by refusing to submit, and Horace seems to admire her for it.

208 Wyke, 112.
Though Vergil and Propertius do not grant Cleopatra a full rehabilitation at the end of their poetic descriptions, they do both pick up on the idea of Octavian taking the *nefas* queen and putting her back in her place by defeating her at Actium. In her last appearance on the shield of Aeneas, Cleopatra, having suffered defeat, flees back to Egypt in terror:

\[
\textit{illam inter caedes pallentem morte futura}
\]
\[
\textit{fecerat ignipotens undis et Iapyge ferri},
\]
\[
\textit{contra autem magno maerentem corpore Nilum}
\]
\[
\textit{pandentemque sinus et tota veste vocantem}
\]
\[
\textit{caeruleum in gremium latebrosaque flumina victos}.
\]

Among the slaughters, the Master of Fire had crafted her carried by the waves and the north-west wind, pale at her coming death, but opposite her he made the Nile, grieving with his great body, opening his folds and calling the defeated with his whole raiment into his blue lap and his hidden streams.\(^{209}\)

The Cleopatra who had dared to array herself and the bestial Egyptian gods against Rome has been sent back to Egypt in disgrace and ignominiously exits the narrative. She is not even allowed to have the story of her death told, though it is foreshadowed. Vergil moves instead to describe Augustus entering Rome in triumph amid celebration. Vergil denies her the masculine glory of dying on her own terms. In Horace’s poem, this allowed Cleopatra to retain something of her status between masculine and feminine. Vergil, on the other hand, chooses to have Augustus restore order by eliminating her from the narrative entirely, thereby denying her any masculine glory. She has been recast in terms that are purely feminine.

Propertius has Cleopatra exit his narrative in similar, though more elaborate, fashion:

\(^{209}\) Vergil, \textit{Aeneid} 8.709-713.
Nevertheless, you fled to the roving streams of the fearful Nile: your hands received
Romulus’ chains. I saw her arms bitten by the sacred serpents and the black path of sleep
draw her limbs. “Rome, you ought not to have feared me with such a citizen as this!”
Thus spoke the tongue overwhelmed by continual wine.210

Propertius’ Cleopatra, like Vergil’s and Horace’s, having been defeated at Actium, is now
subdued and returns to Egypt in defeat. Propertius’ defeated Cleopatra claims that she was never
any real threat. He does allude to her death but does not grant her the defiantly noble death that
Horace did. He removes the choice from her death. Nor does Propertius praise Cleopatra in her
death as Horace does, but he does at least allow her death to be part of the narrative, and this
death is the culminating glory of Augustus, so that the poem can end with an exhortation to
remember Augustus:

\[
\text{at tu, sive petes portus seu, navita, linques,} \\
\text{Caesars in toto sis memor Ionio.}
\]

But you, sailor, whether you are seeking or leaving port, remember Caesar throughout the
Ionian Sea!211

---

210 Propertius, 3.11.51-56.
211 Propertius 3.11.71-72.
This concluding remark locates the poem in an erotic context. Octavian vanquishing Cleopatra has freed the Ionian Sea for safe travel. If Rome is made parallel to Propertius and Cleopatra to Cynthia, then Cleopatra’s removal liberates Rome as liberating a man of a domineering lover would free him from emasculation. By removing a woman who has transgressed Roman gender norms, the seas of Ionia have become safe, just as freedom from an overpowering woman would free a Roman man like Propertius to engage in sex safely, hence the sexual metaphor. Coming back to Propertius’ opening remarks about men yielding to women, this frees the poet for safe poetic expression.

Throughout the Augustan depictions of Cleopatra, Octavian/Augustus comes out as the champion of masculinity, freedom, order, and the Roman way of life. As Wyke has summarized: “Confronting long-standing constructions of oriental tyranny with the Republican slogan of liberty, the poetic narratives of Actium construct an anomalous female despotism by which the libertas of the Roman male is dangerously imperiled... Octavian is thereby rendered the champion of male liberty, seeking to free the Antonian slave from a woman’s chains” Luce, referring specifically to Horace’s account, has said that the depiction of Octavian’s victory “was evoking the lore of those abnormal monsters that abound in Greek myths, Hydra, Gorgon, Cerberus, Scylla, Sphinx, Chimaera, and the like. It is one of the functions of heroes to kill, capture, or subdue such monsters... And Octavian as he rushes to subdue her, remis adurgens, is in the tradition of all monster killers.” Though Octavian defeated the actual Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium, it is in the poetic tradition that this victory becomes truly important. Octavian emerges as the victor over chaos and sacrilege because Cleopatra is portrayed as nefas. By

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213 Wyke, 108.
214 Luce 254.
overcoming her and eliminating that which should not be, Octavian becomes the champion of order and civilization. The historical Cleopatra could not be depicted in Roman terms, and so her personality and even her name is suppressed. Her presence, and her name itself, is unutterable. She is then confined, both by this very suppression and more importantly by the ‘civilizing’ influence of the Roman male, into a role acceptable in Roman society, and thus the Augustan poets rewrite history and redefine Cleopatra in terms of Roman masculinity and femininity, molding her according to their own visions. Horace allows her to retain her position between masculine and feminine gender norms, boundaries she pushed in her own iconography, but the other poets do not. They rewrite her so that her defeat forces her back to a feminine role, thereby making her more acceptable as an enemy.

Conclusion

Cleopatra had every reason to zealously guard her place on the throne. By the time she came to power, a king or queen could easily be deposed, whether by Rome or by her own people. She was herself driven out of her kingdom, and only regained the throne through foreign intervention. Until she had her last sister Arsinoe killed, there was always another who could be raised to the throne in her place.215 Because of this, Cleopatra carefully constructed the images of herself that others would see. When she was young and had newly come to the throne, she used masculine iconography to demonstrate that she was strong, independent, and following in the footsteps of the kings before her. By doing so she claimed the right to rule as a king would. Even if she were technically married to one of her brothers, she was the real power, and she claimed such masculine authority for her own. As bold as this was, Cleopatra no doubt knew the history of her own family. She would have known, as well, that no queen had successfully held the

throne without either a husband or a son ruling alongside her, however independent she might have been.

When Cleopatra gave birth to a son and heir, new possibilities opened up to her. Caesarion was proclaimed king and co-ruler seemingly as soon as his survival of infancy could be counted upon. With this, Cleopatra gained access to a plethora of new images drawing on the divine. As mother of the next pharaoh, she could claim a sort of divinity herself as mother, as an incarnation of the divine on earth. She became the divine mother, Isis to the Egyptians, Aphrodite to the Greeks, who promised fertility and prosperity to her people. The pointedly feminine imagery of these comparisons appears in the iconographical record only after the birth of Caesarion, at which point they seem to propagate quickly and widely. Though images of the first, more masculine, type continue to be produced, this more feminine visual rhetoric takes pride of place. Cleopatra shed masculine royal authority for the higher, divine authority of a goddess.

Such imagery, while presumably effective when the audience was made up of her own subjects, would be less effective aimed at a Roman audience, for whom the third image type, the Syro-Roman type, seems to have been intended. Roman soldiers would be less impressed by Cleopatra’s status as a mother goddess but depended upon her aid as the ruler of the wealthiest of Rome’s client kingdoms. For this audience, Cleopatra again represented herself with the masculine trappings of a Hellenistic king, combined with certain feminine elements, proclaiming her power and wealth to her Roman allies, and thereby reminding them of her worth. She manipulated her image to be a mix of masculine and feminine.

This manipulation of gender may have been effective in demonstrating Cleopatra’s right to rule while she was the one overseeing their production, but the Romans used this manipulation
to an entirely different effect. In Rome, a woman had no right to rule, and a woman who, like Cleopatra, entered into the public sphere and appropriated masculine roles was an aberration. Thus, the Augustan poets at first represent her as an embodiment of all that is nefas, but by confining Cleopatra into various roles played by women in Roman literature, they were able to subject her to their own social constructs. With the exception of Horace, who portrayed her final moments of defiance, the Augustan poets denied her any masculine glory. In their hands, gender was no longer a way to demonstrate Cleopatra’s fitness to rule, but it became quite the reverse: a way to delegitimize her, to make it clear to a Roman audience that she was not a true ruler. They manipulated Cleopatra’s gender in their own representations so that the masculine Augustus could put her back into her proper place as woman. Thus, in defeat, she was subjected to the Roman male and denied the glory and power to which she aspired in life.
Figure 1. Limestone Stele Depicting Cleopatra VII as a male pharaoh (right) giving offerings to Isis. Ca. 51 BCE. Reproduced from Walker and Higgs, 156, no. 154.
Figure 2. Bronze eighty drachma coin, depicting Cleopatra VII. Minted in Alexandria ca. 51-30 BCE. Reproduced from Walker and Higgs 177, no. 179.

Figure 3. Tetradrachm of Ptolemy XII Auletes. Reproduced from Bianchi, 161, no. 61.
Figure 4. Bronze coin depicting Cleopatra VII and the infant Caesarion (Ptolemy XV) on the obverse. Minted on Cyprus ca. 47-30 BCE. Reproduced from Walkern and Higgs 178, no. 186.

Figure 5. Silver decadrachm depicting Arsinoe II on the obverse. Minted at Alexandria ca. 240s BCE. Reproduced from Walker and Higgs 85, no. 79.
Figure 6. Scene of the birth of Harpre before Amun-Re, with the goddess Nekhbet and Cleopatra VII in attendance (on the right). From the Birth Temple at Armant. Ca. 47 BCE. Reproduced from Bianchi, 35.
Figure 7. Bas-relief from the south exterior wall of the naos of the Temple of Hathor at Dendera, depicting Cleopatra VII and Caesarion. Ca. 42–31 BCE.
Figure 8. Bas-relief from the south outer wall of the naos of the Temple of Hathor at Dendera, depicting Caesarion and Cleopatra VII (right). Ca. 42-31 BCE. Reproduced from Goudchaux, in Walker and Higgs, 138.

Figure 9. Phoenician silver tetradrachm depicting Mark Antony and Cleopatra VII. Mint uncertain. Ca. 34 BCE. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.


