

## Special exhibit

---

Julius Caesar



Mark Antony



Octavian/Augustus



### The "*fatale monstrum*"

... or "deadly monster", was the name given to her by a contemporary Roman poet, Horace. The fateful events began to unfold once two Roman statesmen, Julius Caesar and, then, Mark Antony, fell prey to the charms of this unflatteringly named lady.

She was none other than Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt from 51 BC to 12 August 30 BC, who expertly used both men to obtain and secure control of Egypt. The aura that she created continues to fascinate us

immortalised her in his *Cleopatra*", and George *"Caesar and Cleopatra"* to The topic has also been monumental film stunningly beautiful surviving coin images



to this day. Shakespeare drama *"Antony and Cleopatra"* and Bernard Shaw dedicated her other main relationship. revisited by recent productions featuring female leads. And yet, as show, Cleopatra was not a

classic beauty. Instead, ancient authors praised the rapturous sound of her voice, her eloquence and her facility with languages. This intelligent and cunning queen undoubtedly exerted an irresistible attraction. She knew how to make the most of her charms: provocative robes and the tasteful use of cosmetics bewitched Mark Antony, who was extremely susceptible to the opulence of the Orient. Beforehand, Julius Caesar, who had been known to be very receptive to feminine charms, had been easy prey for Cleopatra. He was apparently

quite impressed by Cleopatra's idea of having herself smuggled to him rolled in a rug, and she needed only one evening to convince Caesar of the righteousness of her claim to the throne. She bore four children from these two relationships – a son by Caesar, whom she, with the father's consent, named Ptolemy XV Caesar and later named as co-regent, as well as two sons and a daughter by Mark Antony. Her arrogance and the inevitable conflict between Caesar's adopted son Octavian, who went down in history under the name of Augustus as the first Roman emperor, and Mark Antony were ultimately her undoing. As Mark Antony's political ally, she did much to exacerbate the tension between the two Roman politicians. In fact, she already saw herself ruling in Rome. Her alleged exclamation "As surely as I shall yet dispense justice on the Roman Capital", however, enraged even Mark Antony's supporters, many of whom then defected to Octavian. The ruling couple's behaviour, designed to provoke Rome and exploited smartly by Octavian to incite opposition to his rival, ultimately led to military conflict. At Octavian's urging, the Senate and the enraged Roman people declared war on the Egyptian queen, who was portrayed as the root of all evil. The outcome is well known. Rome triumphed. Cleopatra tried to use her powers of seduction on one more Roman politician in a final effort to maintain power for herself and her son Ptolemy Caesar. Her efforts, however, left Octavian completely cold. A calculating politician who put the state's interests before his own, Octavian only saw the facts: his rival Mark Antony was dead and all he needed to do now was to eliminate Cleopatra. The last queen of Egypt died under mysterious circumstances at the age of 39 after 22 years in power. Her country then became a Roman province and remained one until the Arab conquest in the 7th century. The same year, Octavian had Ptolemy Caesar, the biological son of his adoptive father, put to death.

---

Recommended reading

Pat Southern, *Cleopatra*. Stroud, 2000.

Susan Walker (ed.), *Cleopatra of Egypt: From History to Myth*. London, 2001.