# MYTH, HISTORY AND CULTURE IN REPUBLICAN ROME

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# 11

# Cleopatra in Rome

## Facts and Fantasies

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### Cleopatra's Cinematic Entry into Rome

The fascination of Cleopatra continues to cast a spell on the public imagination. Few, if any, figures from antiquity have so wide a name-recognition.[1] Popular books, novels, movies and television specials that feature this ruler of Egypt appear with regularity and can count on a large market for their wares. The subject, of course, entranced even Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw who produced two very different but still enthralling plays. Perhaps no one has had a broader impact upon the present perception of Cleopatra, however, than Joseph Mankiewicz, whose spectacular film, that broke all financial records—for expenditure—and paraded Elizabeth Taylor as the preening and seductive queen, still enjoys repeated reruns on television and a steady business at the video stores.[2] Yet serious scholarship on Cleopatra lags woefully behind, perhaps reluctant to confront the tide of popular imagery and myth-making that would overwhelm it. Peter Wiseman's keen eye for the manipulation of myth and the manufacture of legends would have a grand field to survey here. It may be a useful—and occasionally amusing—exercise to penetrate a select segment of those fables.

Mankiewicz's film, still impossible to evade or escape on this subject, contains numerous lavish and spectacular scenes. One stands out as especially striking and memorable: the entry of Cleopatra into Rome. She arrives, preceded by lithe, dark dancing girls, sitting in imposing grandeur on

1. On the views of Cleopatra in antiquity, see Becher 1966, and, with particular attention to Augustan writers, Wyke 1992, 98–140. On the modern reception of Cleopatra, see Hallett 1990, 113–307.
2. On Elizabeth Taylor and the Mankiewicz film, see Hallett 1990, 276–92; Wyke 1997, 100–9.

a lofty platform in the lap of a gigantic sphinx, drawn through the gates of the city by dozens of slaves, moving at a measured pace to allow the queen, bedecked in magnificent splendour, to be gawked at every step along the way by thousands of awe-struck Romans, who then burst into wild applause and loud cheers. The scene provides an imposing display of royal majesty, dazzling the spectators and commanding their deference and obeisance. No one who has viewed the film is likely to forget that spectacle. Is there any reason to believe it?

In fact, it is all imaginary. None of our testimony, even that which is most hostile to, or critical of, Caesar or Cleopatra, describes such an event. The very notion of staid and sturdy Romans lining the streets of their venerable city to gaze with pleasure upon the pomp and ostentation of an eastern queen is hard to swallow. Of course, no blame should be laid at the doorstep of Manciewicz. Artistic licence shields him from scholarly nit-picking. Nor did he pull this idea out of thin air. Cleopatra did come to Rome, in the autumn of 46 BCE, and she set up house there, in Trastevere, in Caesar's own estate. She returned to Egypt shortly after the Ides of March in 44 BCE—in a hurry. The situation was a little too explosive for her in Rome after the assassination of Julius Caesar.

## Cleopatra's Stay in Rome

This stay in Rome has stimulated the imaginations of many: not just novelists and film-makers, but some eminent scholars as well. It led to inventive surmise about the powerful and baleful influence exercised by Cleopatra over the Roman dictator. As the embodiment of royalty and luxury, it was conjectured, the queen induced Caesar to aspire after a Hellenistic monarchy of his own, thereby helping to explain the extravagant honours and titles he acquired in the last months of his life, some of them royal, some even divine in character.[3] The visit in Rome induced certain researchers to put credence in the rumours that circulated (then or later) about Caesar's elaborate plans for the future. He allegedly planned to transfer his capital from Rome to Alexandria.[4] Indirect hints surfaced that Caesar proposed to marry Cleopatra, although he already had a wife and Roman law forbade polygamy. Report had it that Caesar even gave instructions to the tribune Helvius

3. See Bouché-Leclercq 1904, II, 220–2; Meyer 1922, 521–2; Taylor 1931, 61–2, 75–6; Collins 1955, 462–5; Volkmann 1958, 79–82; Collins 1959, 125–30; cf. Grant 1972, 88–9; Southern 1999, 57–8. On the honours and distinctions themselves, see Gesche 1968, 12–55; Gelzer 1968, 307–22; Weinstock 1971, 270–341; Rawson 1994, 461–7. A useful survey of scholarship in Gesche 1976, 162–72.
4. Nic. Dam. *FGH*, 130, F 68; Suet. *Iul.* 79.3. See Meyer 1922, 520–1.

Cinna to propose a measure that would permit the dictator to marry whoever—and however many—he wished for the purpose of procreation.[5] This gossip has largely, and rightly, been discounted by recent scholars.[6]

Another item, however, continues to enjoy the status of truth and reliability. Appian, writing in the second century CE, records that Caesar installed a statue of Cleopatra in the Temple of Venus Genetrix, right next to the goddess herself, his own advertised ancestress, an image, so Appian asserted, that still stands in his day.[7] That piece of information has gone almost unquestioned in the scholarly literature.[8] Yet it is difficult to imagine that an honorific statue of Cleopatra in Rome would have survived the battle of Actium and the acquisition of supreme power by Octavian, especially in the house of a goddess who was progenitor of the line to which Octavian now belonged.[9] A more likely scenario deserves preference. Dio Cassius later mentions the statue in the context of spoils taken by Octavian from Alexandria and dedications placed in Roman temples.[10] That makes good sense. The statue represents a token of victory, dedicated to the ancestral deity, not, as Appian mistakenly assumed, a token of Caesar's infatuation.

The speculative particulars, however credible or implausible, do not alter the larger fact: Cleopatra's presence in Rome. She was there, ostensibly for a year and half, ensconced in luxury in Caesar's private quarters, an affront to almost all Romans. Historians have never contemplated seriously the extraordinary nature of this episode; indeed, they have not seen fit to question it. Yet the escapade, once one reflects upon it, veritably bursts with questions. What did Caesar think he was doing by installing the queen of Egypt, with her entire entourage, in Trastevere, there to wander conspicuously about his estate and gardens for an indefinite period of time, while Calpurnia looked on as his tolerant, forbearing, and long-suffering wife? If he were to do it at all, why in 46 BCE, when civil war against the Pompeians still raged, with significant forces under the command of Pompey's son in Spain? Would

5. Suet. *Iul.* 52.3; cf. D.C. 44.7.3; Gellius, 16.7.12. This is accepted, e.g., by Meyer 1922, 525–6; Volkmann 1958, 87–8.
6. E.g. Balsdon 1958, 86; Gelzer 1968, 323; Grant 1972, 92; Meier 1995, 477.
7. App. *BC*, 2.102.
8. See e.g. Volkmann 1958, 80–1; Gelzer 1968, 287; Grant 1972, 87–8; Yavetz 1979, 199; Green 1990, 669; Meier 1995, 446; Southern 1999, 57–8.
9. Would Cleopatra's image have been installed in the temple as a reincarnation of Isis, and hence a counterpart of Venus? So, e.g. Grant 1972, 88. Not very likely. Roman officialdom had frowned on the cult of Isis in recent years. See D.C. 40.47, 42.26; Var. *apud* Tert. *ad Nat.* 1.10. Cf. the discussion of Takacs 1995, 56–67. Note also that Cleopatra's official presentation as the new Isis occurred only in 34, according to Plut. *Ant.* 54.
10. D.C. 51.22.3. It should be observed that the forum of Caesar, where the temple of Venus Genetrix stood, was itself only brought to completion by Octavian. Hence, the dedication of a captured statue of Cleopatra would be most suitable for the new conqueror.

Caesar risk alienating the Roman aristocracy and a host of his own potential supporters by flaunting his bedecked and bejewelled foreign mistress? It all makes very little sense.

Quite apart from what Caesar may have thought he was doing, what did Cleopatra think *she* was doing? This sojourn in Rome, when it is contemplated at all by modern scholars, has been viewed only from a Caesarian vantage point: what was Cleopatra's value to him, or how was he to use her in furthering his royal aspirations, in controlling Egypt, or in assuring a hereditary succession. That represents a skewed and narrow vision. Cleopatra was no mere instrument of Caesarian policy, no mere ornament for his ambitions, no mere plaything for his sexual desires. One would do well to recall that she had only just regained her throne in Egypt, after considerable upheaval and turbulence. What was she doing in Rome for months at a stretch while her own hold upon loyalty in Alexandria must have been very shaky? The volatile Alexandrians had already demonstrated their displeasure with Caesar in no uncertain terms when he had set up his headquarters in their city. They would certainly take no more kindly to Cleopatra's establishing a household in the dictator's dwelling in Rome.

How to explain it? Had Cleopatra become heedlessly enamoured of Caesar, gripped by a fervour to spend all her time at his side? If so, she would not enjoy his company for long. A month or so after Cleopatra arrived in Rome, Caesar went off to the wars in Spain.[11] None could predict how long he would be gone—or if he would ever return. Was Cleopatra planning to wait patiently, no matter how long it took? As it happened, Caesar's expedition abroad lasted for about six months. What was Cleopatra doing during that long absence? How long did she plan to stay? As we know, she left in a hurry after the Ides of March in 44. But the slaying of Caesar could not have been anticipated. Would she, otherwise, have remained indefinitely? Who was running the country in Egypt?

An even more intriguing question suggests itself. How is it that, when Cleopatra did return, after having left Egypt in an unsettled condition, having been away for more than a year and a half, and with her powerful paramour now dead, she apparently picked up the pieces in her homeland without encountering dissent or difficulty?

No one has bothered to pose these questions. But once posed, they make clear that something must be wrong with this picture. A closer inspection is warranted.

11. Caesar himself had returned to Rome from the wars in the East and in North Africa in July 46 and had celebrated four triumphs in late September. Cleopatra, probably, arrived shortly thereafter. Caesar left Rome again around November. See Gelzer 1968, 286–7, 293.

## The Background to the Roman Visit

Cleopatra, it should be emphasized, was a formidable figure in her own right. She possessed considerable intellectual gifts, great resourcefulness and high ambition. Plutarch reports that the queen had a mellifluous voice, like a many-stringed instrument, a woman of great charm and wit, not perhaps a dazzling beauty (as coins and portrait busts confirm), but an engaging conversationalist and a person of wide-ranging intellect. He adds that she was fluent in nine languages—none of which, interestingly enough, was Latin. (She doubtless conversed with Caesar in Greek.) However embellished this portrait might be, it indicates a woman of real accomplishment.[12] The Roman perspective, inescapably, presents her as part of a duo, whether with Caesar or with Antony, either as being manipulated by them for their purposes or as manipulating them for hers. Neither analysis does full justice to the woman or to the circumstances in which she found herself.

Cleopatra VII stood in the long line of the Ptolemies who for two and a half centuries had ruled Egypt and, for much of the time, Cyrene, Cyprus, Palestine, Coele-Syria, parts of Asia Minor, and the Aegean. The Ptolemies enjoyed the most enduring and proudest of the Hellenistic kingdoms. Born to the purple, Cleopatra saw her mission as maintaining the (best) traditions of her royal line, and indeed as reviving the ancient glories of that line. She faced an arduous struggle. Intrigues within the family, court cabals and civil strife made her quest an uphill battle from the start. This is not the place to rehearse those details. It needs only be stressed that Cleopatra had to call upon substantial ingenuity and to resort to both internal and external resources well before Julius Caesar came on the scene.

A brief review of her prior experience, or at least its highlights, can illustrate that resourcefulness. Cleopatra ascended the throne in 51 BCE at the age of seventeen or eighteen. She succeeded her father, the mercurial and rather questionable character Ptolemy XII Auletes (the 'Piper').[13] She shared that throne with her half-brother, Ptolemy XIII, only ten years old at the time, a boy whom, as convention dictated, she duly married. The situation already held the potential for danger and disruption. Conflict soon arose in the court. The advisers of young Ptolemy, portrayed in our sources as sinister and ambitious ministers, one of them (inevitably) a eunuch,

12. Plut. *Ant.* 27.3–5. Pelling 1988, 191, questions the mastery of so many languages, citing Val. Max. 8.7; extract 16, on Mithridates as commanding twenty-two tongues. But this is not a common literary convention. The absence of Latin from the repertoire (not remarked upon by Plutarch) lends some credibility. Whatever exaggeration exists in Plutarch's account, Cleopatra's charms and conversational skills are noted also by D.C. 42.34.4.
13. On the reign of Auletes, see Bouché-Leclercq 1904, II, 116–76; Bevan 1927, 342–58; Olshausen 1963; Bloedow 1963; Fraser 1972, I, 124–6; II, 222–7.

succeeded in driving Cleopatra out of Alexandria, in order to give themselves free rein in the exercise of influence over the king and the kingdom. The expulsion, it appears, occurred some time around spring 48.[14] Soon after, the two contending parties confronted each other in arms: the troops of Ptolemy XIII arrayed against the forces assembled by Cleopatra near Pelusium on the Mediterranean in the easternmost part of Egypt.

A greater international crisis, however, supervened: the Roman Civil War. Pompeius Magnus, defeated by Caesar at Pharsalus, fled to Egypt, where he might hope to find rescue and support from the Roman troops who had served with his lieutenant and political ally A. Gabinius, who were now settled in Egypt, and who formed part of the army of Ptolemy under the command of Achillas. It proved to be a fatal miscalculation. A party met Pompey when he landed on the coast and treacherously murdered him, one of the assassins being a former Pompeian officer. For that deed, young Ptolemy, now just thirteen years old, earned a place among arch-traitors in Dante's *Inferno*—together with such distinguished company as Cain and Judas.[15] If Ptolemy or his advisers expected that this deed would earn some credit with Julius Caesar or, more likely, that it would induce Caesar to bypass Egypt, his mission accomplished by others, they were soon disillusioned. Caesar arrived in Alexandria at the beginning of October 48, spurned the grisly head of Pompey (duly embalmed in Egyptian custom) that was offered to him, wept when he saw it, but did not leave. The Roman *imperator*, instead, announced that he would take it upon himself to arbitrate the dispute between Ptolemy and Cleopatra. That is not exactly what the ministers of Ptolemy had been hoping for. The young teenager turned up to make his case, to induce Caesar to leave, and to forestall the arrival of Cleopatra. But the ever resourceful queen, according to the most celebrated of Cleopatra stories, reached the palace concealed in a carpet, and popped out at the most opportune moment when the carpet unrolled at the feet of Caesar. The event triggered momentous upheaval. Civil war soon erupted in the streets of Alexandria, during the course of which Caesar barely escaped with his life when he had to swim two hundred yards to safety, clad in full armour. The outcome is no secret. Caesar emerged victorious, the advisers of young Ptolemy were slain, the king himself drowned in the Nile, and Cleopatra was declared queen of Egypt, co-ruler with her surviving younger brother Ptolemy XIV, who was a mere twelve years of age. Caesar and

14. Caes. *BC*, 3.103, with reference to September or October 48, places the expulsion 'a few months earlier'. Cf. App. *BC*, 2.84. The effort of Grant 1972, 52–3, accepted by Green 1990, 664, to set this in 50 BCE, is unpersuasive. See the cogent arguments of Peek 2000.

15. Dante, *Inferno*, 33.124.

Cleopatra then enjoyed a leisurely trip up the Nile in the early months of 47, the stuff of which many later legends were made.[16]

So much for the narrative, up to this point. It will be salutary to pause and ponder some interesting features of it, especially as they relate to the accomplishments and influence of Cleopatra. She had been driven out of Alexandria and toppled from her throne by a palace cabal in spring 48. Yet, just a few months later, she managed to show up with an army to confront the forces of her enemy at Pelusium.[17] Obviously, the queen had not suffered the fate of a homeless and impotent refugee in the meantime. She must have had substantial resources to call upon, and a strong base of support for her endeavours in Egypt or its environs. Just where did this backing come from? The sources do not specify, an infuriating omission and a frustration to inquiry. The question rarely surfaces in the scholarship.[18]

Cleopatra, as we happen to know, had taken steps at the beginning of her reign to show concern for, and interest in, the native traditions of the Egyptian populace. Her first act as queen of which we have knowledge was involvement in the installation of the Bucchis bull, the sacred animal of Hermonthis in Upper Egypt, in March 51. An inscription carved on a stele informs us of Cleopatra's presence at the ceremony of transporting the sacred bull to its shrine and installing it there. She proceeded at a later date to finance a birth temple at Hermonthis, entrenching further her connections with the rituals and priesthood of Upper Egypt.[19] The queen showed similar consideration to the shrine of the Apis bull at Memphis. As other epigraphic evidence declares, she provided generous financial support for the Apis cult, confirmed by priestly requests for the god's blessing at the birth of Cleopatra's son.[20] Papyrological testimony takes us a little further, disclosing Cleopatra's solicitude for the population in Alexandria. A decree guaranteeing a supply of grain for the city during a period of drought and potential famine supplies that information.[21] That is not much to go on. But it would be reasonable to infer that gestures and actions of this sort permitted the queen to develop a base of support in the capital and in the countryside. It did not hurt that she had a fluent command of Egyptian, the first Ptolemaic ruler ever to learn the native language of the realm.[22]

16. On the civil war in Alexandria, see the fullest treatment in Graindor 1931 with a useful summary in Carcopino 1968, 415–30. A more detailed study of particular aspects is given by Heinen 1966, 69–165.
17. Caes. *BC* 3.103; Strab. 17.1.11; App. *BC* 2.84; Liv. *Per.* 111; Plut. *Caes.* 48.3; *Pomp.* 77.1; D.C., 42.3.1.
18. It is treated now, in sound and sensible fashion, by Peek 2000.
19. Mond and Myers 1934, II, 12; Grant 1972, 46–7.
20. Thompson 1988, 124–5; Peek 2000.
21. *BGU*, 1730; cf. Peek 2000.
22. Plut. *Ant.* 27.4–5.

When the counsellors and officers of Ptolemy drove Cleopatra out of Alexandria in 48, she, evidently, had somewhere to go and had sympathetic supporters to receive her. Unfortunately, we have no firm information as to where she went. The Byzantine historian John Malalas reports, from sources unidentified and now lost to us, that she went to the Thebaid in Upper Egypt.[23] That is a plausible enough destination, in view of her earlier overtures to the dwellers of that region. But trust in so late a source is risky. Moreover, since Cleopatra eventually turned up with an army in Pelusium, Upper Egypt is hardly the most obvious route. This would not rule out recruitment by supporters in the Thebaid, or even a brief appearance by the queen in the region. But the main gathering of troops must be from elsewhere. Appian's account, that Cleopatra collected forces in Syria, makes logical sense in terms of geography.[24] That notice also corresponds to the independent testimony of Strabo, who has Cleopatra make for Syria upon her expulsion from Alexandria.[25] Just what is meant by 'Syria' here eludes our grasp. The notice appears in a segment of Strabo's *Geography* devoted to Egypt, and he is not concerned to be any more specific. He might well refer to Coele-Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine, or the area in general that lies eastward of Egypt and in the direction of Syria.[26] It may be relevant that the coinage of Ascalon, an important coastal city of Palestine, north of Gaza, includes the issue of a tetradrachm in the year 49 BCE that displays a portrait of Cleopatra, one in a long series of coins honouring Ptolemaic rulers.[27] A suggestion that Ascalon formed the base of Cleopatra's operations can be no more than speculation. But the coinage, certainly, confirms her prestige and authority in areas lying within Egypt's sphere of influence. Whatever the location and whatever the means, the fact that Cleopatra recruited a military force of some size and in a relatively short time is quite striking testimony to the extent of her effectiveness and the power of her appeal. Cleopatra, though just twenty-one in 48 BCE, was a figure of esteem and a force to be reckoned with.

## Caesar and Cleopatra in Alexandria

This takes the tale to the notorious episode of Cleopatra's initial appearance before Caesar. Nothing is likely to eradicate the memorable image of the queen smuggled into Caesar's headquarters rolled up in an oriental rug.

23. Malalas, *Chron.* 10.
24. App. *BC* 2.84.
25. Strab. 17.1.11. Green's (1990, 664) reconstruction of the route is pure conjecture.
26. Cf. Strab. 16.2.1–2. See the excellent treatment by Peek 2000.
27. *BMC*, Palestine, 107–8; Brett 1937, 452–63; Grant 1972, 53; Peek 2000.

Countless movies and television specials have accorded that image canonical status. Scholars have made no effort to undo the impression.[28] Few would pay attention if they did. But scepticism has a place here. One ought at least to underscore the fact, for it is not generally known, that the carpet caper appears in one source only: Plutarch's *Life of Caesar*. Nor does he actually mention anything as elegant as a carpet: Cleopatra was wrapped up in bedclothes![29] The event receives no mention in Appian, nor in Suetonius, fond as he is of pretty stories. It failed to make it even into Dio Cassius' narrative, although that historian does speak of Cleopatra employing every feminine wile, beautifying herself to the hilt, in order to exercise her charms on Caesar.[30] The nearest approximation to Plutarch's version comes in the poet Lucan's fanciful invention that has Cleopatra bribe Ptolemy's guards to give her access to the harbour, slip through in a small boat, and thus reach Caesar. But there is no rug.[31]

The unassailable fact is that Caesar elected to arbitrate differences between Ptolemy and Cleopatra, based on the authority of the will of Ptolemy Auletes, their father, who had left the kingdom to both jointly. The will had provided that the Roman people should have responsibility for seeing that his wishes were fulfilled. Caesar, as representative of Rome, showed no reluctance to take on the role of arbiter and enforcer. To that end he summoned both brother and sister before his tribunal in Alexandria to resolve the matter without arms.[32] So Cleopatra, if she made an appearance at all at that point, did not have to arrive surreptitiously in folds of bedding. Indeed, the very idea that the queen of Egypt, claimant to that proud and commanding kingdom, heir to the ancient dynasty of the Ptolemies, and a devotee of formal ceremonies and ritual, would make her initial appearance to Julius Caesar wrapped in a rug is virtually unthinkable.[33]

Caesar faced formidable difficulties in bringing stability to the tumultuous

28. See e.g. Volkmann 1958, 66; Heinen 1966, 82–5; Grant 1972, 63; Green 1990, 663; Meier 1995, 408; Southern 1999, 32.
29. Plut. *Caes.* 49.
30. D.C. 42.34.3–6.
31. Luc. 10.37.
32. Caes. *BC* 3.105–107: 'He made it known that he wanted King Ptolemy and his sister Cleopatra to disband their armies and to settle their disputes before his tribunal rather than by force of arms between themselves', *ostendit sibi placere regem Ptolemaeum atque eius sororem Cleopatram exercitus, quos haberent, dimittere et de controuersiis apud se potius quam inter se armis disceptare*; D.C. 42.35.4–6. Cf. Strab. 17.11. Caesar may have claimed a standing here on the grounds that Auletes' will had granted Rome a guardianship (ἐπιμέλεια) over his children; D.C. 42.35.5. See Braund 1984, 137. D.C. 42.34.3–6, reports that Cleopatra took the initiative and contacted Caesar first; accepted by Heinen 1966, 82.
33. Heinen 1966, 84, also worries about the propriety of appearances here, but suggests that Cleopatra emerged from the bedclothes at an outer door—before Caesar saw her!

political scene in Egypt. He doubtless knew (or was soon advised) that a settlement in that land had little chance of success without acknowledging the claims of Cleopatra. Politics took priority. That is not to deny a love-match between Caesar and the queen of Egypt. These were two highly gifted, engaging and passionate people, no mere calculating machines. But Caesar had to confront the political realities on the ground in Egypt. His small band of soldiers was in no position to control the situation. A settlement that sought to reconcile the parties, divide authority, and encourage harmony reflected long-standing Roman practice in arbitrating differences among royal rivals in the East.[34] It is striking that Caesar not only endorsed the joint rule of Cleopatra and Ptolemy XIII over Egypt but awarded the island of Cyprus to their younger siblings, Arsinoë and Ptolemy XIV, despite the fact that Cyprus was a Roman province! The *imperator* had now resigned it to the Ptolemies. The decision, plainly, did not derive from infatuation with Cleopatra. Indeed, she may have well have bridled at this distribution of territory to all her siblings. Nonetheless, the ceding of Cyprus represented a notable gesture in the direction of reviving the glory days of Ptolemaic Egypt, and the queen could take pride in that.[35]

All these plans, in any case, came to naught. Civil war broke out in Alexandria, Ptolemy XIII drowned in the Nile, and his younger sister Arsinoë was placed under arrest by Caesar. Cleopatra's principal rivals had now been removed, and her support in the land was doubtless undiminished, perhaps enhanced. She did not need a trip up the Nile with Caesar to shore up her position. That brief holiday may, indeed, have been more passion than politics.[36] The birth of a child, the future Caesarion, came some time later.[37]

The passion, however, was not all-consuming. Caesar himself left shortly after, in the summer of 47, to pursue his civil war against the followers and supporters of Pompey in Asia Minor and in North Africa, campaigns that lasted several months. He then returned to Rome to celebrate four triumphs in the autumn of 46.[38] He had not seen Cleopatra for a year. Indeed, he had made certain to leave a large garrison in Alexandria in the meantime, thus to exercise surveillance in the area.[39] Caesar does not appear to have been obsessed by lust for Cleopatra. The queen arrived in Rome probably in the

34. On Roman arbitration and mediation in the Greek East, see Gruen 1984, 101–26.
35. D.C. 42.35.4–6. Not surprisingly, Caesar passes over this in his own account.
36. The trip took place, probably, in the spring of 47; App. *BC* 2.90; Suet. *Iul.* 52.1. Cf. Heinen 1966, 148–9.
37. On the date of Caesarion's birth and the paternity of Caesar, much disputed matters but not of relevance here, see Balsdon 1960, 68–71; Heinen 1969, 181–203, with earlier bibliography; Grant 1972, 83–5.
38. Sources in Broughton 1952, II, 293.
39. *Bell. Alex.* 33; Suet. *Iul.* 76; App. *BC* 4.59.

late autumn of 46, and, as we have seen, about a month later Caesar went off to Spain for half a year. Cleopatra had, doubtless, brought her infant child with her to Rome. But Caesar never acknowledged him as his son during his lifetime—and did not name him in the will.[40]

## Cleopatra's Stay in Rome Reconsidered

The critical question now resurfaces. What was Cleopatra doing in Rome? Dio Cassius supplies an important bit of information that needs to be taken seriously. The historian reports that Caesar enrolled Cleopatra and her new husband, that is the young boy, her brother Ptolemy XIV, as friends and allies of the Roman people.[41] That notice makes eminently good sense. The establishment or reiteration of formal bonds between Rome and foreign principalities had long held a central place in the diplomatic conventions of Rome and the Hellenistic states, particularly when the situation was an unsettled one. Eastern kings and pretenders whose hold on their thrones was shaky or contested found it eminently useful to obtain Roman endorsement for their claims, a convenient instrument to parade before their countrymen. Such negotiations often occurred through an exchange of diplomatic missions. But royal visitors to Rome for the purpose of affirming official diplomatic relationships were by no means unknown. We have ample testimony for rulers or would-be rulers of Pergamum, Bithynia, Cappadocia and Syria who travelled to Rome in the second century BCE.[42] In each instance they came to seek recognition of their claims or acknowledgment of their legitimacy. More tellingly, the practice was by no means unknown to the Ptolemies themselves. In the mid-second century, when the two brothers Ptolemy Philometor and Ptolemy Euergetes vied for power and territory, each found himself at different times in Rome, presenting his own case and pressing it upon the Roman senate. Philometor even used the ploy of taking up lodging in a cheap rental in Rome, far from the posh districts of the city, thereby shaming the Senate, once they learned of it, into plying him with gifts, presenting him with a royal robe and setting him up in properly luxurious quarters.[43] Caesar's generous hospitality to Cleopatra would ensure that no similar embarrassment to Rome would take place this time. Philometor's rival Euergetes had used a rather different route in his effort to

40. Nic. Dam. F 130, 68. It was, of course, in Antony's interests later to claim that Caesar had acknowledged the paternity; Suet. *Iul.* 52.2.
41. D.C. 43.27.3. Dio adds that Caesar incurred displeasure by housing the royal family in his personal estate. But courtesy and hospitality to foreign dignitaries had a long history in the Republic.
42. Gruen 1984, 573–5, 580–92, 665–7.
43. V. Max. 1.1.1f.; D.S. 31.18.1–2.

secure influence in Rome. He offered himself in marriage to that most aristocratic of Roman widows, Cornelia, daughter of Scipio Africanus and mother of the Gracchi. The noble lady, to her credit, turned him down flat.[44] So Cleopatra's presence and objectives in Rome had some very pertinent precedents.

But one need not reach back to the second century for suitable models. Ptolemy Auletes, Cleopatra's father, had distributed a significant amount of cash in Rome in order to secure recognition of his hold on the Egyptian throne. The strategy backfired badly, for it stirred considerable negative publicity and widespread unpopularity in Alexandria. The reaction prompted an expulsion of the king from his kingdom. Auletes then turned up again in Rome, there to plead his cause and to furnish more funds to Roman leaders, borrowing heavily in order to finance this endeavour.[45] It is noteworthy that, among other things, he obtained official recognition as friend and ally of Rome in 59, and he was housed in the comfortable Alban estate of Pompeius Magnus.[46]

In short, clear precedents existed for the arrival, the aims, and even the housing of Cleopatra in Rome. She knew the value of an official recognition by Roman authorities, a treaty of friendship and alliance, and all the proper diplomatic niceties that would accompany it—reasons enough for Cleopatra to spend time in Rome. This form of certification would substantially shore up her position at home. The respect paid to foreign dignitaries, including the provision of lodging commensurate with their status, fits the conventional expectations of diplomatic practice. No need to conjure up sexual longings to explain the visit.[47]

The likelihood of an ostentatious, luxury-laden and opulent entrance into the city diminishes dramatically. The fanciful re-creation of Manciewicz, however memorable, has no warrant or plausibility. Such a procession would have given gratuitous offence, and was in the interests neither of Caesar nor of Cleopatra. The visit itself, in fact, did not make much of a splash at all. None of our sources mentions a notable or conspicuous arrival by the queen. She was simply another foreign ruler arriving on a diplomatic mission. Most Romans may have failed to notice her.

So far, so good. Cleopatra came on an appropriate mission: to receive formal recognition, to obtain a treaty and to bolster her authority in Egypt.

44. Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 1.4.
45. Cic. *Pro Rab. Post.* 4; D.C. 39.12.1–2.
46. Cic. *Pro Rab. Post.* 6; Caes. *BC* 3.107; Strab. 17.1.11; Suet. *Iul.* 54; D.C. 39.12.1.
47. Caesar, in fact, had had yet another affair since leaving Cleopatra in Egypt, this one with the wife of the king of Mauretania, while he was on campaign in Spain; Suet. *Iul.* 52.1. He was rarely idle on this front.

But why then did she stay? The official ceremonies could not have required an extended stretch of time. It would be difficult to imagine a lengthy and boisterous debate in the Senate on this matter while Caesar ran the show. What then would be the point of Cleopatra remaining in Rome for a year and half, indeed, presumably, much longer had it not been for the Ides of March?[48] If she wished to solidify her position in Egypt, she could hardly do so very effectively at that distance and with so long an absence. The frequent religious rituals, ceremonies and festivals in her home country demanded or expected the presence of the ruler. To abandon them indefinitely would cost Cleopatra dearly and bring a loss of favour with gods and subjects alike. Could she run the risk of leaving the government and administration of the land in the hands of others? Who was minding the store in Egypt?

The solution may lie elsewhere. A very different possibility merits consideration. Perhaps Cleopatra did not, in fact, stay in Rome for those eighteen months or more. A return to Egypt shortly after obtaining a formal alliance with Rome would be practical and logical, thereby allowing her to resume control of the government. Why should we believe that she remained in Rome—especially after Caesar left for Spain?

The critical evidence comes from Cicero, a contemporary and an eyewitness, providing seemingly incontrovertible information. Cicero's letters provide unimpeachable testimony to the date of Cleopatra's departure from Rome, that is, shortly after the Ides of March 44. A continued presence in Rome would be uncomfortable, possibly hazardous, for the queen. The first reference to her exit comes in a letter of mid-April, just a month after Caesar's assassination.[49] Cicero then alludes to the event in a number of subsequent letters to Atticus over the next two months. This would seem to be decisive for the length of stay, as all historians have assumed. Yet Cicero never breathes a word about Cleopatra during the whole of her supposed eighteen-month sojourn. Is this a weak argument from silence? Not really. We possess about two hundred letters of Cicero that fall in this very period from the autumn of 46 to the spring of 44, none of which indicates that Cicero was even aware of Cleopatra's existence.

Another piece of testimony bears, interestingly, on this question. Suetonius, in his biography of Caesar, makes an intriguing and largely unnoticed remark: that Cleopatra had been summoned to the city, that Caesar provided her with the highest honours and rewards and *that he sent her*

48. Even a year and a half is a conservative estimate. Caesar's reform of the calendar in 46 required the addition of approximately two months between November and December of that year. See Gelzer 1968, 289, with references. Cleopatra would have had quite a long stay. Thanks are due to Tim Cornell for making the point in discussion.

49. Cic. *ad Att.* 14.8.1.

*back*![50] The mention of distinctions bestowed upon the queen must refer to the titles accorded her of 'friend and ally of Rome' and to the customary gifts provided for visiting royalty. But more important is the notice that she evidently departed with Caesar's blessing. The return to Egypt may well have come not long after Cleopatra got her official *imprimatur* from Roman authorities—and before Caesar went off to Spain. If that reconstruction is right, it would explain very nicely why matters remained stable and under control in Egypt. The queen was there.

A letter of Cicero may, indeed, offer a hint to that effect. He wrote to Atticus in June 44, venting some spleen against Cleopatra. 'I hate the queen,' he exploded. Just why is unclear. Cicero expressed great irritation at the queen's haughty demeanour when she dwelled in her gardens across the Tiber.[51] But the specific complaint remains obscure. Cicero makes a cryptic remark about some literary material, perhaps manuscripts, promised to him but never delivered. What matters, however, is that Cicero takes a particular jab at a certain Ammonius, evidently a minister of the queen, who guaranteed the carrying out of her promises but failed to implement them.[52] That statement could well imply that, at the time Cicero received his promises, Cleopatra was no longer around in person and that her agents were acting for her. One might even take the conjecture a step further, with due caution and tentativeness, and suggest that Ammonius pledged the delivery of manuscripts (or copies thereof) from the library in Alexandria and that Cleopatra never brought them.[53] But there is no need to press that speculation further.

Cleopatra was, of course, back in Rome before the Ides of March in 44. But we do not know how long she had been there. It may, indeed, not have been very long at all. One might bear in mind that Caesar himself had only returned to Rome from the Spanish wars and from a stay in Gaul in October

50. Suet. *Iul.* 52.1: 'Having summoned her to the city and bestowed the greatest distinctions and gifts upon her, he sent her back again', *accitam in urbem non nisi maximis honoribus praemiisque auctam remisit*. Insofar as scholars have taken note of this passage, they have usually dismissed it as inaccurate or wrong; e.g. Bouché-Leclercq 1904, II, 222; Meyer 1922, 522; Gelzer 1968, 287, n. 2. Grant 1972, 91, allows for the possibility of a 'short visit to Egypt' but does not putsue the matter.

51. Cic. *ad Att.* 15.15.2: 'I cannot recall without intense pain the arrogance of the queen herself when she lived in the gardens across the Tiber', *superbiam autem ipsius reginae, cum esset trans Tiberim in hortis, commemorare sine magno dolore non possum*.

52. Cic. *ad Att.* 15.15.2: 'I hate the queen. Ammonius knows that I have good reason to do so, that guarantor of her promises. The promised writings suited my position and I would have ventured to declare it in a public forum', *reginam odi. id me iure facere scit sponsor promissorum eius Ammonius, quae quidem promissa erant* φιλόλογα *et dignitatis meae, ut uel in contione dicere auderem*.

53. The Library had not burned down, as is often thought, during the Alexandrine war. See Parsons 1952, 188–319; Canfora 1989, 66–82.

of 45.[54] What brought Cleopatra back to Rome (on this reconstruction) can only be guessed at. But an educated guess is possible. Now that Caesar's foes abroad had at last been defeated, the dictator could undertake a wholesale set of institutional and administrative reforms in earnest. Among them, as we know, were major plans for the Roman provinces, including a wide-ranging policy of colonization, both east and west. These involved, among other things, structural changes in provincial administration.[55] Another item of significance in this connection needs to be taken into account. It had not been very long before, in the 60s to be precise, that some Romans seriously discussed the possibility of annexing Egypt as a province.[56]

Under those circumstances, Cleopatra's reappearance in Rome seems almost mandatory. She needed to reiterate her claims on the realm of her forefathers. Even if the queen did not fear the conversion of Egypt into a province, she would surely have a stake in any discussion of the fate of Cyprus. Caesar, as we have seen, had awarded the island in 48 to Cleopatra's younger siblings, Arsinoë and Ptolemy XIV.[57] The situation had changed markedly since then. Arsinoë had been arrested by Caesar and had marched in his triumph, and young Ptolemy was now Cleopatra's husband. The queen would, understandably, be concerned about a possible Roman re-annexation of Cyprus, a jewel in the crown of Ptolemaic overseas possessions.[58]

Good reasons, therefore, existed for a return visit to Rome. A logical time would come after Caesar's triumphant re-entry and after his plans for reorganizing the empire began to take shape and receive public notice. The queen arrived perhaps early in the year 44.[59] Of course, she would not stay after the stabbing of Caesar. Protection of the homeland at a time of such

54. Vell. Pat. 2.56.3.
55. On Caesar's measures concerning the provinces, see Gelzer 1968, 288–9, 296–99, 311–12; Yavetz 1979, 109–10; Rawson 1994, 442–8.
56. Cic. *de Reg. Alex.* fr. 1–2, 6–7; *Lex Agrar.* 1.1, 2.41–4; Plut. *Crass.* 13.1–2; Suet. *Iul.* 11. Cf. Wiseman 1994, 345–6.
57. D.C. 42.35.5.
58. Cleopatra still held the island in 43, under the control of one of her military appointees; App. *BC* 4.61. We also possess a bronze coin representing Cleopatra with a baby, presumably Caesarion, and the monogram KVΠP for Cyprus; *BMC*, Cyprus, CXVII. This was evidently minted in 47 or early 46 when Caesarion was a baby, and indicates that Cleopatra controlled the island in those years. See Heinen 1969, 189. The effort of Bicknell 1977, 325–34, to deny that Cleopatra possessed the island before 44, based on Strab. 14.6.6, is unconvincing. Strabo clearly conflates material here. See Heinen 1966, 91, 145; Schrapel 1996, 106–24.
59. This would require a trip outside the normal season and one that might occupy two or three months. If Cleopatra left Alexandria after Caesar's return to Rome, she could hardly have arrived before the beginning of 44. The north-westerly winds, even in the sailing season, made the trip from Alexandria to Rome much longer than that from Rome to Alexandria, as few as nine days for the one and as many as seventy days for the other; Casson 1971, 282–3, 289, 297–9.

uncertainty and potential upheaval in the Mediterranean was vital. Cicero describes her exit as 'flight' (*fuga*), perhaps a rhetorical flourish. But he certainly does not make much of it, even telling Atticus that her departure is a matter of no great concern.[60] Subsequent Ciceronian references to her withdrawal from Rome are equally brief and elliptical, with an obscure allusion to some rumour whose meaning is never elucidated.[61] The rumour may have touched, in some way, on the situation and future of her son Caesarion and the supposed paternity of Caesar, an issue that would inevitably have been raised by the absence of any mention of him in the dictator's will. Cicero does, in any case, hint darkly that there is something he would wish to know about the queen and 'that Caesar'.[62] The reference surely points to Caesarion, who evidently left the city with his mother. In that connection it may be significant that Cicero says nothing about Ptolemy XIV, Cleopatra's consort and young brother. We know that he accompanied her on the trip to Rome in the autumn of 46.[63] The fact that he goes unmentioned in 44 supplies some support for the idea that this was a separate trip on Cleopatra's part. The teenager, in any case, perished in the summer of 44, allegedly poisoned by Cleopatra.[64] Perhaps he had attempted, or been a figurehead for, an attempted coup in her absence.

So much for speculation. The results can be summed up with brevity. The eighteen-month sojourn of Cleopatra in Rome, so peculiar, puzzling and paradoxical, though accepted almost unquestioningly by modern scholars, may be a phantom. It belongs in the same category with fantasies about Cleopatra holding court in Caesar's gardens, having her gilded statue set up in the temple of Venus Genetrix and turning Caesar's dictatorship into a Hellenistic monarchy—not to mention the Hollywood fantasy of Cleopatra entering the portals of Rome in a dazzling splendour and a grandiose eastern ostentation that no Roman would have tolerated for a moment. Once one dispenses with these ornate trappings, and with the extremely implausible (even nearly inconceivable) notion that Cleopatra dawdled for more than a year and half in Rome while her own kingdom rocked rudderless, a very different and more comprehensible scenario emerges.

It might be reconstructed as follows. Cleopatra came to Rome in 46 to secure official recognition, a signed and sealed treaty of alliance that would strengthen her hand in Egypt and accord her international esteem in the

60. Cic. *ad Att.* 14.8.1: 'The queen's flight does not bother me', *reginae fuga mihi non molesta est.*
61. Cic. *ad Att.* 14.20.2, 15.1.5: 'The rumour about the queen is losing strength', *de regina rumor extinguitur*; 15.4.4: 'I would like the story about the queen to be true', *de regina uerum uelim.*
62. Cic. *ad Att.* 14.20.2: 'I would like to know the truth about the queen and about that Caesar too', *de regina uelim atque etiam de Caesare illo.*
63. D.C. 43.28.3.
64. Jos. *Ant.* 15.89; *CAp.* 2.58; Porph. *FGH*, 260, F 2.16.

Near East. That she may have resumed her dalliance with Caesar, after not having seen him for over a year, is perfectly possible, but probably irrelevant. Caesar, in any case, left Rome for Spain a month later. Cleopatra did not even have an erotic motive for staying. She had accomplished her mission very satisfactorily and could return home, with treaties, honours and gifts in her luggage, as undisputed ruler of the Ptolemaic lands. When she next visited Rome, a similar purpose prompted the trip: to press the claims of her dynastic privileges at a time when the Caesarian government was reconsidering provincial policy in the eastern Mediterranean. Although Cleopatra may have had to leave earlier than anticipated when Caesar was treacherously murdered, she appears to have accomplished what she intended anyway. Egypt stood intact and even Cyprus remained under the authority of the queen. Cleopatra was no mere sexual predator, and certainly no plaything of Caesar, lolling about his gardens in Trastevere and loyally awaiting his return. She was queen of Egypt, Cyrene and Cyprus, heir to the long and proud dynasty of the Ptolemies, and now professed mother of Caesar's son, a passionate but also very astute woman who had manoeuvred Rome—and would manoeuvre Rome again—into advancing the interests of the Ptolemaic legacy.

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