

Critical Dialogues: A Critical Look at Cinema's Cleopatra

Throughout this session we will be taking a closer look at three films which depict the story of Cleopatra (detailed below). We will consider elements of each film including plot, casting, and characterisation, particularly in relation to the established narrative and image associated with Cleopatra. We will watch a number of short videos from the films together. The following readings and timeline serve largely to establish key elements of Cleopatra's narrative and briefly how she is portrayed by the major ancient authors.

Films:

Caesar and Cleopatra 1945 directed by Gabriel Pascal

A Queen for Caesar (Original title – *Una Regina per Cesare*) 1962 directed by Piero Pierotti and Viktor Tourjansky

Cleopatra 1963 directed by J.L. Mankiewicz

If you would like to watch any of these films, *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1945) and *Cleopatra* (1963) are available to view in full online through the UQ library website. A passable version of *A Queen for Caesar* can be found on Youtube. There are also a series of short videos and trailers from all of these films available on Youtube. Viewing these films in part or in full in preparation for the session is not essential by any means. If you would like to familiarise yourself with the plot, characters, and casting of these film please visit their IMDb pages, equally this is encouraged but not essential.

Readings:

Caesar and Cleopatra's Meeting

Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 42.34.4-6.

'She was a particularly beautiful woman and, at the time, being in her prime, she was conspicuously lovely. She also had an elegant voice and she knew how to use her charms to be attractive to everyone. Since she was beautiful to look at and listen to, she was able to captivate everyone even a man tired of love and past his prime. Thus, she thought it appropriate for her to meet with Caesar and she rested all her hopes of a successful outcome on her beauty. Therefore, she requested permission to go before Caesar and, when she received it, she put on all her finery so as to appear to him stately and pitiable at the same time. Once she had devised the perfect look, she entered the city (for she had been outside it) and approached the palace at night, keeping her arrival a secret from Ptolemy.'

Plutarch *Life of Caesar* 49

'Cleopatra, taking with her only Apollodorus the Sicilian out of all her entourage, travelling in a small boat, approached the palace as dusk was already falling; having no other means of escaping notice, she cloaked herself in a bedding sack and lay down flat. Apollodorus tied the bedding sack with a leather strap and carried it inside to Caesar. It is said that Caesar was taken with Cleopatra because of this first artifice, since she seemed intrepid and alluring, and, being no match for her charm and the pleasure of associating with her, he reconciled her with her brother, stipulating that she would have equal power.'

Caesarion

Suetonius *The Divine Julius Caesar* 52

'[Caesar] also allowed [Cleopatra] to name her son after him. Some Greek writers relate that the boy was like Caesar in both appearance and gait. Mark Antony also asserted in the senate that Caesar had acknowledged the boy as his own and that...other friends of Caesar knew it.'

Brief Timeline (dates are approximate and in BC)

323	Death of Alexander the Great Ptolemy I takes control of Egypt
305	Ptolemy I becomes king of Egypt
106	Pompey born
100	Julius Caesar born
83	Mark Antony born
70-69	Cleopatra VII born
61	Ptolemy XIII born
51	Death of Ptolemy XII Cleopatra VII and Ptolemy XII become rulers of Egypt
49	Cleopatra exiled to Upper Egypt War begins between Pompey and Caesar
48	Cleopatra expelled from Egypt Pompey defeated at Pharsalus and killed Caesar arrives in Egypt Alexandrian War begins
47	Ptolemy XII defeated Caesar installs Cleopatra and Ptolemy XIV as rulers of Egypt Caesarion born
46	Arsinoe IV in Caesar's triumph Cleopatra and Ptolemy XIV arrive in Rome
44	Caesar assassinated Ptolemy XIV murdered Cleopatra and Caesarion rulers of Egypt
42	Battle of Philippi
41	Antony and Cleopatra meet in Tarsus
40	Mark Antony's Parthian campaign Antony marries Octavia Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene born
36	Ptolemy Philadelphus born
32	Roman consul + 200 senators leave Rome to join Antony Antony divorces Octavia Octavian publishes Antony's will Octavian declares war on Cleopatra
31	Battle of Actium
30	Octavian annexes Egypt Suicides of Antony and Cleopatra