

For Cleopatra, the role of mother constituted an integral part of her political program. In sources from the Roman world, however, we find a surprising lack of attention paid to Cleopatra the mother. This paper argues that, while Cleopatra's identity as a woman and as a head of state must have seemed incongruous and even dangerous to the Romans, the ways in which she communicates her status as a mother would have been all too familiar to a Roman audience and, thus, would have created a public relations disaster in Octavian's attempts to demonize the woman upon whom he had to focus his attacks, lest his conflict with Mark Antony become civil war.

In Egypt, motherhood was essential to the mythology of the female pharaoh. As the earthly incarnation of Isis, the female pharaoh is the mother of Horus, the divine counterpart of the male pharaoh. As tends to be the case in hereditary monarchies, women, and specifically mothers, play a far greater role in politics than do their counterparts in forms of government not based on familial succession (Pomeroy 8). For Cleopatra in particular, motherhood guaranteed her supremacy: after engineering the deaths of her brothers and successive co-rulers, Cleopatra relied on her son, Caesarion, to be the Horus to her Isis.

In Octavian's propaganda, however, the queen is masculinized, in part because she must act as a substitute for and corrupter of Antony, but also because as a mother in a political family, she would draw unavoidable comparisons to women like Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi and even to legendary figures such as the Sabine women. Even more dangerous for Octavian, Cleopatra's motherhood brings to mind Octavian's own attempt to legitimize his rule by extending his adoptive relationship to Julius Caesar with the biological implications of the title *Divi Filius*. Perhaps the greatest testament to the ease with which Cleopatra the mother could be integrated into the Roman world is the speed with which Livia and Julia adopted aspects of her image after her death (Kleiner 253-55).

Likewise, Octavian's treatment of Cleopatra's children minimizes the maternal aspect of her public persona. He had Caesarion put to death, but not publicly. He also dealt with Cleopatra's other children, who were shown clemency, in relative privacy, in part no doubt to avoid the risk of arousing public sympathy. In addition, Octavian seems to have had Caesarion's image removed from the statue of Cleopatra that resided in the Temple of Venus Genetrix (Kleiner 153). Complete removal of a rival certainly provided one motive for Octavian, but eliminating the child from a mother and child sculpture in a temple devoted to the motherly aspect of Venus effectively abrogates Cleopatra's role as a mother and transforms Cleopatra from a woman central to the perpetuation of one of Rome's leading families to that of a captive. In its new significance, Cleopatra's statue becomes spoils of war and perhaps resembles personifications of conquered provinces, the iconography of which does not feature children (Smith 59, 70-71).

Authors influenced by Octavian's propaganda also reflect his suppression of Cleopatra the mother. In Horace's *Ode* 1.37, Cleopatra redeems herself by taking on masculine qualities (e.g. *nec muliebriter*, 22). In a more subtle but perhaps even more telling choice, Plutarch describes Cleopatra arriving at Tarsus dressed as Aphrodite (*Ant.* 26.2), although her costume doubtless evoked Isis as well (Grant 117-18). While this might seem to be an unremarkable instance assimilating a foreign goddess to one familiar to Plutarch's Greek-speaking audience, there would have been little need to omit a reference to Isis. As the author of *On Isis and Osiris*, Plutarch surely would have understood the significance of Cleopatra's costume. Likewise, Plutarch's audience of Greeks living in the Roman Empire would have had sufficient familiarity with the cult of Isis to understand a description that included this deity. Thus, it is likely that Plutarch mentions only Aphrodite for reasons relating to his characterization of Cleopatra. While Aphrodite is the Greek goddess who most closely approximates the Egyptian Isis, Aphrodite's identity as a divinity associated with fertility and procreation focuses more on sex than motherhood, the quality more closely linked to Isis.

The evidence this paper presents indicates a conscious attempt to decrease Cleopatra's impact as a mother when she is presented to audiences in the Roman Empire. The similarities between the political use both Cleopatra and the Romans make of motherhood explain the political advantage Octavian gained by suppressing this aspect of Cleopatra's self-presentation.