

WHAT TO DO WITH CAESARION

This article is about a young man of whom we know almost nothing. He never said or did anything that was recorded, we do not know for certain what he looked like, and his personality is entirely lost to us. He was killed at the age of seventeen, but even that event is passed over in fleeting comment. However, the very mention of his demise tells us something: that despite our almost total ignorance about the youth himself he was not without some importance. He was at least in name a king, though it can hardly be said that he ever ruled. Yet his birth and death were equally planned, and from his birth onwards he was someone who figured in the plans and dreams of mighty people. Those plans and dreams shifted with the politics of the day, and he was always a pawn on the chessboard of life. What follows here examines how the personalities of the great people around him and their changing fortunes governed how he was seen, and the uses to which he was put.

He was the son of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, and during and after his short life he was popularly known as Caesarion (Καίσαριών, ‘Little Caesar’), a nickname given to him by the Alexandrian populace when he was an infant.¹ Officially he was named Ptolemy Caesar and is usually listed these days as Ptolemy XV.² Though generally referred to as a king, albeit a nominal one, he was also a pharaoh with a string of traditional pharaonic titles.³ The two titles – king and pharaoh – aptly illustrate the two Egypts ruled by the Ptolemy dynasty: one a Hellenistic

¹ On the name as a joke, see J. Deininger, ‘Bemerkungen zum alexandrinischen Scherznamen für Ptolemaios XV’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 131 (2000), 221–6.

² Numbering the Ptolemies has varied depending on whether Ptolemy Neos Philopator (briefly 145 BC) is counted as Ptolemy VII, as in the current practice: see P. Green, *From Alexander to Actium* (Berkeley, CA, 1990), 537. An elder brother of Neos Philopator named Ptolemy Eupator was co-king c.155–150 BC but is not often counted. A more recent renumbering is that of W. Huss, *Ägypten in Hellenistischer Zeit* (Munich, 2001).

³ Iwa-panetjer-entynehem, Setep-en-Ptah, Ir-maat-en-re, Sekhem-ankh-Amun: ‘Heir of the God that saves, Chosen of Ptah, Carrying out the rule of Re, Living image of Amun’. As with pharaohs for centuries before him, these names included his throne name and his Horus name. P. Clayton, *Chronicle of the Pharaohs* (London, 1994), 213, 218; A. Dodson *Monarchs of the Nile* (London, 1995), 212.

kingdom based on Alexandria and a scattering of Greek colonies, the other the greater native realm speaking an ancient tongue that stretched southwards from Alexandria to (occasionally rebellious) Thebes and on to Philae, where it abutted the kingdom of Meroe.⁴ By Caesarion's day there had been no major native threat for some years, and the later Ptolemies appealed to native sentiment by being crowned at Memphis, the old capital, by the high priest of Ptah and by embellishing traditional temples or building new ones.⁵

The mother: Cleopatra

Caesarion's birth resulted from the confluence of two civil wars: one Egyptian, one Roman. The Egyptian one stemmed from the will of his grandfather Ptolemy XII, self-proclaimed as the 'New Dionysus', though his less than admiring subjects called him 'the Flute Player' (*Auletes*) or simply 'the Bastard' (*Nothos*).⁶ In 58 BC his subservience to Rome and his failure to support his brother when the latter was dispossessed of Cyprus by the Romans had led to his expulsion by his exasperated subjects.⁷ Briefly replaced by his wife, Cleopatra VI, and then by their daughter Berenice IV and her husband, Archelaus, he was forcibly restored by Roman arms in 55 BC and celebrated by slaying Berenice and her supporters.⁸ His restoration had been backed by

⁴ Both kingdoms made dedications at the border temple of Isis at Philae but relations in Cleopatra's time were at best guarded and uneasy. D. Welsby, *The Kingdom of Kush* (London, 1996), 67–8.

⁵ The last unsuccessful attempts to replace the Ptolemies by native pharaohs had occurred in 205–186 BC and 131 BC, but there had been an uprising at Thebes as recently as 88 BC. G. Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire* (London, 2001), 154–7, 164–6, 184, 198–9, 259–9; K. Myśliwiec *The Twilight of Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, NY, 2000), 182; Welsby (n. 4), 67; J. Baines and J. Málek, *Atlas of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1980), 54; E. Bevan, *The House of Ptolemy* (reprint, Chicago, IL, 1985), 318–23; A.-E. Veisse, *Les revoltes égyptiennes. Recherches sur les troubles intérieurs en Égypte du règne de Ptolémée III à la conquête romaine* (Leuven, 2004). In Egypt's great imperial age, Thebes and its temple of Amun-Re had been the main beneficiaries of royal bounty but the Ptolemies saw the city as a focus of native unrest, hence they patronized Memphis and Ptah.

⁶ His official Greek titles were *Theos Philopator Philadelphos Neos Dionysos* ('Father- and brother/sister-loving god, the new Dionysus'). Ptolemy Auletes and his brother Ptolemy of Cyprus were sons of Ptolemy IX Lathyrus by a concubine. In the eyes of his native Egyptian subjects the legitimacy issue was irrelevant, as a number of past pharaohs had been the children of concubines.

⁷ Strabo 14.6.6; Plut. *Vit. Cat. Min.* 24.2, 28.1–2; Livy, *Per.* 104.6.

⁸ It remains a matter of debate whether the Cleopatra VI Tryphaena who briefly reigned immediately after Auletes' expulsion was his wife Cleopatra or an eldest daughter of the same name. Bevan (n. 5), 354; Hölbl (n. 5), 227; Green (n. 2), 650. Berenice IV's first husband when she succeeded had been the pseudo-Seleucid Seleucus Cybiosactes, but she killed him after only a few days.

Pompey and Caesar (in harmony at the time) and carried out by Gabinius the Roman governor of Syria, who left some legions in Egypt to prop up Auletes' throne.⁹

Auletes had bought his return by borrowing huge amounts from wealthy Romans with which to bribe other Romans, and the money had to be repaid in some way. Egypt was wealthy but money was still owing when he died in 51 BC. He left behind four surviving children by different wives: Cleopatra, the future mother of Caesarion, aged about eighteen; her sister Arsinoë, perhaps three or four years younger; and two boys, both named Ptolemy, the elder about ten and the younger perhaps about nine.¹⁰ A year before he died he had associated Cleopatra with him as co-regent, thus ensuring that his unpopularity rubbed off onto her. In Auletes' will, Egyptian prejudice in favour of male rulers was met by leaving the throne jointly to Cleopatra and the elder of the two Ptolemy boys, who succeeded as Cleopatra VII and Ptolemy XIII. They were proclaimed as Philopator, 'father-loving', which may even have been true in Cleopatra's case; following tradition Cleopatra VII nominally married her brother Ptolemy XIII.¹¹

In his will Ptolemy XII had invoked Roman protection for his children, in effect recognition of their status. This was necessary as Egypt's independence in Roman eyes was less than clear. In 156 BC Auletes' grandfather Ptolemy VIII had made a will leaving Egypt, Cyrene, and Cyprus (all Ptolemaic possessions in his day) to Rome should he die childless.¹² He had children so the will never operated, though it did set a fashion among client kings.¹³ His bastard son Ptolemy Apion inherited Cyrene and left it to Rome in 96 BC, though Rome permitted Cyrene to exist in a kind of semi-free limbo for years. Later Auletes' cousin and predecessor, Ptolemy XI (Alexander

⁹ Cic. *Pis.* 21.49–50; Cic. *Rab. Post.* 20, 28; Livy, *Per.* 105; Cass. Dio 42.2.4; Luc. 8.448–9, 518–19; 9.1028–9.

¹⁰ See family tree at the end of the article.

¹¹ Cleopatra's parents had also been brother and sister. Brother–sister marriage was common with the Ptolemies from the days of Ptolemy II (282–246 BC) but was not characteristic of the other Hellenistic dynasties. It had been practised by Egyptian pharaohs centuries earlier and by the Achaemenids of Persia. J. Tyldesley, *Cleopatra. Last Queen of Egypt* (New York, 2008), 23–6; A. Goldsworthy, *Antony and Cleopatra* (New Haven, CT, 2010), 40–1. See also S. L. Ager, 'Familiarity Breeds: Incest and the Ptolemaic Dynasty', *JHS* 125 (2005), 1–34.

¹² A. Meadows 'Sins of the Fathers', in S. Walker and P. Higgs (eds.), *Cleopatra of Egypt. From History to Myth* (London, 2001), 20.

¹³ Their countries were bequeathed (without reference to the inhabitants) by Attalus III of Pergamum (133 BC), Ptolemy Apion of Cyrene (96 BC), Ptolemy XI of Egypt (see above), and Nicomedes IV of Bithynia (c.74 BC).

II), did leave Egypt to Rome in 80 BC, but the Senate declined to act on the bequest as it worried about any Roman in charge of Egypt.¹⁴ Instead it permitted the illegitimate Auletes to take the throne by default, though, based on the will, it seized Cyprus in 58 BC. Auletes was no doubt aware that outright Roman annexation of Egypt had been debated in the Senate in 65 BC with no result, and his will was designed to pre-empt a reoccurrence.¹⁵

Despite the murderous family history of the Ptolemies, Auletes had hopefully proclaimed all his surviving children as *Philadelphoi*, ‘brother/sister-loving’, but the joint rule of Cleopatra VII and Ptolemy XIII fell apart immediately. In so doing it created one of the two converging streams that led to the birth of Caesarion. The other stream was that of the Roman civil war between Caesar and Pompey. In Egypt Cleopatra’s inherited unpopularity and her obvious determination to rule with scant regard for her nominal brother-husband, Ptolemy XIII, enabled a court clique led by the eunuch Pothinus and his ally Achillas to drive her out of Alexandria in 50 BC.¹⁶ She fled to Upper Egypt, no doubt using her knowledge of native Egyptian (she was the only known member of the dynasty to learn the native tongue and was reputedly a gifted linguist). From there she moved to Ascalon, where she gathered troops and marched on Egypt.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Pothinus and his allies governed in the name of the puppet boy-king, Ptolemy XIII.¹⁸ Watching the Roman civil war to decide who would come out on top, they sent sixty ships to support Pompey, though these took no part in the actual conflict.¹⁹ In August 48 BC

¹⁴ A century and a half after William Smith declared it impossible to determine which Ptolemy Alexander left Egypt to Rome – either Ptolemy X (Alexander I) in 87 BC or Ptolemy XI (Alexander II) in 80 BC – the question remains unresolved. W. Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* (London, 1850), iii.587. See also Green (n. 2), 553; Hölbl (n. 5), 211; Bevan (n. 5), 350.

¹⁵ Plut. *Vit. Crass.* 13.1; Suet. *Iul.* 11.1.

¹⁶ Eusebius strangely thought Cleopatra was content with joint rule and that it was Ptolemy XIII who wanted to rule alone. A. Schoene (ed.), *Eusebii Chronicon Libri Duo* (Berlin, 1875), i.167–8.

¹⁷ Ascalon was a Hellenistic free city from 104 BC, having been liberated from Hasmonean rule by Cleopatra’s grandfather Ptolemy IX Lathyrus. In gratitude it continued thereafter to place the heads of Egyptian rulers on its coins. M. Grant, *A Guide to the Ancient World* (New York, 1986), 72.

¹⁸ Lucan has Cleopatra claiming that she was really loved by her brother Ptolemy XIII but he was controlled by Pothinus: Luc. 10.94–5. He did not show it.

¹⁹ Appian says that the ships were provided by Cleopatra and her brother who was still a boy, but in 48 BC Cleopatra was in no position to send any Egyptian ships. They would have been sent by Pothinus and Achillas on behalf of Ptolemy XIII. Appian’s wording implies some uncertainty about whether the ships were sent at all. App. *B Civ.* 2.71.

Pompey was defeated by Caesar at Pharsalus and fled to Egypt, where Achilles and his forces were marshalled to oppose Cleopatra's expected attack. As the man mostly responsible for replacing the boy-king's father, Auletes, on his throne only seven years earlier, Pompey could reasonably expect aid and support. Instead he was murdered on his landing while the gold-armoured Ptolemy XIII watched from the shore.²⁰

The father: Caesar

If the Egyptians thought that this would keep Caesar away or give him no reason to stay they were soon disappointed. Among other things he wanted the money still owed from the days of Auletes²¹ and announced his intention of upholding the will of Ptolemy Auletes that Egypt should be ruled jointly by Cleopatra VII and Ptolemy XIII, a decision encouraged after Cleopatra had herself smuggled into him.²² As a sop to the Pothinus clique and the manifest anti-Roman feeling of the Alexandrians, Caesar arbitrarily appointed the other royal siblings, Arsinoë and the youngest Ptolemy, to the throne of Cyprus, grandly surrendering a Roman province. Nothing came of this as Caesar found himself besieged in Alexandria by the mob, while Arsinoë and Ptolemy XIII joined the army against him. The Alexandrian War dragged on into the next year when Caesar's reinforcements (including a Jewish contingent) defeated the Egyptian forces. Ptolemy XIII died in the fighting and Arsinoë was packed off to Rome.

Cleopatra was now undisputed Queen of Egypt, but since tradition required a male co-regent she nominally married her remaining boy brother, who became Ptolemy XIV.²³ Caesar and Cleopatra went on a long trip up the Nile to see the sights (and display Roman power to the natives), after which Caesar departed to fight the remaining

²⁰ Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 77.1–79.4; App. *B Civ.* 2.84–6; Cass. Dio 42.3.1–4.5; Caes. *B Civ.* 3.104; Luc. 8.688–90; Vell. Pat. 2.53.1–4; Livy, *Per.* 112. Dio seems to imply that the boy Ptolemy was not privy to the plan to kill Pompey, or at least could have been swayed by Pompey had the latter had a chance to speak to him; however, Livy's *Periochae* claims that the order to kill came from Ptolemy at the instigation of his tutor, Theodotion.

²¹ Strictly speaking the money was owed to C. Rabirius Postumus, but somehow Caesar had acquired the reversion. Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 48.4.

²² Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 49.1.

²³ Caes. *B Civ.* 3.107–22; Caes. *B Alex.* 1–33; App. *B Civ.* 2.88–90; Cass. Dio 42.34.1–45.1; Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 48–9; Joseph, *AJ* 14.127–6; Joseph, *BJ* 1.187–94.

Pompeian holdouts but left some Roman troops behind to buttress Cleopatra's regime. To increase her popularity he also gave her Cyprus. More importantly, he left Cleopatra pregnant with Caesarion.²⁴ On Cleopatra's part it was unquestionably deliberate, the forging of a bond with Rome's greatest general which would stand her and Egypt in good stead. What she thought about the future of such a child was probably hazy, but as a Hellenistic monarch with perhaps only a limited understanding of the Roman constitution she may well even at this stage have dreamed of the child as somehow succeeding Caesar as well as herself. Even before his birth, Caesarion's future was already being mapped out.

Apart from Octavian's later propaganda, the seeming uncertainty of some ancient authors, and a few historians today, most scholars accept Caesar's paternity of Caesarion.²⁵ The most compelling argument in its favour is that when Cleopatra later took the boy to Rome and Caesar had ample opportunity to deny his paternity he did not do so, and was pushing for legislation that could have led to formal recognition of his relationship to the boy. Equally weight has to be given to Mark Antony's later affirmation in the Senate that Caesar had acknowledged the boy to be his and that this was known to Caius Matius and Caius Oppius.²⁶

What is much less clear is the nature of the relationship between the fifty-two-year-old Caesar and the twenty-two-year-old Cleopatra. Writers both ancient and later have described Caesar as besotted by a beautiful seductress, though other modern authors have seen the episode as a casual affair that meant nothing to a notorious womanizer. In fact, despite the age difference the two had much in common. Both were risk-takers, both were ruthlessly ambitious, and both were proud: Cleopatra as the descendant of a long line of kings and one already accorded divine status by her subjects, and Caesar who could

²⁴ Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 48.3–49.5; Livy, *Per.* 112; Caes. *B Civ.* 3.106–12; Caes. *B Alex.* 1–33; Suet. *Iul.* 35.1; Luc. 10.333–546; App. *B Civ.* 2.90; Cass. Dio 42.37.1–43.4; C. Meier, *Caesar* (New York, 1996), 406–11; L. Canfora, *Julius Caesar. The People's Dictator* (Berkeley, CA, 2007), 199–204; M. Grant, *Cleopatra* (Edison, NJ, 2004), 70–8; D. E. E. Kleiner, *Cleopatra and Rome* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), 84–5.

²⁵ Modern authors denying or doubting Caesar's paternity include Jérôme Carcopino and J. P. V. D. Balsdon. The arguments for and against are admirably summarized by C. Bennet, 'Ptolemy XV Cesarion', *Egyptian Royal Genealogies* (2000–1), <<http://www.reocities.com/christopherjben-nett/ptolemies/genealogy.htm>>, accessed 23 October 2013. See also Grant (n. 23), 83–5; Tyldesley (n. 10), 100–3; A. Everitt, *Augustus* (New York, 2006), 148; Bevan (n. 5), 366.

²⁶ Suet. *Iul.* 52.2.

boast descent from the goddess Venus and one of the early kings of Rome.²⁷ They were both highly intelligent and well educated, and neither felt bound to follow convention where it conflicted with their goals. It is likely that they fascinated each other, and developed a profound mutual respect which included a large measure of affection and even some sexual chemistry.²⁸

That being said, the conception of Caesarion was as deliberate an outcome as such things can be. Cleopatra's motive is clear enough: to have a child (preferably a son) by the conquering Caesar.²⁹ True, there were still Pompeian forces to be fought; in fact, defeating these at Munda was a close run thing, but given Caesar's record of conquest by 47 BC it was a reasonable bet that he would emerge victorious. If he had not done so – if the Pompeian forces had in fact prevailed and Caesar had been killed – the fate of any child of his by Cleopatra must remain unknown, though the Pompeians would not have had the same kind of reason that Octavian had later to kill him.

Caesar's motive in having a child by Cleopatra is less clear. He was probably by this time already planning a war of revenge against Parthia over the death of his ally Crassus six years earlier and Egypt would have been a most useful ally in this but, given Rome's power, Egypt would have had little choice anyway. It may simply have appealed to his vanity to father a child by the Queen of Egypt, a goddess in her own land, whose family had ancient connections with his hero Alexander the Great.³⁰ The idea that one day a son of his would be King of Egypt almost certainly pleased him, especially as such a ruler would be regarded as a god.

Caesarion was probably born in the summer of 47 BC after Caesar's departure, and a coin struck in Cyprus by Cleopatra from soon after this shows her holding her baby son,³¹ though for some months at

²⁷ His grandmother Marcia claimed descent from Ancus Marcius, traditionally listed as the fourth king of Rome in the seventh century BC. Suet. *Iul.* 6.1; Val. Max. 4.3.4; Ov. *Fast.* 6.801–3.

²⁸ Meier (n. 23), 408–9; J. Tyldesley, *Chronicle of the Queens of Egypt* (London, 2006), 202; M. Wyke, *Caesar. A Life in Western Culture* (London, 2007), 90–121.

²⁹ A daughter would have raised issues for them later. Equally illegitimate in Roman law as a son, she would have had to be found a husband one day. Caesar loved his only daughter, Julia, and had lost her seven years earlier. Cleopatra eventually had a daughter by Antony who married the scholarly Juba II of Mauretania. J. Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society* (Princeton, NJ, 1984), 76–110; E. Cantarella, *Pandora's Daughters* (Baltimore, MD, 1987), 90–8.

³⁰ The Lagid dynasty, the Ptolemies, descended from Ptolemy I Soter, whose mother, Arsinoë, was a second cousin of Alexander the Great's father, Philip II of Macedon. Ptolemy was also reputed to have been Philip's illegitimate son by Arsinoë. Paus. 1.6.2; Curt. 9.8.22.

³¹ Grant (n. 23), fig. 29 (facing p. 111). The baby's head is just a blob.

least he would have been fed by a wet-nurse.³² Caesar continued the war against the Pompeians in north Africa (during which he had an affair with Eunoë, the wife of King Bogud of western Mauretania³³), returning to Rome in late September 46 BC to celebrate a string of triumphs. Among the chained captives was Cleopatra's sister, Arsinoë, who so excited the crowd's sympathy that she was immediately sent off in exile to Ephesus.³⁴ Soon afterwards Cleopatra herself arrived, accompanied by the infant Caesarion and her teenage brother-husband and nominal co-ruler, Ptolemy XIV. Her main purpose – which she speedily achieved – was to get a formal recognition of Egypt's independence, but the future of Caesarion cannot have been far from her mind. Her stay in Rome was probably also intended to get a feel for what possibilities might be open to Caesar's natural son there. Under Roman law the child had no legal existence: Calpurnia was Caesar's legal wife not Cleopatra, and in any case the law prohibited legal marriage with foreigners.³⁵ Cleopatra was probably aware (or made aware) of this but, since her father had been illegitimate and still gained a kingdom and since as a divine monarch she was above any laws at home, she may have believed that what applied to ordinary mortals could be subverted for Caesar and herself.

As long as Cleopatra hoped or thought that Caesarion might have a future in Rome there was still room for the boy Ptolemy XIV. There was ample precedent among the Ptolemies for brother–sister marriage to be a real marriage, and by this time Ptolemy XIV had reached puberty. The reserve possibility of bearing a child by her brother may therefore have been entertained by Cleopatra should other options fail. Any child of Cleopatra and Ptolemy would have a double claim to the Egyptian throne, and, given the high rate of infant mortality in the ancient world, there was no guarantee that Caesarion would live long anyway.

Cleopatra was no doubt encouraged when Caesar dedicated a new temple to his family deity, Venus Genetrix, and next to the cult statue

³² For an Egyptian contract (13 BC) stipulating the duties and requirements for a wet-nurse, see '16. Engagement of a Wet Nurse', in a. Hunt and C. C. Edgar (ed.), *Select Papyri* (London, 1988) i.47–51. See also Plaut. *Men.* 20–1; Varro, *Ling.* 9.15; Ov. *Met.* 4.324; Syrus, *Sent.* 659; Juv. 6.592–3.

³³ Suet. *Iul.* 52.1. Apparently this did not affect Bogud's politic support for Caesar, and he was instrumental in helping to win at Munda. Meier (n. 23), 453.

³⁴ Cass. Dio 43.19.12.

³⁵ Gai. *Inst.* 1.55–87; *Inst. Inst.* 1.10.praef.; J. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (Bloomington, IN, 1991), 31.

of Venus placed one of her. Since the worship of Isis was becoming increasingly popular in the Greek and Roman world and Isis was often identified with Venus, it is possible that the statue was in fact of Isis, though the features were those of Cleopatra.³⁶ Either way it sent a message about Cleopatra's standing in Caesar's affections. Caesar then went off to Spain to defeat the remaining Pompeians and only returned to Rome victorious in September 45 BC. Whether Cleopatra went back to Alexandria for a time during his absence is unknown, but if she did she would have taken both Caesarion and Ptolemy XIV with her. Caesarion was a baby and the boy Ptolemy XIV could not safely be left at large in case opposition to Cleopatra formed about him as it had done with his dead older brother. In any event, they were all back in Rome again by late 45 BC.

What is clear is that at Rome Cleopatra publicly asserted Caesarion to be Caesar's son and Caesar did nothing to repudiate this claim and may even have acknowledged it.³⁷ It is interesting to speculate what would have happened to the infant if Cleopatra had died at this time. Would Caesar have raised the child? It would have been folly to send him back to Egypt with Ptolemy XIV and the court clique; the history of the Ptolemies did not favour two brothers ruling or even surviving long together.³⁸ It is doubtful whether Caesar's Roman wife, Calpurnia, would have raised the boy, unlike that later paragon Octavia, who raised all Antony's brood. Speculation is mere interest, however, since the issue did not arise; it was Caesar who died, not Cleopatra.

The Roman elite did not warm to Cleopatra, and attributed some of Caesar's projects to her malign influence. Cicero told Atticus that he hated 'the queen', but that was probably because she failed to flatter his vanity.³⁹ How many of Caesar's supposed plans at this stage were true or whether they have come down to us from hostile propaganda is unclear, but one in particular related to Caesarion. A tribune

³⁶ App. *B Civ.* 2.102; Meier (n. 23), 445–6; Tyldesley (n. 10), 106. However, Caesar also set up a statue of his horse in front of the temple: Suet. *Iul.* 61. The suggestion that the Cleopatra statue was really of Isis is difficult to square with a decree of only 48 BC banning shrines to Isis and Serapis. C. Alfano 'Egyptian Influences in Italy', in Walker and Higgs (n. 11), 285; H. J. Rose, *Religion in Greece and Rome* (New York, 1959), 281–2; E. Orlin 'Octavian and Egyptian Cults: Redrawing the Boundaries of Romanness', *AJP* 129.2 (2008), 231–58.

³⁷ Suet. *Iul.* 52.1–2.

³⁸ Ptolemy VI Philometor and his brother Ptolemy VIII Physcon battled over the throne (170–45 BC); Ptolemy IX Soter II and his brother Ptolemy X Alexander I (116–88 BC) did the same.

³⁹ Cic. *Att.* 15.5.2.

named Helvius Cinna claimed that Caesar had ordered him to prepare a bill that would permit Caesar to have more than one wife for the purpose of begetting children.⁴⁰ If this was with Caesarion in mind then Caesar's intention may well have been the boy's retroactive legitimization.⁴¹ There seems little doubt that at this period Caesar toyed with the idea of kingship, and may also have begun to see himself as at least semi-divine.⁴² For this Cleopatra's example, and more generally the precedent of Ptolemaic and other Hellenistic rulers, rather than her perverse influence may have played a part. Yet whatever Caesar's ultimate intentions for Caesarion may have been, he had made no mention of him in his revised will which he drew up on his return from Spain in late 45 BC. There he had adopted his great-nephew Caius Octavius as his principal heir. Since Caesarion had no standing under Roman law Caesar could hardly have included him at this time. Interestingly, among the secondary legatees was Decimus Brutus, one of Caesar's more distinguished commanders in the Civil War (though included among his assassins), who may possibly have also been the product of one of Caesar's amours.⁴³

It is quite possible that at this stage Cleopatra's plans for Caesarion, and perhaps even Caesar's, assumed some future at Rome. Caesar was planning a war against the Parthians to avenge Crassus, a war in which Egyptian support would be highly useful. If Caesar were to have returned victorious from the east having recaptured the legionary standards lost by Crassus at Carrhae and humbled Parthia, nothing would have stood in his way. If Caesarion could then have been legitimized by a senatorial or popular decree he could indeed have had a future role in what would almost certainly have been some kind of Roman monarchy.

Caesar's assassination in March 44 BC changed everything for Cleopatra and Caesarion. The assassins had debated also killing Caesar's deputy, Mark Antony, but thought better of it. Given her

⁴⁰ Suet. *Iul.* 52.3. C. Helvius Cinna was a poet and friend of Catullus. He was killed at Caesar's funeral when he was mistaken for one of the assassins. Catull. 95; Quint. *Inst.* 10.4.4; Suet. *Iul.* 85.

⁴¹ *Legitimatio per subsequens matrimonium* ('legitimization by subsequent marriage') was unknown to classical law but a vote of the populace could presumably have circumvented this. F. Schulz, *Classical Roman Law* (Oxford, 1961), 143.

⁴² Cic. *Phil.* 2.34.87; App. *B Civ.* 2.107–19; Livy, *Per.* 116.1; Cass. Dio 44.9.1–11, 15.3–4; Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 60.1–61.5; Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 12.1–4. See also Meier (n. 23), 475–9; Canfora (n. 23), 285–9; Wyke (n. 27), 151–3; R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (reprint, Oxford, 1956), 54–5.

⁴³ Nic. Dam. *FGrH* F.130.20; Suet. *Iul.* 83.1–2; Livy, *Per.* 116; Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 64.1; App. *B Civ.* 2.143; R. Syme 'No Son for Caesar?', in *Roman Papers III*, ed. A. R. Birley (Oxford, 1984), 1236–50.

background, Cleopatra might well have believed that Caesarion's life was in danger, and in any case she had to abandon any plans or dreams about a Roman future for him. She left Rome within a few weeks, heading back to Egypt with Caesarion and Ptolemy XIV. Cicero talked of her 'flight' and was glad to see her go. The juxtaposition of his comments with a reference to a miscarriage by the wife of one of the assassins has led some to suggest that Cleopatra also suffered a miscarriage at this time, implying perhaps another Caesar offspring. While the inference is probably groundless, it is likely that Cleopatra may have tried to have more children by Caesar.⁴⁴ Behind her in Rome she left Antony and the 'Liberators' (as the assassins called themselves) jockeying for security and power. The hiatus ended when Brutus and Cassius retired from Rome to the east to consolidate their position, while Antony had to contend with the sudden arrival of Caesar's adopted son, the former Caius Octavius – now Caius Julius Caesar Octavianus.⁴⁵

Back in Egypt Cleopatra was probably as much concerned for her own safety as for Caesarion's. No longer the mistress of Rome's greatest figure, she was exposed to the danger of a hostile faction forming around her nominal brother-husband, the fifteen-year-old Ptolemy XIV. The solution was simple. By September 44 BC Cleopatra had had Ptolemy XIV killed and Caesarion proclaimed as Ptolemy XV.⁴⁶ He was given the names Philopator and Philometor, 'father-loving' and 'mother-loving', with obvious reference to both the dead Caesar and Cleopatra. Caesarion was now four years old, despite which he was almost immediately portrayed in full pharaonic style and may even have been crowned at Memphis by the high priest, Pashereneptah III.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Cic. *Att.* 14.8, 20. The inference involves reading *de Caesare illo* ('about that Caesar') instead of *de Caesare filio* ('about Caesar's son'). Grant (n. 23), 95–6; Tyldesley (n. 10), 107–8.

⁴⁵ Though others called him Octavian in the early years after his adoption he soon dropped the name himself and his supporters always called him Caesar. From 27 BC he was Augustus. Here, to avoid confusion, he will be called Octavian.

⁴⁶ Joseph, *AJ* 15.89; Joseph, *Ap.* 2.57. Despite Josephus' bias against Cleopatra, we must assume that it would have been too much of a convenience for Ptolemy XIV to have died a natural death at this time. He was the only one of Auletes' children who did not try to get rid of his siblings. Grant (n. 23), 98.

⁴⁷ Pashereneptah III had succeeded to the title in 76 BC at the age of fourteen and died during the joint reign of Cleopatra and Caesarion in 41/40 BC, having crowned a succession of Ptolemies – and perhaps even Cleopatra. Bevan (n. 5), 346–9; S.-A. Ashton 'Identifying the Egyptian-style Ptolemaic Queens', in Walker and Higgs (n. 11), 184–6; D. J. Thompson *Memphis under the Ptolemies* (2nd edn, Princeton, NJ, 2011), 99–143. It is remotely possible that his grandmother Berenice was a(n illegitimate?) daughter of Ptolemy VIII. He was succeeded at Memphis by his son Imhotep-Pedubast.

Cleopatra almost immediately began work building Caesarion's *mammisi* or 'birth house' at Hermonthis (modern Armant), proclaiming in stone his double descent from herself and Julius Caesar. The *mammisi* ruins survived into the nineteenth century. They were destroyed in 1861 when the Kedive Ismail built a sugar refinery, but drawings and photographs from before that show the shrine depicting Caesarion as the young Horus, a god who traditionally avenged the murder of his father, Osiris.⁴⁸ That analogies would be drawn between Caesarion and Horus was probably deliberate, especially after the murdered Caesar was declared a god at Rome. The images tell us nothing about what Caesarion really looked like as they follow the highly stylized conventions of pharaonic art.⁴⁹ The same is true for a surviving unquestionable depiction of Caesarion on the south wall of the temple of Hathor at Denderah. There both Cleopatra and Caesarion as rulers of Egypt are shown making offerings to the gods, but again Caesarion is shown as an adult king in the formal style of countless pharaohs before him, when in reality he was still a boy.⁵⁰ The temple relief therefore offers no clue about his real features. It does, however, demonstrate Cleopatra's determination at this stage to present her son as a genuine pharaoh for her Egyptian subjects, with the eventual plan that he would succeed her one day as a real rather than just a nominal ruler.

All this, however – indeed even her own hold on power – depended on the favour and support of Rome. Yet in the years immediately following Caesar's assassination it was far from clear who represented Rome. To preserve Egypt for herself and Caesarion, Cleopatra was therefore forced to play a slippery game amid the contending factions. Already at Rome Antony had revived Caesar's donation of Cyprus to Arsinoë, though again nothing came of it.⁵¹ The leading Liberators, Brutus and Casius, controlled most of Rome's eastern territories and

⁴⁸ Grant (n. 23), 99–100; Tyldesley (n. 10), 119–21; G. Goudchaux, 'Cleopatra's Subtle Religious Strategy', in Walker and Higgs (n. 11), 135–6; J. Baines and J. Málek, *Atlas of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 1986), 83; T. Wilkinson, *Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* (London, 2005), 143. Before the shrine's destruction, drawings of the interior paintings were done by K. R. Lepsius (*Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Ethiopien* [Berlin, 1849]), and images of the then surviving structure by two early travelling photographers: Felix Teynard (*Egypte et Nubie* [Paris, 1858]) and Francis Frith (various volumes of photographs of Egypt, published London, 1858–65).

⁴⁹ E. Iverson, 'The Canonical Tradition', in J. R. Harris (ed.), *The Legacy of Egypt* (Oxford, 1971), 55–81.

⁵⁰ A. Lloyd, 'The Ptolemaic Period', in A. Shaw (ed.), *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 2000), 420; D. Preston, *Cleopatra and Antony* (New York, 2009), facing p. 148.

⁵¹ Cass. Dio 42.35.5.

posed the most immediate challenge to Cleopatra. In Italy the amazing rise of Octavian to rival Antony produced a brief civil war, followed by the unholy alliance of Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus in the Second Triumvirate and the murderous proscription of their opponents there.⁵² It was not until 42 BC that the triumvirs could move against Brutus and Cassius, who in the meantime had been demanding support and supplies from the various client rulers, including Cleopatra. While her sympathies lay with the triumvirs she had to be cautious, as Arsinoë was still at Ephesus and could be used by Cassius to replace her on the Egyptian throne if Cleopatra refused to supply him.

One misstep had been her premature support for the triumvirs' loose-cannon general Cornelius Dolabella when he arrived in the east in 43 BC. She dispatched to his side the legions Caesar had left in Egypt, for which the triumvirs duly confirmed Cleopatra and Caesarion as the recognized rulers of Egypt.⁵³ The recognition shows that at this stage Octavian as Caesar's adopted son had no fears about Caesarion as Caesar's natural son. However, the legions she sent were seized by Cassius after Dolabella's defeat and suicide, and Cassius now menaced Egypt. At the same time Cleopatra's governor of Cyprus, Serapion, defected to Cassius and was plotting with Arsinoë. Although Cassius left to join Brutus he demanded ships from Cleopatra. She not only evaded his demand but fitted out a fleet to support the triumvirs, though it was effectively destroyed by storms. She was preparing a second fleet when news arrived of the defeat and death of Brutus and Cassius at Philippi, leaving the triumvirs as masters of the Roman world (October 42 BC).⁵⁴

The protector: Antony

The triumvirs divided that world between them, with Antony taking the east. The west was left to Octavian (still only twenty-one) and Lepidus, but over the next few years the lightweight Lepidus was gradually eased out, leaving Octavian as sole triumvir in the west. Yet at this stage, throughout the Roman world Antony was seen as the senior and

⁵² Everitt (n. 24), 79–82; Goldsworthy (n. 10), 231–2; Syme (n. 41), 190–6.

⁵³ Cass. Dio 47.31.5.

⁵⁴ App. *B Civ.* 3.78, 4.59–63, 5.8; Goldsworthy (n. 10), 236–8; Grant (n. 23), 102–5; Tyldesley (n. 10), 143–4; Hölbl (n. 5), 240.

most powerful figure, and it was to him that the client rulers of the east now resorted for confirmation of their crowns and territories. Cleopatra chose to be summoned, and then arrived in grand style. The story of their meeting at Tarsus became legendary; the result was that they became lovers.⁵⁵

The later image of Cleopatra as wantonly promiscuous was a gradual development that stemmed originally from a purely political propaganda campaign launched against Antony by Octavian after their uneasy power-sharing degenerated into open rivalry. In reality, Cleopatra only ever gave herself to two men: Julius Caesar and Mark Antony.⁵⁶ While there was passion and perhaps even genuine love in both cases, her primary motive was always self-preservation. Only Rome's power could maintain her as Queen of Egypt, and Rome – as far as the eastern Mediterranean was concerned in 42 BC – meant Antony. The triumvirs had already recognized Cleopatra and Caesarion as rulers but what Rome gave Rome could take away. Cleopatra's interests and those of Caesarion demanded the closest possible ties with Antony.

Yet Antony was always a Roman aristocrat, with eyes always on Rome. By Roman wives he had Roman children whose future would lie at Rome.⁵⁷ After Antony and Cleopatra spent the winter of 41 BC at Alexandria she bore him twins: Alexander (later Alexander Helios) and Cleopatra (later Cleopatra Selene), but like Caesarion neither had any standing in Roman law. However, their birth could affect Caesarion's future: they were the children of the living embodiment of Roman power, Caesarion of a dead one. Cleopatra was building a colossal temple to the dead Caesar at Alexandria and Caesarion was officially her co-ruler Ptolemy XV Caesar, but the temple was a political move and tradition demanded a male pharaoh, however nominal. Although she depended on Roman power to maintain her position and was always simply the most important of the client rulers, within Egypt she had no intention of sharing her authority. Whereas earlier Ptolemaic kings had occasionally depicted their queens and sometimes even co-rulers on their coins, Cleopatra's coinage had always excluded

⁵⁵ Cass. Dio 48.24.2; Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 25.1–27.4; App. *B Civ.* 5.1.8–9.

⁵⁶ Green (n. 2), 662.

⁵⁷ Antony had four Roman wives: Fadia, married when he was a young man, either died or divorced; Antonia, his cousin, 47 BC; Fulvia, died 40 BC; Octavia, divorced 32 BC. He had known children by Antonia, Fulvia, and Octavia. His descendants by Antonia became monarchs of Pontus, Armenia, and Thrace.

her two brothers and continued to exclude Caesarion. All ancient currency had a propaganda function as well as a monetary one, and Cleopatra's issues in Egypt definitively asserted her sole authority.⁵⁸

What Cleopatra's relations with Caesarion would have been if he had lived to be an adult must remain unknown, but given his parentage he would hardly have been content to be a token king forever.⁵⁹ For the time being, however, he was simply a child dressed up in royal garb at Alexandria, probably wearing a small gold and purple *himation* and a royal diadem.⁶⁰ It is also possible, since the Ptolemies were proud of their Macedonian descent, that on occasions he wore a diminutive *kausia*, the distinctive Macedonian broad-brimmed hat.⁶¹ Whether he was present at the dedications at Hermonthis and Denderah is unknown, nor whether, if he was, he was presented wearing traditional Egyptian royal attire. Cleopatra liked to dress as Isis, so having Caesarion appear at times in the role of Horus is within the realms of possibility. Equally unknown is what Caesarion thought about Antony, though as a child his feelings were not considered in the world of high politics. However, where his interests were not at risk Antony was basically a good-natured man and the kind of soldierly figure whom a growing boy could admire.

Then and now writers have disagreed about Antony's character and his relationship with Cleopatra. Opinions range from a simple soldier besotted by an oriental temptress to a cold-blooded political operator using Cleopatra and Egypt simply as a cash cow and supply base.⁶² Whatever the truth, he gratified some of her wishes from the beginning, executing Arsinoë, Serapion, and an obscure pretender claiming to be the drowned Ptolemy XIII.⁶³ Removing Arsinoë and the pretender also

⁵⁸ Green (n. 2), 664; Grant (n. 23), 166.

⁵⁹ Egyptologists find it hard to resist comparisons with Hatshepsut and Thutmose III centuries earlier, but it is highly unlikely that Cleopatra knew of these rulers. A. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford, 1961), 181–7.

⁶⁰ See Val. Max. 6.2.7; Plin. *HN* 7.56(57); Just. *Epit.* 12.3; Green (n. 2), 30; E. R. Bevan, *The House of Seleucus* (reprint, Chicago, 1985) ii.274–5. Although often translated as 'cloak', the *himation* was not a clasped over-garment but simply a rectangular or square piece of cloth wrapped round the body.

⁶¹ Val. Max. 5.1.ext.4. *Causia* passed into more common use: Plaut. *Mil.* 1178.

⁶² Livy, *Per* 130.1; Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 28.1–2; Joseph, *AJ* 15.89–91; Joseph, *BJ* 1.359; Vell. Pat. 2.82.3–4; Flor. 2.21.11; Cass. Dio 49.34.1; Goldsworthy (n. 10), 267–8, 298; Tyldesley (n. 10), 150–5; Green (n. 2), 671–2; S. B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (New York, 1975), 124, 187–8.

⁶³ Joseph, *AJ* 15.89; Joseph, *Ap.* 2.57; App. *B Civ.* 5.9. Although Arsinoë IV was granted royal title to Cyprus in 48 BC and again in 44 BC, there is no evidence that she ever visited the island or had coins minted there. Both grants were stillborn. Skeletal remains found in Ephesus in 1926 and

made the future safer for Caesarion as well as Cleopatra, perhaps an additional motive.

However, Antony undoubtedly frightened Cleopatra in 40 BC by marrying Octavian's sister, the ultra-virtuous Octavia. It was meant to shore up an alliance between the two triumvirs that was increasingly unravelling. Despite producing yet more children for Antony the marriage failed in its primary purpose and, after a three-year absence from Cleopatra, in 37 BC Antony rejoined the Egyptian queen at Antioch. Their affair blossomed afresh, producing another child a year later: Ptolemy Philadelphus. The ten-year-old Caesarion now had three half-siblings: Alexander Helios, Cleopatra Selene, and Ptolemy Philadelphus. As the two boys could arguably be installed in his place as co-ruler with Cleopatra should the need arise, his position if not undermined was perhaps less secure than it had been. In his favour was the extreme youth of his siblings and the high mortality rate among infants in the ancient world. What personal feelings Cleopatra had towards her eldest child remain lost to us. He was useful to her in meeting traditionalist demands about a male king, and the fact that at the end she tried to save him from Octavian suggests some real affection if not love. For the time being, however, he was merely a stage king, a shadowy figure in the palace at Alexandria.

Antony's renewed commitment to Cleopatra produced concrete results. In late 37 BC her kingdom became a restored Ptolemaic empire when Antony granted her Cyprus (an old Ptolemaic possession), Crete, Cilicia, Phoenicia, and a string of Levantine territories. Only Herod's Judea escaped her, despite her plotting against him. Some of these lands were Roman provinces, but Antony's reorganization could be justified on logistical grounds. He was already planning a great expedition against Parthia, and an enhanced Egypt dependent on his goodwill gave him a solid supply base. Coins were minted throughout the new Egyptian dominions showing both Antony and Cleopatra on different sides, along with coins displaying just Cleopatra. Caesarion, despite his theoretical co-rulership, was conspicuously absent from these

re-examined in part in 1992 have been claimed as Arsinoë: 'Cleopatra Had African Ancestry, Skeleton Suggests', *Daily Telegraph*, 15 March 2009 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/world-news/africaandindianocean/egypt/4995155/Cleopatra-had-African-ancestry-skeleton-suggests.html>>; 'Cleopatra's Mother "Was African"', *BBC News*, 16 March 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/also_in_the_news/7945333.stm>, both accessed 23 October 2013.

coins.⁶⁴ At Rome, the seemingly high-handed giving away of Roman provinces aroused great unease, a feeling fomented by Octavian in his increasing campaign to depict Antony as the helpless slave of an oriental schemer.

Relations between Antony and Octavian continued to deteriorate, while Octavian's stature increased greatly when he deposed the other triumvir Lepidus (36 BC). In the east Antony finally launched his much-vaunted invasion of the Parthian Empire, which proved a total failure, Cleopatra having to come to the rescue of his returning men with supplies and clothing.⁶⁵ A successful campaign in Armenia only partly restored Antony's diminishing prestige but he celebrated his victory back in Egypt with a major parade, followed by the 'Donations of Alexandria'.⁶⁶

The parade was deplored in Rome as a pseudo-Triumph, and provided more fuel for Octavian's propaganda machine; the Donations may have been Cleopatra's idea as much as Antony's. In a grand display Antony and Cleopatra appeared enthroned, with Cleopatra dressed as Isis and proclaimed as 'Queen of Kings, and her Sons who are Kings'. Caesarion, confirmed as Cleopatra's co-ruler, sat also enthroned but slightly below them and was proclaimed as 'King of Kings'. The other children were allotted various overlordships embracing both current kingdoms and some yet to be won.

The Donations have been described as great theatre with little practical import, though perhaps outlining Antony's future plans. For Caesarion, however, they had one immediate and very real outcome.⁶⁷ His title 'King of Kings' aped that of the Parthian monarchs, though others had recently usurped it.⁶⁸ That it was actually meaningless was clear from his throne being positioned below those of Cleopatra and

⁶⁴ Grant (n. 23), 135–9; Tyldesley (n. 10), 162; Goldsworthy (n. 10), 295; Green (n. 2), 674–5; Syme (n. 41), 260–1; G. Goudchaux 'Was Cleopatra Beautiful: The Conflicting Answers of Numismatics', in Walker and Higgs (n. 11), 233–8.

⁶⁵ Plutarch attributed his failure to his infatuation with Cleopatra, doubtless reflecting the lasting effects of Octavian's propaganda: Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 37.4.

⁶⁶ This is a historian's designation, rather than one given at the time. See R. Strootman, 'Queen of Kings: Kleopatra VII and the Donations of Alexandria', <<http://igitur-archive.library.uu.nl/let/2010-0909-200243/UUindex.html>>, accessed 23 October 2013.

⁶⁷ Livy, *Per.* 131.3; Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 54.3–6; Cass. Dio 49.41.1–4; Grant (n. 23), 162–7; Tyldesley (n. 10), 168–9; Goldsworthy (n. 10), 329–34; Syme (n. 41), 270; Everitt (n. 24), 160–1.

⁶⁸ The inscription ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ('Great King of Kings Arsaces') occurs on a number of Arsacid coins. G. F. Hill, *Ancient Greek and Roman Coins* (Chicago, IL, 1964), 264.

Antony, though it gave him a public precedence over their young children. Antony obviously raised no objections to this. He endorsed the boy's status as Cleopatra's co-ruler and, since his nature was basically friendly, he may even have been kind to the youth. However, he took one step, possibly at Cleopatra's urging, which was to seal Caesarion's fate: he formally affirmed that Cleopatra had been Caesar's wife and that Caesarion was Caesar's son.⁶⁹ As a Roman he knew perfectly well that under Roman law Cleopatra could never have been Caesar's wife even if some kind of Egyptian ceremony had occurred, but the declaration about Caesarion was his response to Octavian's ongoing propaganda campaign against Cleopatra and himself. Whether he hoped for anything concrete from it is unlikely. After Caesarion's birth, Cleopatra and perhaps even Caesar may have dreamed of a Roman future for the child, but that ended abruptly with Caesar's assassination. For the next ten years Cleopatra's role for Caesarion was as nominal king of Egypt, and her ambitions for him were confined to Egypt and its dependencies. Now, with Antony's proclamation, the possibility of a Roman future seemed once again to be hinted at.

That Antony seriously believed that Rome and the western provinces would reject Caesar's adopted son Octavian in favour of his natural son Caesarion when the latter was a bastard in Roman eyes and the child of Egypt's queen can safely be dismissed. The proclamation about Caesarion was simply a jab at Octavian. Since Antony reiterated in his will that Caesarion was Julius Caesar's son he obviously believed it, but at this stage the affirmation was largely a publicity exercise.⁷⁰ However, it changed Octavian's thinking about Caesarion. Hitherto he had been indifferent about the boy, and had even recognized him at the time of Dolabella's campaign in 43 BC as ruler of Egypt alongside Cleopatra. Now Antony's proclamation may have touched a nerve, for while Octavian was undoubtedly Caesar's adopted son this had required a *lex curiata* to make it legal, since posthumous adoption was a novelty and all that Caesar could strictly leave to Octavian by will was his name and wealth.⁷¹ What Antony had essentially asserted at Alexandria was that Caesarion was Caesar's real son, and by implication that Octavian was less so. Octavian was the dominant power at

⁶⁹ Cass. Dio 49.41.6.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 50.3.5.

⁷¹ Everitt (n. 24), 60, 76; Schulz (n. 40), 145.

Rome and in the west but his position was insecure as long as Antony controlled the east – and at Rome Octavian was not loved. Antony's renewed endorsement of Caesarion's paternity clearly stung Octavian.⁷²

The killer: Octavian

As relations between the two surviving triumvirs moved inexorably towards open conflict, a preliminary war of pamphlets sought to win over waverers. Octavian addressed the issue of Caesarion's paternity by commissioning C. Oppius to write disproving that Caesar had been the youth's father. Oppius had been a close intimate of Caesar's and therefore could be presented as someone who would know the truth of the matter. However, Antony had previously quoted Oppius as one of the witnesses to Caesar actually acknowledging among close friends that Caesarion was his son.⁷³ Oppius was as staunch a supporter of Octavian as he had been of Caesar, and Plutarch considered him a partisan and untrustworthy author.⁷⁴ Whatever he wrote about Caesarion has not survived, but the fact that he wrote it testifies to Octavian's concern. From this point on, the future of Caesarion was inexorably tied to whoever emerged victorious in the looming conflict.

Yet most of Octavian's propaganda was directed at Caesarion's mother, Cleopatra, portraying Antony as a dupe in her hands. Antony himself still had many friends at Rome, and the war which Octavian was building up to had to be presented as Rome against the east, against the ambitious Egyptian queen who sought to displace Rome for Alexandria.⁷⁵ The success of Octavian's campaign carried on long after the war was over, through the poets of the Augustan Age and later classical writers, and continued down the

⁷² Cass. Dio 50.1.5, 3.5.

⁷³ Suet. *Iul.* 52.2. Suetonius does not indicate that Antony himself was a witness; he could have heard of Caesar's statement later. The other witness named was C. Matus Calvena, like Oppius a strong supporter of the young Octavian and therefore unlikely to contradict what Oppius wrote. Both Matus and Oppius corresponded with Cicero, and Matus seems to have been an old friend. Cic. *Fam.* 11.27–9.

⁷⁴ Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 10.5. Oppius wrote lives of several prominent Romans and both Plutarch and Suetonius probably used him as a source. Only fragments of his writings have survived. H. Peter (ed.), *Historicorum Romanorum Reliquiae* (Leipzig, 1906) ii.lxiii, 46–9.

⁷⁵ About a century and a half later Florus could claim that Cleopatra had demanded that Antony give her the Roman Empire as the price of her favours and that Antony had agreed to this. Flor. 2.11.2.

centuries to create an image of Cleopatra as the supreme schemer and temptress.⁷⁶

At Alexandria Antony had been joined by his eldest son, M. Antonius Antyllus.⁷⁷ The boy was about five years younger than Caesarion but unlike Caesarion we have more certainty about what he looked like as Antony issued coins bearing his own and his son's portraits.⁷⁸ His early education at Rome would have been supervised by his stepmother Octavia, and it is unclear when exactly he joined his father and his new siblings. Since his father clearly intended a Roman future for him, even at Alexandria tutors would have been found to continue as far as possible the usual education of a young Roman aristocrat.⁷⁹ One study that would definitely have been continued was Latin, and here he would have joined Caesarion. The first stage of Caesarion learning any Latin would hardly have progressed beyond a very basic vocabulary during his first three years, when Cleopatra and Caesar had perhaps jointly dreamed of a Roman future for him. Even after this dream was shelved following Caesar's assassination he still remained the son of Julius Caesar, and Cleopatra would certainly have made sure that he grew up speaking Latin as fluently as his Alexandrian Greek (and, knowing Cleopatra, perhaps even learning native Egyptian).

Though no longer the great intellectual centre it had been under the early Ptolemies, the Museion at Alexandria still attracted great scholars and Cleopatra could draw on the best to teach her

⁷⁶ Verg. *Aen.* 8.675–728; Prop. 2.16.38–40, 3.11.29–56, 4.6.14–5; Hor. *Carm.* 1.37; Luc. 10.33–170, 351–98; App. *B Civ.* 5.9; Cass. Dio 32.2–35.1, 50.4.1–4; Vell. Pat. 2.82.3–4, 83.1–2; Flor. 2.21.1–3; Joseph, *AJ* 15.88–107, 131–2; Joseph, *BJ* 1.359–65, 390; Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 48.3; Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 25f; Plut. *Comp. Dem. & Ant.* 3.3; Suet. *Iul.* 52.1–3; Suet. *Aug.* 17.1; Eutr. 6.22, 7.6–7; [Aur. Vict.] *De vir. ill.* 81.2. For later authors, see I. Dante, *Inferno*, circ. 2, cant. 5; G. Chaucer, *Legend of Good Women*, 1; R. Garnier, *Marc Antoine* (1578); W. Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606/7); V. Alfieri, *Antonio e Cleopatra* (1774); T. Gautier, *Une nuit de Cléopâtre* (1838); A. Guerne, *Cléopâtre*, in *Les siècles morts* (1890–9); G. B. Shaw, *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898). Chaucer's picture is the most admiring; Dryden's Cleopatra is ambitious and treacherous; Gautier's Cleopatra is ruthless and promiscuous; and Shaw's Cleopatra is a kittenish teenager. Even later historians largely reiterated the negative image generated by Octavian's propaganda: see C. Rollin, *Ancient History* (London, 1845), i.744–51; E. W. Whitaker, *A Complete System of Universal History* (London, 1821), Vol 1, 646–7; C. Merivale, *A History of Rome to the Death of Trajan* (London, 1911), 405–6.

⁷⁷ Antyllus was the son of Antony's third wife, Fulvia.

⁷⁸ D. Vagi, *Coinage and History of the Roman Empire* (Sidney, OH, 1909) ii.213.

⁷⁹ H. I. Marrou *A History of Education in Antiquity* (London, 1956), 232–51, 266; J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (London, 1969), 92–106; S. F. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome* (Berkeley, CA, 1977), 10–33.

children.⁸⁰ At least one teacher is known by name, the tall, slender, Nicolaus Damascenus, who despite his red face was described by Plutarch as singularly sweet-humoured.⁸¹ The boys also had tutors, as was becoming common in the Roman upper classes: Rhodon for Caesarion and Theodorus for Antyllus.⁸² They would undoubtedly have been aware of the impending conflict between their parents and Octavian, and, seeing the warlike preparations being made, could have had no doubt that Antony and Cleopatra would emerge victorious. Some prophecies of unknown authorship circulating at this time took the same viewpoint.⁸³

In 32 BC Antony divorced Octavia and open conflict with Octavian became imminent. Whether Antony married Cleopatra at this point is unclear. Some writers asserted this but Antony would have known that any such marriage was illegal under Roman law and it is unlikely that he would have given more ammunition to Octavian's charge that he had ceased to be a true Roman. However some Egyptian ceremony for use in Egypt cannot be excluded, making him Caesarion's quasi-stepfather.⁸⁴

In 32 BC Antony and Cleopatra assembled their forces in Greece. Given the ages of Caesarion (about sixteen) and Antyllus (about eleven) they would have been left behind in Alexandria under the care of their tutors. The following year on 2 September the decisive encounter took place with the naval battle at Actium, resulting in the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra and their flight back to Egypt. What they would have done if they had proved victorious remains a matter of guesswork. It is certainly likely that if Octavian had just been defeated Cleopatra would have demanded his death. So, whether defeated or killed in battle, Octavian's western provinces would have fallen to Antony. Despite the propagandist claim that Cleopatra wanted to dictate to Rome from the Capitol it is unlikely that she would have sought to

⁸⁰ J. Pollard and H. Reid, *The Rise and Fall of Alexandria* (New York, 2006), 60–89, 159.

⁸¹ Plutarch, *Symposiacs*, 8.4.1; *FGrH* 90 T2. Damascenus later went on to be the friend and apologist of Herod of Judea. Joseph, *B^J* 2.21; P. Richardson, *Herod. King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans* (Columbia, SC, 1996), 13, 21–2; M. Grant, *The Jews in the Roman World* (New York, 1984), 76–7.

⁸² Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 81.1–2.

⁸³ *Sibylline Oracles*, 3.350–61; J. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York, 1983), i.370.

⁸⁴ Strabo 17.1.11; Eutr. 7.6. Some moderns have accepted the marriage: see Vagi (n. 77), i.77. At Brundisium in 40 BC Antony had denied that he had married Cleopatra after the death of his third wife, Fulvia. Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 31.2.

destroy Rome and Antony would never have consented anyway.⁸⁵ A more likely scenario would have been a joint condominium with Antony ruling under some title in the west while Cleopatra acquired real hegemony over Rome's eastern provinces and dependencies: in effect, a dual monarchy with the west ultimately intended for Antyllus and the east for Caesarion. That Cleopatra would have wanted to install Caesarion as Caesar's true son and successor in the west is not totally out of the question, but this would have been impossible to enforce without Antony's backing and, quite apart from any plans for Antyllus, it would have required Antony himself to accept a vastly diminished role. Nor was such a scheme ever bruited in any of our sources.

Such possibilities never arose. As the client rulers of the east fell over themselves to switch their allegiance to Octavian and Cyrenaica and Cyprus defected to him, Antony and Cleopatra prepared in Alexandria for the victor's arrival. Before that event they took a step with major implications for Caesarion and Antyllus: they celebrated their rites of passage from childhood to adulthood. They may have wanted to demonstrate that whatever happened to them their lines would continue; they may even have been responding to appeals from the two boys. In any case, it was a fateful decision. Caesarion was formally enrolled as an *ephebe*, and Antyllus assumed the *toga virilis*.⁸⁶ Ephebic training was normal in many Hellenistic cities but the age range varied. The old Athenian tradition had started military training with *ephebes* at eighteen but the broader category ran from fifteen to twenty. Caesarion was almost certainly presented as ready for military training despite being only sixteen or seventeen at the most. In the case of Antyllus, he certainly had not reached the age of fourteen which Augustus later set for legal male adulthood; but the older criterion was *qui generare potest* ('when is able to procreate'), though whether Antyllus was mature enough is unlikely given his age.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Cass. Dio 50.5.4.

⁸⁶ Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 71.2–3; Cass. Dio 51.6.1–2. An *ephebe*, traditionally a young adult male, enrolled in pre-military training, though in the Hellenistic Age the training became increasingly one of broader studies. The *toga virilis* ('gown of manhood') was the plain white toga assumed by adult Roman males. Originally given at puberty, from the time of Augustus this event was set so that it took place at the age of fourteen. Marrou (n. 78), 102–15; Bonner (n. 78), 84–5.

⁸⁷ Censorinus, *DN* 14.8; Gai. *Inst.* 1.196; R. Flacilière, *Daily Life in Greece at the Time of Pericles* (London, 2002), 249; L. Adkins and R. A. Adkins *Handbook to Life in Ancient Greece* (New York, 1997), 96; Marrou (n. 78), 102–10. See also N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule* (Oxford,

As 30 BC dawned, Antony and Cleopatra made desultory plans to escape west to either Spain or Gaul while trying to delay Octavian with a stream of emissaries. This choice of a new western base of operations would have been Antony's, and when it was abandoned he seems to have left matters to Cleopatra.⁸⁸ She opted for India and organized a fleet on the Red Sea, but it was destroyed by the Nabateans because their king Malchus (Maliku II) wanted to demonstrate his value to Octavian.⁸⁹ Cleopatra tried negotiating with Octavian to salvage the kingdom for Caesarion, but Octavian remained noncommittal.⁹⁰ (She ignored his suggestion that she should abandon or kill Antony.) As Octavian approached Alexandria, Cleopatra decided that Caesarion's only salvation lay in getting as far away from Octavian as possible. For him alone she resurrected the idea of flight to India. But what did she have in mind by 'India' and what was her ultimate hope?

The Greek world had come into contact with India through Alexander the Great but remained very hazy about its geography, despite continuing trade links.⁹¹ Hellenistic outposts in what are today Afghanistan and the northern Punjab finally succumbed around 80 BC, leaving only trade routes through Parthia, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea.⁹² The last had been developed by the Ptolemies after the collapse of the Sabeen kingdom in the modern Yemen and especially after Eudoxus (c. 101 BC) opened up a coast-following route and discovered the south-west monsoon.⁹³ It was this route that Cleopatra had in mind for Caesarion. What remains unclear is which part of India was the intended destination, though it was almost certainly somewhere on the west coast. In 30 BC that coast was divided between four local

1985), 39, 41–7; Balsdon (n. 78), 120–1; 299, 'Application for Enrollment as an Ephebe', and 300, 'Concerning an Ephebe', in Hunt and Edgar (n. 31), ii.308–13.

⁸⁸ Cass. Dio 51.6.3, 8.5.

⁸⁹ Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 69.1–3; Cass. Dio 51.7.1.

⁹⁰ Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 78.4.

⁹¹ S. N. Sen, *Ancient Indian History and Civilization* (New Delhi, 1998), 183.

⁹² Although Hermaios, the last Indo-Greek ruler of the northern Punjab, died or disappeared around 80 BC, coins suggest that a few Indo-Greek petty kings may have survived some years longer before succumbing to the Sakas.

⁹³ W. W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilization* (London, 1952), 245–8, 259; M. Cary, *The Geographic Background of Greek and Roman History* (Oxford, 1949), 200–5; P. Levi, *The Cultural Atlas of the World. The Greek World* (Alexandria, VA, 1992), 186. The route from Egypt to India is described port by port in the first-century AD *Periplus Maris Erythraei*. The early Ptolemies had maintained occasional contacts with the Mauryan emperors in northern India before the rise of the Parthian Empire. –V. Smith, *The Oxford History of India* (Oxford, 1941), 70, 97; K. A. Sagar *Foreign Influence on Ancient India* (New Delhi, 1992), 120–4.

powers. The northern shores around Sind and Gujerat belonged to the Saka great-king and his subordinates, the Western Satraps, but as recent conquerors the Sakas are unlikely to have had much in the way of overseas relations. The central coastline around Mumbai was part of the Satavahana (Andhra) kingdom of the Deccan, and Satavahana coins bear images of ships indicating ocean trade. To the south lay the Chera and Pandyan kingdoms in modern Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Pandyan ambassadors reached Augustus in 21 BC at Samos and archaeology shows extensive later trade with Rome and the west, which was probably a continuation of older contacts.⁹⁴ Caesarion's destination therefore was probably either the Chera, Pandyan, or Satavahana kingdom, with perhaps Chera or Pandya having the preference.⁹⁵ (To the Sakas and their satraps he would have been a *Yavana*, Greek, and they were still mopping up the remaining minor Yavana kingdoms surviving from the Indo-Greek realm.)

None of our sources indicate what Cleopatra thought would happen to Caesarion in India, but while his immediate safety was the paramount concern it may not have been all she had in mind. It is not impossible that there was a rough plan that he could set himself up as a local prince, the treasure which accompanied him, especially if such had been arranged previously as a contingency with one of the Indian rulers. However, it is also possible that his exile was only intended to be temporary. Reviewing the fate of Roman leaders in her own lifetime, Cleopatra may have hoped that in the not too distant future Caesarion could return to reclaim his kingdom. She may have known of Marius, who had died when he dominated Rome, and Sulla, who had died soon after retiring from power; she had seen Caesar command the Roman world only to fall beneath assassins' daggers; she had seen Brutus and Cassius masters of the eastern Mediterranean and both perish soon on the battlefield; she had seen

⁹⁴ Strabo 15.1.4, 73; Hor. *Carm. saec.* 55–6; Suet. *Aug.* 21.3; Cass. Dio 549.8; Flor. 2.23.62; Oros. 6.21. On Pandya, see Arr. *Indica* 8.8–9.

⁹⁵ The chronology of all of these kingdoms is uncertain, so identifying particular rulers who might have been contacted at some point by Cleopatra is almost impossible. However the Saka great-king may have been Azes I, and the Satavahana king perhaps Pulomavi I. See B. N. Puri, 'The Sakas and the Indo-Parthians', in B. N. Puri and G. F. Etmedi (eds.), *History of Civilizations of Central Asia* (New Delhi, 1999), 194–5; B. N. Mukherjee, 'A Note on the Vikrama and Saka Eras', *Indian Journal of History of Science* 32.1 (1997), 87–92; R. C. Majumdar, H. C. Raychaudhuri, and K. Datta, *An Advanced History of India* (New Delhi, 1974), i.112–13; J. Keay, *India. A History* (New York, 2000), 108–11; R. N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (London, 1962), 172–4; N. Sastri, *A History of South India* (Oxford, 1955), 113–24.

the triumvir Lepidus deposed and reduced to obscurity; and she had seen Antony fall from his seemingly overwhelming power. There was no reason to think that Octavian's power would last any longer than theirs, especially since he seemed to be in repeatedly poor health.⁹⁶

Caesarion was sent off up the Nile with his tutor, Rhodon.⁹⁷ The immediate destination was probably either Dendera or Coptos: a road from the first would take the fugitives across the eastern desert to Myos Hormos on the Red Sea coast, and a similar route from the second would take them to the port of Berenice further down.⁹⁸ Meanwhile, Octavian had reached Alexandria and defeated the few infantry troops that remained loyal to Antony. Whether Antony's ships and cavalry who defected to Octavian did so at Cleopatra's secret command in a last bid to gain Octavian's favour was something that a few sources suggest and that Antony may have briefly believed. A false rumour that Cleopatra had killed herself precipitated Antony's suicide. Octavian entered Alexandria on 1 August 30 BC.⁹⁹ Just over a week later, probably believing that Caesarion was safely on his way to India and that Octavian might be more lenient towards him if she were dead, Cleopatra also committed suicide.¹⁰⁰

The fugitive Ptolemy XV Caesarion was finally the sole king of Egypt. By this time he was about seventeen and it is possible that at last we have some idea of what he really looked like. Royal statuary under the early Ptolemies employed both the traditional stiff pharaonic styles and the naturalistic representations of Greek art. Under the later Ptolemies royal statues often kept the traditional stiff pose but added naturalistic details.¹⁰¹ A few statue heads have been tentatively identified as Caesarion, one as a boy and the others as a youth.¹⁰² Allowing for damage and wear, he appears in all of them with the serious expression appropriate to royalty, and the features have been

⁹⁶ Suet. *Aug.* 80–82.2; Everitt (n. 24), 32, 43, 88–9, 96, 216–17.

⁹⁷ Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 81.2.

⁹⁸ Both were listed as starting places for the voyage to India in the *Periplus Maris Erithraei*.

⁹⁹ 1 August became a Roman public holiday. 'The Calendars (*Fasti Anni Iuliani*)', in V. Ehrenburg and A. H. M. Jones (eds.), *Documents illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius* (Oxford, 1955), 49.

¹⁰⁰ Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 76.4–5, 77.1–4; Livy, *Per.* 133.2; Cass. Dio 51.10–13; Suet. *Aug.* 17; Everitt (n. 24), 190–5; Preston (n. 49), 169–77; Goldsworthy (n. 10), 377–85; Grant (n. 23), 222–8; Tyldesley (n. 10), 186–4; S. M. Burstein, *The Reign of Cleopatra* (Westport, CT, 2004), 31–2.

¹⁰¹ S.-A. Ashton (n. 46), text accompanying Photo 19 (p. 54).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, text accompanying Photos 14 (p. 51), 171 (p. 152), 172 (p. 174), 173 (pp. 174–5), and Fig. 5.5 (p. 152). (The statue in Fig. 5.5 could, however, just possibly be one of Cleopatra's brother-husbands, either Ptolemy XIII or Ptolemy XIV.)

described as showing a rounded face, small nose, and well-defined eyes, or alternatively as possessing a broad and flat face, a full mouth, and downturned lips.¹⁰³ Yet perhaps one facial feature may be guessed at. On many of her coins his mother Cleopatra appears with a distinctive hooked nose, a genetic characteristic (rather like the Habsburg lip) that appears on the coins of some of her ancestors and on the coins of the later Seleucid kings descended from the Lagid queen Cleopatra Thea.¹⁰⁴ It is more than likely that Caesarion also boasted the same feature, though unfortunately all the statues that can provisionally be ascribed to him have damage to that part of the face.¹⁰⁵ Suetonius asserts that some Greek writers claimed that Caesarion resembled his father, Caesar, in looks and bearing, but does not say to what age this claim alludes: if while Caesar was alive and Caesarion a baby it can be dismissed as flattery; if when Caesarion was an adolescent it might have more in its favour, though it is too vague to be helpful.¹⁰⁶

It is doubtful whether Caesarion ever reached Myos Hormos or Berenice. He certainly got no further if he did. Exactly what happened is unclear, perhaps deliberately so. Both Dio and Suetonius agree that Caesarion was overtaken in his flight, though Dio alone implies that he was murdered at that point. Plutarch and Suetonius both claim that Caesarion was brought back to Alexandria and killed there. Plutarch alone says that Rhodon persuaded Caesarion to go back to Alexandria because Octavian had invited him to remain as king, and that while Octavian was deliberating on the matter his tame philosopher Areius advised him that ‘too many Caesars is not a good thing’, following which Octavian had Caesarion killed.¹⁰⁷ Areius’ motive for making his remark is unknown. He was an Alexandrian philosopher and rhetorician, almost certainly attached to the Museion, and had therefore

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 172, 174.

¹⁰⁴ The description ‘hooked nose’ is rather subjective, but arguably applies to at least some coins of Cleopatra’s father, Ptolemy XII Auletes, her great-grandfather Ptolemy VIII Psychon, and her great-uncle Ptolemy VI Philometor. Among the Seleucid descendants of Cleopatra Thea it occurs on the coins of her sons Antiochus VIII Grypos and Antiochus IX Cyzecinus. Grypos increased the genetic heritage by marrying Cleopatra’s great-aunt Cleopatra Tryphaena, and the hooked nose occurs on coins of all their sons, Seleucus VI, Antiochus XI, Philip I, Demetrius III, and Antiochus XI.

¹⁰⁵ Plutarch claimed that Octavian ordered all of Antony’s statues destroyed and would have done the same with Cleopatra’s but was bribed to leave them alone. *Plut. Vit. Ant.* 86.5. The damage to the Caesarion statues (if indeed they are his) may have been done at this time, though many statues were mutilated much later by fanatical Christians and Muslims.

¹⁰⁶ *Suet. Iul.* 52.2.

¹⁰⁷ *Plut. Vit. Ant.* 81.1; *Cass. Dio* 51.15.5; *Suet. Aug.* 17.5. Areius’ observation was a variation on a line by Homer: ‘No good thing is a multitude of lords’ (*Il.* 2.204).

benefited from Cleopatra's patronage. Perhaps he was just being clever.¹⁰⁸

It remains unclear from Plutarch's version whether Rhodon's advice to Caesarion to return to Alexandria was given before any pursuers caught up with the fugitives, and what his motive was in giving it. As it stands, he could hardly have claimed that Octavian would permit Caesarion to remain on the throne without some contact with Octavian in Alexandria. Without that, at the most he could only suggest that Octavian might possibly retain Caesarion as a client king. On his way to Alexandria Octavian had indeed confirmed Herod of Judea and other local rulers on their thrones, and this might well have been known at Cleopatra's court. The idea that Rhodon deliberately betrayed his trust and talked Caesarion into going back knowing that the youth would be killed is certainly plausible and may even be the best explanation, but it rests in part on assuming that Rhodon was as faithless as Antyllus' tutor Theodorus. According to Plutarch, Antyllus was hiding in the half-finished temple that Cleopatra had been building in memory of Caesar when he was betrayed by Theodorus, who then stole a precious gem from the boy's body (for which he was subsequently crucified). A few other chosen victims also perished, despite which some sixty years later the sycophantic Velleius Paterculus extolled Octavian's clemency and claimed that no-one was put to death; but then Paterculus also omitted any reference at all to Caesarion.¹⁰⁹

It is unlikely in the extreme that Octavian ever contemplated even briefly leaving Caesarion as puppet king of Egypt. Desperately short of money to pay his legions, he needed Egypt's wealth as his own personal treasure. Equally, despite having induced Oppius to write rejecting the claim that Caesar had been Caesarion's father he would have been well aware that a pretender could be just as dangerous as the real thing.¹¹⁰ In all probability Octavian himself believed that Caesarion was Caesar's son. Areius' pitiless comment about too many Caesars did not provoke the response 'He's no Caesar!', at least not in our sources. The comment was almost certainly not needed

¹⁰⁸ Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 80.1–2; Cass. Dio 51.16; Suet. *Aug.* 89; Quint. *Inst.* 2.15.36, 3.1.16.

¹⁰⁹ Vell. Pat. 2.86.2.

¹¹⁰ At Rome after Caesar's assassination an Amatius had caused trouble, claiming to be a son of Marius. Antony had him killed, as later he killed an imposter claiming to be the drowned Ptolemy XIII. A century earlier two pretenders, Alexander Balas and Alexander Zabinas, had both made it to the Seleucid throne.

to persuade Octavian that Caesarion must die: he had probably come to that conclusion long before he reached Egypt.

Conclusion

For all his life Caesarion had been the pawn of others determining his future. At his birth his mother, Cleopatra, and then later perhaps his father, Julius Caesar, had dreamed of a role in Roman public life. After Caesar's death Cleopatra cleared the way for Caesarion to join her on the throne of Egypt, and probably envisaged a long joint reign there. Moved off centre-stage for a time even in Egypt when Cleopatra tied her fortunes to Antony and bore him children, Caesarion was again given prominence with the Donations of Alexandria and proclaimed King of Kings. With the reiteration of his paternity by Caesar the possibility of a Roman future perhaps opened up once more, or, if not, that Caesarion could at least be used to destabilize Octavian's position. Actium determined his fate as much as it did that of Antony and Cleopatra. For a brief few days he was sole legitimate king of Egypt, but a king on the run. Finally, his future and his end were determined by someone else: Octavian, the other 'son' of Caesar.

What happened to Caesarion after death is unclear. Dio claims that after Antony's death Cleopatra embalmed his body, but she would not have had the requisite skills, and mummification for the corpses of the elite took seventy days according to Herodotus.¹¹¹ Cleopatra herself was dead within a week or so after Antony and so would not have had the time. A more likely scenario for Antony's remains would have been cremation, following Roman custom.¹¹² Plutarch states that Cleopatra buried Antony in royal fashion, almost certainly meaning in the mausoleum of the Ptolemies.¹¹³ It was there that Octavian would have given permission for the burial of Cleopatra and then of Caesarion. Both had been rulers of Egypt and Octavian seems to have gone out of his way to avoid unnecessarily offending Egyptian susceptibilities. Although mummification had spread from native Egyptians to Greek Alexandrians by this time, it remains unknown

¹¹¹ Cass. Dio 51.11.5; Hdt. 2.86; F. Dunand and R. Lichtenburg, *Mummies and Death in Egypt* (Ithaca, NY, 2006), 94–101; R. Partridge, *Faces of Pharaohs* (London, 1994), 6–12.

¹¹² Tyldesley (n. 10), 195.

¹¹³ Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 82.1.

CAESARION'S RELATIONS.

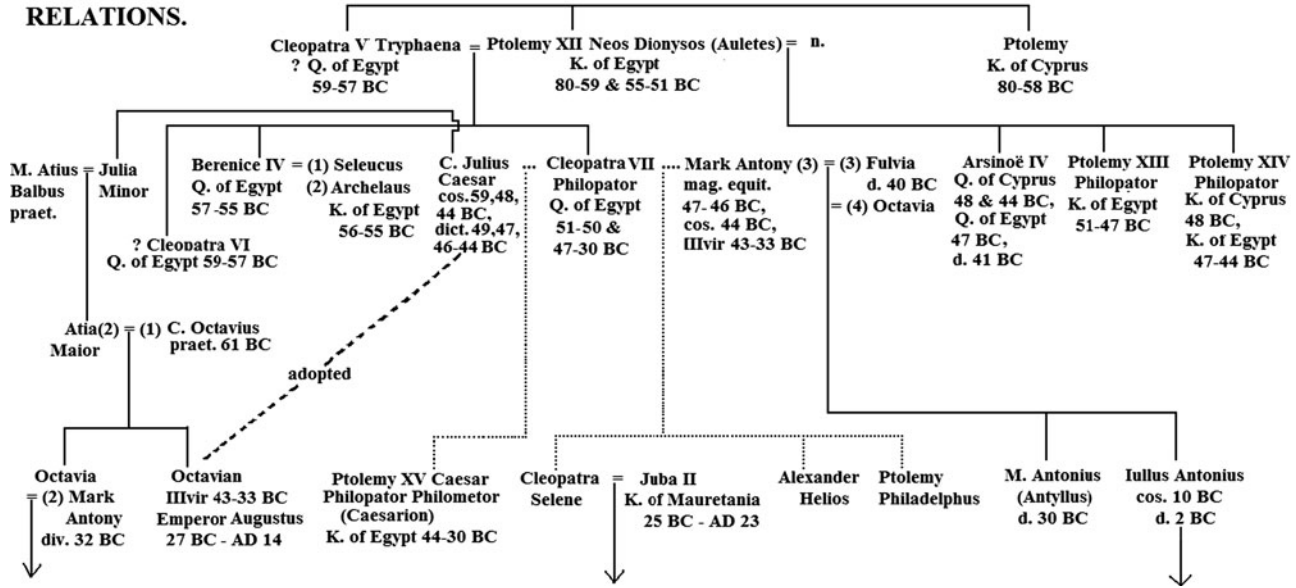


Figure 1. Caesarion's family tree.

whether any of the later Ptolemies were mummified.¹¹⁴ In any event, the royal mausoleum – along with other parts of Alexandria – eventually disappeared beneath the waters of the Mediterranean.

It could be said that Caesarion was the last of the pharaohs. Egypt became a Roman province, albeit a peculiar one, under the close control of Octavian/Augustus and the emperors who followed him.¹¹⁵ They never assumed the title of pharaoh, but the native Egyptian priesthood continued to give them pharaonic titles. As the Emperor Augustus, Octavian was called Setepenptah, ‘chosen of Ptah’.¹¹⁶ It had been Caesarion’s title as pharaoh.

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¹¹⁴ Dunand and Lichtenberg (n. 110), 72–93.

¹¹⁵ L. Capponi, *Roman Egypt* (London, 2010), 11–17.

¹¹⁶ J.-C. Grenier, ‘L’empereur et le pharaon’, in H. Temporini (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur* (Berlin, 1972), 3188–90.