CLEOPATRA: PERFORMING POWER Humanities Seminar Spring 2024



Antioch coin, Vatican head, Pompeii fresco

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Course Description: This course focuses on Cleopatra VII (69-30 BCE), the far-famed last ruler of Ptolemaic Egypt and a key powerbroker during a period of important political change. Her legacy in the western world emphasizes her actions as a "romantic" agent, a deployer of "feminine wiles", a hostile representation drawn by her opponents. A broader examination of Cleopatra's context demonstrates her connections to dynamic royal women in the Hellenistic world, all image-makers in their own right, wielding female authority and patronage in a cosmopolitan, multicultural world. This course will sift through the evidence for Cleopatra VII, both the contentious (and largely hostile) material on her Mediterranean activities as well as the Egyptian record, which incorporates the specific efforts of the queen herself to assert her legitimate imperial authority and structure her collaboration with major stakeholders in the Hellenistic East.

Throughout the course, students will be assessing ancient evidence and its modern interpretation; challenging traditional assumptions about a significant historical character and considering the social and political interests that underlie those assumptions, in antiquity and in more modern periods; and analyzing ancient material in multiple genres, textual and visual.

For each class meeting, students will read collected snippets of ancient texts in translation, which will be posted on the course website in digital format. Visual materials and links to archaeological evidence will also be made available.

Course Outline:

Week 1:	Queenly Dynasts in a Spear-Won World
	Read: Selections from Plutarch, Justin, Appian, Diodorus Siculus, Memnon, Athenaeus, Theocritus, and Strabo.
Week 2:	Family Friction: Habits of the Ptolemies Read: Selections from Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch, Polybius, Josephus, Athenaeus, Justin, Strabo, and Livy.

Week 3:	Cleopatra and Caesar Read: Selections from Appian, Caesar, Suetonius, Dio Cassius, Josephus, Lucan, and Cicero.
Week 4:	Cleopatra and Egypt Read: Selections from Valerius Maximus and Strabo.
Week 5:	Cleopatra and Antony Read: Selections from Josephus, Cicero, Horace, Propertius, Athenaeus, Pliny, Plutarch, Appian, and Dio Cassius.

Instructor: Prof. Alison Futrell focuses on the performance and imagery of power in imperial Rome, with special interest in spectacle, gender, and pop culture. She has authored and edited *Blood in the Arena; The Roman Games*; and *The Oxford Handbook of Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World*, as well as pieces on *Viking Queen* (1967), *Spartacus* (1960 and 2010-13), HBO's *Rome* (2005, 2007) and *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001). She appeared as a talking head most recently for National Geographic, BBC History Extra, and the History Channel's eight-part series "Colosseum".