

History 225 : Cleopatra: History & Myth

Cleopatra VII Philopator, the last Ptolemaic ruler of Egypt (69--30 BCE), has long intrigued the imaginations of her onlookers. She has been dubbed the "world's first celebrity," and her name and many guises have been immortalized in everything from perfume to cigarettes to the silver screen. And yet Cleopatra remains hidden in what has been called a "fog of fiction" – a multiplicity of meanings that the queen herself encouraged, but which have also resulted in a tangled profusion in her images and stories. At times a glamorous seductress, at others, a self-indulgent victim, a tragic romantic, or a power-crazed visionary, Cleopatra has been at once a worldly and alluring manipulator of men, the ruination of the last Hellenistic kingdom, and an inspirational rebel. This course explores the many "Cleopatras," from her own times to the present. It introduces the worlds of Hellenistic Egypt and Late Republican and Early Imperial Rome, and considers the ways in which the Ptolemaic queen constructed her own legend, as well as how her contemporaries responded in both writing and material culture. It examines the gendered nature of cultural politics between Egypt and Rome, as well as between Romans, in the wars between Pompey and Caesar, and Antony and Octavian. The course then reviews subsequent receptions of the Cleopatra legend, from later Greek and Roman authors to modern gendered, Orientalist, and racist versions of "Cleopatra," as she continued to evolve as an icon of the exotic, enigmatic, and ill-fated woman-in-power. May be taken for credit toward the Classics or Classical Studies major or minor or the Gender Studies major or minor.

Credits 4