

THE "MYTH" OF CLEOPATRA: A RECEPTION- HISTORICAL STUDY

by

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

SUMMARY

Cleopatra VII of Egypt (69-30 BCE) has a protean story. She was a woman of variety, great appeal and passion. She was also an astute politician. Her charisma and eventful life as the “last pharaoh” of Egypt, the last of the Ptolemaic line that assumed power after the death of Alexander the Great, have been described in various histories and tales. She was one of the protagonists at a cataclysmic time in world history, when the Roman empire was expanding.

The Greek historian Plutarch included her history in his lives of the great Greeks and Romans as she had captured the emotions of two very powerful Romans, firstly Julius Caesar by whom she had a son named Caesarion, and secondly Mark Antony. The Cleopatra myth was born in the second half of the first century BCE, after the assassination of Caesar. His successors, Mark Antony and Octavian (who was to become Caesar Augustus) were competing for power after having punished Caesar’s murderers.

At first they divided the Roman world among them. As the most influential and experienced, Mark Antony chose as his arena of power the richest and most important part, the Oriental Mediterranean, the jewel and breadbasket of which was Egypt. He became allied to its queen, Cleopatra, and together they strove to regain the empire of Alexander the Great.

Octavian had taken possession of the western part of the Mediterranean which included Rome. As he feared Cleopatra’s power, coveted the wealth of Egypt and resented her influence on Antony, he launched a successful and virulent propaganda war against her, before actually declaring war on her and emerging victorious from the struggle. Cleopatra was therefore depicted by ancient writers and historians as a depraved, luxurious and cruel Oriental despot who ruled men by passion

and unnatural temptation. She was accused of having emasculated Antony and alienated him from his Roman compatriots.

Using these sources, writers such as William Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw carried on the negative tradition. So did other authors, as well as the masters of art and films.

The Cleopatra of popular tradition became an enchantress rather than an ambitious intellectual and astute politician. Her story contained a great deal of disinformation and “myth”. She was perceived in history, literature and the visual arts as a symbol on which the creators projected their own views and desires. Her image has been received according to the tradition and “reality” of period and place, as art mirrors values and beliefs.

OPSOMMING

Cleopatra VII van Egipte (69-30 vC) se verhaal is 'n veranderlike een. Sy het groot aantrekkingskrag, verskeidenheid en hartstog gehad. Sy was egter ook 'n uitgeslape politikus. Haar charismatiese en veelbesproke lewe as die "laaste farao" van Egipte en die laaste van die Ptolemese linie wat na die dood van Alexander die Grote geregeer het, is in 'n verskeidenheid van geskiedenis en verhale beskryf. Sy was een van die hoofspelers in 'n tyd van groot omwenteling in die wêreldgeskiedenis, toe die Romeinse Ryk besig was om uit te brei.

Die Griekse historikus Plutarchus het haar geskiedenis ingesluit in sy lewens van die prominente Grieke en Romeine, aangesien sy die liefde van twee magtige Romeine gewen het, naamlik Julius Caesar by wie sy 'n seun, Caesarion, gehad het, en vervolgens Markus Antonius. Die Cleopatra mite het in die tweede helfte van die eerste eeu voor Christus en na die moord van Caesar ontstaan. Caesar se opvolgers, Markus Antonius en Oktavianus (wat Caesar/Keiser Augustus sou word) het om heerskappy meegeding nadat hulle Caesar se moordenaars uit die weg geruim het.

Aanvanklik het hulle die Romeinse wêreld verdeel. Markus Antonius, die invloedrykste een met die meeste ondervinding, het die oosterse Middellandse See gebied met ryk Egipte gekies. Hy het hom aan die koningin van Egipte, Cleopatra, verbind en saam het hulle gepoog om die ryk van Alexander die Grote te herstel.

Oktavianus het die westelike Middellandse See gebied geneem, wat Rome ingesluit het. Aangesien hy Cleopatra se mag en invloed oor Markus Antonius gevrees en gewantou het en die rykdom van Egipte begeer het, het hy eerstens 'n suksesvolle en kwaadwillige propaganda-oorlog teen haar gevoer, en vervolgens oorlog teen haar verklaar, wat hy inderdaad gewen het.

Cleopatra is deur antieke skrywers en historici as 'n immorele en wrede Oosterse potentat voorgestel, wat mans met hartstog en onnatuurlike versoekings verlei het. Sy is daarvan beskuldig dat sy Antonius in 'n swakkeling verander het en hom van sy Romeinse landgenote vervreem het.

Skrywers soos William Shakespeare en George Bernard Shaw het van dié bronne gebruik gemaak en die negatiewe tradisie voortgesit. Ander skrywers, asook die meesters van kuns en rolprente, het dit ook gedoen.

Die Cleopatra van populêre tradisie het 'n verleier eerder as 'n ambisieuse, intellektuele en slim politikus geword. Haar verhaal bevat baie verdraaiings en het "mite" geword. Sy is in die geskiedenis, letterkunde en die beeldende en visuele kunste voorgestel as 'n simbool waarop die skeppers hulle eie sienings en begeertes geprojekteer het. Haar beeld is geresepteer volgens die tradisie en "werklikheid" van tyd en plek, aangesien kuns waardes en geloof weerspieël.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Subject of the Thesis

“Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale

Her infinite variety; other women cloy

The appetites they feed; but she makes hungry

Where most she satisfies: For vilest things

Become themselves in her ...”

(Shakespeare: *Antony and Cleopatra*, II. ii. 242-246)

The story of Cleopatra VII of Egypt (69-30 BCE) is a protean one. She was a phenomenon in her time, a woman of such variety, appeal, passion and astuteness that she still captivates the attention today. The story of her eventful life as the last pharaoh of Egypt forms the subject of various histories and myths. She is arguably the most famous woman of antiquity. The reason for this is twofold.

On the one hand she was one of the protagonists when great change was brought about in world history, led by the Roman, Julius Caesar, one of the great conquerors of all time.

On the other hand, the Greek historian Plutarch included her history in his lives of the great Greeks and Romans. Plutarch was hostile to her as most writers were, yet he showed great insight into her character and circumstances.

It is to Plutarch that we owe Cleopatra’s subsequent immortalisation by Shakespeare, the greatest playwright of all time, who obtained his information from Plutarch. After Shakespeare, many other writers patterned their Cleopatras on that of the Bard.

She was neither completely wicked and a sexual glutton, nor the personification of female virtue who died for love. The “truth” is somewhere in between. Cleopatra comes across as a woman of great vigour and power,

and immense charm. Her life, aspirations, achievements and suffering were well documented, albeit from different angles.

In Cleopatra's time cataclysmic socio-historical events took place, leading to her downfall as the last Ptolemaic ruler and to the eventual occupation of Egypt by Rome. There was a great deal of interaction between the Hellenist, Roman and Egyptian cultures. Cleopatra ruled from Hellenist Alexandria and yet she adhered to the rules and customs of ancient Egyptian kingship. She used Egyptian ideology to achieve her own ends and to keep the Egyptians loyal to her person. She was the only ruler of stature who was to survive out of the empire created by Alexander and she was forced to fight for the survival of Egypt as an independent state, challenged by Rome, the greatest military power of the time.

She progressed from the struggle to keep Egypt independent, to the struggle to dominate the Roman world through her alliance with Mark Antony. She failed, but remained magnificent, even in failure.

Egypt along the Nile – ever mysterious, rich in unique tradition, religion and art, has produced historical figures of great renown, of whom Cleopatra has been foremost.

On the soil of Egypt stand the ancient and fascinating pyramids, the sphinx, great temples such as Karnak and Luxor, the Valleys of the Kings and Queens. From its soil have come artefacts and riches of unimaginable splendour, such as those discovered in the boy-king Tutankhamun's tomb on 12 February, 75 years ago. Any new discovery catches the world's attention and it is believed that great treasures still lie hidden in the bone-dry earth of Egypt.

This was a wealthy civilization of deified pharaohs and the belief that an afterlife could be ensured by mummification, tomb art and the preservation of the body and all its needs to sustain life. The world-view and beliefs of the Egyptians ensured that enduring things were created which we may study today, trying to establish meaning from the hieroglyphics, writings and art of this most creative and spiritual people.

Coming from such a milieu and history which until today elicits great general interest, added to the allure and mystique of the ruler, Cleopatra, goddess and daughter of the Sun-God Re.

Cleopatra captured the emotions of two very powerful Romans, Mark Antony and Julius Caesar, and instilled fear into a third, Octavian (Augustus Caesar), at a time when Rome was bent on conquest and extending the Roman empire to the corners of the known world. She has been disparaged by ancient writers and historians as well as William Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw. They have created a Cleopatra of popular tradition, dwelling on the enchantress more than on the ambitious and astute politician and intellectually well-endowed individual that she apparently was.

She spoke various languages, including Greek, Latin, Ethiopian, Hebrew, Arabic, Syrian, Persian and the strange Troglodyte language of the desert and was the first and only of the Ptolemies who could speak Egyptian to her subjects from that ancient culture (Franz 1968: 17; Shaw & Nicholson 1995: 66).

Apparently she had many attributes to attract others, and though not conventionally beautiful, was splendid to look at. Her charm was considerable. She could be stormy but was naturally dignified and proud. This information Franz (1968: 16) gained from ancient writers such as Plutarch, Dio Cassius, Pliny the Elder and Cicero.

Cleopatra was cultured, with the artistic temperament of many of the Ptolemies. She actively promoted and patronized art and literature. The mathematician Plotinus published *The Canons of Cleopatra* and the physician Dioscorides wrote under her patronage. It was because of her that Julius Caesar adopted the Calendar reformed by the astronomer Sosigenes (Franz 1968: 18).

She lived with the knowledge of the unpopularity of her father and the virtual control of Rome, the unrest of the dissatisfied Egyptians, the struggling economy when the Nile inundations failed and her father's extravagances. There was not much tenderness in the family. Continual intrigue, fights for survival and extreme cruelty constituted their way of life and struggle for survival. Relatives who stood in the way of succession were

ruthlessly eliminated. Orgies and excesses characterised life at the palace (Franz 1968: 20).

Nevertheless, Cleopatra, although given to much indulgence, first and foremost believed in the divinity of the pharaoh, in the gods, and in her duty and claim to greatness.

The Cleopatra myth was born in the second half of the first century BCE, after the assassination of Caesar and when his two successors, Mark Antony and Octavian were competing for power. The two rivals had been joined in a triumvirate by Lepidus. They were to punish Caesar's murderers and divide the Roman world among them. As the most influential and experienced, Mark Antony chose as his arena of power the richest and most important part, the Oriental Mediterranean, the jewel of which was Egypt, the breadbasket of the ancient world, which possessed a huge fleet. This country was ruled by the Lagidae, the last representative of which was Cleopatra. The Oriental Mediterranean was Hellenist, of great strategic importance. When Mark Antony became allied to this queen, they strove to regain the empire of Alexander the Great.

In order to destroy these formidable opponents and to unite Rome behind him, Octavian resorted, not only to war, but also to negative propaganda. The depraved, luxurious and cruel Cleopatra who ruled men – even a supposedly true Roman such as Mark Antony – by passion and unnatural temptation, was born.

Cleopatra's story is all too often told as that of a famous figure "alternating between glorious action and glamorous debauchery" (Papanghelis 1987: 201). It was said that the Romans "feared and hated no foreign ruler so much, apart from Hannibal" (Lindsay 1971: 438; Foss 1997: 10).

To pass judgement on Cleopatra as merely a glamorous feminine beauty, luxurious, cunning, exotic and decadent, is unjust. Few female rulers have surpassed her in astuteness for she managed for thirty years to play a wise game on the chessboard of Mediterranean politics, but it was the quarrels

among Roman leaders and her participation in it, which brought about her downfall (Canning 1969: 120).

This last Ptolemaic queen passed into legend. History “traduced and maligned her as an infamous woman, given to sexual excess and capable of even perfidy” (Bradford 1971: 271) but the truth was quite different as she had to have possessed great courage and political resource to withstand so long the Roman threat.

Green (1990: 661) maintained that the “propaganda mills” presented her as “an Oriental ogre, a drunken hypnotic Circe of all the passions” but that this was done to distract Roman attention from the unfortunate fact that Octavian was fighting against another Roman, Mark Antony, who had been his comrade in the past. She was, Green (1990: 662) said, “passionate but not promiscuous” as the “prurient” tradition that existed at the time would have enumerated any other lovers besides Julius Caesar and Antony, had they existed. He also pointed out that her choice of lovers was conspicuous as the fact that she “aimed for the top” could not have been motivated by “sheer unbridled passion” (Green 1990: 662).

Hughes-Hallett (1990: 15) maintained that “Even in her lifetime her legend was already shaped by the two overlapping chauvinisms of race and sex.” Cleopatra was a threat mainly because she was alluring, as this is how writers and painters have portrayed her “to personify something they seek” (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 17).

She was a complex figure, and as she played a key role in a time of crucial historical change, her history and reputation and how it is received until today, requires re-assessment and new inquiry.

1.2 Research Problem

Hughes-Hallett (1990: 14) postulates that even “the most scrupulous historian selects and edits. Propagandists, poets, painters and film makers go further, using history as a store of raw material from which new images can be produced.”

The story of Cleopatra has been told repeatedly, in different ways and at different times, when the recipients' world views differed according to their period in history.

The history of Cleopatra VII has in many cases been distorted to form a creature of "myth" in the modern mind. Therefore a wide spectrum of information, disinformation and "myth" concerning her, needs to be studied. For this purpose the study deals with the classical writers and historians, Shakespeare and other great authors, as well as the masters of art and films.

"Laborious collection of facts ... make up our written histories ... build our picture of the past ... Rather, we want a vision for the mind that reveals itself in drama, passion, elemental conflict, emblematic events that become the basis for mythologies" (Foss 1997: 9). This quotation explains why an Egyptian queen of the first century BCE, who led a life so eventful that it influenced the march of history, has been mythologised into a multi-faceted creature who still exercises fascination today.

This study will examine how the image of Cleopatra was perceived or received in classical authors, Shakespeare, Shaw, Dryden, as well as the visual arts and modern film media and how this came about.

1.3 Aim

The Cleopatra motif and figure as received/interpreted in history will be studied.

The image of temptress, seductress and courtesan that originated with the propaganda encouraged by Octavian (Augustus Caesar) will be researched. This propaganda was intended to denigrate the woman who managed to cast such a strong spell and inspire such devotion from two of the foremost Romans of the time, Julius Caesar and Mark Antony – both figures of later myth and legend in art and literature. Apparently Cleopatra was faithful to these two Romans and bore their children.

It will be argued that she was an ambitious politician, not a mere harlot, and that the effect she had on the politics of the day constituted a real threat to Roman hegemony. This study aims to deal with a comprehensive number of

aspects regarding this fascinating historical figure and to illustrate by example the prurient and unfair images to which her name is attached to this day.

1.4 Theory, Methodology and Research Procedure

In order to study the different aspects of Cleopatra's life, i.e. that of a queen of Macedonian/Hellenic descent ruling over Egypt and influenced by the Roman world, a reception historical approach has been followed.

The study will attempt to show how Cleopatra was perceived in history, literature and the visual arts as a symbol in her own and Roman culture, ending with modern Western civilization. Art, after all, mirrors values and beliefs.

The research commences with a study of how the information about the historical background of the last ruler of the Ptolemaic dynasty, Cleopatra VII, was distorted, starting with ancient historians and poets. The resultant depiction of the queen in literature, in the form of propaganda or drama, will then be studied to illustrate the varying images created by artists and storytellers/image-makers in the visual media.

Reception theory investigates the role of the *reader* or *observer*. The reader/observer is central to the investigation and this implies a shift of emphasis from the author or creator of a work from the work itself, to the role of the reader or observer (Jackson 1990: 86-87).

Reception theory focuses on the interaction between reader/observer and text/object observed. This person concretises the text/object and constructs his/her own aesthetic object. The reception may be critical, scientific or spontaneous (Jackson 1990: 86-87).

Readers are classified as implicit or abstract and explicit or actual. The implicit reader/observer is an active co-creator of meaning (Jackson 1990: 87).

Textual clues show what type of reader is implied, i.e. naïve or informed. The reader becomes explicit when there is a naïve "listener" in the text, to whom things are explained, so that the reader may understand (Jackson 1990: 89).

Iser postulates that the physical text has *gaps* in the meaning and indeterminate features. The reader interprets and fills these in various ways. He/she projects his/her own standards on the text or else he/she is prepared to revise his own prejudices and assumptions (Jackson 1990: 92). The reader/observer is connected to his/her own historical reality and therefore he/she will have certain expectations regarding a literary text. The expectation horizon includes expectations regarding the period, literary work and author (Jackson 1990: 93).

The text has an affect on the reader with his/her extratextual historical and cultural preconceptions.

Fokkema & Kunne-Ibsch (1977: 136) maintain that in reception theory the recipient has become "an integral part of the purpose of literary research". They quote Stempel as saying "The object [of literary studies] is created by means of the 'perspective' which is thereby a 'factor' of the structure of the object."

The historicity of the researcher was supposed to be dominated by his objectivity, according to positivism. In the intrinsic approach, the object is seen as a-historical to which the reader responds a-historically. In reception theory "facts are reinstated into their historicity, and the *historicity of the researcher* [my emphasis – MB] is acknowledged as well" (Fokkema & Kunne-Ibsch 1977: 136). In other words, the reader has his own historical frame of reference and mindset which he or she imposes on the matter. He/she reshapes reality in terms of his/her own thinking.

"This theory allows for historical and cultural relativism, since it is fundamentally convinced of the mutability of an object, also of the literary work, within the historical process" (Fokkema & Kunne-Ibsch 1977: 138).

What is written is definite and this applies to art as well. The literary or artistic fact has an effect, it creates an empathy. Fokkema & Kunne-Ibsch (1977: 141) quote Jauss as saying that the goal of research in the humanities is comprehending the "hermeneutic difference between the previous and the present understanding of a work". This is fundamental and indispensable in reception theory.

The theory of reception is "interested in" the aesthetic object, but focusses on the artefact "as the point of departure for all concretizations" (Fokkema & Kunne-Ibsch 1977: 143).

Fokkema & Ibsch (1977: 143) quote Günther who, in turn, quotes from the Czech scholar Mukarovsky: "The work of art manifests itself as sign in its inner structure, in its relations to reality, and also in its relations to society, to its creator and its recipients."

CHAPTER 2: FROM HISTORY INTO MYTH

2.1 Cleopatra's Historical Background

It is necessary to know something of the images of women in Dynastic Egypt and in the ancient world to understand the image of seduction and allure which this "Oriental Queen" acquired. She was a product of a land of exoticism and mysticism where gods assumed animal form and people appeared to be obsessed with death. Women were not as strictly supervised as in patriarchal societies. They were exotic and regarded as lax in morals and wanton and were described thus by Greek and Roman poets. This heightened their fascination. The decadent image was perpetuated by modern authors from Shakespeare onwards. Cleopatra was the ultimate prototype of this kind of woman (Tyldesley 1994: 17).

In order to place the reception of Cleopatra's history into perspective, it is necessary to briefly set out the formative background and events of her life as they actually took place, without embellishment and additions.

2.2 The Ptolemaic Dynasty

Alexander the Great conquered Egypt in 332 BCE, beginning the period when Egypt was ruled by Macedonians from the mainland of Greece. When he died in 323 BCE, one of his ablest generals, Ptolemy, made sure that he obtained, not only the body of Alexander, but Egypt as well. After all, it was at the Egyptian oasis of Siwah that Alexander had been proclaimed the son of god by the Oracle of Amon. Deified, he became worshipped as a cult-figure and immortal (Foss 1997: 25).

Egypt was the richest of Alexander's conquests and Ptolemy, who became satrap of this province of the Macedonian Empire, by stealth and conquest ensured that the king was buried in Alexandria, "the god's magnificent new city" (Foss 1997: 12). In 305 BCE Ptolemy became pharaoh, Ptolemy I Soter (Saviour). He had "saved" the ancient land from the Persians and restored it to the god Horus (Foss 1997: 12).

The first three Ptolemies formed a dynasty, practising brother-sister marriage which was common in Egypt but not the general rule.

The barren lands and desert of the south and west protected Egypt from invasion. The dangerous front, north of the Red Sea and the marches from Palestine across the desert to the Nile delta was protected by a client king of Coele-Syria (Palestine). The danger of naval attack from the eastern Mediterranean was countered by controlling the north African lands of Cyrene and the island of Cyprus. Egypt had a great naval power and the fine harbour of Alexandria (Foss 1997: 23).

In Egypt religion was an integral part of state life. The greatest of the gods, Thoth, Amun, Isis, Osiris, Horus and Hathor, were honoured in great temples, which, together with the priesthood, had always played an important part in the economy. Kingship was divine and so the Ptolemies ensured that their deified kings were accepted by adapting to the traditions and practices of the Egyptians (Foss 1997: 26).

The farther one went from Lower Egypt and Alexandria to the Thebaid in the south, the more ancient practices prevailed and the more tenuous the hold of the Hellenistic government was. In order to achieve a better relationship, the Ptolemies maintained and developed temples such as Karnak, Philae, Edfu, Dendera, Kom Ombo and others (Foss 1997: 29).

The Ptolemaic capital, Alexandria, was set apart from the kingdom. Founded by Alexander in 331 BCE and designed by the architect Dinocrates of Rhodes, it was the most splendid city on the Mediterranean Sea. There were two harbours, Eunostos or the Harbour of Happy Return and the so-called Great Harbour guarded by the Pharos lighthouse, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Adjoining to it was the palace complex, the Brucheion, with its own protected anchorage (Foss 1997: 36). The tombs of Alexander and the god-kings were at the Sema and Serapion. The Museum was the center of philosophical learning and attached to it was the great library. The Ptolemies ensured the glory and power of this seat of learning (Foss 1997: 38).

Alexandria contained “an incendiary mixture of peoples and cultures” (Foss 1997: 40). The world of the eastern Mediterranean was in turmoil, with constant wars raging and Rome hovering ready to swallow the smaller

kingdoms. At the same time the delicate ecological balance of the Nile valley was disturbed by minor revolts by peasant cultivators.

The government of the Ptolemies became increasingly decadent and corrupt, causing unrest among the Egyptians. The direct line of Ptolemaic males ended in 80 BCE when Ptolemy X Alexander was killed by an Alexandrian mob. Two illegitimate sons of Ptolemy IX Soter survived and one was crowned as Ptolemy XII in Alexandria, not in Memphis according to custom. He was nicknamed Auletes the Flute Player and assumed the name of Dionysus. This decadent king fathered a daughter, his third child, in 69 BCE and called her Cleopatra according to the custom of the family (Foss 1997: 47).

The demise of the Ptolemies coincided with the rise of Rome, which eventually declared itself guardian of the Ptolemaic Dynasty. Ptolemy XII, Cleopatra's father, had paid tribute to the Romans to safeguard his kingdom. He was despised in Egypt. He died in 51 BCE and left his kingdom – under Roman supervision – to his ten-year old son Ptolemy XIII and eighteen-year-old daughter Cleopatra VII who were to rule jointly.

“Ptolemaic Egypt ... shows an imposing, substantial edifice built on the foundations of some three thousand years of Egyptian history, newly enlivened and decorated by Greek political good sense” (Foss 1997: 29). But fatigue had set in by the advent of Cleopatra VII. “Roman eyes began to calculate the weakness of the later Ptolemies, coveting the wealth of the land” (Foss 1997: 31).

A foreign dynasty had been grafted onto the Egyptian stock. Yet both peoples thought about religion in much the same way, having no notion of transcendental theology. Both had myths to explain the universe and gods took on human form. Egypt, however, had made religion “an integral part of state life” (Foss 1997: 23-24). Religion in the ancient world tended to be syncretic (Foss 1997: 25).

2.3 Last of the Pharaohs

Although Cleopatra was a descendant of a Macedonian general of Alexander the Great, and therefore of foreign stock, not a true Egyptian, she was last in

the line of pharaohs until the end, when her country fell to the conquering Romans.

She started ruling as coregent with her father Ptolemy XII (80-51 BCE). Subsequently (51-47 BCE) she shared a coregency with her brother Ptolemy XIII until he ousted her from power. Julius Caesar restored her to the throne in 47 BCE, when she was coregent until 44 BCE with her brother Ptolemy XIV, whom she married according to Egyptian tradition. Her royal career commenced at the age of seventeen and ended with her death at 39, closing a whole era of Egyptian history. From then on, Egypt was a Roman province (Ashmawy 1997: 1-2).

According to Green (1990: 661) she was the apotheosis of the brilliant, strong-willed Macedonian queens who dreamed of and came close to obtaining a world empire greater than Alexander had known.

Her legend was fabricated rapidly and deliberately with the purpose of denigrating her, while the events of her life were still current. Hughes-Hallett (1990: 50) postulated that the “idea which passed into the *musée imaginaire* of Western culture is derived almost entirely from the propaganda of her enemies.”

Her “competent and successful government of Egypt forms no part of this legend” Hughes-Hallett (1990: 51) says, because only the sensationalised parts of it lived on.

Fraser (1972: 806) said that the reigns of Auletes and Cleopatra were “marked by an intellectual revival” in some respects. During her reign the only “specifically Alexandrian school of philosophy in the pre-Roman period” was established. This was the neo-Sceptic school of Aenesidemus of Cnossus, a former member of the Academy (Fraser 1972: 807). This is a sign that high civilization flourished under Cleopatra’s patronage.

According to Fraser (1972: 808-809) there was much intellectual activity, in medicine, literary and grammatical studies and philosophy, which Cleopatra encouraged, and, he maintained that it was only natural that “the brilliant gifts and personal charm of Cleopatra should also have led to the

concentration around her of varied talent.” When Antony became her unofficial consort, he also was a “gay and lavish patron of the arts.”

A number of works on various themes have been attributed to Cleopatra herself. She was a true intellectual in her day (Fraser 1972: 311).

2.4 Cleopatra and Julius Caesar

When Cleopatra was married to her brother Ptolemy XIII his advisors, led by the eunuch Pothinus, conspired to strip Cleopatra of her power and forced her into exile in Syria (Daniels 1998: 2-3). Her sister Arsinoë accompanied her.

In order to regain her throne she amassed an army on her country’s border. During this time Pompey the Great was battling Julius Caesar for control of the Roman Empire. Having lost the battle of Pharsalos, Pompey went to Alexandria to seek Ptolemy’s protection, but was murdered. When Caesar reached Alexandria, Ptolemy sent him the head of Pompey. It was a fatal mistake that made Caesar seize control of the palace and capital.

Cleopatra, who had amassed an army on the border, devised a supposedly clever strategy. She came to appeal to Caesar secretly, hidden in a rug, according to some legends - shown in a Hollywood film “Antony and Cleopatra” and a DSTV Discovery Channel documentary shown in 1999. She so impressed him, that he championed her cause henceforth. Ptolemy, who accused Caesar of treachery, was held prisoner. Her sister Arsinoë and the eunuch Pothinus besieged the palace, but after Ptolemy had been released, Pothinus was killed in battle and Ptolemy drowned. Arsinoë was captured and Cleopatra restored to the throne. Caesar induced her to marry her brother Ptolemy XIV. This kind of marriage was in accordance with Egyptian tradition (but not necessarily the rule), and Green (1990: 667) called it a “sop to tradition” but pointed out that in fact she in effect became sole ruler.

Cleopatra and Caesar cruised up the Nile for two months in a *thalamegos* or “floating palace”, as far south as the First Cataract (Aswan), accompanied by Roman legionaries. Upon his return to Alexandria, he was compelled to leave for Syria to quell disturbances, leaving three legions behind to act as a guard for Cleopatra. Such was their relationship that she conceived a son, Ptolemy

XV, also called Caesarion (“Little Caesar”), whom Caesar acknowledged (Marlowe 1971: 175). He is depicted with his mother on a relief at the temple of Hathor, Dendera (Figure 4).

Marlowe (1971: 175) maintained that becoming Caesar’s mistress was, for a Macedonian princess, a “practical course” to take to satisfy ambition, political necessity and the welfare of her subjects.

Green (1990: 663) was of the opinion that Cleopatra had a “genuine respect and admiration for Caesar” who was as witty and brilliant as she was.

Caesar returned to Rome after a victorious campaign in Asia Minor. He was elected Dictator for the second time and subsequently Consul. In Africa he defeated an army raised by Pompey’s supporters. In 46 BCE, in Rome, he celebrated a *Triumph*. In the *Egyptian Triumph*, Arsinoë, Cleopatra’s sister, was led in chains. Her life was spared, however, and she found asylum in Ephesus. Caesar had invited Cleopatra to join him in Rome where she was lodged in the Villa Trastevere in 46 BCE. She, her husband and son lived together in Caesar’s villa (Marlowe 1971: 176).

Caesar was married to Calpurnia yet, despite Roman opprobrium, he showered Cleopatra with titles and gifts, erecting a golden statue of her in the temple of Venus Genetrix to commemorate his victory over Pompey at Pharsalia (Marlowe 1971: 177).

Cleopatra was not idle. She is said to have deliberately cultivated relations “with Romans of all parties”. Most of the Roman senators visited her (Marlowe 1971: 177).

However, Caesar’s time was running out. He had accepted a lifetime dictatorship and sat on a golden throne in the Senate. The possibility of Alexandria being a rival to Rome excited resentment. There was suspicion of the East in general and Roman opinion was against Cleopatra. There were rumours that Caesar intended to become king, marry Cleopatra and establish a dynasty at Alexandria (Marlowe 1971: 178).

Conspirators, accusing him of wanting to become king, killed him at a Senate meeting on March 15, 44 BCE. Cleopatra had lost her greatest protector. She

returned to Alexandria where she reputedly had Ptolemy XIV poisoned and made Caesarion her co-regent (Daniels 1998: 2).

2.5 Cleopatra and Mark Antony

Caesar's assassination in Rome caused anarchy and civil war. To control the empire, it was divided among a triumvirate, Caesar's great-nephew Octavian (who was to become known as Caesar Augustus), Marcus Lepidus and Marcus Antonius or Mark Antony, who was consul at the time of Caesar's death (Marlowe 1971: 178).

Antony was a cavalry officer with a great reputation. Marlowe (1971: 178) called him "vain and boisterous, a *coureur des femmes*, fond of high living and hard drinking." This type of man was a fairly easy conquest for a woman with the reputed attractions of Cleopatra (cf. Plutarch in 3.3.2.4). Antony was also greedy and acquisitive.

Cleopatra had a fleet that constituted a powerful weapon and it was this fleet and Egyptian gold that made her country a valuable and sought-after ally (Marlowe 1971: 180).

Antony, who took the eastern part of the empire, which included Egypt, summoned Cleopatra to Tarsus in Cilicia with the aim of questioning her about siding with his enemies. In fact, he intended to obtain money for his Parthian campaign (Marlowe 1971: 182).

In 44 BCE Antony had the power to make Cleopatra's sister, Arsinoë, the ruler of Cyprus in accordance with a promise made by Caesar. He was therefore a threat to watch. At this time, when Cleopatra had returned to Egypt, the Nile inundations were low and there was famine, plague and consequent social unrest. She had much adversity with which to deal. Antony's summons was something that she had to turn to her favour. By this time she knew a great deal about his military prowess, his aristocratic background, his attraction to women, his drinking and pretensions to being seen as Hercules and Dionysus. Rural Egypt may have been "on the verge of financial collapse" but she put on a show of startling opulence and bravura, to impress and conquer Antony (Green 1990: 670).

She came to meet Antony at Tarsus, progressing in such regal style up the River Cydnus that subsequent historians and writers such as Plutarch and Shakespeare waxed lyrical. It was here that the susceptible Antony became so entranced that he was said to have become besotted with Cleopatra (cf. Plutarch's description in 3.3.2.4 and Shakespeare's description in 4.3 of this occurrence.) The next chapter in her history - and the most mythologised - commenced.

Green (1990: 663) maintained that Cleopatra had had a genuine respect and admiration for Caesar, whereas Antony's excesses, vacillations and "intellectual shallowness" maddened her. She was compelled to provide "endless, stupefying entertainments" to keep him occupied, which she never needed to do for Caesar. She was, Green (1990: 664) said, too much of a "charismatic personality", a "born leader" and far too ambitious to have deserved the self-indulgent Antony with his "Herculean vulgarities and fits of mindless introspection."

Green (1990: 672) also alleged that Cleopatra and Antony had "highly practical ulterior reasons for cultivating one another" and that "how much personal chemistry helped the equation is hard to tell".

Antony accompanied her to Alexandria, there to spend the winter in pleasures and debauchery. After he had returned to his duties as one of the rulers of the Roman Empire, Cleopatra gave birth to twins, Cleopatra Selene and Alexander Helios.

Antony's relations with Octavian were severely strained. They made peace at Brundisium and in 40 BCE he married Octavian's half-sister Octavia (Green 1990: 672).

For the next three years Cleopatra lived in Egypt, governing her kingdom and restoring the economy. She was apparently celibate during this time (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 37-38).

Antony had three children by Octavia, but in 37 BCE, while on his way to invade Parthia, he again met Cleopatra. After his military campaign, he went to Alexandria where he allied himself with Cleopatra in 36 BCE. She gave birth to another son, Ptolemy Philadelphus.

Cleopatra asked Antony to give her territories now in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and southern Turkey. Consistent with Rome's policy, these were governed by client kings. He gave them to her, probably more out of policy than mere love, for in exchange she promised to build him a fleet in the Mediterranean and to help provision his army (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 40-41).

The life which Antony and Cleopatra led, was grist to the mill of Octavian and facilitated his vilifying propaganda. Octavia, still loyal to Antony, was to meet him in Athens but Cleopatra contrived to keep him away. The Roman world watched and censured.

The principal aim of the alliance between Antony and Cleopatra was the recreation of Alexander the Great's empire. Cleopatra was his legitimate heir whereas Antony with his legions represented the greatest power of the Mediterranean world. These two created a huge eastern empire from Greece in the north to Cyrenaica in the south and the Euphrates in the east, while Octavian had to be content with the west (Calvat 1995: 2).

Cleopatra's government was a synthesis between Greek political organization and pharaonic Egyptian traditions. The sovereign was divine and this gave him/her great power, theocratic and total. The pharaoh was supposed to control the Nile and ensure that his/her people did not suffer famine. He/she was superior to mere mortals (Calvat 1995: 2).

During this time, while Mark Antony lived in Alexandria, Octavian did his best to convince the Roman people that Antony was their enemy and Cleopatra's tool, that he meant to rule from Alexandria together with Cleopatra, making Rome a "mere dependency of an Oriental empire" (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 42).

Antony and Cleopatra founded a religious organisation based on Dionysiac mysticism in which the sovereigns were declared divine. It was called "The Inimitable Livers". Cleopatra was called the New Isis/Aphrodite and Antony the New Dionysus (Calvat 1995: 2). The members entertained one another daily with extreme extravagance (Marlowe 1971: 184).

The Dionysiac cult "had long played an important part in the divinising of Hellenistic kings, especially in Egypt" (Lindsay 1971: 18). Cleopatra's father

had been devoted to it. The Alexandrians had called him and his children “Our Lords and Mightiest Gods.” Cleopatra was accustomed to being a deity since her youth and it was clear in later life that these practices had influenced her greatly” (Lindsay 1971: 19).

Fraser (1972: 205) said that Cleopatra and Antony adhered to the Dionysiac cult extravagantly, which led to pomp and revelry in Alexandria, in Greece, the Islands and Asia Minor. They made use of tableaux, processions and Dionysiac artists. They “fabricated” a genealogy in their desire to “associate the dynasty with Alexander’s Indian triumphs”. Dionysus is the god of revelry, wine, drama and “luxury of nature and of man”. Another aspect of Dionysus was that he was associated by the Ptolemies with the Underworld and so there was an identification with the Egyptian Osiris, whose queen was Isis, the goddess with whom Cleopatra identified herself.

Lindsay (1971: 245-246) maintained that Cleopatra, who wore an Isis robe on State occasions, saw the ideal of herself as queen in the Aretologies of Isis of the late period and he quotes the version from Kyme: “I am Isis, the Mistress of Every Land, and I was taught by Hermes ... I gave and ordained Laws for men ... I am eldest daughter of Kronos. I am wife and sister of King Osiris. I am She who finds Fruit for men. I am Mother of King Horus ... I divided the Earth from the Heaven. I showed the Path of the Stars. I ordered the Course of Sun and Moon ... I am the Queen of Rivers and Winds and Sea ... I am the Queen of War ... I am the Rays of the Sun ... Fate hearkens to me. Hail Egypt that nourished me.”

Cleopatra was depicted as Isis in a limestone relief at the temple of Hathor in Dendera with Caesarion as Horus (see figure 4) and by herself as Isis also at Dendera (see figure 5).

In the winter of 37-6 BCE Antony had to go on his Parthian campaign, assembling a huge army and client-kings. Cleopatra accompanied him as far as the Euphrates then turned back for Egypt, intending to visit the new territories that Antony had granted her. Antony’s campaign was a disastrous failure (Foss 1997: 131).

Octavian had no intention of reinforcing Antony. As Foss (1997: 134) said, “After eight years of prudence, steadfast effort, canny political scheming and

manipulation, Octavian's position was secure, even triumphant, in the West."

It was time for him to eliminate Antony so as to ensure an "unpartitioned Roman world" (Foss 1997: 135). Octavia, his sister and Antony's wife, tried to go to the latter's rescue with troops and stores. Nevertheless, Antony ordered her back to Rome (Foss 1997: 136).

In 34 BCE he invaded Armenia and captured King Artavasdes and his two sons. After this triumph, he returned to Alexandria with Cleopatra. She gave him a triumphal, celebratory procession. It was intended to represent "an Egyptian Isis welcoming to her court the god Dionysus" (Foss 1997: 137).

In 34 BCE Antony made the so-called "Donations of Alexandria" - a fatal mistake in the eyes of Rome and Octavian. He divided parts of the eastern Roman Empire between Cleopatra and her children (Shaw & Nicholson 1995: 66). He made Alexander Helios the King of Armenia, Media and Parthia, Cleopatra Selene the Queen of Cyrenaica and Crete and Ptolemy Philadelphus the King of Syria. Caesarion was proclaimed "King of Kings" and Cleopatra "Queen of Kings" (Daniels 1998: 3).

Cleopatra wore her robes of Isis at the ceremony and Antony subsequently had a coin struck with his head on one side and the legend *Armenia conquered* and Cleopatra's head on the reverse with the legend *Queen of Kings and of her Sons who are Kings* (Foss 1997: 138). (See Figure 6b.)

The countries of Asia Minor in question had client kings and accepted Antony's overlordship as a representative of Rome. But when he made Ptolemy Philadelphus their overlord, it seemed that he was not annexing them to the Roman Empire but to Egypt. Antony proclaimed the boy to be Julius Caesar's rightful heir, as he was his legitimate son, even though Caesar had been married to Calpurnia at the time of the boy's birth (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 43).

Romans were aghast at Cleopatra's securing of the greater part of the eastern Roman empire. The goddess-queen of Egypt seemed intent on becoming empress of Rome and she began to use a "customary oath" that said "as surely as I shall one day give judgement in the Capitol." Knowing

Antony's faults, Romans credited her success not to astuteness or political manipulation, but to "sexual manipulation" (Foss 1997: 139). Fear of her made their criticism turn into coarse abuse in many instances.

Octavian obtained Antony's will where it had been left with the Vestal Virgins in Rome and revealed to the senate that Antony wanted his body to be taken to Cleopatra in Egypt upon his death. He had given her, among other things, the library of Pergamon with 200 000 precious scrolls. The Ephesians had had to salute her as their queen. Octavian's propaganda made it plain that such conduct was considered degenerate and unworthy for a Roman, who had to be "drunk with lust for his Egyptian sorceress" (Foss 1997: 145).

Octavian, frugal and restrained in his habits but extremely ambitious, had an ideology opposite to Antony's. In fact, two opposite civilizations were to clash, for in 31 BCE he convinced the Roman Senate to declare war on Egypt, a *justum bellum* (a just war) (Foss 1997: 148).

Antony needed Cleopatra's wealth and resources in his fight against Octavian. Their relationship may have been calculated policy on her side and lust and possessiveness on his, but their joint ambition to be rulers of a Roman-Egyptian world, bound them indissolubly and tragically (Foss 1997: 152).

Egypt had always relied on naval power and the Romans on land-warfare. The decisive naval battle was to take place off the coast of Actium in Greece in 31 BCE (Foss 1997: 154).

Hughes-Hallett (1990: 46) defends the fact that Antony allowed Cleopatra's wishes for a sea offensive to prevail. If he lost her, he lost not just a lover, but his dreams of an empire in the east. "They were, irrevocably, partners." If the only way they could fight together was on sea, then it had to be the choice. Cleopatra's treasure was loaded onto her flagship. She had taken sails so that she could flee, if necessary, not out of cowardice, but so as to be able to fight another day.

Sixty of Cleopatra's ships joined Antony's, huge cumbersome vessels which succumbed to Octavian's light, swift boats. In the midst of the battle she fled the scene with her fleet. Antony supposedly lost his head and followed her,

abandoning his men and ships. Much was made of the fact that his allies went over to the Romans, who were supposed, according to Octavian propaganda, to regard his shameful defection as proof of his total enslavement by this Oriental queen.

Back in Egypt Antony withdrew from society for a while but learning that his allies had abandoned him, went back to Cleopatra to spend his days in dissolution. She added to his misery by making plans to flee across the desert and sail with ships she had dragged overland from the Nile to the Dead Sea, to India. Caesarion was sent on ahead with his tutor. Cleopatra's plans were foiled when the Nabataean Arabs burned her ships (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 48).

Cleopatra was expecting Rome's final attack and knew that Octavian needed her treasure to pay his troops. She had a mausoleum built to hold her body after death and her treasure. Octavian reached Alexandria in 30 BCE. Antony and his soldiers marched out to meet him but saw his fleet and cavalry desert him and join the Romans. His infantry were defeated.

Plutarch (see 3.3.2.4) and writers such as Shakespeare (see 4.3) wrote that Antony's violent accusations that Cleopatra had betrayed him, caused her to withdraw into her mausoleum and let him know that she was dead. Believing this, Antony fell on his sword. Fatally wounded, he was told that Cleopatra still lived and wanted to see him. She and her two serving women drew him up into the mausoleum by ropes. At his death she expressed terrible remorse and sincere love.

Octavian entered her mausoleum through treachery and a ruse, after Antony's death. She and her children were imprisoned but well treated. She greatly feared that she was to be paraded through the streets of Rome as her sister Arsinoë had been and so consequently prepared her suicide. Antony was buried and she was permitted to attend the burial. She subsequently returned to her mausoleum where her two faithful attendants washed and dressed her in her Isis robes for a regal death (Foss 1997: 176).

She has often been depicted in subsequent centuries' art as dying naked or half-naked (perhaps to over-emphasise her sensuality), when in fact she has

been described by historians such as Foss (1997: 176) as wearing her royal robes and full regalia.

It is believed that Cleopatra had an asp brought to her in a basket of figs, to give her the final fatally venomous bite. It has been suggested in modern times that the asp-death was a deliberate apotheosis and that she acted out the goddess role to the end. The asp was, in fact, the cobra, or uraeus, which was the pharaoh's emblem, rising on the diadem to menace and crush the pharaoh's enemies. Its venom caused a swift death. It also placed the ruler under the protection of Re, the Sun god and as Plutarch said, her end befitted "the successor of so many kings" (Lindsay 1971: 433).

Cleopatra was a goddess, according to Egyptian tradition. She was the daughter of Re and had been hailed as the New Isis. In her death she was supposedly united with Re (Lindsay 1971: 434).

Daniels alleged that this last of the pharaohs died "on a golden bed", and her attendants died by her side (1998: 3). (See depiction in Fig. 15.)

Grant (1982: 17) said that Cleopatra, who was formally known as "Cleopatra VII Philadelphus Philopater Philopatri", used the two great Romans to "revive the great Ptolemaic empire", but her dream collapsed when she and Antony were defeated at Actium.

Egypt became a Roman province and Cleopatra's children were taken to Rome. Caesarion was strangled by his tutor at Octavian's command. Cleopatra Selene married King Juba I of Mauretania. Cleopatra VII's sons by Mark Antony disappeared out of history.

CHAPTER 3: CREATING THE “MYTH” OF CLEOPATRA

3.1 Sybilline Prophecies

The ideas circulating among eastern peoples, were mainly generated by the *Sybilline Leaves*, which were strange prophecies in verse known to the Hellenistic world and which were distinct from the Sybilline pronouncements of Rome. People, including Romans, appealed to the Sybils for revelation (Lindsay 1971: 355).

One great theme of the Sybilline verses was the downfall of Rome and the suggestion that Antony and Cleopatra would bring renewal. The avenging *despoina* is Cleopatra (Lindsay 1971: 361).

One prophecy talks of a queen:

“And while Rome will be hesitating over
The Conquest of Egypt, then the mighty Queen
Of the Immortal King will appear among men.
And then the implacable Wrath of the Latin men.
Three will subdue Rome with a pitiful state.”

Another Sybilline prophecy said:

“And then the whole world under a Woman’s hand
Ruled and obeying everywhere shall stand
And when the Widow shall queen the whole wide world ...”

The widow is surely Cleopatra, who is the widow of Caesar (Lindsay 1971: 365-366).

3.2 Image Developed by Octavian After Julius Caesar and Before the Battle of Actium

Octavian practised the politics of disinformation and caused the clichés of Cleopatra to be born. This was the major influence on the historical reception of the Cleopatra story by the West.

Julius Caesar was reticent on the subject of Cleopatra. He did not leave his wife Calpurnia for her, nor did he desist from having other mistresses. He did not acknowledge Caesarion in Rome and make him his heir. The legend of the temptress who had had an erotic adventure with him, was born after his death (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 55).

After conflict had broken out between Antony and Octavian, the latter was basing his claim to political importance on his supposedly being proclaimed Caesar's heir in his will and on the fact that Caesar had adopted him. Therefore it was important to him to deny that Caesar had had a son by Cleopatra. Under his direction propagandists said whatever suited their, or his, aims (Lindsay 1971: 58).

Her relationship with Julius Caesar had been disturbing, but then she became allied to Antony as well, marrying him and bearing his children.

Therefore, the real reason for the anti-Cleopatra propaganda was that Rome feared her and her influence. The accusation of depravity was convenient to stir up hostility towards her.

Foss (1997: 142) said: "She was portrayed as a witch of the Orient, a voracious fertility goddess of an alien culture who unmanned Roman probity, and the hunting-dogs of the writer's yellow trade were set on her, in support, as always, of the ascendant power. But a greater mystery than her supposed sexual appetite was the extent and brilliance of her aura which engulfed the Roman intentions of Antony, and eventually lost him in the Alexandrian quagmire where he forgot both his military duty and Octavia. This was a triumph of personality that Rome could not understand."

Octavian refused to understand, for he saw a Roman general who neglected his duty and who was endangering Rome's interests in the east and indulging Cleopatra's desire for imperial power (Foss 1997: 142-143).

Before the Battle of Actium Octavian spoke to his troops, disparaging the way Antony had strayed from the customs of his forefathers and espoused strange and barbarous ones, prostrating himself before Cleopatra as before a Selene or Isis and himself taking the name of Osiris and Dionysus. He was no longer a Roman, but an Egyptian and could not be called Antony any

longer, but something like Serapion. He had rejected the pride of his ancestors and now played “Canopus’ cymbal”. He had become weak and debauched and was no longer to be feared. Thus reported Dio Cassius (Calvat 1995: 3).

By the time Cleopatra committed suicide she was famous, her character was supposedly known and so was her political significance. What people thought they knew about her was based on prejudices and fiction selected for a specific purpose to convey an idea. Her story was told as a deliberate misrepresentation (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 56).

Hughes-Hallett (1990: 57) said: “The story was devised by Octavian, Cleopatra’s enemy, as the main vehicle for the propaganda against her and Antony.” It was very cleverly done because its plausibility was due to “archetypes and preconceptions already ancient when Cleopatra was born.”

The story is tragic, developed for immediate denigration, but its structure has made it popular for thousands of years. It was intended to “hasten” Cleopatra’s “despair”, Antony’s downfall and Octavian’s “triumph” (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 57).

In the process Cleopatra’s character had to be assassinated. Her lust and cunning supposedly undid a Roman hero. Her love consisted of tricks and charms, sexual power, deceit and manipulation. She intoxicated him so that he became her “creature” (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 57).

Hughes-Hallett’s (1990: 57) description of the process of character assassination is as follows: “That character was formed to some extent by crude hostility – hence the representation of Cleopatra as a devious, barbaric libertine – but the Octavian propaganda project made use as well of subtler strategies than simple invective.”

For his purposes Octavian turned her into the image of a beautiful temptress for whom a man willingly sacrificed his honour. She was supposed to eclipse Antony and attention was to be drawn to her and away from Antony. The reason was that this was essentially a power struggle between two Romans. Two ambitious politicians fought one another. Octavian did not want the Romans to think they were fighting yet another civil war, but rather that

they were fighting a foreign enemy, the Egyptian queen. So he declared war on her, and not on Antony (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 57-58).

Thus the elaborate story of the temptress had to “mask another, truer, but uglier story” (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 58). Octavian’s vanquishing of her, had to be, and was, applauded by the Romans.

As Octavian is male and Roman and Cleopatra is female and foreign, he would receive support, if the sexual and racial prejudices of that time were taken into account. Women were not supposed to be the equals of men (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 59). Octavian played on the Romans’ custom of not permitting women to dominate in a matriarchy.

Antony is a “predestined victim” in the Cleopatra story (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 60). When he meets her, he is lost. Cydnus is his Waterloo.

Antony, a Roman, was subjected by Cleopatra’s beauty or poison and she made him betray his gods and traditions. Octavian changed the divination process of Antony and Cleopatra to something without mystique – mere domination (Calvat 1995: 3)

He had vessels of *terra sigillata* made at the ceramic centre of Arretium containing pictorial propaganda directed at Antony and Cleopatra. On these vessels were painted the story of Omphale, queen of Lydia, and the Greek hero Hercules. (Antony liked to be associated with Hercules.) The oracle of Delphi sent Hercules to Omphale who bewitched him so that he wore women’s clothing for a year while she wore the hero’s clothes and lion skin. The allegory was plain. Antony had become effeminate and enslaved by the perfidious queen, Cleopatra, as Hercules had become the slave of Omphale.

Octavian was the one who described the Donations of Alexandria to the Senate. Antony’s secret will was made known. Octavian emphasized that Antony wished to be buried in Alexandria, which made him a traitor to his country (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 63).

Octavian “edited” the Sybilline oracles after his victory and had over 2 000 documents burned. After Cleopatra’s death he wrote and published his own autobiography to make sure that his version of the Cleopatra story received the most publicity. He catered to the reigning prejudices: Foreigners are

inferior, so are women to the Roman male, a man dominated by a woman is not a true Roman male and this must be blamed not on him, but on the woman who has seduced and emasculated him (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 64).

Egyptians were non-Roman and therefore inferior. They also had Oriental vices such as deceit and duplicity, dissimulation and treachery (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 66).

The Romans believed that Egyptians were cowardly and Cleopatra proved this by fleeing the Battle of Actium. Egyptians were so deficient in virtue, according to Octavian propaganda, that even their religion was called into question. The animal deities that featured in their worship were used disparagingly against Cleopatra in her time, prompted by Octavian (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 67).

In wartime enemies are “dehumanized” by propaganda and depicted as bestial. The Egyptian gods strengthened this view. The Egyptians were said to be primitive and savage. “Their gods are weird, their music bizarre, but what stamps the Egyptians most surely as a backward and degraded people is their monarchical constitution. Cleopatra, simply by being a queen, could be used to typify everything the Romans found most politically abhorrent” (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 68).

She is a decadent foreigner, cowardly and treacherous, frivolous and only statesmanlike in her greed for new territories (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 71).

Octavian propaganda makes Cleopatra’s main transgression the deprivation of Antony’s manhood. She has emasculated and feminized him. She has therefore degraded him (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 73)

The fact that she dared to choose her own lovers, was enough to accuse her of nymphomania. This caused her to be accused of committing intercourse with anyone in her court. In fact she came from a line so proud that they committed incest rather than stoop to marrying inferior or commoner husbands (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 74).

Sex gave her power with which to infatuate her lovers, ran the Octavian propaganda. Sexual morality to the Romans was a sign of weakness or strength. It was acceptable to be promiscuous as long as a man was not

“ruled by his desire” (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 78). Discipline had to prevail. Passion caused folly. It was Cleopatra’s strategy to have Antony become this unmanned being. “By brilliant sleight of hand Octavian had transformed his Roman rival into a foreign woman’s plaything, and thence into a foreigner and a woman himself” (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 82).

The politics of disinformation continued under the new regime. The poets, the best known of whom were Virgil, Horace and Propertius, who surrounded the new emperor, would ensure that the myth of Cleopatra continued. The image of Cleopatra as debauched and treacherous, subjecting Antony to her evil charms, continued throughout the Roman Empire (Calvat 1995: 5).

The Egyptian queen was depicted as using Antony as she had used Caesar as the basis of her claim to become “Empress of the whole Roman world”. Not only was she an eastern queen (her Macedonian lineage conveniently forgotten) but she was the product of “numberless incestuous unions” (Bradford 1971: 202).

By harping on Cleopatra’s “sexual, ethnic, cultural and moral” difference from the Roman male and epitomising her as irresistible, exotic, self-indulgent and lascivious, they made her an “object of desire” for centuries to come, equating her with forbidden pleasures and bliss, and therefore sought by those with a taste for depravity. She was made a siren, too alluring to forget (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 87).

Hughes-Hallett (1990: 94) said that Octavian had presented Cleopatra as everything the virtuous Roman male had to resist, and so “alongside a horror of Cleopatra’s vices grew up a regret for her fabled but prohibited beauty and all it represented. ... As Cleopatra receded from living memory, as new generations of writers took up her story, she acquired the melancholy glamour of something irrevocably lost”.

3.3 The Image of Cleopatra VII Created and Perpetuated by Ancient Historians and Poets

Cleopatra was greatly envied but also admired. Politically she was suspect and even hated, and yet her person was honoured and admired, and also

greatly loved. She was anything but mediocre and despite the world's differing evaluations, she inspired awe (Samson 1987: 107).

The ancient poets and historians employed the themes of the sorceress, prostituted, perfidious and debauched queen. They also emphasised the danger that Cleopatra posed for the Romans. Octavian (Augustus) was the defender of the Italian identity that was endangered by Cleopatra and Antony's eastern pretensions.

Green (1990: 678) maintained that subsequent to the Donations of Alexandria, "hysterical xenophobia" was whipped up by the propaganda of Octavian poets Virgil and Propertius, and Horace as well. The exaggerated charges against her indicated that she was feared. The Republican literary tradition was intended to "promote the *pax Augusta*" (Green 1990: 679).

Cleopatra did know how to use her sexuality, so her dress and looks were adorned with clever calculation. She dressed for effect in the Greek costume of Alexandria but also to show the Egyptian majesty of Isis. She had to impress her subjects and dignify her monarchy. This made later Roman writers, who were indulging in the virulent Octavian propaganda, criticise her to the point of "coarse abuse" (Foss 1997: 140).

However, contemporary records of her reign did not accuse her of sexual depravity. In her 39 years she had four children by two men, Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, and scandal did not touch her at home. These two men whom she had loved, were themselves both great and open womanisers who fell in love and consorted with her, while they were married to Roman wives (Foss 1997: 141).

The theme of the incestuous queen, an Egyptian tradition, featured in the Roman emperor's propaganda.

Lindsay (1971: 437) maintained, that Cleopatra, whose fame which grew so "great in legend", actually fostered Egyptian nationalism under the Romans.

3.3.1 The Poets

3.3.1.1 Horace

Horace wrote an ode to Cleopatra after the news of her death had reached Rome and despite the customary vituperation, it was nonetheless a tribute to the impact that her powerful personality had made on the world of her time:

“She and her plotting gang, diseased and vile,

Went mad with heady dreams of baseless pride: drunk with their luck were they awhile,

But soon the frenzy died

When not a single ship of hers escaped.

... Caesar ... meant to load with captive chains

the fatal creature. But more bravely she

turned to her death, no woman’s part she bore...

Seeing her ruined court with placid eyes,

She grasped the asps and did not feel the pains,

Wishing the venom to surprise

And brim at once her veins;

For brooding arrogance had nerved her thought.

She grudged in triumph shackles to be seen,

By the Liburnian galleys brought

to slavery, a queen.”

(Foss 1997: 151)

However, he was the one who also alleged that Cleopatra’s mind had, from frequent bouts of inebriation, become “clouded and disordered by Mareotic wine” (Foss 1997: 151).

3.3.1.2 Virgil

Cleopatra left a deep imprint on the Aeneid in which Virgil dwelt on the Egyptian peril. To him Actium was a cosmic battle and even the gods were

allies of Augustus to defend Roman traditions. He compared her to Queen Dido of Carthage, who loved the Trojan hero Aeneas and he compared the latter to Octavian. Neither of the Romans succumbed to these fascinating African queens who both committed suicide. What also appears in this work is the fear and release which Virgil and other Romans who sided with Octavian, felt when the disaster of Actium occurred (Lindsay 1971: 439).

For his purposes Virgil had to make Cleopatra a vile, monster-worshipping menace but it is clear that she had a great hold on his mind.

He (Lindsay 1971: 361) described the forces led by Antony as follows:

“Opposing was Antony; with him aboard

Were Egyptians and the whole strength of the East

Even to far-off Bactria. On his side was the Orient’s wealth and all its varied arms; victor he came from the Nations of the Dawn

And Red Sea shores. Followed – alas, the shame –

By an Egyptian wife.”

3.3.1.3 Propertius

Propertius was the most virulent and hostile of Roman poets, developing an image of an immoral queen, prostituted and living in luxury. He wrote a “most devastating one-verse Augustan vilification” “(*et famulos inter femina trita suos* ‘a female pursuing her daily grind even among her slaves’ 3.11.30)” that makes her a “harlot-queen” (Papanghelis 1987: 23). He celebrated “the marriage between royalty and lust” in 3.11.29-30 ” (Papanghelis 1987: 174).

Propertius wrote an elegy on Semiramis, Omphale and Cleopatra. Of Cleopatra he said that she demanded “the Walls of Rome and the subjected Senate” from her “lascivious husband” (Antony) (Lindsay 1971: 405). Her Gods are also depicted as monstrous. He (Lindsay 1971: 406) describes her as:

“The harlot-queen of incestuous Canopus

(the sole blot on the line of Philip) dared

to set up barking Anubis against our Jove

and force our Tiber to bear the threats of Nile...”

Propertius called Alexandria “noxious” and “Land most skilled in guile”, according to the Octavian theme (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 67).

3.3.1.4 Lucan

The poet Lucan called her a perfidious and despotic queen who lived in sordid luxury.

He described a banquet held by Cleopatra to celebrate the reconciliation which Julius Caesar had brought about between her and her brother, to illustrate the extremes of luxury to which she devoted herself:

“Great was the bustle as Cleopatra displayed
A magnificence not yet adopted in Roman ways.
A temple-size hall, too costly for an age
Corrupted with pleasure-spending. The ceiling panels
blazed wealth, the rafters hidden in thick gold...
A swarm of attendants too, a ministering mob,
Differing in age and race.”

He describes precious things and a hybrid people, unromanly differing in race and appearance. As for Cleopatra, he describes her as wearing Red-Sea pearls, Sidonian stuffs through which her white breasts showed, and Chinese silks. All this is far too exotic for Roman taste. The precious pearls are symbols of opulence to the Romans. Therefore she is vain and extravagant (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 91).

3.3.2 The Historians

3.3.2.1 Seneca

Seneca insisted that the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra was immoral.

He told that the Nile remained without overflowing in the 10th and 11th years of Cleopatra’s reign and that men said that this “indicated the fall” of her and Antony, and in fact they did fall from power (Lindsay 1971: 125).

He called Antony a great and noble man who had been led into alien ways and unroman vices because of his passion for Cleopatra and his love of drink (Lindsay 1971: 478).

3.3.2.2 Dio Cassius

The Roman historian Dio Cassius wrote much of Cleopatra's double-dealing, and so did Plutarch (Lindsay 1971: 441).

Dio Cassius said of Cleopatra that "her delightful way of speaking was such that she captured all who listened to her" and that she was capable of inspiring love in the hearts of young and old for "she was both wonderful to hear and to look at". However, he lived long after her and was careful with his description (Bradford 1971: 14).

Of Cleopatra's first meeting with Julius Caesar, when she appeared out of the carpet, Dio Cassius said that "he was spellbound the moment he set eyes on her and she opened her mouth to speak" (Bradford 1971: 69).

Hughes-Hallett (1990: 93) quotes Dio Cassius as saying that she set out to seduce Julius Caesar "even a love-sated man already past his prime."

Dio Cassius also said that, after she had been brought to live in Rome, Caesar "incurred the greatest censure of all through his passion (*eros*) for Cleopatra: not what he had shown in Egypt, which was a mere matter of hearsay, but what was evident in Rome itself. For she had come to the City with her husband and settled in Caesar's own house, so that he too derived an ill repute on account of the pair. However, he was not at all concerned, but actually enrolled her among the Friends and Allies of the Roman People" (Lindsay 1971: 62).

He mentions her son whom she "pretended" to be that of Julius Caesar, who was named Ptolemy, but she called him Caesarion (Lindsay 1971: 122).

Dio Cassius also said in his book XLVIII Ch 24 (quoted in Hughes-Hallett 1990: 61) that Antony "gave not a thought to honour, but became the Egyptian woman's slave and devoted his time to his passion for her. This caused him to do many outrageous things." These things include loss of Roman identity, foreign dress, botching his Parthian campaign and giving away kingdoms to her and her children.

Antony, he says, “was so under the sway of his passion and his drunkenness that he gave not a thought either to his allies or his enemies” (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 71)

Dio Cassius also mendaciously maintained that she had obtained her wealth by “plundering the ancient temples” (Lindsay 1971: 163).

He called Alexandrians blusterers “ready to assume a bold front ... but for war and its terrors they are utterly useless” (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 67).

Another untruth that he propagated was that Octavian had pretended in messages to Cleopatra that he loved her (Lindsay 1971: 417), but this is unlikely.

Nobody was really sure that she had died by the bite of an asp, but Dio Cassius said that she had pricks on the arm, caused by an asp brought in a water-jar or among flowers, or else caused by poison on a hair-pin with which she scratched her arm (Lindsay 1971: 433).

3.3.2.3 Florus

Florus, the Roman historian who wrote a century after Cleopatra “perpetuated the hostile (and largely untrue) portrait” by saying the following: “As the price of her love she demanded from her drunken general the whole Roman Empire. Antony promised it to her, just as if Rome was easier to conquer than the Parthians ... Forgetful of his name, his country, his Roman toga, and the insignia of his office, he had completely degenerated in feeling, outlook and even dress, into that monster with whom we are all familiar. A sceptre of gold was in his hand, a scimitar at his side. He wore robes of purple embellished with large jewels, and on his head a crown, so that he might be shown a king beside the Queen he loved” (Bradford 1971: 202).

To Florus, Antony had been the “firebrand and tornado of the age” but he had turned into a drunkard who had fallen into the hands of a *monstrum* (Lindsay 1971: 478).

3.3.2.4 Plutarch

Plutarch of Chaeronea stands apart from the other historians in that his work was used as a basis for Shakespeare's great plays *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. He lived from the mid-40s AD and used contemporary records. His grandfather told him stories that he had heard from a doctor living in Alexandria during Cleopatra's reign. He had known about Antony's charisma among his troops and the hatred that was felt towards Cleopatra, although he described her irresistible charm, intellect and vibrant personality (Samson 1987: 121-122).

The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans by Plutarch was first translated out of Greek by James Amyot, Abbot of Belloczane, Bishop of Auxerre, king's privy counsellor and great Amner of France in 1559. His work, in turn, was translated into English by Thomas North in 1579. Shakespeare used this work, *Plutarch*, as the source of information for his plays.

The literary tradition regarding Cleopatra was almost uniformly reviling and hostile. Plutarch also dwelt on the infatuation Mark Antony felt for Cleopatra, and yet he wrote about her with psychological empathy (Pelling 1988: 18).

Plutarch described Cleopatra in "The Life of Marcus Antonius" (Spencer 1964: 203) as follows:

"Now her beauty, as it is reported, was not so passing as unmatchable by other women, nor yet such as upon present view did enamour men with her; but so sweet was her company and conversation that a man could not possibly but be taken. And, besides her beauty, the good grace she had to talk and discourse, her courteous nature that tempered her words and deeds, was a spur that pricked to the quick. Furthermore, besides all these, her voice and words were marvellous pleasant; for her tongue was an instrument of music to divers sports and pastimes, the which she easily turned to any language that pleased her."

When Antony needed the Ptolemaic wealth and that of Egypt to wage a campaign against Parthia, he had to meet the Egyptian monarch and invited her to Tarsus in Cilicia. Her progress up the river Cydnus, and what

followed, was described in such glowing terms that Shakespeare was inspired to reproduce it in lyrical terms. Plutarch wrote that the poop of her barge was of beaten gold, “the sails of purple, and the oars of silver, which kept stroke in rowing after the sound of the music of flutes ... and such other instruments as they played upon the barge. And now for the person of herself: she was laid under a pavilion of cloth of gold of tissue, apparelled and attired like the goddess Venus ... Her ladies and gentlemen also, the fairest of them were apparelled like the nymphs Nereides ... there came a wonderful passing sweet savour of perfumes ... in the end there ran such multitudes of people one after another to see her that Antonius was left post-alone in the market-place in his imperial seat to give audience. And there went a rumour in the people’s mouths that the goddess Venus was come to play with the god Bacchus, for the general good of all Asia” (Samson 1987: 126).

How the two protagonists feasted one another in incomparable surroundings and with “sumptuous fare” was also described at length (Samson 1987: 126).

Shakespeare’s version of this arrival is even more poetic. He maintained that “her own person, It beggar’d all description” (Samson 1987: 127).

Plutarch described Cleopatra as Antony’s “final evil” (Pelling 1988: 12), an accusation that he justifies by sketching Mark Antony’s main characteristics, hereby in fact revealing the fatal weaknesses of the man: “His simplicity and warmth are important elements in his rapport with ordinary soldiers, but they leave him vulnerable to Cl.’s flattery (21.1-5, 24.9-12n.); his excesses win the army’s affection, but are fatal when he comes to share them with Cl. (4n.). His generosity is endearing, but not when he bestows Rome’s dominions on a foreign queen (1, 36.3-4, 54.4-9nn.). His philhellenism is attractive, especially to P(lutarch), but his lower eastern tastes will expose him to the disastrous charge of hating Rome (23.2-5, 54.5-9nn.).”

Plutarch makes Cleopatra loyal to Antony, deeply concerned for her children and magnificent in dying (Pelling 1988: 16).

CHAPTER 4: CLEOPATRA IN LITERATURE

4.1 Cleopatra's Image during Certain Periods

Calvat (1995: 5) said that during the Middle Ages, the myth of Cleopatra was treated with discretion. In her *City of Women*, Christine of Pisa, writer of the XIV-XVth century, deals with all the famous women in history but leaves out Cleopatra. Boccaccio wrote briefly on her but showed her to be cruel, perfidious and greedy.

In the 16th century, the Renaissance, a return to Antiquity took place (Calvat 1995: 5). The first translation of the Life of Antony by Plutarch dates from 1519, but it was with the translation by Jacques Amyot in 1559 that Cleopatra was really “rediscovered” in Europe. The literature was dominated by myth and legend. From 1540 to 1905, 127 theatre plays, 77 dramas, 45 operas and five ballets saw the light, but the best known one was the *Antony and Cleopatra* by the English playwright William Shakespeare (1607), which marked an important stage in the evolution of the “myth”. It shows the role of passion in history, but Cleopatra was shown in a positive light. Antony and Cleopatra are shown to be the opposite of the rigid and austere Octavian. Their celebration of passion and love has taken the place of the luxury and despotism of Octavian propaganda.

In the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries it was assumed that Cleopatra had to be weak because she was a woman (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 14). During the Eighteenth Century Playwrights such as the Englishmen John Dryden and William Shakespeare dramatised her love story but in general, at this time, there was much ignorance about the east.

In the Nineteenth Century Cleopatra again surfaced in painting and literature in the Oriental and Egyptian dimension which Octavian (Augustus) had given her. She was the subject of masochistic fancies (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 14).

Several important events brought about the return of the Oriental image of Cleopatra. The School of Oriental Languages was founded in Paris in 1795. Napoleon organised an expedition to Egypt between 1798 and 1799 and Champollion deciphered hieroglyphics in the 1820's. European imperialism

and colonialism came into contact with the Ottoman Empire and Europe mobilised to support Greece against the sultan in Istanbul. Algeria was conquered by the French in 1830. This could be called the beginning of Orientalisation in Europe. The myth of Cleopatra was anchored in this Orientalism, like the Arabian 1001 Nights (Calvat 1995: 7).

4.2 Giovanni Boccaccio: *De Claris Mulieribus* and *De Casibus Illustrium Virorum* (14th Century)

The Italian writer of the 1350's, Giovanni Boccaccio, produced a very hostile depiction of Cleopatra in *De Claris Mulieribus* and *De Casibus Illustrium Virorum*. She was famous only for her beauty and sinfulness, in his opinion (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 95).

He made her greedy, cruel and lustful. She seduced Julius Caesar into sinfulness. She also gave herself to Oriental kings with the aim of obtaining riches from them. Cleopatra looted the temples of Egypt and induced a love-struck Antony to give her kingdoms. She was so covetous that Antony gave her the Armenian king Artavasdes, so that she could seduce him to obtain his riches. Cleopatra seduced King Herod and wanted the Roman empire from Antony.

She was portrayed as practising two of the seven deadly sins, lasciviousness and avarice, in other words she was greedy for sex and wealth.

He told the story of the priceless pearl which she dissolved in a cup of vinegar and drank – the ultimate luxury and wastefulness. In ending her life, by placing asps in her split veins, she was ending her greed and immorality as well (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 164-165).

4.3 Cleopatra as Shakespearian Heroine (1607)

In the Sixteenth Century there was a return to antiquity. Interest revived in the history of Queen Cleopatra. Plutarch's *Lives* had been translated, also into English by Thomas North. Although Shakespeare used this work, *Plutarch*, as a source of information for his plays, he adapted it to suit his own dramatic purposes (Spencer 1964: 13). He created a new text according to his reception of Cleopatra's history.

The best known of the works about Cleopatra was Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. This marked an important step in the evolution of the myth. The play dealt with the role of passion in history, but this was not the real or only aim of the author. Queen Cleopatra has often served the political and ideological aims of writers and this has removed her from historical reality. Shakespeare wrote the play in his third period, in 1607, an era when Puritanism was emerging and which would close theatres in later years. Cleopatra was shown positively. Shakespeare depicted Antony as subjected by his love for the queen, but Shakespeare was not ultimately hostile towards her. When the Roman's cause became desperate, Shakespeare showed him as generous and human. The couple Cleopatra and Antony were totally contrasted to Octavian, who was rigid and austere. The celebration of passion and love replaced criticism of luxury and despotism as in the Octavian propaganda. In fact, at the end of the play, when Cleopatra committed suicide, she made a prediction (Calvat 1995: 5):

“Saucy lictors

Will catch at us, like strumpets; and scald rhymers

Ballad us out o'tune: the quick comedians

Extemporally will stage us, and present

Our Alexandrian revels. Antony

Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see

Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness

I' the posture of a whore.” (V.ii.216)

Shakespeare made Cleopatra glamorous, fascinating and “many-faceted”, and a character “of incisive and resolute action in the sphere of world politics” (Lindsay 1971: xiv).

Cleopatra, in her meeting with Antony on the River Cydnus, which was described in all its luxury by Plutarch, “pursed up his heart” as Enobarbus said in Shakespeare's play (II. ii. 194). Shakespeare's description was lyrical:

“The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,

Burn'd on the water: the poop was beaten gold;

Purple the sails, and so perfumed that

The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were silver ...

The water which they beat to follow faster,

As amorous of their strokes.” (II. ii. 198)

By describing Cleopatra thus, Shakespeare sets the scene of her enchantment and her seductiveness, above all else.

Plutarch’s Antony was “a plain man, without subtlety” (Lobban 1934: xii) but Shakespeare made him subtle enough to appreciate both his own and Cleopatra’s faults:

“She is cunning past man’s thought...

These strong Egyptian fetters I must break,

Or lose myself in dotage.” (I.ii.153)

Shakespeare, however, made such moments of insight with Antony, become dissipated by sloth and passion:

“Now for the love of Love and her soft hours,

Let’s not confound the time with conference harsh ...” (I. ii. 45)

Antony sacrificed imperial power and warrior honour for love (Wilson Knight 1968: 206) and he was

“The triple pillar of the world transform’d

Into a strumpet’s fool.” (I. i. 12)

Antony’s honour was paralysed by this queen. He married Caesar’s sister Octavia to avert a clash with him, but this was unfair to both women.

Enobarbus is the character who best described Cleopatra’s hold over Antony. He maintained that Antony would never leave her for “she makes hungry where most she satisfies”. Indeed, although he married Octavia, Antony fled to Cleopatra:

“I will to Egypt;

And though I make this marriage for my peace, I’ the east my pleasure lies.”

Throughout the play the splendour of the Mediterranean empire is vividly depicted. The protagonists had a whole world at their feet and they mapped out the fate of nations (Wilson Knight 1968: 216).

Antony sent a message to Cleopatra:

“... I will piece

Her opulent throne with kingdoms; all the east.

Say thou, shall call her mistress.” (I.v.45)

She was somebody to whom her Roman husbands gave kingdoms. Julius Caesar “mused of taking kingdoms in” while he kissed Cleopatra (III.xi. 83). For her, Agrippa said, he “lay his word to bed: He plough’d her, and she cropp’d.” (II.ii.231)

Antony was what Pompey called a “libertine” and the latter wished that Cleopatra would keep him from the wars “That sleep and feeding may prorogue his honour” (II.ii.23).

The element of continual feasting is seen throughout the play and love is often described as lust. Cleopatra is referred to as “a gipsy” (I.i.10), “this foul Egyptian” (iv.x.23) and “triple-turn’d whore” (IV.x.26).

Nile imagery is also used, e.g. “serpent of old Nile” (I.v.25), and “pretty worm of Nilus” (V.ii.243).

Antony gratified Cleopatra’s wish to fight by sea at Actium, although his own men warned against such folly, at which they remarked:

“... so our leader’s led,

And we are women’s men”.

Antony was portrayed as “a doting mallard” who “flies after her”. It is the final dishonour for which he suffers much torment. He admits to her:

“Egypt, thou knew’st too well

My heart was to thy rudder tied by the strings...o’er my spirit

Thy full supremacy thou knew’st.” (III. ix. 58)

Lobban (1934: xvii) said that Shakespeare had made Cleopatra a more virile figure than Plutarch’s “languishing enchantress” and that the decadent

Antony was attracted to her varying moods and temper, which she knew “with a wanton’s intuition”. This is certainly very condemnatory of Cleopatra’s spell of love. Yet Shakespeare transformed her into a noble figure at the end.

Magical power was ascribed to Cleopatra. In her “witchcraft joins with beauty” (II.i.22). Although she was no longer so young, but “wrinkled deep in time” (I.v.28), she still managed to seduce. She was Antony’s “charm” (IV.x.29). On the other hand she was the utterly royal “Sovereign of Egypt” (I.v.34), “Royal Egypt, Empress” (IV.xiii.70), “most noble Empress” (I.v.34). In the end her death was

“fitting for a princess

descended of so many royal kings.” (V.ii.329)

Octavian paid tribute to her by saying: “Being royal she took her own way” (V.ii.339).

Her personality was composed of royalty and magic (Wilson Knight 1968: 247) and he was overcome by the oriental beauty of her death, so that he said

“...she looks like sleep,

As she would catch another Antony

In her strong toil of grace...(V.ii.349)

“She shall be buried by her Antony:

No grave upon the earth shall clip in it

A pair so famous.” (V.ii.359)

4.4 The Eighteenth Century: John Dryden's Cleopatra in *All For Love*

The fascination of the Antony and Cleopatra story attracted dramatists other than Shakespeare. Dryden is one of the most famous and his work echoes Plutarch and Shakespeare. Nevertheless he expressed the hope that his dramatic masterpiece would not seem to have imitated Shakespeare’s, and pointed out that “the Unities of Time, Place and Action [were] more exactly observed than perhaps the English Theatre requires” (Lobban 1934: xxviii).

His *All for Love: or The World Well Lost* is a Restoration tragedy which developed the part of Octavia and the play's motive was Antony's vacillations between love and honour (Lobban 1934: xxviii).

Dryden makes Antony's friend Ventidius say:

"I love this Man, who runs to meet his ruine;

And sure the gods, like me, are fond of him:

His Virtues lye so mingled with his Crimes,

As one would confound their choice to punish one, and not reward the other."

(III.i. 47-51)

Dryden's description of Cleopatra's unfailing attractiveness is as follows:

"There's no satiety of Love, in thee;

Enjoy'd, thou art still new; perpetual Spring

Is in thy armes ... (III. I. 25-27)

In his sources Dryden encountered the attitudes towards Cleopatra, the Roman condemnation of oriental luxury and decadence, Plutarch's depiction of Antony as a man consumed by lust, Daniel's depiction of Cleopatra as a woman consumed by self-love and passion, and Shakespeare's depiction of lust and "transcendant passion". He chose a completely different theme. His work took place in a single day and place, when Alexandria was besieged. He showed the end of one era and commencement of another. If Cleopatra was to be the last of the Ptolemies, she had to "end her life well" (Novak et al 1984: 375).

Dryden wrote about "truly great lovers in adversity", about heroic emotion. His lovers had done great things, the greatest being the fact that they sacrifice everything for love. Dryden made his lovers innocent. Cleopatra did not use guile, instead she won back Antony's love by convincing him that she had always loved him and had never wanted to betray him.

Plutarch among the classical authors had the greatest influence on Dryden. His description of Cleopatra's progress up the River Cydnus to meet Mark Antony was not as lyrical as Shakespeare's and yet it came a good second:

"For sending him no aid, she came from *Aegypt*.

Her Gally down the Silver Cydnos row'd.

The Tackling Silk, the Streamers waved with Gold,

The gentle Winds were lodg'd in Purple sails ...

She, another Venus, lay ...

And cast a look so languishingly sweet,

As if, secure of all beholders hearts ...

But if she smil'd,

A darting glory seem'd to blaze abroad:

That men's desiring eyes were never weary'd ..." (III.i .162-175)

Nevertheless, Dryden took away much of the "depth" of Cleopatra when he made her virtuous and faithful, a 'wife-mistress', the opposite of the debauched and subtle lover of Plutarch and Shakespeare (Novak *et al* 1984: 386).

Octavia berated Cleopatra as an "abandon'd, faithless Prostitute" (IV, I, 414-415), but she could not accept Antony's feelings and could not see the stature of the Egyptian queen. Octavia was dully virtuous, without the heroic ideals of her erring husband and his lover (Novak *et al* 1984: 387).

Dryden wrote in the time of Charles II and the Restoration in England. The faithless king had many mistresses. The queen, Catharine of Braganza, was good, dull and virtuous, like Octavia. Cleopatra was supposed to resemble the Duchess of Portsmouth, the king's favourite mistress (Novak *et al* 1984: 387).

Dryden (Aden 1963: 10) said that in *All for Love* the protagonists were "famous patterns of unlawful love; and their end accordingly was unfortunate."

In a synopsis of the play by Dana Wortman (1998: 1) Cleopatra's relations with Antony are under the spotlight. The servants cause a great deal of trouble by their scheming and this ultimately leads to tragedy. Ventidius wants Antony to break off the relationship and Antony seems convinced. Consequently he refuses to see her, to break her hold over him. Their reputations are lost and so is Antony's family even though Octavia does offer to leave him to Cleopatra. Antony refuses because she does it out of duty, not love.

Dollabella is told to inform Cleopatra of the end of the relationship but he is also in love with her. Ventidius and Alexas try to convince Antony that Cleopatra and Dolabella have been amorously involved. Alexas then tells Antony that, because of his harsh accusations, Cleopatra has killed herself. Antony realizes that she was innocent and asks Ventidius to kill him. The guilty Ventidius kills himself and Antony falls on his sword. Cleopatra enters too late to save the dying Antony and they part, expressing love and sorrow. She cannot live without him and kills herself. The servants subsequently kill themselves before Caesar's guards enter to capture Cleopatra.

The priest Serapion says at the end:

"... she died pleas'd with him for whom she lived,

And went to charm him in another World ...

No lovers liv'd so great, or dy'd so well." (V.i.511, 519)

The Cleopatra of this version is truly loved and loving. No trickery or sorcery are implied. That was the historical reception of the writer and presumably the audience.

4.5 The Nineteenth Century: Théophile Gautier – *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre* and Other Poetry

Gautier wrote in 1845 that Cleopatra was "the most complete woman ever to have existed, the most womanly woman and the most queenly queen, a person to be wondered at, to whom the poets have been able to add nothing, and whom dreamers always find at the end of their dreams" (Gautier 1894: 8, quoted in Hughes-Hallett 1990: 11).

Gautier described the marriage between royalty and lust thus in his poem “Impéria” (from *Emaux et camées*) and his first verse started with Cleopatra. As Papanghelis (1987: 175) quoted Praz (1951: 214ff) “The fascination of women already dead, especially if they were great courtesans, wanton queens, or famous sinners” was very much in the air when Baudelaire, Gautier, Swinburne and Pater were engaged in poetry and criticism. Prominent among them were Helen and Cleopatra. For Gautier the latter is a “reine sidérale” of irresistible charm (‘chaque regard de ses yeux était un poème supérieur à ceux d’Homère ou de Mimnerme’ – each look from her eyes was a poem superior to those of Homer or Mimnerme) and the “knowledge of her body is an end in itself, beyond which life has nothing to offer”. This was what Mark Antony experienced (Papanghelis 1987: 175).

Gautier described a queen of Egypt who was near to the Augustan image. She participated in orgies and was shown bored in one scene during an orgy. Her maid Charmion then remarked to one of her friends that the queen had not had a lover or killed anybody for a month. Her feasts were Gargantuan and exotic to the point of being disgusting (Calvat 1995: 6).

She was like other tyrants “noted for their extravagance and contempt for the lives of others” and she fulfilled “fantasies of power”. Sexual power is undoubtedly cruel (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 289).

Gautier’s Cleopatra was a frightful creature, a merciless killer and tigress, a psychopath. She used her suitors for sexual satisfaction, feeling nothing for them. Nevertheless there were men dying of love for her and ready to die for her. “Her cruelty is capricious, superbly negligent” Hughes-Hallett (1990: 301) said of Gautier’s Cleopatra. She did not recognize an old lover who was condemned to die tied to a tree, burning in the Egyptian sun. She was busy with a new seduction when another lover was torn to pieces by lions at her command. The “virginal young huntsman” Meiamoun, who was recklessly brave when hunting, drank poison after a night of love with her. Sadly, he died neglected when her attention was distracted and she went to meet Antony who was approaching with a fanfare. She was without love or “morality” and therefore, life having no meaning, she was “engulfed in boredom” (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 301).

She was the ultimate *femme fatale* whose beauty overcame any resistance and for whom men gladly – and foolishly, as she hardly cared – immolated themselves.

4.6 The Twentieth Century: George Bernard Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*

The image of Cleopatra became more politicised in the twentieth century. In 1898 George Bernard Shaw's play titled *Caesar and Cleopatra*, was first performed. It was one of Three Plays for Puritans.

The role of the queen was diminished while Caesar was represented as powerful. She was presented as malleable, naïve and dominated by the Roman. Shaw wrote the antithesis to Shakespeare's play and did not introduce passion into the story. He was Irish and wanted to show that the Victorian belief that purification could only come by death, was not true. This was a comic piece intended to satirise the Puritans who went to the theatre to always see the same thing, a love story that ended in death. In his play Caesar returned to Rome after having conquered Egypt and then completely forgot Cleopatra (Calvat 1995: 7).

Ward (Shaw 1969: 144) in his introduction to Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* maintained that it was evident from, among others, Plutarch, that Cleopatra had possessed more than physical attraction. She was subtle in speech and had "uncommon intellectual ability". He thought it obvious that the Cleopatra of history had used Caesar and Antony as political tools to serve her own and Egypt's ends. This and the fact that she had seduced them, made him sure that she was "cunning and unscrupulous". He gives her no credit for inspiring love and loving in return, but sees her as a politician above all.

Ward (Shaw 1969: 144) also pointed out that the modern English popular opinion was based on how Shakespeare had dealt with her. He had made her romantic. His idea had been, not to elaborate on the political effect of Antony's love affair with Cleopatra, but to turn it into a tragic love drama. He "grafted" beauty and splendour onto what he had taken from Plutarch, eliminating what was "sordid and disastrous in the actual historical relationship between the Roman soldier-statesman and the Egyptian queen".

So, Ward (Shaw 1969: 145) says, Shaw's opinion was that Shakespeare had "glamorized and falsified a ruinous case of sensual indulgence and debauchery". What Shaw did in his play was to show that passion had to be disciplined and controlled "by reason" (1969: 144). For this reason he chose, not Antony, who is "passion's slave" but Julius Caesar, who is supposed to be a man of reason (in fact he was also given to immorality) and who "managed" Cleopatra without being managed by her.

Neither Shakespeare nor Shaw really drew a realistic picture of Cleopatra. Shaw, in his Preface, denied that she was one of the world's great lovers. Both dramatists modified their sources to suit their own purposes. Ward said that Shaw (1969: 149) intended to show how a "crude and spiteful teenager" was turned into a "responsible queen" by a statesman. He had no intention of glorifying or glamorizing Cleopatra.

When Cleopatra first meets Caesar she tells him: "I am the Queen; and I shall live in the palace at Alexandria when I have killed my brother ... When I am old enough I shall do just what I like. I shall be able to poison the slaves and see them wriggle, and pretend to Ftatateeta that she is going to be put into the fiery furnace" (Shaw 1969: 29-30). This Cleopatra is hardly a pleasant character and leaves a bad impression.

As to her intentions regarding love, these are monstrous: "I will make all the men I love kings ... I will have many young kings ... and when I am tired of them I will whip them to death ..." (Shaw 1969: 35).

Cleopatra and Caesar have taken the eunuch Pothinus prisoner. When he tries to obtain his liberty from Cleopatra and fails, he tells Caesar that Cleopatra is planning to betray him to his enemies. She takes revenge by causing her servant Ftatateeta to kill him. The central theme is the wickedness and futility of revenge and so Caesar tells her "murder shall breed murder." She is portrayed as representing the opposite to his decency (Shaw 1969: 151).

Carpenter (1969: 177) said that Shaw designated vicious motives as human. They cannot be destroyed, only "checked and discouraged". These vicious motives can assume the guises of ideals such as justice, honour, duty and

high morals. Shaw engrossed the audience in the education of a childishly wicked Cleopatra.

This Cleopatra, Hughes-Hallett (1990: 312) said, had been “desexualized” and “infantilized”. The “scholar, administrator and empire-builder” was, in the twentieth century and the West, merely a “pretty little kitten”. She was intellectually and emotionally “retarded” by Shaw, pouting and prattling, idle, unaccomplished – unlike the intellectual and linguist that the true Cleopatra was – a “silly ignoramus” who wasted Caesar’s time and was callous and thoughtless (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 313). This Cleopatra was also stripped of sex or romance.

So unimpressed was Caesar that he left Alexandria and forgot to say goodbye to what was “a pretty but rather tiresome infant” (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 313).

4.7 Ahmad Shawqui's *Masra' Kliyupatra* (1929)

In 1929 the Egyptian nationalist dramatist, Ahmad Shawqui, wrote a drama (not translated into English) entitled *Masra Kliyupatra*, in which she was represented as the protector of Egypt against European invasion. He “reversed” the anti-Oriental, pro-Roman propaganda, making the Romans the debauchees and Cleopatra the patriotic anti-imperialist heroine. He was an anti-British imperialism nationalist himself. He made Cleopatra's flight from Actium, not an act of cowardice, but a stratagem to leave the two Roman forces under Octavian and Antony to fight it out without Egyptian help (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 367). To Shawqui Cleopatra was not depraved, like the Romans, but full of love and compassion (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 373).

CHAPTER 5: CLEOPATRA VISUALISED

5.1 Cleopatra Depicted by Artists

Shakespeare's play inspired many other attempts to portray the famous Egyptian queen. Plays were produced and artists used the eroticism of her story to make salacious presentations. Cleopatra's story surfaced in many countries and genres. She was an absolute monarch associated with the universal cult of the goddess Isis. Into her tale are woven elements of passion, cruelty, power, wealth, divinity and death. This has all given rise to Egyptomania and the "contrasting ways in which the West has viewed Egyptian civilization" (Humbert *et al* 1994: 554).

Hughes-Hallett (1990: 192) said that in the "scores of representations" of Cleopatra's death in painting and sculpture, she was shown naked or almost so. Sixteenth century Italian, French and Dutch artists made her nude, with the snake reminiscent of Eve and the serpent in the Bible. She was often made an erotic object. A further enhancement of the "pornographic potential" was that she was shown applying the asp, not to her arm, but her breast(s). It was also blasphemous, an "anti-type" of the Madonna and child (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 193).

The seventeenth and eighteenth century paintings (cf. Humbert *et al* 1994: 554 ff) were also erotic but they preferred to portray the strong-willed and brave queen as helpless, submissive and self-abasing, a defenceless woman conquered by a strong male. She was seen as a "sexual victim" and the asp was a phallic symbol (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 206).

Hughes-Hallett (1990: 13) said that the painters of the European Renaissance depicted Cleopatra as "a plump blonde" who was erroneously believed to have been a great beauty and the ideal of the time was fair, a member of a racial and social elite. The nineteenth century painters placed this Hellenistic queen in a "Pharaonic Egypt or a prettified medieval Orient, a land of Turkish delights".

Napoleon's Egyptian expedition (1798) and developments in Egyptology at the beginning of the nineteenth century did not help artists to portray the historical Cleopatra. She was placed in a pseudo-Egypt that she would never

have recognised, or in an “Arabian Nights” setting. Romanticism made artists see her in a certain light. They projected their fantasies and painted exotic, erotic pictures of semi or wholly naked Cleopatras surrounded by wealth, reliefs, sacred texts, obelisks and strange deities. There are feline skins, damask, pearls, gold, ebony, ostrich feathers and harem-like clothes. Cleopatra has a Hellenistic hairstyle or her vulture headdress, jewels and a milk-white body.

Other features are languour and cruelty, “morbid eroticism” and “venomous beauty”. She was depicted as “dangerously attractive”. This was all on account of the propaganda of antiquity (Humbert *et al* 1994: 559-560).

Before attention is devoted to such depictions, material from antiquity itself will be studied.

5.1.1 Cleopatra in Antiquity

5.1.1.1 Heads of Cleopatra in Various Museums

Apart from the stylised Dendera relief showing Cleopatra and Caesarion in Egyptian costume (Fig. 4), there are coins with a female profile of Hellenistic appearance and a few busts attributed to her.

In the Antiken Museum, Berlin, there is a marble bust, 28 cm high. This one shows a woman in her thirties, with a Hellenistic diadem on her head, large, wide eyes, a strong rounded face, full lips and a prominent only slightly hooked nose (See Fig. 1) (Foss 1997: back cover).

Green (1990: 664) mentions that a marble portrait “very probably” of Cleopatra VII exists which dates from the first century BCE. It is said to be in the Vatican Museum. She appears to have a rather large nose and is not a conventional beauty.

A head (slightly damaged) of Cleopatra VII is to be found in the Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria with a Grecian hairstyle and a strong face with a prominent nose (Figure 2):

[<http://ce.eng.usf.edu/pharos/alexandria/Gallery/cleo2.jpg>].

5.1.1.2 Cleopatra in the Temples of Dendera, Edfu and Philae

Cleopatra was worshipped as Isis and her son therefore was seen as Horus. In late Pharaonic times the birth of the pharaoh, as Amun-Re's son, was depicted in detail "as a ritual drama on temple walls" (Lindsay 1971: 59). Amun is shown as the king visiting the queen and after the birth of their child he is taken by the god and greeted as Horus. The baby is then suckled by a Cow, by Isis or Hathor (Fig. 3) (Keel 1980: Fig. 40). The Ptolemies observed these rites. The imagery was put on temple walls and special birth temples were built, the best preserved of which are at Philae, Dendera and Edfu. A yearly ritual took place here to represent the birth of the divine child (Lindsay 1971: 60).

A limestone relief at the south (rear) wall of the temple of Hathor at Dendera shows Cleopatra and Caesarion as Isis and Horus offering to the gods (Figure 4) (Foss 1997: between 128-129). Caesarion wears the double crown of the pharaoh and Cleopatra has the horns with sun disk and double feathered headdress on her head. In her hands are a damaged Hathor sistrum, Caesarion holds an incense burner.

A whole series of depictions are found at Dendera, devoted to the goddess Hathor, consort of Horus of Edfu.

The temples have a peristyle enclosed to half its height by walls between columns. There are gay, musical scenes on the abaci and propylaea. The divine marriage and birth of the baby king are depicted on the inner walls (Lindsay 1971: 60).

Samson (1985: 102) shows another Cleopatra in Fig. 5 with the symbol of Isis on her head and the headdress of the vulture goddess Nekhbet and sun disk with horns of Hathor. This crown was taken over for the goddess Isis from Hathor.

The Cleopatra image described by Foss (1997: between 128-129) is not the queen but part of a relief of Isis and pharaoh Nectanebo II (cf. Aldred 1980: Fig 194). The disk is a sun disk and is not the moon, which was associated with Isis in the Graeco-Roman form of Selene.

At Edfu a piece of limestone was found, supposed to be Cleopatra, now in the Musée du Louvre in Paris (Humbert *et al* 1994: 562). The figure is a queen or goddess and wears the vulture headdress which rests on a long wig. She wears a sheath with bird-plumage design and has the vulture wings on her hips. Her bosom is bare. Her jewellery consists of *armillae* on the upper arms and the *usekh* necklace has floral designs.

5.1.1.3 Cleopatra on Coins

Coins depicting Antony and Cleopatra were struck, but coins of Cleopatra are rare. Nevertheless, she was the only Ptolemaic queen “who coined in her own right” (Lindsay 1971: 245).

The coins engraved during their lifetimes (Hughes-Hallett 1990: after p 130) give us the most reliable representation of how they actually looked as they were minted while they were still alive. Antony looked virile, with a good head of hair and a strong neck. Cleopatra was attired in her royal robes and jewellery, wearing a diadem and a necklace of what were probably large pearls. She has a strong, almost masculine face and prominent nose.

A coin in the British Museum (Fig. 6a) depicts an all but beautiful Cleopatra. A rare silver tetradrachm of the two of them, minted circa 36-34 BCE, exists (Figure 6b) (<http://www.edgarlowen.com/C006.html>). Her face (coin below) is surrounded by the Greek legend “The Younger Queen Goddess Cleopatra” (*Basilissa Cleopatra Thea Neotera*). A bareheaded Antony is surrounded by the Greek legend “Antony Imperator Third Proclamation”. Green (1990: 678) said that these coins were issued in 34/3 BCE to celebrate the Donations of Alexandria. They were minted in Antioch in Syria and gave the impression that Antony and Cleopatra were determined to “amalgamate the Ptolemaic and Seleucid royal houses”. Cleopatra wears a diadem with a pearl necklace.

There is a bronze coin of Cleopatra VII (51-30 BCE) in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and another silver coin of Cleopatra VII, ca. 30 BCE. A bronze issue struck in ca. 47/6 BCE, probably on Cyprus, shows Cleopatra and the baby Caesarion. She wears the royal diadem and coronet and carries a sceptre (Green 1990: 677). This coin is in the British Museum in London.

Green (1990: 678) said that Antony had put the Egyptian queen's head on his silver denarii that circulated widely in the Mediterranean, which was intended to force the West to recognize his relationship with Cleopatra. Octavian subsequently formally declared war on her in order to obtain power.

5.1.2 Cleopatra Depicted in Western Art

5.1.2.1 Drawing of Cleopatra by Michaelangelo Buonarotti

One of the few authenticated drawings of Michaelangelo depicts a sorrowful Cleopatra, beautiful in the Italian Renaissance fashion, with snakes winding around her head and neck. (See Fig. 7.)

He had drawn it for a young artist he loved, Tommaso de' Cavalieri. The drawing is a study for a bust of Cleopatra. As Cleopatra was believed in Renaissance times to have emasculated Caesar and Mark Antony with her beauty, this was indicative of the weakness to which Cavalieri had brought Michaelangelo by his love (Hooker 1997: 2).

Hughes Hallett (1990: 191) described this Cleopatra as "clothed in serpents", even with braided hair and "snaky" ringlets, everything "twining and writhing", with her wearing the asp around her shoulders like a "stole".

5.1.2.2 *Cleopatra*, a Nude Study by Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669)

This is a drawing showing Rembrandt's customary fleshy kind of woman with heavy stomach and thighs, holding a breast with one hand and a serpent in the other behind her back. She is naked, with only a drapery over one arm, a wholly Flemish kind of woman of the fifteenth century with nothing Egyptian about her (Figure 8) (Foss 1997: 129).

5.1.2.3 Paintings of *Cleopatra's Banquet* by Giambattista Tiepolo (1742-1743)

In the late classical period and Middle Ages, a certain Cleopatra tableau was preserved and described. It was described by Lucan in his *Pharsalia* and is the banquet Cleopatra gave to Julius Caesar in Alexandria. Other banquets entered the story and other writers placed Antony there as the guest. The banquet is extravagant, sensual and excessive and is intended to seduce. It is a parade of wealth and is intended to be followed by "carnal

seduce. (It is a parade of wealth and is intended to be followed by “carnal satisfaction”.) Cleopatra’s banquet is not a mere meal, it is far too costly, full of precious things and people of different races (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 88-89).

Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770) made paintings of oil on canvas depicting Cleopatra’s banquet (See Figures 9 and 10). Humbert *et al* (1994: 567) show one version. Another version is shown in the following:

<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/collection/international/painting/t/tiepolo/ipa00006.html>

Tiepolo shows Cleopatra and Antony dressed in fashionable eighteenth century clothing. There are temples and colonnades to indicate the historical setting. One is in the Melbourne National Gallery, Victoria. Cleopatra’s table is surrounded by servants with Oriental costumes but otherwise this is a very Italianate painting (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 248).

Cleopatra is displaying the fabulous pearl to Antony and senator Lucius Plancus and is intended to show that she has won a wager of giving a banquet worth ten million sesterces. She is a blonde dressed in moire and lace. Plancus is in an Oriental costume and Antony wears the uniform of a Roman general, a plumed helmet and a purple toga. There are turbaned courtiers and black servants.

The Melbourne painting (Fig. 10) is a variation on one in the Musée Cognacq-Jay in Paris, painted 1742-43, oil on canvas 69 x 50,5 cm. The tableau in the foreground is the same but the backgrounds differ.

Humbert *et al* (1994: 566) say that the subject of the banquet was taken from a description by Pliny the Elder which has inspired many artists. This, they allege, is the banquet Cleopatra had at Tarsus to overwhelm Antony and she is about to dissolve a priceless pearl in a cup of vinegar and drink it. The fabrics, dishes and tableware are sumptuous.

The Labia family, wealthy merchants of Venice, commissioned Tiepolo to decorate the walls of their palazzo with studies of Cleopatra. They were ostentatiously rich and this was how Cleopatra was represented. She is shown in eighteenth century costume, her hair done up fashionably, holding

a banquet, looking “haughty, magnificent and surrounded by the appurtenances of inherited power” (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 131), a pale, Nordic beauty. Tiepolo’s Cleopatra, is true to the ideal of period and place. She has blonde curls, blue eyes, and a pearly white skin and bared breasts complemented by ropes of pearls.

5.1.2.4 *Cleopatra before Octavian* by Giovanni Francesco Barbieri
Guercino (1640)

The painting is oil on canvas and is in the Museo Capitolino in Rome (Humbert *et al* 1994: 568); (see Fig. 11, Foss 1997: between 128-129).

This Cleopatra is submissive and defenceless, kneeling before the conqueror Octavian. Her small white hands are baring her breast as she looks at him in supplication. He is strong, standing up straight and in armour, his hand on his sword, indicating to what extent he has her in his power. She is inviting him to protect or ravish her, the quintessential sexual victim (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 206).

5.1.2.5 *Augustus and Cleopatra* by Anton Rafael Mengs (1759)

This painting is in the Deutsche Barockgalerie of the Schaezlerpalais in Augsburg. It is oil on canvas, 59,5 x 45 cm. (See Fig. 12.)

Henry Hoare commissioned this painting for his country house at Stourhead to complement a painting by Maratti. There are different versions of this work. The one approved by Hoare, has Cleopatra kneeling before Augustus as seen in the painting by Guercino. He holds out his hand and is wearing laurel crown and purple toga. She looks supplicating.

This episode tells of the encounter between Cleopatra and Augustus (Octavian) where she is captive and forced to plead and justify what had happened between her and Antony. He came after a few days to find her in a pitiable condition.

In the version in Augsburg (Figure 12, Humbert *et al* 1994: 569), Augustus, wearing his laurel wreath crown and purple toga, sits on a chair with a severe expression, facing Cleopatra who is on a day-bed, her two attendants Iras and Charmion behind her, all looking distressed. Julius Caesar’s statue

is dominant on the left. The traitor Seleucus emerges from behind with the papyrus that proves her guilt (Humbert *et al* 1994: 568).

The painting has a Graeco-Roman flavour although there is a pillar with badly executed Egyptian reliefs behind Cleopatra's bed. Cleopatra is blond and extremely fair, clothed in a diaphenous white garment, baring one nacreous shoulder. Her feet are small and bare.

5.1.2.6 *Cleopatra before Caesar* by Jean-Léon Gérôme (1866)

A sturdy but attractive Cleopatra with rounded limbs stands before Caesar whose astonishment is plain. (See Fig. 13.) She is not a fragile woman but rather voluptuous, bare-breasted with a diaphenous, leg-revealing garment. Her girdle is jewelled, her belly bare. She has a haughty, challenging pose. Cleopatra is being appraised by Caesar and a naked black attendant pushes aside the carpet in which she had been concealed. She is to win the conqueror's favour, as a slave purchaser would approve of a potential acquisition (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 269). (Figure 13, Humbert *et al* 1994: 574)

On the walls in the background are Egyptian frescoes and hieroglyphics.

5.1.2.7 *Cleopatra and Octavian* by Louis Gauffier (1788)

This is oil on canvas 83,8 x 112,5 cm, in the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh (Fig. 14). It was commissioned by the Count d'Angivillier, the Director of Public Buildings in Paris. This is the moment when Octavian visits Cleopatra and she still tries to seduce him. In the background and to the right are conspicuous statues of Julius Caesar. Charmian and Iras whisper together in the background. Behind them in niches, are Egyptian god-figures. Octavian looks down and not directly at Cleopatra. He is dressed as a soldier but wears his purple toga and laurel crown.

The women are all fair-skinned and fleshy, Hellenistic looking. Cleopatra has dark hair but a white skin. One breast is bared and so are her feet. She sits on an Egyptian-looking day-bed adorned with hieroglyphs derived from the obelisk of Thutmosis III at the Lateran. Octavian sits on a throne adorned with a winged sphinx on the side (Humbert *et al* 1994: 571-572). (See Fig. 14.)

5.1.2.8 *The Death of Cleopatra* by Jean-André Rixens (1874)

This is oil on canvas, 1,95 x 2,86 cm and is in the *Musée des Augustins* in Toulouse, France (Fig. 15).

Cleopatra's death was a popular subject for 19th century painters, who followed Plutarch's "romanticized narrative". It is set in the mausoleum, where the Ptolemies' treasure is stashed away and which is Cleopatra's refuge. The walls in the background are covered in hieroglyphs and aquatic plants. A yellow wall-hanging has winged scarabs and a vulture with spread wings. These designs were copied from items in the Louvre. As Tutankhamen's tomb had not yet been discovered to give an indication of what furniture looked like, the artist has taken the liberty of setting Cleopatra on a bed with next to her a table, both of gold. The bed has a vulture motif at the head and wings on the side, with a double uraeus. The basket of figs is at the bedside. A feline skin lies on a thick carpet. Iras lies dead over her dead mistress's feet. Charmian is straightening her diadem. The women are partly naked. Cleopatra is not wearing her royal robes, but looks like a naked courtesan. This became a fashion of the time, to portray Cleopatra in this way (Humbert *et al* 1994: 576-577) (Fig. 15).

5.1.2.9 *Cleopatra Testing Poisons on Condemned Prisoners* by Alexandre Cabanel (1887)

This is oil on canvas 1,65 x 2,90 cm and is in the *Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten* in Antwerp, Belgium (Fig. 16).

Cleopatra "lolls on a divan", an indifferent, sulky look on her face. She holds a bouquet of lotus flowers and is bare-breasted, but wearing her vulture headdress with the uraeus. Beside her lies a leopard and a half-naked female attendant leans over beside her, with a fan in her hand, to watch the death throes of a prisoner who has drunk poison, and whose silver cup lies on the floor. Another one, already dead, is being carried off in the background.

In the background are colonnades like those of a temple, adorned with Egyptian murals. Luxuriant vegetation peeps out from behind the divan. This is exotic, casual cruelty. Plutarch alleged that the queen tested poisons

on prisoners to ascertain which was the most painless way of dying. She looks unfeeling and erotic, a *femme fatale* of a most depraved kind (Humbert *et al* 1994: 578-579).

Calvat (1995: 7) says that Cabanel's inspiration is a combination of elements of antiquity taken from the works of Pliny and the Augustan poets, references to pharaonic Egypt and the Orient of the 19th Century. The building in the background of the painting is actually the temple of Philae (Shaw & Nicholson 1995: 223).

5.1.2.10 *Cleopatra* by Gustave Moreau (1887)

This is watercolour highlighted with gouache and edged with black, 40 x 25 cm and is in the *Musée du Louvre* in Paris, France (Fig. 17).

Cleopatra is seated on a terrace overlooking the Nile. She is framed by curtains. In the background we see imaginary architecture containing pylons, colonnades and obelisks suggesting a temple. On the right are a sphinx and two pyramids and two red ibises. The queen holds a lotus flower and on her forehead is the uraeus. The asp is on the left on the arm-rest but Cleopatra is turned away and seems to ponder. She is wearing exotic jewellery but is practically naked, merely draped behind and below the breasts and partially over one white leg. Her profile and hair look classical Greek (Humbert *et al* 1994: 579-580).

5.1.2.11 Cleopatra Depicted on a Book Cover

There is a depiction of Cleopatra on the front cover of a book entitled *Cleopatra: Goddess of Egypt, Enemy of Rome*, by Polly Schoyer Brooks (Fig. 20) showing an aggressive woman wearing Graecian dress.

5.2 The Film *Cleopatra* (1963)

Many films portrayed Cleopatra. Vivien Leigh is one of the actresses who played this role (Hughes-Hallett 1990, after p258) (Fig. 18).

The Joseph L Mankiewicz film starred Elizabeth Taylor, one of the great beauties of the big screen, but also one of the most notorious *femmes fatales* of Hollywood, as Cleopatra. Rex Harrison starred as the astute and urbane Julius Caesar and Richard Burton was a passionate Antony. Roddy

McDowell was an effete Octavian. The film covered the 18 turbulent years preceding the foundation of the Roman empire, since Cleopatra's meeting with Caesar to her death in defeat and as the lover of Antony.

This was a great spectacle and panorama with exotic costumes, especially those worn by Cleopatra. The story is surprisingly acute as far as personalities go. Taylor is portrayed as a woman of endless fascination, as in Shakespeare (see 4.3). She grows from a child-queen to a mature queen, with "voluptuous assurance".

Caesar, like George Bernard Shaw's character (see 4.6), is vain, wise and shrewd. Antony is shown as a self-pitying drunk in defeat. This is in contrast to the self-assured Cleopatra who demands more from a man than physical offering. She is shown as splendid and self-assured in her triumphant entry into Rome, up the Tarsus to meet Antony, and at Actium. (However, an element of burlesque comedy occurs when she winks her heavily made-up eye when she enters Rome seated between the paws of a huge sphinx in what seems to the viewer an extraordinary, lavish and rowdy show.)

Caesar says to her "You have a way of mixing politics with passion" and that is the key to this character. She is not merely a seductive woman, but an ambitious and politically scheming one, who uses her charms to get what she wants from powerful men.

Mankiewicz tried to do justice to the historical Cleopatra's "political acumen and personal intelligence" (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 345) but his actress, Elizabeth Taylor, carried such a reputation as a *femme fatale* with her, including her love affair during the film with Richard Burton, that she was a spurious kind of latter-day Cleopatra. She was a film-star who was an "avatar" of Cleopatra (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 346).

In this opulent movie Cleopatra's image is associated with "Dionysiac excess". Taylor was a Cleopatra, Bacchante and modern Maenad "possessed (sic) by an orgiastic spirit" whose primary aim is to achieve rapture (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 346).

Hughes-Hallett (1990: 359) calls this film "camp" and says that "Taylor-Cleopatra is Mistress of Misrule".

Calvat (1995: 9) says that that this Cleopatra was shown to be the defender of Aristotle, Plato, pharaonic Egypt and even the Bible, against Roman barbarism. The debauchee and harlot became, for Mankiewicz, the guardian of arts and knowledge for when Caesar and the Romans burnt the library of Alexandria, she launched a tirade against Caesar, telling him to steal, kill, pillage, but that no barbarian had the right to destroy human thought.

5.3 Cleopatra – DSTV Discovery Channel

In this hour-long documentary shown in 1999 an overview is given of Egypt and the reign of the last queen, Cleopatra VII. There are four commentators, scholars who have written definitive works on Egypt and Cleopatra. Visuals are obtained from films and works of art which have been dealt with elsewhere in this study. The emphasis is on the historical reception of Cleopatra and the propaganda and myths that have influenced Westerners' way of seeing her.

The programme commences by saying that Egypt has flourished for 5 000 years, leaving a dazzling legacy. Alexandria attracted the finest scholars and artists of the time. The belief in an afterlife vested the Egyptians' faith in a pharaoh who was to lead and protect them.

Cleopatra VII, the last pharaoh, was supposedly "the face that launched a thousand legends". She is one of history's "great enigmas" who kept the Roman empire at bay. She was equated with the goddess Isis who controlled power and fertility, and the Nile's annual flood. For thousands of people Cleopatra really was Isis.

She "bewitched" the two most powerful men in the world, Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. Was this the "real Cleopatra or the fiction left by her enemies?" The narrator says that in fact today new evidence is showing a different Cleopatra, a magnetic, ambitious and visionary daring queen who "nearly conquered the world".

For centuries Cleopatra has been a "fascinating riddle", Lucy Hughes-Hallett, author of the book *Cleopatra: Histories, Dreams and Distortions* (1990) commented, saying that "she is something about whom we know very little

except that it's irresistible". Hughes-Hallett stressed that Cleopatra was also a good self-publicist.

Another commentator, the scholar RS Bianchi, who edited *Cleopatra's Egypt: Age of the Ptolemies* (1988) said that she "dreamed of a universal empire".

Peter Green, author of *Alexander to Actium: The Hellenistic Age* (1990), commented that the Romans were worried because she was something larger than life and terrifying, "supposed to be sexually indefatigable". But, he points out, "this has fed the tradition from then to Cecil B de Mille." Seduction was probably just one of her many strategies.

One had to look beyond the Greek and Roman propaganda to unlock the Egyptian evidence, Bianchi said. Her story had been "preserved by Greek and Roman scholars", which was all that was available, but "now we can look at Eastern sources to get a more complete picture of who the queen was."

She had learnt from her father of glorious conquests and ancestors beginning with Alexander and Ptolemy I, the first of the royal line. By her time the kingdom had shrunk drastically and it was deep in debt to Rome. Most of Egypt's neighbours had already been swallowed by the Roman empire. She had been educated as a potential ruler according to the most advanced Greek curriculum.

Bianchi also said that she was the child of three centuries of repeated incest and the interesting thing about consistent incest was that it can sometimes "concentrate the genes wonderfully, which it did in Cleopatra's case, producing a cocktail of brilliance in her." Incest was a form of self-protection to the Egyptian royalty.

Cleopatra faced huge challenges in wanting to keep Egypt from being swallowed by Rome. Egyptian evidence presents a very different picture from the spoiled, frivolous Cleopatra of legend. Dorothy Thompson, historian of Cambridge University, England, maintained that she was a "serious queen", who, when the Nile failed, passed a decree to have the grain sent to the cities, with the aim of feeding the people in the cities who did not have access to food.

To her Egyptian subjects she was a foreigner and she had to win their loyalty. She embraced the ancient religion of the pharaohs and became a god. One monument shows her alone, worshipping Isis. She knew exactly where she was going and had no intention of sharing power with a brother, but her ambitious plans cost her dearly. Isis was the most popular deity in Egypt and Cleopatra was the living reincarnation. She represented herself as such, which is diametrically opposed to the legend. She used the ancient pharaohs' means of propaganda, namely massive temples. On them Cleopatra was Isis and her son was Horus (see Fig. 4).

Hughes-Hallett commented that her appearance to Caesar out of a carpet (see Fig. 13) was "the basis for hundreds of pornographic legends" but it showed her to be a "young woman of terrific courage and aplomb". Green commented that she evidently had "a razor-sharp mind" like Julius Caesar's.

Legend tells of her irresistible beauty but the historical evidence shows otherwise, Hughes-Hallett said. Coins provide clues. They must have had her approval and so one must "assume some likeness", but coins are crude (see Figs 6a and 6b).

Green (*Cleopatra* - DSTV Discovery Channel) repeated Blaise Pascal's remark that "if Cleopatra's nose had been shorter the whole face of the world might have been different."

The narrator said that some historians allege that Caesar and Cleopatra were devising a "spectacular blueprint for world domination", but when he fell, her dreams fell with him. Octavian became the heir and she had to return home to Egypt.

When she met Antony he was the antithesis of Caesar. He was the New Dionysus, god of wine, ecstasy and immortality. Cleopatra, on the other hand, was "firmly grounded in political reality". He came to her for a political partnership with one of the most powerful monarchs of the time. She, on the other hand, hoped that Antony would replace Caesar as her ally.

Bianchi (*Cleopatra* - DSTV Discovery Channel) commented that in Egypt "everything is couched in ritual". Cleopatra may have seemed to have an "endless round of parties and diversion" but she never forgot her larger

purpose. She was a capable and popular ruler but regaining the wider empire of her ancestors seemed to lie beyond her grasp. Her partnership with Antony held out the revival of Alexander's empire and she reclaimed all her ancestors' lands from him.

As Bianchi (*Cleopatra* - DSTV Discovery Channel) commented, he was "the only one around to help her realize her dreams". Green said that she had to make the best she could of him, but "it was not enough".

Hughes-Hallett, in commenting on the Donations of Alexandria, said that the Romans were "outraged" for it was plain that Antony was attempting to build an empire for himself with Cleopatra as his partner. The empire they were planning, obviously included Rome as well. Octavian started to launch a bitter propaganda war against Cleopatra. His depiction of her has survived for 2 000 years and it made her a debauched, dangerous, promiscuous harlot queen. It was against her, and not Antony, that he declared war.

Green pointed out that it was "extraordinary how persistent Octavian's propaganda had been". Bianchi said that the Roman texts never actually proved that she was a harlot, they merely called her that. Octavian accused her of turning Antony into a weak-willed slave.

To survive, Cleopatra knew that she must conquer Rome itself. Octavian had, on his side, the brilliant naval commander Agrippa, who then blockaded Antony and Cleopatra at Actium. Cleopatra's squadron of 60 ships escaped with the Egyptian treasury. Modern analysis suggests that the retreat from battle was pre-arranged.

Hughes-Hallett alleged that Actium was "bad luck but not the result of womanly cowardice". Cleopatra's dreams of a new world order were, however, "smashed".

She prepared for the ordeal to come, offering to abdicate if her children were spared. Antony offered his life to save her. Octavian ignored their pleas. She ultimately chose history's "most famous suicide, unlike most people who compromise their principles", Bianchi said.

In death she is shown dressed in the robes of Isis, royal crown on her head. The cobra which bit her is supposed to confer immortality and she dies as a

In death she is shown dressed in the robes of Isis, royal crown on her head. The cobra which bit her is supposed to confer immortality and she dies as a goddess, a most “fitting death for a queen of Egypt”. She shared a dream of an empire of the east and west and the “radiance of her dream lives on”.

For 2 000 years the story of the Romans has been remembered, that she was the wicked temptress of Caesar and Antony, but we are hearing a very different version that has prevailed in Egypt, the narrator said. There, for hundreds of years Cleopatra was revered as a heroic and brilliant patriot.

Thompson (*Cleopatra* - DSTV Discovery Channel) said that Cleopatra had reconstructed her country. She was a “working queen”. Bianchi (*Cleopatra* - DSTV Discovery Channel) ended off by saying that she was “morally driven” and Green (*Cleopatra* - DSTV Discovery Channel) concluded by saying that “she had all the qualities of a ruler, man or woman”.

Seven hundred years after her death an Egyptian holy man called her the “wisest among women”.

This programme mostly succeeded in conveying as objective a view as possible of a Cleopatra encompassed by mystery and legend, but who was far more worthy than most writers and artists have represented her.

5.4 The Opera *Cléopâtre* by Jules Massenet

This opera in four acts by Jules Massenet with a libretto by Louis Payen, was first produced at the Opéra de Monte Carlo on February 23, 1914. It has not been staged frequently.

In a synopsis of the play by Chris Hapka (1998:1), in the first Act, Marcus Antonius is in his camp at Tarsus. Cleopatra, whom he calls a “courtesan with a crown” is announced. When he orders everybody to leave them alone and they embrace, they are interrupted by Ennius, with a message from the Roman Senate that he is to marry Octavia. Marcus Antonius sails to Egypt with Cleopatra instead.

In the second Act Marcus Antonius marries Octavia in Rome and hears that Cleopatra has forgotten him. He ignores Octavia’s pleadings and resolves to go to Egypt. In an Egyptian tavern a disguised Cleopatra and Spakos, her new lover, watch a young dancer, Adamos. The jealous Spakos tries to

strangle him, but Cleopatra reveals who she is. Charmion enters to tell her that Marcus Antonius has returned and she goes to meet him, ignoring Spakos's pleas.

In Act 3 dancers from all regions of the ancient world entertain the lovers. Cleopatra poisons a goblet of wine and offers a kiss to any slave who will drink it (cf. Fig. 16), but Marcus Antonius stops a slave from drinking. Octavia enters and pleads that Antony return to Rome, and so does Cleopatra. He refuses and goes out to rally his armies against Rome. Spakos leads Octavia away and Cleopatra reviews Marcus Antonius's army.

In Act 4 Cleopatra is in her tomb and has spread the word that she is dead. However, she has sent for Marcus Antonius whose army has been defeated by Octavian. She admits to loving Marcus Antonius but Spakos spitefully tells her that he has confirmed her death to mislead him. Cleopatra stabs Spakos with a dagger and at that moment a slave announces that Marcus Antonius has come. He is carried in by his soldiers and is covered in blood, as he did not want to outlive her. When he dies Cleopatra lets the asp bite her. Octavian and his soldiers enter as the curtain falls.

This Cleopatra dresses as a man so as to go searching for dancing boys in the taverns of Alexandria. They must have good bodies and lips "purple of desire" (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 286). She is cruel and unfeeling, yet she does profess to love Marcus Antonius. The reception of her character is not sympathetic.

5.5 Comic Cleopatra in *Astérix et Cléopâtre*

This is a parody of the Taylor-Burton *Cleopatra* film. Some years after this film, Uderzo and Goscinny published the *Asterix and Cleopatra* album. The image of the queen was changed completely, Calvat (1995: 9) said. The prostitute of Propertius, the monster depicted by Horace and Florus, had become a heroine drawn for children. The sensual and erotic Cleopatra had disappeared, because she was used for another purpose.

Stéphane Rivière (1998: 1) did a presentation of this on the Web (Fig. 21). Her summary says that Cleopatra is furious because Caesar sees her people as decadent. She wants her people to build her a sumptuous palace at

Alexandria. Numerobis is the architect to whom she appeals. He finds it easy to build pyramids but this job is too difficult and he looks to Panoramix to help him.

The latter, accompanied by Asterix and Obelix, comes to her assistance in Egypt. The Gauls must help the project succeed. Caesar has a spy called Ginfiz planted in their midst.

Cleopatra has a beautiful rather big nose but is very sensitive. The allusion to her nose reappears again and again, as Blaise Pascal, author of *Pensées*, had said that had it been shorter, the face of the world would have been changed.

References to Pascal and the Suez Canal give this a very French slant.

Rivière calls this a very good album for revisiting Ancient Egypt and says that Goscinny and Uderzo have given great pleasure with their hieroglyphics.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Reception theory concentrates on the role of the *reader* or *observer*, emphasising that the visual arts and literature mirror beliefs and values. This study illustrates how Cleopatra was perceived in history, literature and the visual arts and hereby ascertains how her image was created in ancient Egyptian, Roman and Western European culture.

The historical information about this last ruler of the Ptolemaic dynasty was distorted by historians, poets and artists alike, with the result that she was depicted in a certain way in literature, as well as in the visual media. In fact, the history of Cleopatra VII has constantly been distorted into a “myth” in the Western mind through these writings, by those who came in later ages, as well as by the artists and film-makers.

The writer/artist created a certain character which was received with different emphases and deductions by readers or observers who concretised the text/object (Cleopatra) and from this constructed their own *aesthetic object*. They projected their own prejudices and assumptions, with their own historical reality. In this way the historicity of the researcher and his/her own reality also entered into the conclusions and representations.

Cleopatra and the loves of her life, powerful Romans who were rulers of an expanding empire, dominated the world stage during her lifetime. What was written about her and how she came to be portrayed in various art forms, made her the most famous woman of antiquity.

Octavian propaganda conveyed the idea that sex gave her power to infatuate her lovers. This was a sign of weakness and folly, for although it was acceptable to be promiscuous, a man ought not to be ruled by it. Discipline had to prevail. Octavian transformed his rival, Antony, into a foreign woman’s plaything. These politics of disinformation continued so that the poets such as Virgil, Horace and Propertius, ensured that Cleopatra appeared to be debauched and treacherous, a sorceress. She was shown to constitute danger for the Romans.

Octavian and his apologists made her court and civilization appear decadent and grotesque. In fact she probably stooped to Antony's level, that of a gross and dissolute soldier, when she herself was educated, refined and accomplished. She had to amuse him and so she provided entertainment on a scale that shocked her contemporaries.

Octavian (Augustus) was held up to be the defender of the Roman identity that was endangered by Cleopatra and Antony's eastern pretensions. The donations of Alexandria caused Octavian poets to encourage xenophobia.

Even the non-Roman writers such as Josephus, Plutarch and Dio Cassius perpetuated the Octavian "myth" and version of the Cleopatra story. Yet quite different insights into the image of this woman have also been published by others, such as Arab writers. For instance, Al-Masudi, the Arab historian, regarded her as a wise woman (Calvat 1995: 6). He ascribed works on medicine, charms and natural science to her or her patronage. There was a Cleopatra whose image was that of benefactor and scholar who spoke various languages. Even her enemy, the Roman author Cicero, confirmed this. Plutarch said that she spoke several languages. The Jewish historian Josephus mentioned in his work *Against Apion* that an Alexandrian writer, Apion, whose work has been lost, praised her highly (Josephus: <http://baptist1.com/books/josephus/apion-2.htm>)

The work of Plutarch of Chaeronea (Pelling 1988. *Plutarch: Life of Antony*) set off a train of imitations when he wrote her history in his lives of the great Greeks and Romans. Most post-Renaissance versions of Cleopatra's story are derived from Plutarch, making her passionate, inconsistent and capricious.

After Plutarch, the greatest exponent of Cleopatra's story was William Shakespeare, arguably the greatest playwright of all time. Then, after Shakespeare, other eminent writers patterned their Cleopatras on that of Shakespeare.

It transpires from a study of the historical circumstances that it is simply erroneous to judge her merely as a "Oriental" queen who outshone all others in glamour, feminine wiles, beauty, luxury and decadence. We see that she was astute and that she managed for thirty years to survive and dominate in the dangerous game of ancient Mediterranean politics.

So high was the profile of this woman that her story has fascinated people throughout the centuries, so that it has been told repeatedly, from different angles and with varying motives, according to the world views and reception of people in different periods and with diverse backgrounds.

Even during her own lifetime, Cleopatra's legend was distorted by racial and sexual chauvinism. She was made alluring. Writers and painters portrayed her *to personify some ideal of their own*. She was a complex figure to whom motives and passions were ascribed as people wanted to see her. The fact that she was a queen of a land of exoticism and mysticism made her all the more fascinating, but as she was unconventional and liberal, she was thought to be lax in morals and decadent in keeping with the Oriental courts, where excess and luxury were thought to have prevailed. This dissolute image was perpetuated by modern authors from Shakespeare onwards.

The stories that built up about Cleopatra being a wanton are not difficult to understand. She attracted men, but it cannot be proved that she loved anybody other than Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, the only men with whom she allied herself, and they were powerful. They also had political motives in allying themselves to her.

Cleopatra had a powerful fleet and it was this fleet and Egyptian wealth which made her country a valuable and sought-after ally. For this reason Antony, who took the eastern part of the empire, which included Egypt, summoned Cleopatra to Tarsus in Cilicia. He needed her support and he also intended to obtain money for his Parthian campaign. The influence which Cleopatra gained over these two Romans aroused hostility in Rome that would lead to her ultimate downfall.

Octavian's antagonism in Rome before the battle of Actium took place was exacerbated by the fact that Antony had, also for political reasons, married his sister, Octavia, whom he subsequently neglected and left for Cleopatra. Octavian stirred up legends of the siren, the seductive "Oriental", promiscuous and pleasure-loving, a "harlot-queen".

Cleopatra was also responsible for creating a certain image of herself, that of an autocratic yet benevolent queen, a goddess – who therefore was immortal

– and a liberator of Asia beyond Egypt. She deliberately enhanced her public image by such means as her progress to Antony on the River Cydnus, and appeared dressed as a goddess in elaborate public spectacles. She travelled in pomp and splendour to show her wealth and power and to impress her subjects and the world at large. As a head of state she had to show her country's economic strength. This opulent and magnificent Cleopatra has been portrayed by many an artist and writer, causing the receiving writer and observer to picture a certain image of excess of luxury, which has persisted throughout centuries.

She certainly was a goddess in the eyes of the Egyptians, identified with Isis as the foremost goddess of Egypt, the “Mistress of the Two Lands”. Even in Rome and the Hellenistic world the cult of Isis was strong. Caesar strengthened the idea of her being the goddess's representative on earth by putting up her statue in the temple of Venus Genetrix in Rome. So her image was also received as godlike, not a mere mortal.

In public spectacles, as the New Isis, she wore a royal headdress with the uraeus (cobra) sacred to the sun-god Ra and the sun disk of the goddess Hathor and the all-powerful Isis (see Fig. 4). She and her twin brother and later husband, Osiris, were the progeny of Sky and Earth (Nut and Geb). Her son was Horus. This side of her, was depicted on temple walls such as those of Dendera (Figs 4, 5).

Cleopatra was also known as Aphrodite in the classical world and, knowing the importance of symbolism, she went as such to Tarsus in her magnificent barge. Tarsus had been known since the fifth century BCE as the site of the meeting between the goddess of love and the god who ruled the east, according to Plutarch. In other words, Aphrodite had come to join with Dionysus. This being a magnificent spectacle as first described by Plutarch, it was compelling material for subsequent artists who ensured that it was received by readers and observers in all the splendour that they could convey.

Antony, who also knew the significance of symbolism, presented himself as Alexander the Great, Dionysus and Hercules. He wanted to be seen as Alexander's successor and heir. Dionysus was a god revered and popular in

the Mediterranean world. Dionysus was also supposed to be Cleopatra's ancestor, and that of the Ptolemies. Cleopatra's father had called himself the New Dionysus. This too, was wonderful material for artists to depict and so was the fact that Cleopatra incorporated the Antony-Dionysus image into her own myth. He was Dionysus/Osiris and she would therefore be Aphrodite/Isis, both sister and wife according to Egyptian custom. This was represented and received as glorious and sensational. This was the image presented on the coins in circulation in the Mediterranean countries.

If Cleopatra and Antony were represented as gods, so was Octavian, who was represented as Apollo, despite the fact that the Romans professed to be scandalised by the deification of Antony and Cleopatra.

Cleopatra's ceremonies were political, and even defiant of Rome. She and Antony founded the "Order of the Inseparables in Death". Plutarch wrote about this. It was the stuff of high drama and so Shakespeare and others (see Chapter 4) who followed him, saw this dying together as the climax of Cleopatra's and Antony's lives. This love was excessive and therefore fatal to life.

This has been received as laudable or culpable, depending on the time and historical background of the receiver. Excessive love always contains the element of death, because the lovers cannot live without one another. This was received as wasteful or the height of virtue and loyalty.

The fact that Cleopatra died defiant, a queen to the last, who refused to be subjected by a conqueror, was the last and best spectacle of her life. This role, whether she was dressed in the regalia of the goddess Isis (Figs. 4-5), or depicted naked and erotic as many artists did (cf. Fig. 15), was her finest and most memorable role, played grandly and majestically to the very end. It redeemed her in the eyes of many writers and artists, and yet some Western writers and painters have displayed her as craven and erotic, as we see in paintings by Gauffier and Guercino (Figs. 11 and 14).

Cleopatra is a chameleon-like figure. Her image was received and interpreted according to the fashions and mores of the time. Rome saw her as sensual and sinful, especially when the precepts of Christianity began to gain ground.

The image of depravity was counteracted by the virtue she assumed in Mediaeval and Renaissance Europe as a woman prepared to sacrifice her life for the sake of the man she loved, a martyr to love.

Already in the sixteenth century her story was “the stuff that [tragedy] was made on”. In all the tragedies and dramas her end was very important. Courtly love, immensely popular in the Middle Ages, supported the chivalry of dying for love. Then it was also courageous to end one’s own life and in this way one foiled fate and tyranny by choosing how and where to die. Shakespeare’s Cleopatra called it “brave” and “noble” and said “Let’s make death proud to take us.” She considered that by her action she was saving her honour. She demonstrated that her love was true, not that of a harlot. It was virtuous for a loyal wife to die with her husband.

Women have over the centuries been accused of being fickle and the fact that Cleopatra did not turn to another man after Antony’s death, also counted in her favour.

Then, on the other hand, Renaissance thinkers also regarded passionate and overwhelming love as madness or a disease that robbed the lover of his reason and dignity. Therefore it had to be avoided, or one had to recover quickly. It was certainly not acceptable, was even morally reprehensible and destroyed one’s judgement. Marriage and not mad passion was the basis on which an orderly state operated.

Shakespeare made his Hamlet say:

“Give me that man

That is not passion’s slave,

And I will wear him

In my heart’s core ...”

(Hamlet, Act III Scene ii).

He also said, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*:

“Reason and love keep little company together ...”

(Act III Scene i).

In Octavian's propaganda the message was conveyed that Antony had lost his manhood for Cleopatra's love, which was an abomination. Shakespeare based his play on this premise. In Cleopatra's fecund world, men become weak and dissipated. In her vilest things are said to become themselves. She dominates the feminine, dissolute and guileful Egyptian world.

The Nineteenth Century Cleopatra depicted in painting (Chapter 5) and literature (Chapter 4) had an Oriental and Egyptian dimension and she was made the subject of masochistic dreams and desires.

As the stories told about the same protagonists whose lives were set in a certain period and circumstances are devised by different writers or artists with their own prejudices and circumstances, there are many Cleopatras. Some appear to be parodies, but underlying all the various personae is a woman truly admired, albeit for the wrong reasons. The fact that somebody like Théophile Gautier (see 4.5) could regard her as "the most complete woman ever to have existed", whom dreamers found at the end of their dreams, meant that he, and others, projected a certain romanticised image of her into his, and their own, dreams.

She has been represented as the ultimate *femme fatale*. Artists used the eroticism of her story to make salacious presentations in many countries and genres, containing elements of passion, power, divinity and death.

Queen Cleopatra has often served the political and ideological aims of writers and this has removed her from historical reality. The "true" Cleopatra has effectively been obscured by countless visions and representations and each one of us receives this image uniquely.

She has been turned into much more than a magnetic, ambitious and daring queen whose ultimate and never neglected purpose was to regain the empire of her ancestors, *she indeed became a figure of myth!*

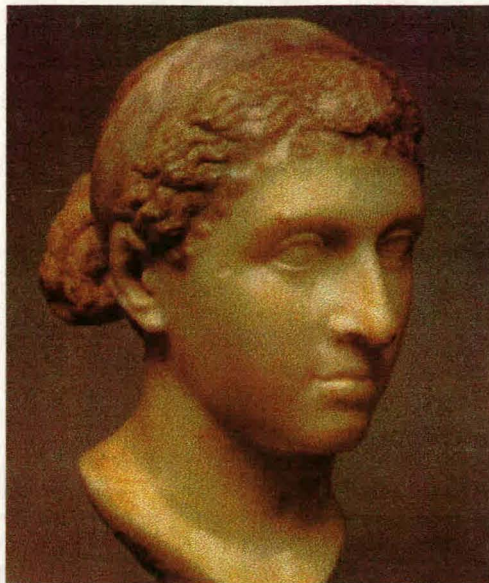


Fig. 1

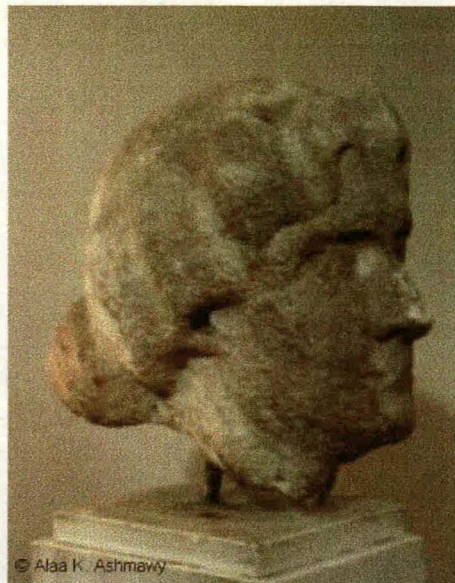


Fig. 2

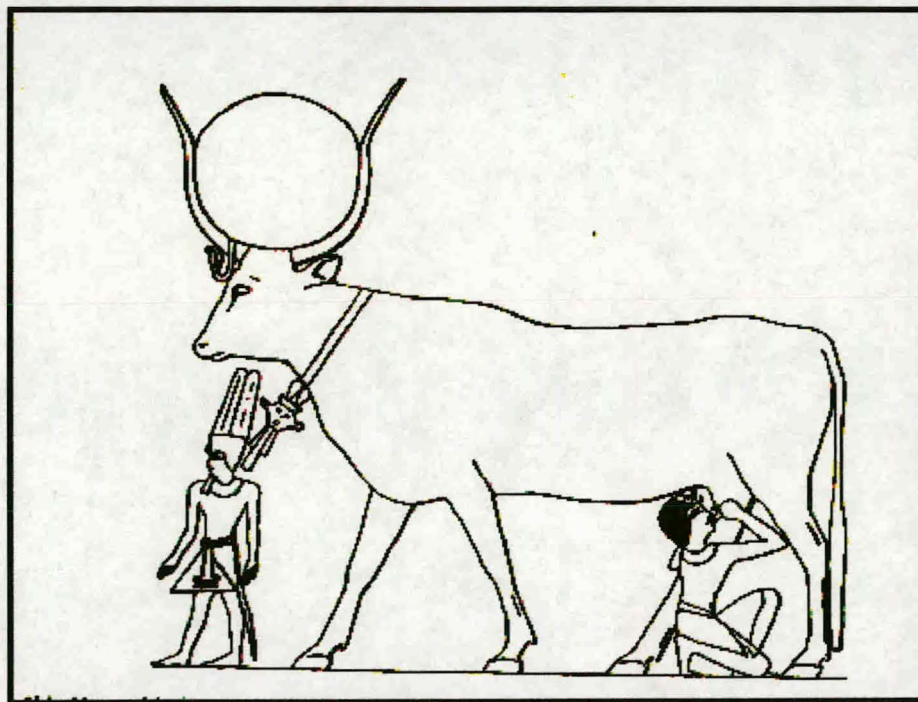


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6a



Fig. 6b



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

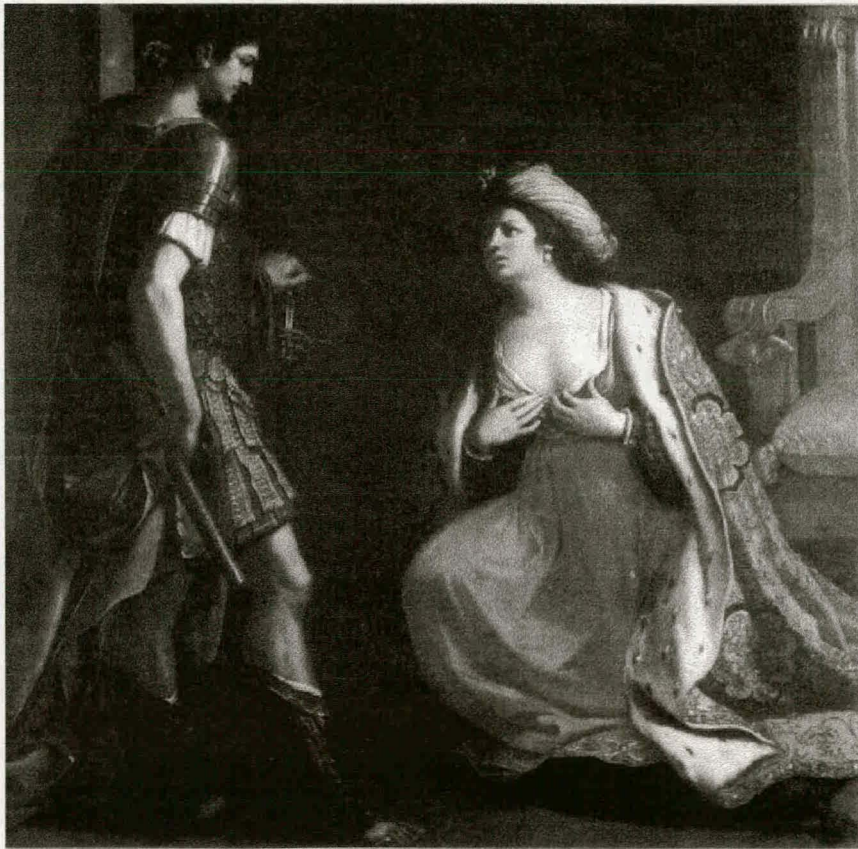


Fig. 11



Fig. 12

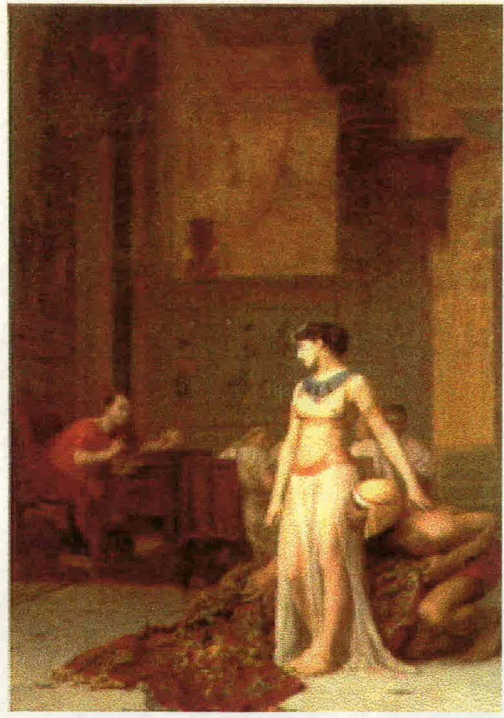


Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

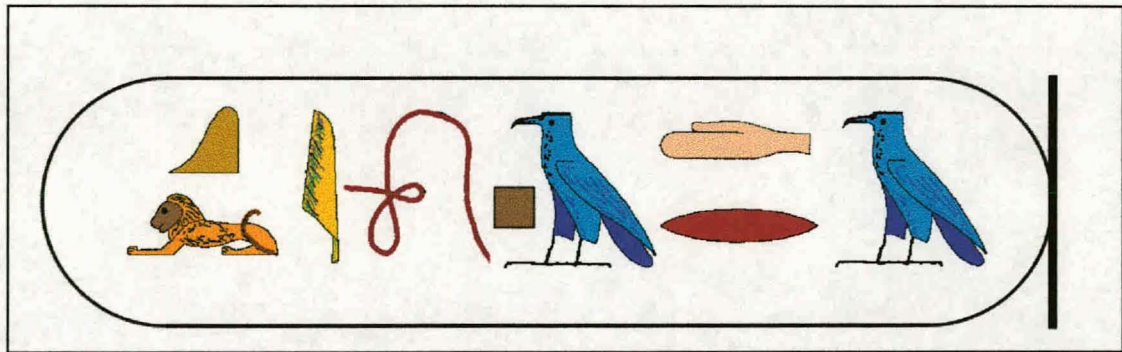


Fig. 19

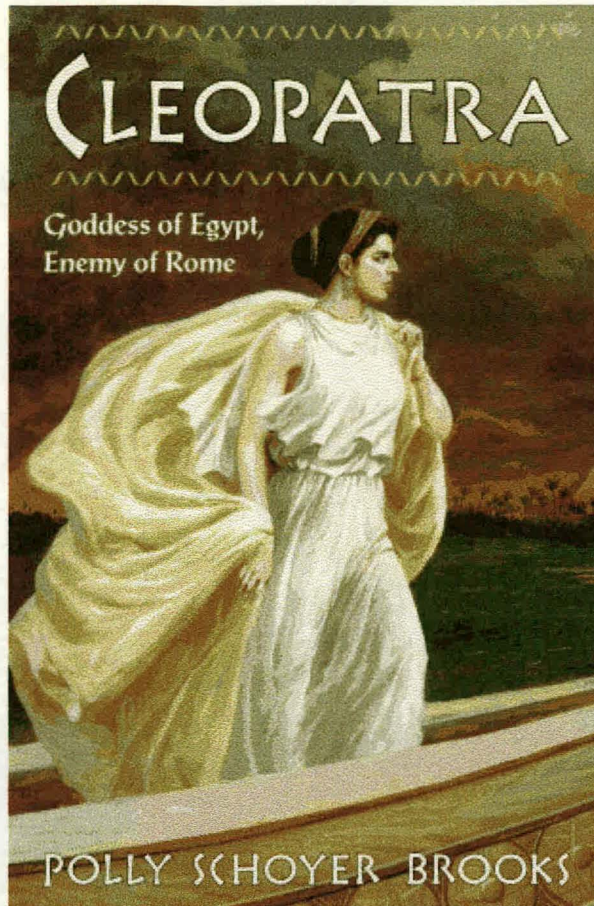


Fig. 20



Fig. 21

FIGURES

1. Bust in the *Antiken Museum*, Berlin. Cleopatra in her thirties. (Foss 1997, back cover)
2. Head of Cleopatra VII, Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria. (Courtesy of Renaud Calvat) with chronology of Cleopatra.
[<http://ce.eng.usf.edu/pharos/alexandria/Gallery/cleo2.jpg>]
3. Pharaoh being suckled by Hathor cow, temple of Deir el-Bahri (18th dynasty). (Keel 1980: fig.40)
4. Limestone relief at temple of Hathor at Dendera showing Cleopatra and Caesarion as Isis and Horus. (Foss 1997: between 128-129)
5. Cleopatra as Isis, temple of Dendera(h). (Samson 1985: 102)
- 6a. Coin of Cleopatra. Cleopatra - koelbloedig én hartstogtelik. *Rooi Rose* 14 October 1998, 114-115
- 6b. Silver tetradrachm of Marc Antony and Cleopatra, circa 36-34 BC.
[<http://www.edgarlowen.com/C006.html>]
7. Michelangelo Buonarotti: *Cleopatra*. (front cover of Hughes-Hallett 1990)
8. *Cleopatra* by Rembrandt van Rijn. (Foss 1997: between 128-129)
9. Giambattista Tiepolo: *Cleopatra's Banquet*. (Humbert *et al* 1994: 567)
10. Giambattista Tiepolo: Another version of *Cleopatra's Banquet*.
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11. *Cleopatra before Octavian* by Giovanni Francesco Barbieri Guercino (Foss 1997: between 128-129)
12. *Augustus & Cleopatra* by Anton Rafael Mengs (Humbert *et al* 1994: 569)
13. *Cleopatra before Julius Caesar* by Jean-Léon Gérôme (Foss 1997: between 128-129)
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15. *Death of Cleopatra*. by Jean-André Rixens (Humbert *et al* 1994: 577)

16. *Cleopatra testing poisons on condemned prisoners* by Alexandre Cabanel. (Humbert *et al* 1994:578)
17. *Cleopatra* by Gustave Moreau. (Humbert *et al* 1994: 580)
18. Vivien Leigh as Cleopatra. (Hughes-Hallett, after p 258)
19. The cartouche of Cleopatra VII. (©MACU)
20. Front cover illustration: *Cleopatra: Goddess of Egypt, Enemy of Rome* by Polly Schoyer Brooks.
21. *Asterix and Cleopatra* : [<http://www.mage.univ-mulhouse.fr/riviere/bd/asterix/cleopatr/cleopatr.html>]

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