

Caput III. Caesar and Cleopatra

Cleopatra

*Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero
pulsanda tellus, nunc Saliaribus
ornare pulvinar deorum
tempus erat dapibus, sodales.*

*Antehac nefas depromere Caecubum
cellis avitis, dum Capitolio
regina dementes ruinas
funus et imperio parabat*

*contaminato cum grege turpium
morbo virorum, quidlibet impotens
sperare fortunaque dulci
ebria. Sed minuit furorem*

*vix una sospes navis ab ignibus,
memtemque lymphatam Mareotico
redegit in veros timores
Caesar, ab Italia volantem*

*remis adurgens, accipiter velut
molles columbas aut leporem citus
venator in campis nivalis
Haemoniae, daret ut catenis*

*fatale monstrum: quae generosius
perire quaerens nec muliebriter
expavit ensum nec latentes
classe cita reparavit oras;*

*ausa et iacentem visere regiam
vultu sereno, fortis et asperas
tractare serpentes, ut atrum
corpore combiberet venenum,*

*deliberata morte ferocior,
saevis Liburnis scilicet invidens
privata deduci superbo
non humilis mulier triumpho.*

Horace, Odes, 1, 37

Cleopatra – The Life

Cleopatra VII ruled Egypt as co-regent (first with her father, then with her two younger brothers, and finally her son) for almost three decades. She was born either 70 or 69 BCE. She was the daughter of **Ptolemy XII Auletes**, a descendant of **Ptolemy I Soter**, one of **Alexander the Great's** generals, founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty

Dynastic problems resulted in Cleopatra fleeing Egypt for **Syria** in 49 BCE. One year later, having raised an army, she attacked and won the battle of **Pelusium**, on Egypt's eastern border. Meanwhile, the Roman general **Pompey**, landed in Egypt. He was murdered on landing. **Ptolemy XIII**, playing Roman-against-Roman allowed Pompey's rival **Caesar** to land in Egypt. Cleopatra, to further her claim to the throne, sought Caesar's aid by having herself smuggled into the palace to plead her case. Legend claims Cleopatra entered Caesar's private quarters rolled within a carpet. This act is often seen as a 'romantic' gesture. No, the act was a calculated political gesture

Caesar was desperate for money, he marched to Alexandria and defeated Pompey's troops. Yes, he restored Cleopatra to the throne

There is a romantic twist to the meeting of Cleopatra and Caesar. About the year 47 BCE, Cleopatra gave birth to a son, named **Ptolemy Caesar**, often referred to by Egyptians as **Caesarion** or **Little Caesar**

Sometime in 46-45 BCE, Cleopatra travelled with Caesarion to Rome. She was in Rome on the day of Caesar's assassination

Caesar's death resulted in civil war. **Mark Antony**, **Octavian** (Caesar's nephew), and **Lepidus**, the **second triumvirate**, were arrayed against **Brutus** and **Cassius**, the assassins. Roman troops stationed in Egypt supported Antony and Octavian, winning the battle at **Philippi**. Antony and Octavian co-shared rule

Roman politics were acutely complicated post-Caesar's assignation. Antony now associated himself with Cleopatra. In turn, the Roman Senate stripped him of all titles. Octavian perceiving a challenge, defeated Antony and Cleopatra at the naval battle of **Actium**, the western coast of Greece. Antony hearing post-battle, Cleopatra had committed suicide, also committed suicide. Antony fell on his sword at the same moment word arrived the rumour had been revealed false

Cleopatra returned to Egypt and buried Antony. She met Octavian the victor. Then, she entombed herself in the same vault as Antony. Caesarion, age 16, was murdered shortly after his mother's death

Cleopatra – The Poem

Nunc est bibendum...Now is the time to drink...is the poem's opening words speak of an era of heroic deeds done and echoed in the third line of the second stanza: **regina dementes ruinas, the queen demented ruined**

Horace wrote his ode of joy to celebrate Octavian's naval victory at **Actium**, the capture of Alexandria, and the death of Cleopatra. Triumph over the fallen queen in the first, four stanzas is countered in the last-half of the ode with admiration for her pride and courage

The first two lines of the seventh stanza **ausa et iacentem visere regiam** and **vultu sereno, fortis et asperas**, **audacious and prostate the stare of the queen** and **countenance bright, strong and fierce** are the rebuttal to defeat. For the poem's ending line sums Roman awe of an equal **non humilis mulier triumpho, not a low woman, rejoice**