Papers of the British School at Rome **80** (2012), pp. 45–64 © British School at Rome
doi:10.1017/S0068246212000049

DYNASTIC POLITICS, DEFEAT, DECADENCE AND DINING: CLEOPATRA SELENE ON THE SO-CALLED 'AFRICA' DISH FROM THE VILLA DELLA PISANELLA AT BOSCOREALE[1]

by Jane Draycott

This article examines the so-called 'Africa' dish, part of a treasure trove of silver table-ware discovered in a cistern at the Villa della Pisanella, a villa rustica *destroyed in the eruption of Vesuvius in* AD *79. It proposes a new interpretation of the dish's iconography and argues that the woman in the centre of the emblema is Cleopatra Selene, while the attributes surrounding her reference her parents Cleopatra VII and Marcus Antonius, her brothers Alexander Helios and Ptolemy Philadelphus, her husband Juba II of Mauretania, and their mythological ancestor the demi-god Heracles. Thus the emblema serves as a meditation on the fates of Antony and Cleopatra VII, descendants of Heracles who chose the path of vice, a choice that resulted in their defeat by Octavian at the Battle of Actium. Octavian's virtue, victory and clemency, combined with his guardianship of their children, ensured the subsequent promotion of their daughter Cleopatra Selene as a key figure in his dynastic and political strategy, through her marriage to Juba II and the couple's appointment as client rulers of Mauretania. Also supposedly descended from Heracles, Juba II and Cleopatra Selene chose to follow in their illustrious ancestor's footsteps along the path of virtue. In common with other pieces from the treasure trove, the 'Africa' dish alludes to recent historical events and personages, utilizes death as a means of promoting the enjoyment of life, and incorporates popular elements of Greek mythology, all the while offering banqueters an erudite puzzle to solve during the course of their banquet.*

Questo articolo esamina il cosiddetto piatto 'Africa', parte del tesoro di vasellame da mensa in argento scoperto in una cisterna nella Villa della Pisanella, una villa rustica *distrutta nell'eruzione del Vesuvio nel 79 d.C. L'articolo propone una nuova interpretazione dell'iconografia del piatto e deduce che la donna al centro dell'emblema sia Cleopatra Selene, mentre gli attributi che la circondano si riferiscono ai suoi genitori Cleopatra VII e Marco Antonio, suoi fratelli Alessandro Helios e Tolomeo Filadelfo, suo marito Juba II di Mauretania, e il loro antenato mitologico il semi-dio Eracle. Pertanto gli emblemi hanno lo scopo di stimolare una riflessione sui destini di Antonio e Cleopatra VII, discendenti di Eracle che scelsero la via del vizio risultata fatale nella disfatta inflitta da Ottaviano nella battaglia di Azio. La virtù, la vittoria e la clemenza di Ottaviano, combinato con il tutorato dei loro figli, assicurò la seguente promozione della loro figlia Cleopatra Selene come figura chiave nella sua strategia dinastica e politica, attraverso il*

[1] I would like to thank Mark Bradley and Andreas Kropp in the Department of Classics at the University of Nottingham, and Josephine Crawley Quinn and the three anonymous readers of the *Papers of the British School at Rome*. I would also like to thank the Fondation Hardt pour l'Étude de l'Antiquité Classique where, as the recipient of a Graduate Bursary, I undertook the initial research and writing of this paper, and the British School at Rome where, as the recipient of a Rome Fellowship, I completed it. All abbreviations follow those listed in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (third edition).

matrimonio con Juba II e la loro nomina come sovrani clienti della Mauretania. Anche loro supposti discendenti di Eracle, Juba II e Cleopatra Selene scelsero di seguire i passi dei loro illustri antenati lungo la via della virtù. In comune con altri pezzi del tesoro ritrovato, il piatto 'Africa' allude a recenti episodi storici e a personaggi, e utilizza la morte come mezzo di promozione della gioia della vita e incorpora elementi popolari della mitologia greca, offrendo per tutto il tempo ai banchettanti un enigma erudito da risolvere nel corso del loro banchetto.

INTRODUCTION

In 1895 archaeologists excavating a *villa rustica* at Boscoreale discovered a treasure trove containing 109 pieces of silverware (Fig. 1).[2] The collection was a *ministerium* comprising silver for both eating (*argentum escarium*) and drinking (*argentum potorium*). It had been deposited — most likely in some sort of wooden chest that no longer survives — inside a cistern below the *cella vinaria* for safe keeping immediately prior to or during the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79; the skeleton of the man presumed to have hidden it there was found alongside it, clutching a leather purse filled with a thousand gold *aurei*.[3] The pieces are thought to date from the Augustan Principate, 27 BC–AD 14. Over a hundred of them are now owned by the Musée du Louvre and are currently on display in Paris. Several items in the collection have come under particular scrutiny: one pair of drinking cups with historical reliefs portraying Augustus and Tiberius, a second pair of drinking cups that depict the skeletons of famous Greek writers and philosophers, and a dish presenting a woman wearing an elephant scalp have been the subjects of much scholarly debate.[4] It is this last piece that is the subject of this paper.

The dish is made of partially gilded cast silver and is decorated with an emblema depicting a female wearing an elephant scalp in conjunction with a wide range of religious and mythological attributes in high relief achieved by the repoussé technique; it is 22.5 cm in diameter and 6 cm in height, with the weight engraved on the bottom.[5] It rests on a low ring foot and would have been displayed prominently. But what, exactly, would those who saw the dish

[2] For the original publication of the silverware, see A. Héron de Villefosse, *Le trésor de Boscoreale* (*Monuments et mémoires Eugene Piot 5*) (Paris, 1899). See also F. Baratte, *Le trésor d'orfèvrerie romaine de Boscoréale* (*Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux*) (Paris, 1986).

[3] K.S. Painter, *The Insula of the Menander at Pompeii: the Silver Treasure: Volume* 4 (Oxford, 2001), 14.

[4] All are exhibited in the Musée du Louvre: BR I and II; BJ 1923 and 1924; and BJ 1969 respectively.

[5] See D.E. Strong, Greek and Roman Gold and Silver Plate (London, 1979), 22 for publication and transcription of the inscription with explanatory notes: *PHI(ALA) ET EMB(LEMA) P(ENDENTIA) / P(ONDO) II (= 2 librae) S = =(= dextans) > VI (= 6 scripula) / PHI(ALA) P(ENDENS) P(ONDO) II (= 2 librae) = (= sextans) Σ(= ½ uncia) / EMB(LEMA) P(ENDENS) P(ONDO) S – (= septunx) Σ (= ½ uncia)*. The first part gives the weight of the dish and the emblema together, the second part the dish alone and the third part the emblema alone.

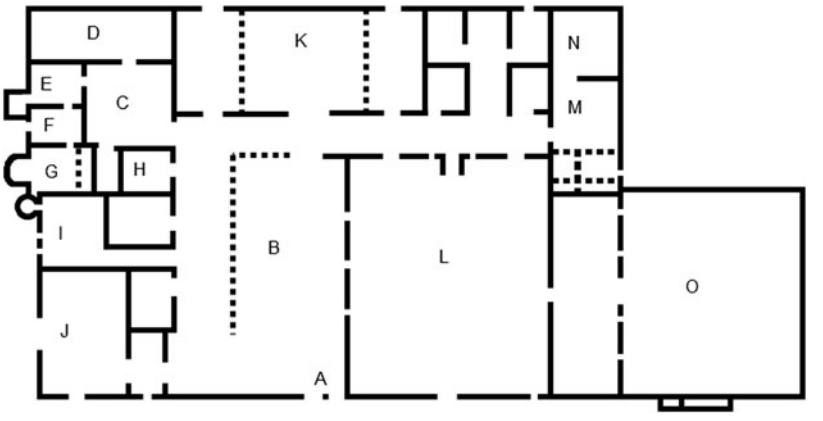

Fig. 1. Plan of the Villa della Pisanella. A = entrance; B = courtyard; C = kitchen; D = stables; E = apodyterium; F = tepidarium; G = caldarium; H = storage (tools); I = bakery; J = triclinium; K = *cella vinaria* (cistern where treasure was found is directly underneath); L = storage (wine dolia); M = oil press; N = olive crusher; O = threshing-floor. *(Drawing: author.)*

displayed thus have been seeing? And was this what those who commissioned and crafted the dish originally intended them to see? Ancient viewing practices are difficult to reconstruct in their entirety: the very existence of ekphrastic texts makes it clear that, in the words of Jaš Elsner, there was 'an acute self-awareness about the gaze's potential for failure, error and deception'.[6] Paul Zanker's examination of the innovations that occurred in the visual language and imagery of public art and architecture over the course of the Augustan Principate led him to observe that the adaptation of these innovations in private art and architecture resulted in the development of 'a kind of erudite puzzle': an image, or set of images, that were deliberately designed to be ambiguous.[7] Since the original publication of the dish in 1899, numerous different suggestions regarding the identity of the woman and the meaning of the attributes have been made. Antoine Héron de Villefosse suggested that she is the personification of Africa, and so the piece has come to be referred to generally as the 'Africa' dish.[8] Paul Perdrizet thought the city of Alexandria a more appropriate identification.[9] Contrarily, Marie-Odile Jentel considered it a personification of

[6] See J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer* (Cambridge, 1995), 26, and J. Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text* (Princeton, 2007), 67–8, for a discussion of ekphrasis.

[7] P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor, 1990), 253.

[8] See also G.F. Salcedo, 'La iconografia de Africa en epoca romana', *Archive Español de Arqueologia* 64 (1991), 284–92, for a more recent attempt to argue in favour of the identification of the woman as the personification of Africa Panthea, refuting all other suggestions such as Alexandria, Cleopatra VII and Cleopatra Selene (for these, see below).

[9] Héron de Villefosse, *Le trésor de Boscoreale* (above, n. 2), 177; P. Perdrizet, *Bronzes Grècques d'Égypte de la Collection Fouquet* (*Bibliothèque d'art et d'archéologie*) (Paris, 1911), 39. See also

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Egypt.[10] However, Matteo Della Corte thought Cleopatra VII a far likelier candidate; and, more recently, her daughter Cleopatra Selene, wife of Juba II of Mauretania, was also proposed.[11] If the emblema was purposely designed to be inherently ambiguous, thus enabling the dish to serve as an erudite puzzle, it is entirely possible that an ancient viewer likewise might have registered certain aspects of the figure and the attributes, and concluded that one or more of these putative identifications was correct. The identification of the woman with the elephant scalp as Cleopatra Selene has found favour with a number of scholars; however, so far the explanations as to what the attributes depicted in conjunction with her were intended to signify have been less convincing.[12] The approach that I am privileging in this paper, however, not only provides a plausible identification of the woman, but allows a full and comprehensive interpretation of the iconography and the context within which it operated.

THE FIGURE

The figure depicted on the dish is a mature woman with thick curly hair, deep-set eyes, a slightly hooked nose, a strong jaw and a thick neck (Fig. 2). The realistic and distinctive nature of these facial features has led scholars to suggest that she represents a mortal rather than a goddess or a personification, for if she had been intended to represent a goddess or personification, her features surely would have been portrayed in a more idealized and generic way.[13] This in turn suggests that it was intended as a portrait of one particular woman who would be recognized as such by people who saw it, for clearly an object as well-crafted as this was intended to be seen and commented on, rather than permanently hidden away. This implies a subject of some considerable renown, and, considering the historical period in which the emblema is thought to have been designed and subsequently produced, a member of the imperial family such as Octavia or Livia, or an equally well-known figure such as Cleopatra VII, would make sense.[14] However, even without taking into account the

M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, second edition (Oxford, 1957), 277.

[10] M.-A. Jentel, 'Aigyptos', *LIMC* (1981) 1.1, 379–81, esp. p. 380.

[11] M. Della Corte, *Cleopatra, M. Antonio e Ottaviano nelle allegorie storico-umoristiche delle argenterie del tesoro di Boscoreale* (Pompeii, 1951), 35–48; A. Linfert, 'Die Tochter — nicht die Mutter. Nochmals zur 'Africa' Schale von Boscoreale', in N. Bonacasa and A. di Vita (eds), *Alessandria e il mondo ellenistico-romano: studi in onore di Achille Adriani* (*Studi e materiali* 4–5) (Palermo, 1983), 351–8.

[12] See S. Walker and P. Higgs, *Cleopatra: from History to Myth* (London, 2001), 312, for the dish's inclusion in an exhibition celebrating Cleopatra VII (catalogue number 324) and its classification as 'gilded silver dish, decorated with a bust perhaps representing Cleopatra Selene'.

[13] Walker and Higgs, *Cleopatra* (above, n. 12), 312.

[14] See Della Corte, *Cleopatra, M. Antonio e Ottaviano* (above, n. 11), 40–3, for the original suggestion that the emblema was a portrait of Cleopatra VII.

Fig. 2. The 'Africa' dish. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. BJ 1969. © RMN (Musée du Louvre)/Hervé Lewandowski. *(Reproduced courtesy of the Musée du Louvre.)*

peculiar iconography of the emblema, Octavia and Livia can be discounted; enough consistent official portraiture survives in the form of both coin types and sculptures to be certain that the woman in question does not resemble either of them.[15]

When the official portraiture of Cleopatra VII is examined, however, some similarities between the two are apparent; she evidently possessed a distinctive hooked nose and thick neck, seemingly inherited from her father, Ptolemy XII Auletes.[16] While the possession of a hooked nose and thick neck is not proof

[15] See E. Bartman, *Portraits of Livia: Imaging the Imperial Woman in Augustan Rome* (Cambridge, 1999); S.E. Wood, *Imperial Women: a Study in Public Images 40 BC–AD 68* (Leiden, 1999), 27–141; and R. Winkes, 'Livia: portrait and propaganda', in D. Kleiner and S.B. Matheson, *I Claudia* II*: Women in Roman Art and Society* (Austin, 2000), 29–42 for discussion of portraits of Octavia and Livia.

[16] See R.S. Poole, *A Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum: the Ptolemies, Kings of Egypt* (*A. Forni*) (Bologna, 1963), 115–17, plates 39.13 for the coinage of Ptolemy XII Auletes and pp. 122–3, plate 30.5–8 for the coinage of Cleopatra VII. The hooked nose is unusual; for a coin issued by Antony in 34 BC to celebrate his victories in Armenia depicting himself on the obverse and Cleopatra on the reverse, both with distinctive hooked noses, see *RRC* 543; H.A. Gruber, *Coins of the Roman Republic in the British Museum* (London, 1910), 179. These were discussed by J. Williams, 'Imperial style and the coins of Cleopatra and Mark Antony', in S. Walker and S.-A. Ashton (eds), *Cleopatra Reassessed* (*British Museum Occasional Papers* 103) (London, 2003), 87–94, at p. 92. The thick neck is more problematic, as it may not have been a genuine physical characteristic of either Ptolemy XII Auletes or Cleopatra VII, but rather a generic sign of

positive, this at least does not emphatically rule out identification of the woman as Cleopatra VII, or even Cleopatra Selene, in the way that it does Octavia and Livia.[17] However, when the attribute of the elephant scalp is taken into account, it seems less likely that the woman is intended to be Cleopatra VII (Fig. 3).[18]

Both the elephant and the elephant scalp were associated more commonly with the Roman province of Africa rather than Egypt, although they were also used to signify Mauretania during the reigns of Bocchus II and Juba II.[19] In fact, in the wake of the Roman annexation of Egypt it became common practice to use the crocodile as an attribute, whether the intention was to symbolize Egypt, Alexandria or even the river Nile.[20] Thus, considering the probable date of design and production, the likelihood that the woman is an historical figure and the clear association with Roman Africa, Cleopatra Selene is the most appropriate candidate.[21]

strength and power that was utilized in portraits of numerous Hellenistic rulers. See also S. Walker, 'From queen of Egypt to queen of kings: the portraits of Cleopatra VII', in N. Bonacasa and A.-M. Donadoni Roveri (eds), *Faraoni come dei, Tolemei come faraoni. (Atti del V congresso internazionale Italo-Egiziano, Torino, Archivio di Stato)* (Palermo, 2003), 508–17, esp. p. 512 for the suggestion that a monumental Parian marble head found at Iol Caesarea and identified as either Cleopatra Selene or Cleopatra VII derived from the Cleopatra VII 'queen of kings' portrait type intended to portray her as the defender of Egypt, which in turn derived from portraits of Cleopatra Thea, queen of Syria.

[17] For discussion of the official portraiture of Cleopatra Selene, see D.W. Roller, *The World of Juba II and Kleopatra Selene. Royal Scholarship on Rome's African Frontier* (London, 2003), 139–42; and P. Higgs, 'Resembling Cleopatra: Cleopatra VII's portraits in the context of late Hellenistic female portraiture', in Walker and Ashton (eds), *Cleopatra Reassessed* (above, n. 16), 57–70.

[18] See D. Svenson, *Darstellungen Hellenistischer Könige mit Götterattributen* (Frankfurt, 1995), 106–15, for discussion of the different uses of the elephant scalp as an attribute on portraits.

[19] J.A. Maritz, 'The image of Africa: the evidence of coinage', *Acta Classica* 44 (2001), 105–26. For a coin type depicting the head of Bocchus II on the obverse and an elephant marching on the reverse, see British Museum inv. G1874, 0715.493. For a coin type depicting a diademed bust of Juba II on the obverse and the bust of a woman wearing an elephant scalp on the reverse, see British Museum inv. 1908, 0404.23. For a coin type depicting a diademed head of Juba II on the obverse and Victory holding an elephant scalp and accompanied by an elephant holding a crown on the reverse, see British Museum inv. 1938, 0510.178. For publication and discussion of these coin types, see J. Alexandropoulos, *Les monnaies de l'Afrique antique, 400 av. J.-C.–40 ap. J.-C.* (Toulouse, 2007), catalogue numbers 60, 70 and 138 respectively.

[20] As inaugurated by Octavian's AEGVPTO CAPTA coinage issued in the period 29–27 BC; see L. Vecchi and J. Vecchi-Gomez, 'Of crocodiles and coins: Roman Egypt personified', *Minerva International Review of Ancient Art and Archaeology* 13.3 (2002), 51–3.

[21] Although attempting to discern personal appearance from coin portraits is notoriously problematic, it is worth noting that the woman on the 'Africa' dish does resemble closely the portraits of Cleopatra Selene that appear on the coins issued in her name, such as British Museum, inv. G1874, 0715.491; both have curly swept-back hair, deep-set eyes, a long slightly hooked nose, a strong chin and a thick neck.

Fig. 3. Elephant scalp detail. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. BJ 1969. © RMN (Musée du Louvre)/Hervé Lewandowski. *(Reproduced courtesy of the Musée du Louvre.)*

THE ATTRIBUTES

The identification of the woman as Cleopatra Selene does not automatically explain away the plethora of attributes depicted in conjunction with her. As already discussed, she wears the elephant scalp associated with Roman Africa or Mauretania, but in addition to this, in her right hand she holds a snake while in her left she bears a cornucopia topped with a crescent moon and embossed with a bust of a god, an eagle and two stars. To her left, a lyre fills the gap between the cornucopia and the edge of the emblema. Diametrically opposed to the snake is a panther; the two creatures face each other and look directly into each other's eyes. At her right shoulder are a lion, a club, a bow and a quiver. Below these, a sistrum fills the right-hand gap between her upper arm and the edge of the emblema. At her waist is a cluster of fruit including grapes, pomegranates and figs, along with a stalk of wheat and cedar cones. These are surmounted by a peacock positioned between but below the snake and the panther. Underneath these, a dolphin rides the crest of a wave next to a pair of tongs, a snake entwined around a staff and a sword.

If the relative size of each of the attributes is any indication of their significance, it is the cornucopia clasped in the woman's left hand that is the most important, an instantly recognizable symbol of fertility and abundance that appeared frequently on Ptolemaic coinage from the reign of Ptolemy I Soter through to that of Cleopatra VII (Fig. 4). It is also here that we can begin to strengthen the initial identification of the woman as Cleopatra Selene. The cornucopia is engraved not only with a bust of the sun god Helios, but it is topped with a crescent moon (Fig. 5); according to Plutarch, the fraternal twins borne by Cleopatra

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Fig. 4. Cornucopia detail. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. BJ 1969. © RMN (Musée du Louvre)/Hervé Lewandowski. *(Reproduced courtesy of the Musée du Louvre.)*

VII and fathered by Mark Antony were named Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene.[22] The two stars, often used to symbolize the Dioscuri, thus can be seen as being a second — rather whimsical — reference to the twins.[23] However, the Dioscuri equally could be a reference to Alexander Helios and his and Cleopatra Selene's younger brother Ptolemy Philadelphus; alluding to the Dioscuri was not the sole prerogative of twins, as the Emperor Tiberius would later make clear when he associated them with himself and his younger brother Drusus.[24] The eagle was a royal symbol and, like the cornucopia, was used throughout the Hellenistic period by the Ptolemaic rulers, thus emphasizing the

[22] Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 36.3.

[23] Each of the stars has eight points, as opposed to the seven-pointed star — frequently accompanied by a crescent moon — used to represent the Graeco-Egyptian god Sarapis.

[24] For the Emperor Tiberius rededicating the Temple of Castor and Pollux in the Forum in the name of himself and his deceased younger brother, Drusus, see Dio Cass. 55.27.3–5, 55.33.4; Ov. *Fast.* 1.707.

Fig. 5. Moon detail. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. BJ 1969. © RMN (Musée du Louvre)/Hervé Lewandowski. *(Reproduced courtesy of the Musée du Louvre.)*

roles of Alexander Helios, Cleopatra Selene and even Ptolemy Philadelphus as members of the Ptolemaic royal house, siblings who, following the territorial grants of 36 BC and 34 BC respectively, were also rulers in their own right.[25]

Second in size to the cornucopia are the snake clasped in the woman's right hand and the panther rearing to face it. While the cornucopia can be interpreted as a reference to Alexander Helios, Cleopatra Selene and perhaps even Ptolemy Philadelphus, the snake and the panther clearly can be seen to represent their parents. It has been suggested that the snake is the asp — or Egyptian cobra — that Cleopatra used to commit suicide, or possibly even the uraeus, the royal symbol of the Egyptian pharaohs.[26] Neither of these

[25] For discussion of the possibility of identifying allusions to the children on the dish, see Linfert, 'Die Tochter — nicht die Mutter' (above, n. 11), 352–3. For the eagle as a royal emblem, see Diod. Sic. 1.87.9; Horapollo 2.56. Ptolemy I Soter issued coins depicting an eagle as early as 315 BC, while he was still technically only governing Egypt and Cyprus for Alexander IV. See Poole, *The Ptolemies* (above, n. 16), 2, plate 1.2–4. The eagle continued to be featured on Ptolemaic coinage through to the reigns of Cleopatra VII and Ptolemy XVI Caesar (Caesarion). See Poole, *The Ptolemies* (above, n. 16), 122–4, plate 30.5–9.

[26] Della Corte, *Cleopatra, M. Antonio e Ottaviano* (above, n. 11), 36. J.G. Griffiths, 'The death of Cleopatra VII', *JEg. Arch.* 47 (1961), 113–18; Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (above, n. 9), 277.

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suggestions is unreasonable, but ultimately the overriding association is clearly with Cleopatra herself, simultaneously queen and pharaoh of Egypt, as well as the New Isis.[27] Likewise, the panther rearing to face the snake — and by doing so enabling the pair to make direct eye contact — clearly is associated with Dionysus and, through him, Antony, himself proclaimed the New Dionysus (Fig. 6).[28]

Also placed in apposition with each other at the very edges of the emblema and so both echoing and supplementing the snake and the panther are the sistrum of Isis and the lyre of Dionysus.[29] The peacock perched amongst the fruit between the two creatures, all of which is much smaller than the snake and the panther, can be seen — as the sacred bird of the goddess Hera — not only to allude to Cleopatra's preparations for her first fateful meeting with Antony at Ephesus in 41 BC, explicitly linking Cleopatra's preparations for her meeting with Antony to those made by Hera for her meeting with Zeus in Book XIV of the *Iliad*, but also to serve as an introduction to the hero Heracles, to whom the majority of the remaining attributes can be linked.[30]

The cluster of objects at the woman's right shoulder — a lion, club, bow and quiver — all can be recognized as symbols of Heracles, not only the supposed ancestor of Antony but also Cleopatra — as a descendant of Ptolemy I Soter —, and through them Cleopatra Selene and her siblings; even her husband Juba II associated himself with the legendary hero.[31] A number of Heracles's labours had long been thought to have taken place in northwest Africa, and some of the Mauretanian tribes over which Juba and Cleopatra Selene went on to rule

[27] Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 54.6.

[28] Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 24.3, 60.3; Dio Cass. 50.5.3.

[29] For Antony associated with Dionysus and the lyre, see Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 26.3. For Cleopatra associated with Isis and the sistrum, particularly using the sistrum as a means to summon her troops to arms, see Verg. *Aen.* 8.696; Prop. 3.11.43; Luc. 8.832, 10.63.

[30] For the peacock as the sacred bird of Hera, see Ath. 655 A. For Hera's preparations for her meeting with Zeus, see Hom. *Il.* 14.162. Cleopatra VII was not the only royal woman associated with Hera: for a coin of Julia Domna, issued in Alexandria and depicting Hera in conjunction with a peacock, see R.S. Poole, *British Museum Catalogue of the Coins of Alexandria and the Nomes* (Bologna, 1964), 185. For the etymology of Heracles, Ἥρα κλέος, see J. Boardman, O. Palagia and S. Woodford, 'Herakles', *LIMC* 4.1, 728–838, at p. 728. Another item from the Boscoreale hoard is illustrated with easily recognizable figures from Greek mythology: a silver mirror bears a medallion depicting the encounter between Zeus in the form of a swan and Leda, Musée du Louvre inv. BJ 2159.

[31] Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 4, 36, 60. See also the frequent references to Heracles on the coinage of Antony and Juba in particular. One of Juba's silver coin types, dating to the 35th year of his reign, depicts Heracles wearing his famous lion scalp and the legend REX IUBA on the obverse face with his club and bow on the reverse face, British Museum inv. 1908, 0404.35. Another, dating to the 36th year of his reign, depicts Heracles wearing the lion scalp and the legend REX IUBA on the obverse face with the club, bow and an arrow on the reverse face, British Museum inv. 1938, 0510.183. A third, dating to the 40th year of his reign, depicts Heracles wearing a lion scalp with the club over his shoulder and the legend REX IUBA on the obverse face, while the reverse face encloses the legend CAESAREA, the name of Mauretania's capital city, in a wreath.

Fig. 6. Panther detail. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. BJ 1969. © RMN (Musée du Louvre)/Hervé Lewandowski. *(Reproduced courtesy of the Musée du Louvre.)*

claimed to descend from him as well.[32] The lion could refer to the Nemean lion, whose invulnerable hide Heracles wore and once even used as a sail during his voyage to Erytheia to undertake his tenth labour.[33] The club likewise could refer to the weapon that in one version of the myth he cut from the trunk of an olive tree at Nemea.[34] The bow and quiver were his earliest weapons; Homer, in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, depicts him as a bowman, as does Hesiod.[35] To these can be added the tongs and snake-entwined staff; the tongs indicate the god Hephaistos, who forged Heracles's armour, while the snake-entwined staff indicates Asklepios, who healed Heracles after he was injured, and the sword was given to Heracles by Hermes.[36]

[32] Plin. *HN* 5.7; Strabo 17.3.7; Pompon. 1.26–7. See Roller, *The World of Juba II and Kleopatra Selene* (above, n. 17), 154, for discussion of Juba's attempts to link himself with the Heracles cycle. According to Plut. *Vit. Sert*. 9, a genealogy was produced that traced Juba's descent from Heracles.

[33] For the Nemean lion, see Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.65–6, 4, 9–10. For the voyage to Erytheia, see *Serv. Dan*. 8.299.

[34] Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.71, 4, 11.

[35] Hom. *Il*. 5.392–7; Hom. *Od*. 11.607; Hes. *fr*. 33a 29.

[36] For an image of Hephaistos forging Heracles's armour dating from the late third–early second centuries BC, see Musée du Louvre, inv. CA 551. Heracles reputedly was given a bow by Apollo (Hes. *fr*. 33a 29), a sword by Hermes and a club by Hephaistos (Diod. Sic. 4.14.3). For Asklepios Kotyleus healing Heracles after he was injured, see Paus. 3.19.7, 8.53.93. He is depicted frequently with any one or a combination of these weapons.

However, there is more to the incorporation of various elements from the mythological cycle of Heracles than an acknowledgement of the shared heritage of Antony and Cleopatra VII, and Juba II and Cleopatra Selene: there is also the issue of Heracles's choice between Virtue and Vice. This story supposedly dates back to the fifth century BC, when it was developed by the sophist Prodikos, but the earliest version that survives is to be found in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*.[37] It was later incorporated into Cicero's *De Officiis*, in an attempt to offer guidance to his son.[38] Heracles ultimately made the right choice, following the path of virtue to a future as a demi-god, but of his descendants, Antony and Cleopatra VII arguably chose to follow the path of vice, while Cleopatra Selene — in addition to her husband, Juba II — could be considered to have followed the path of virtue, and this is reflected in Octavian's (and later Augustus's) attempts to incorporate the couple into his dynastic and political strategies. Just as Juba II participated in Julius Caesar's African triumph in 46 BC, so Cleopatra Selene participated in Octavian's triple triumph, appearing with her twin brother Alexander Helios alongside an effigy of Cleopatra VII and an asp on the third day, when Octavian's Egyptian victory was celebrated.[39] However, she also appears to have featured in one or both of the previous days' festivities, riding in Octavian's chariot with him and consequently occupying a prominent position on the monument commemorating Octavian's victory at the Battle of Actium at Nikopolis.[40] Once appointed king and queen of Mauretania, Juba II and Cleopatra Selene proved to be model client rulers, renaming the royal capital Iol Caesarea — in honour of Octavian — and transforming it into a Roman city complete with forum, theatre and amphitheatre, as well as establishing the royal court as a centre of intellectual and artistic patronage and innovation.[41] During this period, Cleopatra Selene may even have been depicted — with one of her children — in the north

[37] Prodikos *fr.* 2 DK; Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.21–34. For discussion of this story and its reception in antiquity, see E. Stafford, 'Vice or virtue? Herakles and the art of allegory', in L. Rawlings and H. Bowden (eds), *Herakles and Hercules: Exploring a Graeco-Roman Divinity* (Swansea, 2005), 71–96.

[38] Cic. *Off.* 1.118: 'For we cannot all have the experience of Hercules, as we find it in the words of Prodicus in Xenophon: 'When Hercules was just coming into youth's estate (the time which Nature has appointed unto every man for choosing the path of life on which he would enter), he went out into a desert place. And as he saw two paths, the path of Pleasure and the path of Virtue, he sat down and debated long and earnestly which one it was better for him to take' '.

[39] For Juba's participation in Julius Caesar's triumph (which also included Cleopatra VII's sister Arsinoe), see App. *B. Civ.* 2.101; Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 55. For Cleopatra Selene's participation in Octavian's triumph, see Dio Cass. 51.21.8; Euseb. *Chron.* 2.140; Zonar. 10.31.

[40] For Cleopatra Selene's role in Octavian's triple triumph on the monument at Nikopolis, see K. L. Zachos, 'The *Tropaeum* of the sea-battle of Actium at Nikopolis: interim report', *JRA* 16 (2003), 65–92, at pp. 90–2.

[41] On Iol Caesarea and the client kingdom of Mauretania, see Roller, *The World of Juba II and Kleopatra Selene* (above, n. 17), 119–62.

processional frieze on the Ara Pacis, intended to represent the Roman presence in Africa.[42]

So when the woman wearing the elephant scalp and the attributes surrounding her are considered together in this way, the emblema can be read as a meditation on the fate of Antony, Cleopatra and their children, the result of the choices they made — or had made for them — in life. The emblema was not unique in presenting such a meditation, although the means by which this was accomplished is incredibly innovative and complex: contemporaneous works of art such as the Portland Vase and the Carpegna Cameo seem to have been produced with similar aims in mind. Susan Walker recently proposed a new reading of the Portland Vase; that, rather than the subject being the marriage of Peleus and Thetis or even the birth of Augustus, the scenes are a depiction of Antony choosing Cleopatra VII over Octavia, with a dual chronological perspective enabling the subsequent downfall of Antony and supremacy of Octavian also to be shown as resulting from this choice (Figs 7 and 8).[43]

However, there are several additional features of the 'Africa' dish that cannot be disregarded if we are to appreciate fully both the historical and the cultural context of the entire piece. At the very bottom of the emblema, almost hidden by the protruding repoussé figure of the woman and her plethora of attributes, is the seemingly innocuous engraving of a dolphin riding the crest of a wave. This can be read as a subtle reference to Octavian's victory, and thus Antony and Cleopatra's defeat, at Actium in 31 BC.[44] A famous naval battle, the victory was commemorated in Rome in the form of dolphins set up on the spina of the Circus Maximus for the purpose of keeping track of the laps during races.[45]

[42] For Cleopatra Selene's role in Octavian's dynastic strategy and propaganda, and the possibility of her appearing on the Ara Pacis, see D.E.E. Kleiner and B. Buxton, 'Pledges of empire: the Ara Pacis and the donations of Rome', *AJArch.* 112 (2008), 57–89, at pp. 83–5.

[43] S. Walker, *The Portland Vase* (*British Museum Objects in Focus*) (London, 2004), 41–58. She has agreed with a previous identification of the subject of the base disc as Paris, who, like Antony, was overly influenced by Eros and plunged his city into war (p. 61). She also has suggested that, in the same vein, the Carpegna Cameo, generally considered to depict Dionysus and Ariadne, actually portrays Antony being both literally and physically intoxicated by Cleopatra, accompanied by two satyrs — one whom is of African appearance — and a panther (pp. 61–3).

[44] This was first suggested by Della Corte, *Cleopatra, M. Antonio e Ottaviano* (above, n. 11), 45. However, with regard to the other attributes, he considered the lyre to refer to Apollo, the bow and quiver to Diana and the sword to Mars, as deities particularly associated with the Julian gens, and could not account for the forceps of Hephaistos, the staff of Asklepios and the club of Heracles. The presence of the dolphin as a reference to the Battle of Actium here is interesting when juxtaposed with Walker's interpretation of the creature coiled in Cleopatra's lap on the Portland Vase as a *ketos*, or monstrous sea-serpent, indicative of Cleopatra's role supplying arms to Antony for both his eastern campaigns and his war against Octavian; see Walker, *The Portland Vase* (above, n. 43), 47–8 (chief among her provisions were timber and ships for the construction of a navy). See also Zachos, 'The *Tropaeum* of the sea-battle of Actium at Nikopolis' (above, n. 40), 79, for the use of dolphins in alluding to Actium and the role of Neptune in Octavian's victory on the Nikopolis Tropaeum.

[45] These dolphins subsequently were fitted with pipes and turned into a fountain (Tert. *De spect.* 8).

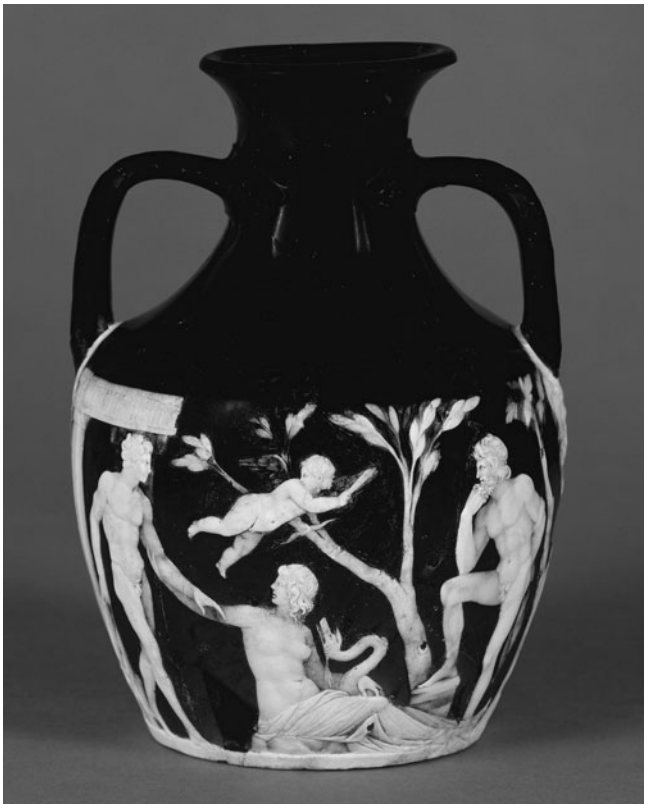

Fig. 7. The Portland Vase depicting (from left to right, as interpreted by Susan Walker) Antony, Eros, Cleopatra and Antony. British Museum, inv. 1945, 0927.1. *(Reproduced courtesy of the British Museum.)*

In addition to this, the entire emblema is surrounded — entirely constrained, in fact — by a wreath of myrtle and laurel (Fig. 9). According to Pliny the Elder, not only did myrtles grow on the original site of the city of Rome, but the tree and its fruit were associated with Romulus, the founder of the city whose name Octavian considered taking before he finally settled on Augustus in 27 BC.[46] The myrtle wreath was associated also with military victory, historically worn by generals celebrating ovations and triumphs.[47] In turn, laurel wreaths also were assigned to generals for their triumphs; not only did Octavian celebrate a triple triumph that culminated in an entire day focusing on his victory over Cleopatra and his subjugation of Egypt, but a type of laurel known as the royal laurel or Augustan laurel later came to be associated specifically with him.[48] Consequently, the Romans used the laurel to signify peace, rejoicing and victory.[49]

[46] Plin. *HN* 15.36; Suet. *Aug*. 7.
[47] Plin. *HN* 15.38.
[48] Suet. *Aug*. 22; Augustus, *Res Gestae* 34; Plin. *HN* 15.39.
[49] Plin. *HN* 15.40.

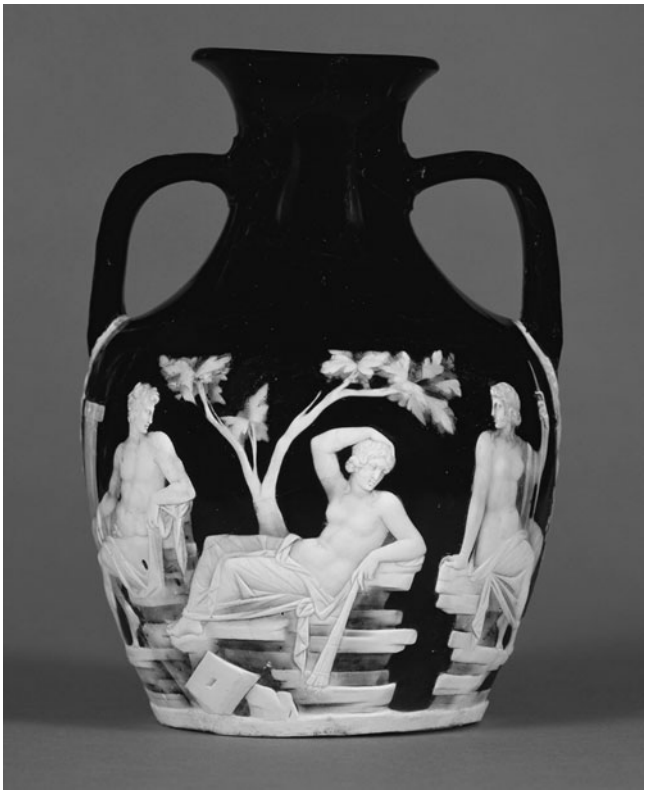

Fig. 8. The Portland Vase depicting (from left to right, as interpreted by Susan Walker) Octavian, Octavia and Venus. British Museum, inv. 1945, 0927.1. *(Reproduced courtesy of the British Museum.)*

Fig. 9. Myrtle and laurel detail. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. BJ 1969. © RMN (Musée du Louvre)/Hervé Lewandowski. *(Reproduced courtesy of the Musée du Louvre.)*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068246212000049 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Although at first glance the emblema appears to be commemorating Antony, Cleopatra VII and their offspring, the small but emphatic reference to the Battle of Actium and the use of the myrtle and laurel wreath to enclose the entire display allude to their defeat and demise; it is worth noting also that there are no apparent references to Cleopatra's eldest son Ptolemy Caesarion, whom Octavian had executed following Cleopatra's suicide. In fact, the choice of Cleopatra Selene as the central figure extends far beyond Octavian's victory and alludes to his subsequent mercy in keeping her alive. She would not have married Juba II, come to be queen of Mauretania and thus been entitled to be depicted wearing an elephant scalp — let alone been considered historically and politically significant enough to be depicted at all — had it not been for Octavian's clemency.[50]

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE DISH

The silverware from Boscoreale can be dated securely to prior to the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79. However, individual pieces have been dated more emphatically to specific points during the Augustan Principate; a strong case has been made for dating the pair of silver cups with historical reliefs to the end of the Principate, contemporaneous with the composition of the *Res Gestae*.[51] The reading I have proposed for the dish would require a date sometime after 25 BC, when Cleopatra Selene married Juba II and the pair was dispatched to Mauretania to serve as the kingdom's client rulers.[52] It is worth remembering that the friezes on the Ara Pacis depicted a procession occurring in 13 BC, and if Cleopatra Selene and her son were involved, occupying prominent positions befitting of their high status as the Mauretanian client queen and prince, she no doubt would have been deemed an entirely suitable subject for a work of art such as

[50] For clemency, or *clementia*, as one of Augustus's virtues, see K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture* (New Jersey, 1996), 84–5. Augustus himself later emphasized how he had acted with this in mind following the end of the civil wars, at *Res Gestae* 3.1. See also Verg. *Aen.* 6.853.

[51] A.L. Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire in the Age of Augustus. The Case of the Boscoreale Cups* (Berkeley, 1995). She also proposed that the individual who originally received or commissioned the Boscoreale cups did so because he had served in the military on the staff of Tiberius and/or Drusus, much like the historian Velleius Paterculus, as a tie between himself and one or both of the brothers, and thus explained why the cups were kept for so long, despite showing signs of significant wear and tear. See also Galinsky, *Augustan Culture* (above, n. 50), 66–70.

[52] On the marriage of Cleopatra Selene and Juba II, see Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 87; Dio Cass. 51.15.6. For a poem possibly written by Crinagoras to celebrate the occasion, see *Anth. Pal.* 9.235; see also D. Braund, 'Anth. Pal. 9.235: Juba II, Cleopatra Selene and the course of the Nile', *CQ* 34.1 (1984), 175–8. For coins issued in Mauretania in the name of both that have been dated to 20–19 BC, see J. Mazard, *Corpus Nummorum Numidiae Mauretaniaque* (Paris, 1955–8), no. 357; see also J. Mazard, 'Un inédit de Juba II et Cleopatre-Selene', *Gazette Numismatique Suisse* 31 (1981), 1–2.

the 'Africa' dish.[53] One very specific suggestion made is that the dish was commissioned upon Cleopatra Selene's death, in around 5–4 BC.[54] This is certainly compatible with the dating of the aforementioned drinking cups, as well as the pair that depict a banquet being enjoyed by animated skeletons.[55]

There is also evidence for Cleopatra VII and her offspring having been honoured privately in the nearby town of Pompeii during the mid- to late first century BC. Recently, a female figure in a wall-painting in the House of Marcus Fabius Rufus was examined and an identification of Cleopatra VII in the guise of the goddess Venus Genetrix has been suggested.[56] If this identification is in fact correct, it is thought that this painting was commissioned to celebrate Julius Caesar's dedication of the Temple of Venus Genetrix in the Forum Iulium at Rome in 46 BC, which also contained a statue of Cleopatra, since her son by Caesar, Caesarion, was born around this time.[57] At some point, this wall-painting was covered up, possibly soon after Cleopatra's suicide and Caesarion's murder in 30 BC. According to Walker, in this wall painting, 'we see reflections of the life and times of Cleopatra and Caesar refashioned for private consumption. This was not a static process, but one that evolved with changing tastes and changing politics'.[58] Thus it is feasible that shortly after this, and not too far away, similar reflections were being made upon the life and times of Cleopatra and Antony, their offspring and their ultimate fates at the hands of Octavian.

THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE DISH

This new reading of the dish begs the question: why was this subject — or set of subjects — considered suitable and selected? The dish is unique; it was evidently specially commissioned, designed and crafted, perhaps even by Alexandrian silversmiths.[59] Although Augustus had close links with Pompeii and Boscoreale, the emblema does not seem to have been designed to honour him and his victory in a way that would have been immediately obvious to all who saw it.[60] Rather, the main focus of the piece is very much on Antony and Cleopatra, and

[53] See Kleiner and Buxton, 'Pledges of empire' (above, n. 42), 84–5, for Cleopatra Selene's political prominence in this period.

[54] Walker and Higgs, *Cleopatra* (above, n. 12), 312.

[55] K.M.D. Dunbabin, 'Sic erimus cuncti … the skeleton in Graeco-Roman art', *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 101 (1986), 185–255, at pp. 224–30.

[56] S. Walker, 'Cleopatra in Pompeii?', *PBSR* 76 (2008), 35–46, 345–8.

[57] For the statue of Cleopatra, see App. *B. Civ*. 2.102.424; Dio Cass. 51.22.3.

[58] Walker, 'Cleopatra in Pompeii?' (above, n. 56), 44.

[59] Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (above, n. 9), 277.

[60] See *CIL* X 832 for Augustus's nephew Marcellus acting as a patron of Pompeii. See also Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire in the Age of Augustus* (above, n. 51), 7, for a set of salt dishes from the Boscoreale hoard that are inscribed 'Pamphili Caes L', perhaps the name of a freedman manumitted by Octavian in the period 44–27 BC.

through them Cleopatra Selene. There is a significant amount of evidence for close links between Pompeii and both Alexandria, in particular, and Egypt as a whole.[61] However, the archaeological context in which the dish was found should not be forgotten; the Villa della Pisanella was a *villa rustica* that cultivated vines and produced wine, and the silverware was even found within a cistern beneath the *cella vinaria*. The villa is thought to have been owned by the banker, Lucius Caecilius Jucundus, and managed by one of his freedmen, Lucius Caecilius Aphrodisius, and it was not unprecedented for either a banker or a freedman to own items of such high quality, particularly when the fact that the Boscoreale hoard was an assemblage of pieces that had accumulated over the course of a century (and a high proportion of the pieces showed evidence of significant wear and tear) is considered.[62]

The possession of silverware was of fundamental importance in the late Republic and early Empire, a mark not only of wealth but also of culture.[63] Consequently, its prominent display was common practice, a form of ostentation and conspicuous consumption.[64] The 'Africa' dish was part of a set of silverware that would have been intended to be used for banqueting — the dish was itself likely propped up and used to decorate the triclinium, its central erudite puzzle intended as a means of occupying and entertaining guests —, so the choice of Antony and Cleopatra as subjects makes sense, particularly when Heracles's choice between virtue and vice is considered too. In a general sense, the barbaric and decadent east was where extravagant and luxurious banqueting was thought to have originated, along with those foods and drinks necessary to accomplish it.[65] More specifically, Antony and Cleopatra were renowned for their extravagant feasting; Lucan wrote at length about the way Cleopatra was reputed to have used banqueting as a means of impressing and seducing Julius Caesar in 46 BC, Plutarch claimed that she employed similar tactics at Ephesus with Antony in 41 BC, and Macrobius satirized their subsequent gluttony, culminating in Cleopatra's wager that she could consume ten million sesterces in

[61] See P.G.P. Meyboom, *The Nile Mosaic at Palestrina: Early Evidence of Egyptian Religion in Italy* (Leiden, 1995); and M.J. Versluys, *Aegyptiaca Romana: Nilotic Scenes and the Roman Views of Egypt* (Leiden, 2002), for discussion of the possibility that the Nile mosaics of Palestrina and Pompeii were produced at a workshop in Alexandria.

[62] R.C. Carrington, 'Studies in the Campanian *villae rusticae*', *JRS* 21 (1931), 110–30, esp. p. 113. For an overview of the different sets of silver table-ware recovered from *domus* and *villae* in Pompeii and the surrounding area, see Painter, *The Insula of the Menander at Pompeii* (above, n. 3). For discussion of the Boscoreale hoard as an assemblage accreted over time, see Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire in the Age of Augustus* (above, n. 51), 7. However, considering Jucundus's occupation, the possibility that the silverware did not in fact belong to him but was being retained as security for a loan also must be considered.

[63] See K.M.D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge, 2003), 65–6.

[64] Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet* (above, n. 63), 86.

[65] See A. Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures* (London, 2000), 10–11, 266–9; C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 1993), 187, 204. For the use of dining in as a means of defamation of character in political invective, see A. Corbeill, 'Dining deviants in Roman political invective', in J.P. Hallett and M.B. Skinner (eds), *Roman Sexualities* (New Jersey, 1997), 99–129.

a single meal.[66] Pliny the Elder also recorded this episode; Cleopatra dissolved a pearl in vinegar and drank the mixture in order to win the bet with Antony.[67] This apparent disregard for priceless possessions seemingly was not an isolated incident; she was also renowned for bestowing gifts of gold and silver plate upon her dinner guests.[68]

In one sense, the tales of Antony and Cleopatra's extravagant lifestyle in Alexandria — a seemingly never-ending series of banquets and celebrations — are very obviously negative propaganda designed to represent them as self-indulgent and decadent, heavily influenced by the *luxuria* of the east and anathema to Roman sensibilities. However, such *luxuria* was not despised universally, and when Antony and Cleopatra's banqueting is considered as having been something almost inspirational and even something to aspire to, as far as was possible for a member of the provincial élite, the choice of the couple as a subject for an item of silver table-ware is more understandable. It is even possible that this subject was intended to serve as a warning to the banqueters of the danger of overindulgence and *luxuria*; ultimately, old-fashioned Roman sensibilities triumphed over new-fangled exotic ones.

CONCLUSION

Although Cleopatra Selene was first identified as the woman portrayed wearing an elephant scalp on the emblema of the 'Africa' dish almost 30 years ago, this initial identification and subsequent attempts to supplement it by interpreting the numerous attributes depicted in conjunction with her portrait have been inconsistent, and as a result this reading has remained fundamentally unconvincing. However, in this paper I have suggested an alternative reading, one in which the emblema serves as a meditation on the fates of Antony and Cleopatra VII, both descendants of Heracles who failed to follow in his footsteps, choosing instead the path of vice, a choice that resulted in their defeat by Octavian at the Battle of Actium. Octavian's virtue, victory and clemency, combined with his guardianship of their children, ensured the subsequent promotion of their daughter, Cleopatra Selene, as a key figure in his dynastic and political strategy through her marriage to Juba II and the couple's appointment as client rulers of Mauretania. Also supposedly descended from Heracles, Juba II and Cleopatra Selene did choose to follow in their illustrious ancestor's footsteps along the path of virtue, and successfully ruled Mauretania for almost half a century.

Consequently, the emblema on the 'Africa' dish from the Villa della Pisanella at Boscoreale is a fitting companion piece to the Augustus, Tiberius and Drusus

[66] Luc. 10.156–76, 396–8; Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 26; Macrob. *Sat.* 3.17.15. See also Walker, *The Portland Vase* (above, n. 43), 61–2 for discussion of the image of Antony intoxicated with alcohol and Cleopatra on the Carpegna Cameo.

[67] Plin. *HN* 9.119–21.

[68] Ath. 6.299.

drinking cups in that it alludes to recent historical events and personages, as well as to the skeletal philosopher and playwright drinking cups, and the animated skeleton drinking cup in that it utilizes death as a means of promoting the enjoyment of life and commemorates the ultimate deceased libertines. Like the mirror depicting the meeting of Zeus (in the form of a swan) and Leda, it incorporates popular elements of Greek mythology through its prominent allusions to Heracles. These items do not seem to have been conceived, commissioned, designed and produced contemporaneously, but rather were accumulated over time, perhaps by one individual but more likely by several generations of the same family, although their ties to Octavian and the various members of his extended family continued to be celebrated.

The solution to the erudite puzzle of the dish may have been intended as both an inducement to pleasure and a warning of the dangers of too much of the same, and therefore a highly appropriate piece to have on display in a triclinium during a banquet. When displayed prominently, such an unusual item likely would have been a talking point, provoking discussion and debate among the banqueters that would have begun with identification of the images before moving on to possible interpretations of them, perhaps even serving as an introduction to more controversial topics of conversation such as recent history and politics. As is clear from the numerous attempts of modern scholars to identify and interpret the portrait and its attributes, this might well have been a lengthy and contentious process.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068246212000049 Published online by Cambridge University Press