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## How the attributes of Cleopatra VII changed over time

### Abstract

The legend of Cleopatra VII in Western culture is a frequently researched topic. However, little thought is devoted to the Queen's attributes which, as centuries passed, underwent frequent metamorphoses. In art and literature, the attributes and motifs associated with Cleopatra are mainly the crocodile, the pearl, the snake and the cat (the panther, the lion and the sphinx). These royal symbols seem to have lived their own "lives" and form an interesting linear pattern. Furthermore, their history is full of paradox. The crocodile, although probably attributed to Cleopatra by the Romans, never became Cleopatra's perennial symbol. The famous cobra, initially huge and multiplied, was reduced over time to the size of a bracelet and was eventually replaced by the cat. The latter, undeniably an ancient animal, became Cleopatra's symbol only in the nineteenth century. Moreover, most probably, the snake was not linked to Cleopatra because of the erotic association, neither was the cat assigned to her because she was a voluptuous witch. Modern representations of Cleopatra with African animals are not necessarily a misunderstanding.

**Keywords:** Cleopatra VII; Attributes; Ancient tradition; Western culture.

Cleopatra VII – the last Queen of Hellenistic Egypt – is one of the most prominent figures of the ancient world in Western culture. The Egyptian Queen is also found in the Muslim tradition. However, these two images of Cleopatra are completely different: a *fatale monstrum* versus a great scientist and architect [Ashton 2008: 22; El Daly 2003: 51-54]. In Western culture, Cleopatra herself is the most important figure and her fame has nothing to do with the assessment of her rule over Egypt. A huge number of works of art devoted to Cleopatra prove the extraordinary position held by the Queen in European and American cultures. As Pucci states: "From Jodelle's *Cleopâtre Captive* (1552) to Margaret George's *The Memoirs of Cleopatra* (1997) at least two hundred plays and novels, forty-five operas, five ballets, forty-three movies have been inspired by the Queen of Egypt.

As for paintings and statues, A. Pigler records no fewer than 230 works in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries alone” [Pucci 2011: 195; see also Schuller 2006: 208]. Obviously, every era had its Cleopatra – svelter or more voluptuous, light-skinned or swarthy, with blond or dark hair, clothed or naked, with a shorter or longer nose, Greek (European), Egyptian or African [Shohat 2003: 127-138; Walker and Ashton 2006: 13]. Never in history has Cleopatra been reduced to physiognomic formula – she would not be identified as the Queen without her royal attributes. This is most likely due to the fact that artists and writers created their art in alignment with the spirit of the times, and also because the ancient authors have left no literary description of Cleopatra’s beauty – not even one specific characteristics of her royal face is known. Her profile on coins, which is the basis for the identification of Queen’s busts, is more of a propaganda image rather than a faithful portrait. Also, the famous Cleopatra’s nose has different shapes on different coins – from upturned to Roman [Goudchaux 2001: 210-214; Johansen 2003: 75-77; Walker 2003: 508-517].

The myth of Cleopatra has often been a subject of scientific research [Hughes-Hallett 1990; Hamer 1993; Wyke 1997: 73-109; Walker and Higgs 2001; Walker and Ashton 2003; Andrae and Rhein 2006; Miles 2011]. And yet, the scientific literature has devoted just a meagre space to the traditional Queen’s attributes and their metamorphoses over the centuries in European and later American cultures (from antiquity to the present day). Thus, a question arises whether the elements which contribute to the modern, popular image of the Egyptian Queen originate from the treasury amassed through the ages in the form of great works of literature and art, or whether they are a result of new associations. Which attributes assigned to the Egyptian ruler can boast ancient provenance and which originated later? Recent studies of the legacy of antiquity place the analysis within a specific framework of time and space [Hardwick 2003: 5, 9-10], however, Cleopatra’s attributes form an interesting linear pattern.

It might seem that the modern Cleopatra should resemble a ruler of the cultural centre of the Mediterranean world, which was Alexandria – the capital of Hellenistic Egypt. Unfortunately, few people imagine the Queen holding a papyrus scroll, even though this must have been the object she used most often during her twenty-year rule. In films, it is mainly Romans, the intruders, who handle writing in the Alexandria palace. In modern art, Cleopatra does not look like the owner of the Royal Chancery. The numerous animal attributes that accompany the half-naked ruler attest to the fact that she is more of an erotic Mistress of Wild Animals. This interpretation is perfectly evident in the paintings of American pop culture artists, such as the one by Frank Brunner (1976), where the Queen walks through the dark Egyptian interior, holding two enormous animals of the *Felidae* family on a leash. Two enormous snakes are visible in the background. In another painting (by Jeff Barson, 1996), if not for the Egyptian scenery, one could think that it is the sacred circle of the Syrian Goddess, or a zoo, as we can see a resting lion, two leopards and a monkey. Also, in modern literature many cats are named Cleopatra, including a literary cat character (Mehitabel), who believes that she ruled Egypt in her distant incarnation. The Queen is also – as if it was mandatory – the

owner of an animal of the *Felidae* family. This might be a domestic cat which she pets or feeds poison, but also a leopard, and even a singing maneless lion, as in the *Asterix and Cleopatra* comic book. Sometimes the Queen is accompanied by the very basic element of the Nilotic landscape, namely a crocodile. This menagerie is complemented by elements of the Egyptian desert scenery: a pyramid, a sphinx (which became a royal vehicle in the film by J. Mankiewicz, 1963), and pharaonic regalia, including the famous vulture scalp and, occasionally, the famous pearl which the Queen's hand drops into a cup of vinegar.

If we tried to briefly summarize the story of the abovementioned Cleopatra's attributes using only a few sentences, it would look as follows: The sources that have survived to our time indicate that in ancient times Cleopatra was primarily associated with the crocodile, the pearl and the snake. It was the Romans who immortalized the Queen [Becher 1966; Alfano 2001: 276-291; Kleiner 2005] by endowing her with these attributes. In subsequent centuries, notions of the Egyptian ruler were developed on the basis of her image contained in Greco-Roman sources, corrupted with Augustan propaganda. We might assume that in ancient times the crocodile, the pearl and the snake were equally popular and defined the Egyptian Queen by associating her with the eastern exoticism, madness, arrogance and luxury. Among these attributes, the snake became the major symbol of the Queen for many centuries, overshadowing the crocodile and the pearl. As time went by, Cleopatra's snake got smaller and eventually became a snake bracelet. In many paintings, the outline of the reptile can only be guessed from the arrangement of robes, covers, hair, etc. In the nineteenth century, the snake – Queen's basic attribute – was largely replaced by the cat (lion, panther) which, although an Egyptian animal, was not the Queen's attribute in antiquity.

The progress of each Cleopatra's attribute through different eras is worth following. Due to the enormous number of works devoted to the Queen throughout history, this article will discuss only the most representative examples, and specify those which – according to the author – had key influence on the formation of canonical image of the Egyptian ruler. Not all works devoted to Cleopatra, even those created by great artists, became famous. This article only briefly illustrates the history of the four most common attributes associated with Cleopatra, without attempting to synthesize issues, but rather to present their outline.

## THE CROCODILE

The crocodile has been associated with Egypt since its beginning. The animal can already be found in the images from the predynastic period [Patch 2012: 32-40]. Most likely, the crocodile appeared to the Romans as a *par excellence* Egyptian animal since their conquest of the land of the Nile. Undoubtedly, it was due to the imprint of the animal on the coins minted after the final defeat of the Queen, with the inscription *Aegypto capta* [Mattingly 1976 [BMCRE], nos. 650-655; see Draycott 2012: 43-56]. Numerous images of crocodiles in Roman art argue that the animal symbolized Egypt and personified the Nile. It was also associated with the cult of Goddess Isis who was already well known in Rome while Cleopatra

was alive [Versluys 2003: 95-100]. Consequently, the crocodile reminded about the Egyptian Queen because she identified herself with the goddess.

Although the crocodile was considered the cheapest and easiest African animal to transport [Jennison 1937: 64], it was perceived in Rome as a threatening and haughty beast. The evidence of such perception can be found in the writings of Pliny the Elder, according to whom the crocodile is a threat to those who flee before it but it runs away from those who chase it [Plin. *NH* 8.92-94]. Similarly to the crocodile, Cleopatra (in Augustan propaganda) was a threat to the Capitol at first, but then fled from Actium frightened of the powerful Octavian forces. Moreover, of all the Egyptian animals known to the Mediterranean world, the crocodile must have been the biggest surprise to the tourists who could see it adorned with earrings and bracelets [Fletcher 2008: 133]. What is important, no god had ever impersonated a crocodile to beget Roman leaders. Thus, the crocodile was a purely Egyptian animal. The ship depicted in the relief from Palestrina can be easily identified as Antony's warship from Actium, because it is decorated with a crocodile [marble frieze with a scene depicting warship, c. 40-30 BC, Vatican Museums, no. 31680; Walker and Higgs 2001: no. 311].

When the Egyptian Queen was portrayed in Roman caricature, she must have been in the company of a crocodile. There is an interesting decoration on an oil lamp dating from the first century AD. It shows an ithyphallic crocodile with a nude female holding a palm branch. The vulgar image is supposed to portray Cleopatra as Isis [Roman terracotta lamp with a caricatured scene, c. 40-80 AD, London, British Museum, GR 1865.11-18.249; Walker and Higgs 2001: no. 357; Grimm 2000: 127-133 contra Etienne 2003: 95-100].

The crocodile did not prove a permanent attribute of the Egyptian Queen, neither in the arts nor in the literature of successive eras. It would not have been a fitting attribute for the Egyptian Queen as a woman in love. In one of the Renaissance plays, the despairing Egyptian Queen wishes to be eaten by a crocodile [R. Garnier, *Marc Antoine*, trans. Mary Sidney, *The Tragedie of Antonie* 2.398, London, 1595], while Shakespeare gives an enigmatic description of the animal in his *Antony and Cleopatra* [2.7.43-46].

In a modern playful representation, Cleopatra threatens the defiant to throw them to crocodiles to be devoured.

Admittedly, today it is the crocodile dung that are more popular than the animal itself – part of the ancient “filth pharmacy” [*Dreckapotheke*: von Staden 1989: 18]. Did Cleopatra use it as a contraceptive or perhaps as an ingredient in facial skin care?

## THE PEARL

The pearl, which, according to Pliny, was worth ten million sesterces, was an entirely different matter. Cleopatra removed it from her earring and dropped it into a cup of wine vinegar where it dissolved. The Queen then drank the liquid only to flaunt her wealth and extravagance before Antony. The other pearl, which the

Queen was prevented from destroying, after her death was cut in half and adorned the statue of Venus in the Pantheon of Agrippa, the winner of the battle of Actium [Plin. *NH* 9.119-121; Macr. 3.17.14-18; Flory 1988: 498-504]. In ancient times, the Queen was undoubtedly associated with a pearl necklace. She was repeatedly depicted like this on coins. Most likely, the jewels were part of Cleopatra's regalia.

Because Pliny's work enjoyed extraordinary popularity in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the story of the Egyptian Queen dissolving a pearl of great value was permanently ensconced in the European canon. The image of Cleopatra taking out the pearl from her earring or holding her hand over a cup in which she will drop the pearl in a moment, is shown in numerous paintings, such as *Cleopatra's Feast* by Jacob Jordaens (1653), *The Banquet of Cleopatra* by Gérard de Lairese (1675) or *The Banquet of Cleopatra* by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1743-1744).

Over time, Cleopatra's pearl became the subject of jokes. In a burlesque by F. C. Burnand the Queen invents a "modern" alcoholic beverage based on a pearl [*Antony and Cleopatra; or, His-tory and Her-story in a Modern Nilo-metre*, London, 1866; Wyke and Montserrat 2011: 176-177]. Not surprisingly, in the pop culture, the Queen is associated with wine and her name appears on bottle labels. In modern scientific studies, the pearl links the Queen with chemistry, and an interesting question arises whether Cleopatra was really able to dissolve the pearl in wine vinegar? [Ullman 1957: 193-201; Fletcher 2008: 250; Jones 2010: 207-220].

## THE SNAKE

It is the snake which is most often associated with the image of Cleopatra. The snake appears in a double, triple or even multiple form, forming specific tangles. A female figure with a snake, regardless of its size and location, is always associated first and foremost with the Egyptian Queen. This is true even if the serpent does not come in physical contact with the figure, and remains only a decorative motif of the vessel, forming part of the imagery – as is the case in what is known as Esquiline Venus, thought by some researchers to be Cleopatra [Esquiline Venus, c. 50 AD, Rome, Capitoline Museums, no. MC 1141; Andreae 2006: 14-47 contra Goudchaux 2006: 138-142].

During the Queen's lifetime, the snake was rising over her forehead, symbolizing royal majesty. The Uraeus, also shown as three cobras, was a part of Cleopatra's image, both in the Egyptian and Greek style [Ashton 2001: 148-155; Ashton 2008: 69-71]. In Rome, the city which made the Egyptian Queen famous, the Uraeus appeared in the decorative arts in the midst of obelisks and lotus flowers. Also Cicero was familiar with the Egyptian cult of the serpent [Cic. *Tusc.* 5.78]. However, it was not that snake that accompanied Cleopatra through the centuries. Instead, the tradition embodied a mysterious viper, which, according to tradition, had fatally bitten her.

Regardless of the alleged symbolic connection between the Uraeus and the death of the Queen, as well as the images of Isis with a snake entwined around the divine arm [Griffiths 1961: 113-118; Griffiths 1965: 209-211; Grant 1972: 227; Chauveau

2002: 74], Octavian decided to popularize in Rome the image which was primarily based on Roman interpretations. Cleopatra committing suicide by means of a cobra is part of Roman, not Egyptian, propaganda and therefore the image must have served Octavian's policy. Otherwise it would not have been used [Tronson 1998: 31-50; Kostuch 2009: 115-124].

In Rome, a viper was attached to Cleopatra's arm, as it was believed that the serpent poured its deadly venom just there. As early as in Augustan times, the Roman imagination doubled the viper, hence, in the work of Horace, Cleopatra picked up *serpentes* [Hor. *Carm.* 1.37.23.27] and Virgil in his *Aeneid* placed two serpents behind the Queen's back [Verg. *Aen.* 8.696-697; Prop. 3.11.53-54]. Cleopatra's snakes had already been multiplied on a massive scale in ancient times, as evidenced by the fact that the Queen allegedly owned their farming [Plut. *Ant.* 71; Cass. Dio 51.11.2].

With the beginning of the Christian era, viper tangles "slithered" on the Queen's body, reaching the royal breasts. At the beginning of the sixth century, bishop Fulgentius of Ruspe in Numidia wrote that the Egyptian Queen put snakes to her breast [Fulg. *De aetat.* 14]. It was undoubtedly a preliminary step to the sexualisation and demonization of images of Cleopatra with serpents. According to the ancient lore, the Queen died dressed in royal robes, therefore her breasts must have been covered, which would be further indicated by the fact that she herself hurt her breasts while lamenting the loss of Antony [Plut. *Ant.* 77; 83; 85]. It is not inconceivable, of course, that the image of the Queen with a snake in a love scenery was created by the Romans, however, it is not easy to prove. The story of Octavian's mother mating with a snake did not really encourage the creation of caricatures of Cleopatra mating with a viper.

Had the Queen been actually bitten by the Egyptian cobra (*Naja haje*), one of the most venomous serpents, able to instantly paralyze the victim, Cleopatra would have died from the venom injection of a two-meter long serpent. Also, smuggling such a monster, or even two, to the royal apartments seems a very risky venture [Tyldesley 2008: 193].

However, such scary snakes can be found in late-Medieval and early-Renaissance depictions of Cleopatra. The illustration in one of the editions of Giovanni Boccaccio's *De casibus illustrium virorum et feminarum* shows the Queen putting two huge, knee-length cobras to her naked breasts [translated into French by Laurent de Premierfait, Netherland (Burges) c. 1479-1480; London, British Library Royal MS 14 EV, f. 339 v; Reynolds 1988]. In an edition of *De mulieribus claris*, Cleopatra is killed by two dragons [in an anonymous French translation, France (Paris) 1st quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century; London, British Library Royal MS 20 CV f. 131 v; Reynolds 1988]. An even greater creative fantasy is found in the depiction of the Egyptian ruler in Albrechtsburg castle in Meissen, where bloated snakes held by Cleopatra in her hands are larger than the Queen.

In Chaucer's work, snakes somewhat became an integral part of the body of the Queen. The Queen jumped into the pit full of snakes, which is an allusion to the

popular at that time idea of worms and snakes devouring the entombed body [*The Legend of Good Women*, 669-702; Kolve 2009: 37]. The concept of snakes emerging from human remains has ancient roots, as evidenced by Plutarch's argument that, similarly, bees originate from the corpse of an ox, wasps from the corpse of a horse and scarabs from that of a donkey [Plut. *Cleom.* 39.6]. Shakespeare [*Antony and Cleopatra* 1.5.25-34; 5.2.308-309] then equates the body of Cleopatra with serpentine shapes of the Nile, and as for the snake at the breast of the Queen, he says that the serpent is nursing at her breast (in which he mimics Fulgentius). It is not surprising that in the same era, Piero di Cosimo, Andrea Solario and Michelangelo painted the Egyptian Queen in physical intimacy with serpents: her hair weaves resemble serpentine twists, her robe snakes around her body, she wears a snake necklace, and finally she holds a snake like a child in her royal arms.

The Baroque art of painting reversed the proportions: Cleopatra's naked body expands, and the snake disappears, often taking the form of a simple, barely visible viper which often resembles a mere string. In pictures, Cleopatra is dying with dignity and serenity from a venom of a small snake – there the Queen seems to dominate the serpent [for example sardonix cameos, late sixteenth century, London, British Museum Sloane Bequest 86, MME 1772, 3-14.188; Walker and Higgs 2001: no. 379, 380]. The only truly scary picture is that by Claude Vignon (*Cleopatra Committing Suicide*, 1643-1657), in which the bloodthirsty beast attacks a voluptuous body of the Queen.

The tendency to minimize the snake size continued in the following centuries, to the point where the serpent has to be looked for in a robe or between the bodies of Charmion and Eiras. In a novel by Henry Rider Haggard, published at the end of the nineteenth century, Cleopatra dies from the poisoned cup, and not from the venom injected into her blood [*Cleopatra. Being an Account of the Fall and Vengeance of Harmachis*, Longmans, 1889, pp. 260-262]. A few years later, George Bernard Shaw demoted the snake to the position of the leather used by the Queen to beat her nurse, and in the "carpet" scene, the Romans take the Queen for a viper [*Caesar and Cleopatra*, Act I, II]. When playing Cleopatra, Sarah Bernhardt used a live snake, and Yvette Guilbert sang of the actress's small (*petit*) snake, which dies of hunger at her breast. The peak of snubbing the snake is Theda Bara's film role as Cleopatra (1917) wearing a snake bra.

Although in modern literature and arts (including film), the Queen still uses the cobra to take her own life, the scene clearly alludes to Plutarch. Therefore, Cleopatra, dressed in royal attire, quietly falls into eternal sleep, and the scary serpent is not excessively exposed in most cases. In the film by J. Mankiewicz, we can only guess where it is. It is really hard to imagine Elizabeth Taylor putting snakes to her breast, like in pictures in Boccaccio's works. In the art of painting, the snake remains a decoration or a toy, and sometimes, the Queen holding a snake looks like a circus character. Today, Cleopatra's cobra is a symbol of exoticism, not metaphysics. In popular commercial images, Cleopatra, dressed as Isis, wears an earring in the shape of a snake, halfway between the forehead and arm.

It is evident that in the course of centuries, the snake was associated with different parts of Cleopatra's body. While she was alive, the snake was proudly raising its hood over her forehead. For a while, the second serpent was wrapped around her arm, then it "dropped" on her breasts only to "rise up" after centuries to the level of the royal ear. As time went by, it wrapped itself around her neck, in her hair or slithered up and down her robes.

## THE CAT

To say that today Cleopatra is associated with a cat rather than with a snake would not be an exaggeration. A lion, panther (leopard) and a domesticated representative of the *Felidae* family replaced the snake in a spontaneous association with the Egyptian Queen.

It seems that these fur-bearing animals became Cleopatra's companions only in the nineteenth century. The initial stone base of the throne decorated with lion protomas and spotted coverlets assumed a life of their own, transforming themselves into four-legged animals, absolutely obedient to the Egyptian Queen. One could assume that artists found interest in Cleopatra full of life, imperious and indomitable, and thus they needed a new attribute. However, even earlier, the imagination of European artists was stimulated by images of Cleopatra's banquets, and cat decorations also persisted in the scenes of royal death.

Of course, single examples of the *Felidae* species can already be found in earlier European depictions of the Queen, such as the cat sitting next to Antony's chair in the painting *The Banquet of Cleopatra and Antony* (1610) by Leandro Bassano. Interestingly, dogs are also depicted in this and some other images. Although traditionally present at banquets in antiquity, they don't seem to be related to the Egyptian "barking Anubis" from Virgil's and Propertius's works [Verg. *Aen.* 8.698-700; Prop. 3.11.41]. There are no cats associated with the Queen in Shakespeare's works. She does not own a cat, a leopard or a lion, and yet the playwright must have been familiar with cat symbolism [Dyer Thiselton 1884: 159-164; Dent 1981].

Obviously, the cat is associated with the land of the Nile more than any other animal. It is significant that the cat became known in Italy only after the conquest of Egypt, that is, after the death of Cleopatra. Even if the animal had earlier lived in Italy, brought in by the Hellenes as evidenced by its images on the coins from Greek colonies in Italy (Tarentum, Rhegion), it was the last Egyptian Queen who contributed to the dissemination of knowledge about cats along the Tiber River. Although previously almost absent in Roman literature, the interest in the land on the Nile grew along with the increasing knowledge about Cleopatra. Another thing is that in Ptolemaic times, it was prohibited to export cats from Egypt and attempts were made to recover those which had already been illegally exported [Jennison 1937: 129]. Initially, cats must have been unpopular in Rome and it took some time before they became pets, since for the Romans the Egyptian cult of animals was absurd. As Cicero disdainfully remarked: the Egyptians worship an ibis, a snake, a cat, a dog and a crocodile [Cic. *Tusc.* 5.78]. Besides, the cat had



no practical use because mice were effectively controlled by the non-venomous species of snakes.

It cannot be ruled out that in Rome, due to her association with the popular cult of Isis, Cleopatra might have been linked to the cat-goddess Bastet. The figure of the she-cat often appears on the *sistra* found at Pompeii [Witt 1971: 28, 30, 82]. Also the panther (*pardus*, *leopard*) might have provided potential associations with the Queen, not only because Egyptian priests traditionally wore leopard skins, but due to the cult of Dionysus, widespread in the Hellenistic world. The god was traditionally presented riding a panther and accompanied by Maenads dressed in the skins of these wild animals. This image was well known throughout Italy, which is proven by the painting of Dionysus riding a panther in the Pompeian Temple of Isis. Another example is the famous silver plate from Boscoreale, where the animal is shown with a female figure considered to personify Alexandria, Cleopatra or her daughter Selene [I century BC – I century AD, Paris, Louvre; for example Grant 1972: 277]. The panther was of course associated with the East and symbolized the march of Dionysus to India. In his role, Dionysus was the precursor of Alexander the Great. Cleopatra's father, Ptolemy XII, venerated the god with particular concern as he himself was worshiped as *Neos Dionisios*. We shall not forget about Antony, who was identified himself with Dionysus. According to Athenaeus, the Roman commander arranged a "Bacchus Grotto" above the theatre in Athens, complete with this god's accessories [Athen. *Deipn.* 4.148].

There is little evidence to suppose that the Romans assigned the Queen a cat or panther as attributes. Also the sphinx – a "cat" in a specific sense – was well known in Rome but was not associated with the Queen because Octavian Augustus used its image as his seal. However, it is possible that Cleopatra was associated with a lion because of Antony. The Roman propaganda images portrayed the triumvir as Hercules in the company of Omphale. As we know, Omphale took the lion's skin from the hero and put it on, thereby depriving him of honour [Zanker 2003: 66-67].

Probably due to the lack of Roman sources, Cleopatra was not identified with furry animals, though in subsequent centuries the panther was associated with luxury (*luxuria*), and the cat with a bad and often dissolute woman.

All the evidence indicates that "Cleopatra's cat" has its roots in the nineteenth-century association between Egypt, the cat and the Queen. Following the Napoleonic military campaign in Egypt, Europe rediscovered the ancient Egyptian civilization. It was from there that animal mummies, and mummified cats in particular, were brought to Europe.

It is also significant that by the middle of the nineteenth century, the European population of cats increased enormously, to the point that there was one cat for every ten people in London [Werness 2006: 75; for cats in London, see also Thomas 1983: 110].

When searching for the reason why the Queen was accompanied by wild animals, we must remember that in the nineteenth century people started to talk about black Cleopatra, hence despite her typically white skin, paintings depict her as an African Queen.

In the nineteenth-century literature and art, the Egyptian Queen was associated with the lion, the panther, the cat and the sphinx. It's worth adding that at the same time, a fluffy Persian carpet appears, from which the Queen rolls out at Caesar's feet in the famous scene (previously it was a laundry sack or a mattress). As Pelling points out: "a carpet, in the modern sense, features in art at least as early as Jean Léone Gérôme's *Cleopatra before Caesar* (1866)" [Pelling 2011: 385]. In fact, the last decades of the nineteenth century found Europe in the grip of "Oriental carpet fever" [Spuhler, 1988: 10].

The nineteenth-century pictures show huge live cats and their skins. In the famous painting by Alexandre Cabanel, *Cleopatra Testing Poisons on Condemned Prisoners* (1887), the Queen is sitting on a lion's skin, with a live panther nearby. Cleopatra reclining on the skin of a leopard or dressed in it was painted by such artists as Mosè di Giosuè Bianchi (1865), Jean André Rixens (*Death of Cleopatra*, 1874) and Lawrence Alma-Tadema in two pictures: *Cleopatra* (1875) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1883). Louis-Marie Baader showed Cleopatra dying under a picture of two lions (1899).

In the play by George Bernard Shaw, the Queen hides behind a sphinx, calling it her pet, just as if it was a cat. She also openly refers to her great-great-great-grandmother as the Black Kitten, daughter of the White Cat [*Caesar and Cleopatra*, Act. II].

At the turn of the century, the aforementioned Sarah Bernhardt named her tame leopards Antony and Cleopatra [Roberts 2002: 185]. It should be thus considered that at this point, cats – the big and the small, made of stone and alive – became permanent attributes of the Egyptian Queen.

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In post-ancient literature and art, Queen Cleopatra is primarily a great lover, a seductress, the embodiment of tragedy, eroticism, and sensuality – a shadowy figure associated with the moon, mystery and sin. It is no wonder that the Egyptian ruler's attributes perfectly synthesize her character. In a dictionary, the snake is the oldest phallic symbol and the cat has been associated with lust and magic for centuries.

However, most probably, Cleopatra was not linked to the snake because of the erotic association, and the cat was not assigned to the Queen because she was a voluptuous witch from Egypt, even though that is how she was depicted in Roman propaganda. In both cases, the original context was therefore lost while succumbing to schematization.

Moreover, although the Queen could have been associated with furry animals in antiquity, she was not identified with them until centuries later. The panther was associated with the cult of Dionysus. In Hellenistic Alexandria, cats enjoyed particular protection. Numerous sphinxes transported from the depths of Egypt adorned the city streets. According to Lucian, Cleopatra even had a trained monkey [Luc. *Apol.* 5]. Thus, paradoxically, the modern pictures of Cleopatra with wild African animals – although they seem to be a misunderstanding because the Queen represented the Hellenic civilization on the Nile – are not actually unreasonable.

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