

Queen of Kings: Kleopatra VII and the Donations of Alexandria

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Introduction

The so-called Donations of Alexandria, a Ptolemaic royal ritual in 34 BCE, is an important but puzzling landmark in the development of the Roman Near East. At this theatrical, public ceremony, of which relatively detailed accounts survive in Plutarch's biography of Antonius and Dio Cassius' *Roman History*,¹ the *triumvir* Marcus Antonius solemnly promised to Kleopatra VII Philopator and her infant children rulership over the east "from the Hellespont to India", a domain that was largely identical with the empires of both the Ptolemies and Seleukids at their greatest extent.

The celebrations lasted several days. The key ceremony took place in the *gymnasion*, the usual location for coronations in Alexandria. Like actors on a stage, Antonius and Kleopatra and her four children—three of whom were also Antonius' children—performed on an elevated dais before the royal household, the royal guard and members of the Alexandrian citizenry. Kleopatra and her eldest son Ptolemaios XV Caesar ('Caesarion'), with whom she shared the Ptolemaic kingship, were proclaimed Queen of Kings and King of Kings of the enormous empire outlined above. Antonius' children by Kleopatra—Alexandros Helios, Kleopatra Selene, Ptolemaios Philadelphos—received lesser, albeit still magnificent royal titles. Kleopatra was dressed as Isis, Antonius presumably as Dionysos; Alexandros Helios wore the attire of an Iranian king, and Ptolemaios Philopator the generic royal dress of a Hellenistic king. The only participant, who was not awarded royal honours, was Antonius, the Roman.

The ceremony was fashioned as a coronation ritual. The ritual language employed was based on Hellenistic, particularly Seleukid tradition, while the material symbolism, the pomp and the regalia,

came from contemporary Ptolemaic court culture, with some important distinctions, notably the use of Iranian regalia for Alexandros and Kleopatra's appearance as Isis.

At first sight, Kleopatra's new empire appears to be somewhat ephemeral, as Antonius' generosity obviously contained some catches. First of all, Mesopotamia and the countries further east were controlled by the Parthians, who had defeated Antonius' army two years earlier. Second, only part of the remaining territory was really Roman—the provinces Syria, Asia and Bithynia—whereas the other half consisted of autonomous cities and kingdoms, though most of them within the Roman sphere of influence. Third, many of the regions Antonius 'donated' to Kleopatra had already been given to her at an earlier occasion.

Historians have seldom bothered to understand the meaning of this enormous, non-existent empire. The Donations of Alexandria are either explained as a fanciful blueprint for future conquest, or else dismissed as an unhistorical later invention.² In this paper, I hope to demonstrate that the far-stretching claims made in the Donations of Alexandria are fully intelligible when examined in a Hellenistic context. The empire envisaged in the Donations was not an unhistorical *topos* devised by Octavianus' supporters or by writers from the imperial period; instead this propaganda was firmly rooted in Hellenistic royal ideology. Furthermore, I will argue that Kleopatra's claims—including not only the former empire of the Ptolemies but also the entire territory that was once under the sway of the Seleukids—were legitimate from an eastern point of view. Finally, I will argue that Kleopatra's imperial ambitions played a fundamental role in the creation of a Roman Near East, instead of having temporarily halted and frustrated this process.

Antonius' Roman enemies and later Augustean propaganda-makers have successfully given the impression that news of the Donations came as a shock to the people and senate of Rome, who suddenly became aware that Antonius had become a bewitched love slave, betraying his own people by

¹ Dio Cass. 49.40.2-41.3; Plut., *Ant.* 54.3-6. The evidence is cited and discussed below.

² E.g. Volkmann (1953), p. 142-44; Bradford (1971), p. 200; Southern (2000), p. 115; Hölbl (2000), p. 292.

giving away Roman territory to his 'Egyptian' mistress. In 1953 Volkmann could still maintain that this was a reasonable explanation for Antonius' actions.³ At present, most historians do not accept this explanation. As a result, however, the land grants to Kleopatra have become even more puzzling. The problem as it still stands today has been summarised by Michael Grant: "Although this [revived] Ptolemaic empire's special task of reinforcing Antony's fleet was clear enough, its status in relation to the Roman empire had become increasingly hard to define. It was dependent upon the Romans, but it could not be described as their 'client'. ... Egypt was not so much a vassal as an autonomous, allied and protected kingdom, the like of which had not appeared within the Roman orbit before."⁴ In 1996 Thomas Schrapel proposed a partial solution to this problem by arguing that Ptolemaic power was extended *in the interest of Rome*.⁵

Prelude to the Donations of Alexandria

We know now that the ceremony of the Donations could impossibly have come as a surprise, as it was the pinnacle of an ongoing increase of Ptolemaic influence in the Mediterranean, which was part of Antonius' reorganisation of the eastern state system. This reorganisation followed arrangements initiated by Pompeius and mainly amounted to supporting or installing dependent, and thus loyal, oligarchs and kings.⁶ This policy was essential because Parthian power politics in the western part of the Near East aimed at the same. Parthian armies had at several occasions invaded lands under Roman protection, most recently and dangerously in 40 BCE.

³ Volkmann (1953), p. 145.

⁴ Grant (1972), p. 141-2.

⁵ Cf. Schrapel (1996), p. 279: "Die Verschmelzung hellenistischer und römischer Sitten (...) [war der Voraussetzung] für den Übergang von der Republik zur Monarchie. Für die Beurteilung der politischen Vorgänge in der letzten Phase der Römischen Republik ist daher nicht der Gegensatz zwischen Römern und Griechen (...) zu betonen, sondern deren Symbiose."

⁶ For Antonius' arrangements see Buchheim (1960).

Many of the regions and cities presented to Kleopatra in 34 were already under her rule. As Günther Hölbl summarises this paradox:

[The Donations of Alexandria] did not make any fundamental changes to the *status quo* of the administration. The area under Cleopatra's control remained just as it was in 36. The vassal-rulers retained their positions. ... The Roman proconsul continued to administer Syria while Armenia and Cyrene remained garrisoned by Roman legions.⁷

With an extensive examination of all contemporary numismatic, epigraphic and papyrologic evidence related to the Donations of Alexandria, Schrapel showed that with his gifts to Kleopatra, Antonius continued a policy of the late Julius Caesar. For instance, Cyprus (included among the Donations in Plutarch's account) had been returned to Ptolemaic rule already in the summer of 48 on the occasion of Caesar's arrival in Alexandria. More surprisingly, Schrapel was able to show that Antonius initially acted with the consent of Octavianus.⁸ For instance western Kilikia was added to the Ptolemaic kingdom already in 40 BCE as part of the treaty of Brundisium, where Antonius and Octavianus divided the Mediterranean in a western and eastern portion.⁹ Thus, Schrapel's study provides important modifications of the *communis opinio*, as expressed for instance in the commentaries on the narrative sources by Reinhold and Pelling.¹⁰

Antonius had on several previous occasions involved Kleopatra in his reorganisation of the east, particularly at his meetings with the queen at Tarsos in 41 and at Antioch in 37/6. These meetings were accompanied by pompous propaganda comparable to that in 34.

⁷ Hölbl (2001), p. 244.

⁸ Schrapel (1996), p. 276-86.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 259. Ptolemaic administration in Kilikia is first attested for November 38 but the country probably had been handed over in 41/40, see Hölbl (2001), p. 241 n. 98.

¹⁰ Reinhold (1987); Pelling (1988).

In 41 Kleopatra met Antonius for the first time. Plutarch (*Ant.* 26) describes how she sailed up the river Kydnos to Tarsos in her fabled barge, dressed as Aphrodite. The carefully planned coming together of queen and *triumvir* was celebrated in the entire east as a hierogamy of Dionysos and Aphrodite “for the benefit of Asia” (Plut., *Ant.* 26.3).¹¹ Kleopatra’s self-presentation as ‘Aphrodite’ presumably was a rendering of her association with Isis in Egypt but for a much wider audience.¹² Semi-hellenised elites in the Near East could subsequently associate her with Asian ‘universal’ goddesses like Atargatis, Astarte and Ishtar. Antonius, for his part, had earlier that year entered Ephesos in a bacchanal procession as *Neos Dionysos* (Plut., *Ant.* 24.4). In the Hellenistic east, Dionysos, the conqueror of Asia and harbinger of good fortune, was a god of royalty *par excellence*.¹³

¹¹ Hölbl (2001), p. 244 with n. 110. Hölbl claims that Antonius and Kleopatra did not ‘officially’ marry before the autumn of 34 BCE, and postulates that the ceremony of the Donations was also a celebration of their marriage. This seems strange, since in the years between Tarsos and the Donations Kleopatra gave birth to three children, all of whom Antonius acknowledged as his. Volkmann (1953), p. 117, dates the marriage to 37/6 BCE. The statement, encountered in most modern literature, that Antonius’ marriage with Kleopatra was not valid under Roman law is gratuitous; Antonius’ association with Kleopatra was part of his political actions in the east, where polygamous marriage among royalty was normal. On the *hieros gamos* of Antonius and Kleopatra see Śnieżewski (1998), p. 134.

¹² Kleopatra and Antonius may have been inspired by the gold statue of Kleopatra placed inside the temple of Venus Genetrix on the Forum Iulium in Rome by Caesar, and the simultaneous proclamation of Kleopatra as *Isis Regina*, cf. Hölbl (2001), p. 290. Many Romans, most of all Cicero (*Att.* 14.8.1, 15.17.2), did not like that; but in the Hellenistic east the association of royals with gods was only natural. For Kleopatra’s appearance as Isis at Tarsos see Grant (1972), p. 117-20.

¹³ Tondriau (1953). Antonius received cultic honours as *Neos Dionysos* in Athens (Sokrates of Rhodes, FGrH 192 F 2; Sen., *Suas.* 1.6.7) and later in Alexandria, cf. Hölbl (2001), p. 291. Dionysos was the most prominent god with whom Hellenistic kings, notably the Ptolemies, associated themselves when entering a city. Dionysos was *der kommende Gott*, the epiphany deity *par excellence*, cf. Burkert 1985, 162, with n. 6 on p. 412. Versnel (1970), p. 250-3., argued that Dionysos became such a suitable model for Hellenistic kingship because by defeating human adversaries instead of supernatural opponents, and by conquering *real* territory, Dionysos’ conquest of Asia was mythical and historical at the same time; he was the victorious god who triumphed over man and world, whose return signalled the dawn of an age of good fortune. The notion of a hierogamy with Kleopatra-Aphrodite followed from the fact that the Greeks equated Aphrodite with Isis and Dionysos with Osiris, Isis’ divine consort (Dio Cass. 50.5.3).

In the winter of 37/6 Kleopatra again visited Antonius, who was now at Antioch in Syria, where he had taken up residence in order to re-arrange power relations in the Near East and make preparations for war against the Parthians (Plut., *Ant.* 36.3-4; Dio Cass. 49.32-1-5). Again, Kleopatra was at the centre of Antonius' propaganda and plans. She received the city of Kyrene in Libya, estates on Crete, and several strongholds in the Levant (Jos., *AJ* 15.4.88 and 92).¹⁴ At this occasion Antonius acknowledged paternity of Kleopatra's twins Alexandros and Kleopatra, who were given the epithets Helios and Selene. The beginning of a new era in history was announced, complete with a new year reckoning, starting with 37/6 BCE as year 1.¹⁵ This was a new era for the entire east, replacing the existing Seleukid Era. In Antioch—one of the capitals of the Seleukids, having a similar status as a 'royal city' as Alexandria—a ceremony like the Donations of Alexandria was staged. Since in 37/6 the new imperial era began, the 'Donations of Antioch' must have been of equal importance as those of Alexandria. No accounts have survived of this occasion, however, presumably for the simple reason that it has no place in pro-Octavian propaganda because at that time Antonius and Octavianus had not yet openly fallen out with each other.

After 37/6 Antonius and Kleopatra appeared on coins more or less as joint rulers of Asia. Antonius struck silver tetradrachms at Antioch with the image of Kleopatra on the reverse. Kleopatra meanwhile struck bronze coins in Syria and Phoenicia with Antonius' portrait. Significantly, the style of

¹⁴ Jos. *AJ* 15.4.96 says that Sidon and Tyre were the only coastal cities *not* given to Kleopatra, but she claimed them nonetheless. After 37/6 BCE, Kleopatra issued coins in Arados, Tripolis, Berytos, Damascus, Ptolemaïs-Ake and Askalon; see Hölbl (2001), p. 242 with n. 102.

¹⁵ Evidence for this new era (which, as it turned out, lasted less than ten years) is found on coins from Syria and elsewhere, as far as the city of Chersonesos at the northern Black Sea; the era is also attested on Egyptian papyri and inscriptions, and confirmed by Porphyry FGrH 260 F 2.17. See Volkmann (1953), p. 116-22; Schrapel (1996), p. 209-23. Hazzard (2000), p. 25-46, argues that in 262 BCE Ptolemaios II Philadelphos introduced a new era, too, a 'Sotēr Era'; if so, this makes it all the more possible that the epithet given to Kleopatra's youngest child, Ptolemaios Philadelphos, indeed referred to the prosperous days of Ptolemaios II, as is suggested by Volkmann (1953), p. 117-7. However, the image of a (new) Golden Age is a fundamental aspect of Hellenistic imperial ideology; see Strootman (2007), p. 348-56.

both coin types is a mixture of Hellenistic and Roman influences. Thus it was made clear that the two of them would rule the east together.¹⁶

On her way back to Alexandria, instead of taking the short sea route, Kleopatra made a royal progress through the Levant, in order to ritually mark the area as hers, visiting 'royal cities' like Apameia, Damascus, and finally Jericho, where she met her new vassal Herod in 36 (Jos., *AJ* 15.4.96). Antonius meanwhile began his war against the Parthians, which ended in disaster. There followed a more successful but less pretentious campaign against the Armenian king Artavasdes in 34, a strategic preparation for a second attempt at defeating the Parthian king rather than an act out of frustration. Following this victory, Antonius left his legions in Armenia and proceeded to Alexandria, where together with Kleopatra he performed the royal ritual later known as the Donations of Alexandria.

The Ceremonial of 34 BCE

Antonius entered Alexandria in a splendid procession, parading the spoils and captives of his Armenian campaign, including the Armenian king himself:

He made them walk at the head of a kind of triumphal advent into Alexandria, together with the other captives, while he himself entered the city upon a chariot. And he presented to Kleopatra not only all the spoils that he had won, but even led the Armenian together with his wife and children before her, bound in chains of gold. She herself was seated upon a golden throne on a stage plated with silver, amidst a great multitude. (Dio Cass. 49.40.2-3)

Antonius made his advent into the city in Hellenistic fashion, carrying a thyrsos wand and other dionysian paraphernalia, but not a diadem. He made offerings in the temple of Sarapis (Vell. Pat. 2.82),

¹⁶ Hölbl (2001), p. 242. Until 36 Caesarion had not figured prominently in Ptolemaic propaganda; after that date, images of, and inscriptions dedicated to him, foreshadowing his inauguration as Great King in 34; see Weill Goudchaux (2001), p. 139 with figs. 3.2 and 3.3.

the Ptolemaic god of kingship who could be identified with both Osiris and Dionysos (Plut., *De Is. et Os.* 28).

Antonius' enemies later accused him of having celebrated a Roman *triumphus* outside Rome, an allegation that is usually accepted as truth in modern scholarship.¹⁷ It is very unlikely, however, that Antonius committed such a sacrilegious deed, only to antagonise Roman public opinion and offend the Alexandrians to boot. It is easy to see that this was in reality a Hellenistic royal *parousia*, reminiscent of the well-known *pompē* (of uncertain date) of Ptolemaios II Philadelphos, described by Kallixeinos of Rhodes (*FHG* III 58 *ap. Ath.* 196a-197c), and the dionysian procession of Antiochos IV at Daphne in c. 166 BCE (Polyb.30.25.1-12; Diod. 31.16).¹⁸

The following day, or some days later, the Donations were staged, a royal ceremony which combined the age-old idiom of Hellenistic coronation ritual with some new elements that were unique for this occasion. This is Dio's account of what happened on that day:

Next Antonius organised sumptuous celebrations for the population of Alexandria. He appeared before the assembled people with Kleopatra and her children seated at his side. In his speech to the people he ordered them to call Kleopatra Queen of Kings, and the Ptolemaios, whom they named Caesarion, King of Kings. He then made a new distribution of countries and gave them Egypt and Cyprus. ... Besides these donations he gave to his own children by Kleopatra the following lands: to Ptolemaios Syria and the whole region to the west of the Euphrates as far as the Hellespont; to Kleopatra [Selene] the country of Kyrene in Libya; to her brother Alexandros [Helios] Armenia and all of the other lands east of the Euphrates as far as India; and he bestowed these regions as if they were already in his possession. (Dio Cass. 49.40.2-41.3)

¹⁷ For instance Bradford (1971), p. 196-8: "a unique spectacle, even in that ostentatious city ... designed to infuriate the Romans and to proclaim that theirs was only a second-rate city." So also Volkmann (1953), p. 141-2; Southern (2000), p. 113-5; Weill Goudchaux (2001), p. 139.

¹⁸ For royal entries and processions in the Hellenistic kingdoms see Strootman (2006), p. 289-325. On the *pompē* of Philadelphos see Versnel (1970), p. 250-4; Rice (1983); Moevs (1993); Thompson (2000); and Strootman (2007), p.

The account in Plutarch, who used a different or additional source, pays more attention to ritual and symbolic aspects:

[Antonius] assembled a great crowd in the gymnasium, where he had erected a stage covered with silver, whereupon he had placed two golden thrones, one for himself and one for Kleopatra, as well as two lower thrones for the children. First he proclaimed Kleopatra queen of Egypt, Cyprus, Libya and Koile Syria and named Caesarion her co-ruler. ... Next he gave his own sons by Kleopatra the title King of Kings. To Alexandros he gave Armenia, Media and Parthia, as soon as he would have conquered it, and to Ptolemaios Phoenicia, Syria and Kilikia. At the same time he presented Alexandros, dressed in a Median garb with a *tiara* and a *kitaris*, and Ptolemaios in *krepides*, *chlamys*, and a *kausia* encircled with a diadem. For the latter was the attire of the kings who had come after Alexander and the former that of the kings of Media and Armenia. And after the children had embraced their parents, one was given a guard of Armenians, the other of Macedonians. Kleopatra was on this occasion, as indeed she always was when she appeared in public, dressed in a robe sacred to Isis and she was hailed as the New Isis. (Plut., *Ant.* 54.3-6)

To sum up: Caesarion was made overlord of Koile-Syria, Cyprus and Egypt; Ptolemaios Philopator of Syria, Phoenicia, Kilikia and the rest of Asia Minor; Alexandros Helios of Armenia, Mesopotamia and the Upper Satrapies; Kleopatra Selene of Cyrenaica. Kleopatra and Caesarion received overlordship off all this. Theirs was a dual monarchy of king and queen in accordance with Ptolemaic tradition.¹⁹ The fact that Caesarion's throne was placed lower than Kleopatra's suggested that he was subjected to her until his coming of age. Antonius' place beside Kleopatra and the equal status of his throne showed that

314-325, with further literature. Hellenistic royal ritual influenced the evolution of the *triumphus* rather than the other way round: Versnel (1970), cf. Holiday (1997).

¹⁹ On the formal aspects of the gradual transformation of Ptolemaic queen into co-rulers see Hazzard (2000).

Roman hegemony in the East was still intact.²⁰ Indeed, Antonius possessed not only the authority of a father over his own sons, but as Kleopatra's husband also was the guardian of Caesarion, the King of Kings.²¹

The regalia used in the ritual are meaningful as well. Unfortunately, the attire of Caesarion is not given. As the Donations took place in the Ptolemies' Mediterranean capital Alexandria and not in Memphis, the place where they were inaugurated in Egyptian style, Caesarion can not have been dressed as an Egyptian pharaoh. Likewise, Kleopatra's "robe sacred to Isis" presumably presented her as the culturally neutral, hellenised version of Isis rather than a purely Egyptian goddess. Explicit use of native Egyptian idiom was anathema to the Ptolemies' monarchical representation in Alexandria, and would in this case have given the impression that the east had come under the hegemony of Egypt – unacceptable for all non-Egyptian elites and rulers, and most Alexandrians. Instead, the Donations were meant to convey the message that the east had been *united*, in accordance with royal traditions acceptable to all eastern peoples. For this reason, Ptolemaios Philopator wore the costume of a Ptolemaic or Seleukid king;²² his Macedonian bodyguard also presented him as such. Caesarion may have worn similar attire as his youngest half-brother. The Iranian attire of Alexandros Helios may have been a reference to the Achaimenids, but first of all had the immediate, specific relevance of his being

²⁰ Dio adds that afterwards "[Antonius] sent a despatch to Rome in order that it might secure ratification also from the people there" (Dio Cass. 49.41.4).

²¹ According to Dio Cass. 49.41.2 Antonius made Caesarion King of Kings because of his descent from Caesar, "and he had arranged it so for the sake of Caesar" (Plutarch's statement that *Antonius'* sons were Kings of Kings is evidently a mistake). Furthermore, Caesarion's cult title Qeov~ Filopavtwr kai; Filomhvtwr not only reflected his mother's Qeav Filopavtwr, but emphasised Caesar's paternity as well; cf. Hölbl p. 239. On Kleopatra's title of Filopavtwr see Schrapel (1996), p. 223-5. The place of the revived Ptolemaic empire in a wider Roman system found expression, too, in the presentation of Kleopatra on official Roman coinage; the well-known coins proclaiming the conquest of Armenia, issued at the time of the Donations, bore the portrait of Kleopatra with the Latin (!) legend CLEOPATRAE REGINAE REGUM FILIORUM REGUM.

²² For Hellenistic regalia and royal costume see Smith (1988) and Strootman (2007), p. 360-84.

inaugurated as successor of the captive Armenian king Artavasdes (whose own son had fled to the Parthians) in addition to his overlordship over the larger area he received.²³

Imperium sine fine

The world empire given to Kleopatra was so vast that it has always been considered either an unrealistic dream of empire or an unhistorical later invention, no more than a *topos* in Dio and Plutarch and best to be discarded. But to make sense of propaganda it is not always wise to separate fact from fiction.

If one scrutinises the donations for their historical veracity only, it will become clear that all land grants controlled by Kleopatra in actuality were lands given to her *before* the Donations. By the time that the ceremony of the Donations took place, Kleopatra already was the formal ruler of an empire that included Libya, Egypt, Koile Syria, Phoenicia, Syria, Kilikia, and Cyprus, and the ceremony merely confirmed this. This means that the significance of the Donations resides not in what was actually acquired by Kleopatra, but in what she claimed in addition. It may be so that the historian's task is to discover the truth behind the myth, but the historian's task is also to elucidate the myth as it is. Below, I will argue that the claim to world empire was topical in Hellenistic royal ideology rather than an enigmatic incident.

It has become customary to assume that there existed a balance of power between the Hellenistic kingdoms, and to project this view with retrospective effect on Hellenistic royal ideology. But ideology *qualitate qua* does not yield to the limitations of reality, let alone to a modern reconstruction of that reality. Most ancient ideologies of kingship contain a substantial amount of mythical thinking, and we should better accept that in the eyes of the inhabitants of the ancient Near East the mythical character of kingship was as real as any myth.

There is overwhelming evidence that the ideal of *imperium sine fine*, to use Virgil's rendition of that notion for Roman use (*Aen.* 1.279), was as characteristic for Hellenistic royal ideology as it had been

²³ Grant (1972), p. 164.

for the Assyrian and Persian empires, as well as for New Kingdom Egypt.²⁴ The idea of limitless and eternal monarchy was expressed by multifarious means in the monarchical rituals, court poetry, and iconography of both the Seleukid and the Ptolemaic empires. These included Panhellenic rhetoric, heraldic emblems such as the *omphalos* or Zeus Ouranios, the accumulation of knowledge of the world at the royal courts, the symbolic attainment of the world border by transferring objects, animals and plants from exotic lands to the imperial centre, *et cetera*. The most conspicuous Hellenistic universal symbolism was the use, notably on coins, of cosmic emblems: the zodiac, the moon and, above all, the sun – symbol *par excellence* of almighty and eternal power.²⁵

Like so many other Hellenistic monarchs, Kleopatra abundantly availed herself of solar symbolism. She gave her twins Alexandros and Kleopatra the epithets Helios and Selene as reference to the eternal lasting power exercised in the universe by the sun and the moon.²⁶ In the Hellenistic east, the emblem of the sun was a symbol of the apocalyptic expectation of a Golden Age.²⁷ Another, equally

²⁴ Hellenistic universalist ideology developed partly from ideologies of empire in the preellenistic Near East and partly from pre-existing Greek conceptions and Macedonian monarchic traditions; *pace* Hölbl (2001), p. 291, who presumes that the Donations of Alexandria expressed the wish to “[create] a kingdom which would unite Achaemenid and ancient pharaonic traditions” – as if the previous three (!) centuries could suddenly be rendered an irrelevant interlude in the collective memory of the inhabitants of the Near East. For the Hellenistic influence on Virgil’s conception of a Roman world empire consult Hardie (1986).

²⁵ For the concept of ‘symbolic attainment of the world (border)’ see Liverani (1979). Solar symbolism could also be expressed e.g. by radiant crowns attached to a king’s diadem on coins, and perhaps also in reality during ceremonial occasions. The type of Zeus Ouranios figures on coins of Antiochos VIII from c. 121 to 96, where the King of Heaven holds the sun in his outstretched hand, while a moon stands above his head. The so-called Star of Vergina, used as an heraldic emblem by the Antigonids and Seleukids, is of course not a star but the sun. For solar symbolism in royal propaganda see Strootman (2007), p. 352-3, with literature.

²⁶ On Kleopatra’s ‘solar propaganda’ see Grant (1972), p. 142-4, and Śnieżewski (1998), esp. p. 135-8. Volkmann (1953), p. 117, suggests that the children’s names were chosen to rival Parthian king’s title ‘Brother of the Sun and the Moon’. On the walls of the Hathor temple at Dendera, *i.e.* in an Egyptian context, Kleopatra had already presented herself as the mother of the sun-god Ra when Caesarion was born: Grant (1972), p. 99.

²⁷ On this aspect see Grant (1972), p. 143 and 171-5.

important, association was with the Seleukid practice of equating the king and the queen with Apollo and Artemis, who could in turn be equated with various eastern sun and moon deities.

The ideal of world empire burdened Hellenistic rulers with the obligation to permanently try to expand their dominion by means of conquest, and to make their imprint on territories that were considered peripheral, such as Central Asia, India and Ethiopia. Hellenistic kingship rested principally on military force, and kings presented themselves as heroic champions safeguarding the civilised world from chaos and guaranteeing universal concord (*homonoia*).²⁸ Kings claimed to do so even when their power was in reality not that formidable at all. The notion of limitless rule found expression, too, in royal titles. The Hellenistic title *basileus* and its female counterpart *basilissa* (meaning ‘female king’ rather than ‘royal consort’) were used without any restrictive addition and carried the connotation of universal rulership. Seleukid and Ptolemaic kings never publicly acknowledged other kings as their equals, even though they often dealt with other kings on the basis of equality in diplomatic negotiations.²⁹

The enumeration of countries in the Donations ceremony has many parallels in earlier royal propaganda. For example in line 6 of the Behistun inscription Darius—“the Great King, King of Kings, King of Countries” (line 1)—proclaims:

²⁸ On the importance of victory and war for the legitimisation of Hellenistic kingship see Gehrke (1982); Chaniotis (2004), p. 57-77, with select bibliography at p. 75-7; and Strootman (2007) 31-53.

²⁹ When Darius offered Alexander half his empire after the Battle of Issos, Alexander is said to have replied “that the universe (*kosmos*) could not be governed by two suns nor the world (*oikoumenē*) by two rulers” (Diod. 17.54.5; cf. Plut., *Alex.* 39) – an anecdote, of course, but a very meaningful one. According to Plut., *Demetr.* 25.4-5, Demetrios Poliorketes—whom the Athenians once honoured with a painting of the king standing upon the *oikoumenē*—“ridiculed all those who gave the title of king to anybody other than his father and himself”, and drank toasts to “Seleukos as Master of the Elephants, Ptolemaios as Admiral, and Lysimachos as Treasurer”, as if they were not kings but magistrates in the service of the one and only great king Demetrios. The paradox of, on the one hand, acceptance of limited political and military influence—especially in international diplomacy—and, on the other hand, ideological claims to global dominance, has been brilliantly considered by Liverani (1990) for the Near Eastern state system in the Late Bronze Age; cf. Gundlach (1992).

These are the countries which are subject unto me, and by the grace of Ahuramazda I became king of them: Persia, Elam, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, the countries by the Sea, Lydia, the Greeks, Media, Armenia, Kappadokia, Parthia, Drangiana, Aria, Chorasmia, Baktria, Sogdia, Gandhara, Skythia, Sattagydia, Arachosia, and Maka; twenty-three lands in all.

More relevant for the present discussion are the many examples from the Hellenistic empires, for instance the encomiastic passage in Kallimachos' *Hymn to Delos*, where it is said that Ptolemaios II Philadelphos

... shall rule over the Two Countries and over the lands that lie beside the sea, as far as the edge of the earth, where the swift horses always bring the sun. (Call. *Hymn* 4, 169-70)

In another early Ptolemaic court poem, Theokritos' encomium for Ptolemaios Philadelphos, the king is glorified as a new brand of Homeric hero, and the poet sketches both a realistic outline of his actual empire and an image of unlimited dominance:

Wealth and good fortune are his in abundance; and vast is the territory he rules, vast the sea. Countless countries and numberless tribes harvest rich crops thanks to the rains sent by Zeus. But none is as fruitful as the broad plains of Egypt, where floods of the Nile soak and soften the soil, or has so many towns full of skilled labourers. (...) And over all of this Ptolemaios rules as king. And he also takes as his Phoenicia, Arabia, Syria and Libya, and the dark Ethiopians; he commands all the Pamphylians, the Kilikian and Lykian spearmen, and the warlike Karians; he even rules the isles of the Cyclades, for his fine ships control the seas. The whole sea and all the land and the roaring rivers are ruled by Ptolemaios. (Theocr. *Id.* 17.77-92).

The list of countries and peoples in this poem corresponds in part to the countries given to Kleopatra VII. There is also a noticeable difference between Theokritos' description of the early Ptolemaic empire and the empire described in the accounts of the Donations: where Philadelphos' realm is depicted as a

maritime empire, incorporating the coastal areas of the eastern Mediterranean and united by Ptolemaic sea power, Kleopatra in addition claimed the whole land empire once ruled by the Seleukids, and previously by Alexander and the Achaimenids.

Kleopatra was not the first of her dynasty to do so. The victory stele of Ptolemaios III Euergetes, a Greek inscription of c. 241 BCE, copied in the sixth century CE from a now lost original at Adoulis on the Red Sea, glorifies the achievements of Ptolemaios III during the Third Syrian War (246-241):

Ptolemaios the Great King, the son of King Ptolemaios and Queen Arsinoe the Brother-Sister Gods, children of King Ptolemaios and Queen Berenike the Saviour Gods, descendant on his father's side of Herakles, the son of Zeus, and on his mother's side of Dionysos, the son of Zeus, after inheriting from his father the kingship over Egypt, Libya, Syria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, Lykia, Karia, and the islands of the Cyclades, marched out into Asia with infantry, cavalry, a fleet, and elephants from the land of the Troglodytes and from Ethiopia. (...) Having gained possession of the whole land on this side of the Euphrates, of Kilikia, Pamphylia, Ionia, the Hellespont, Thrace, and of all the forces in these countries and of the Indian elephants, and having made all the rulers of these lands his subjects, he crossed the river Euphrates, and having subdued Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Susiana, the Persis, Media and the rest of the land as far as Baktria, and having sought out all the sacred objects that had been carried out of Egypt by the Persians, and having brought them back to Egypt together with the booty taken from these provinces, he sent his troops [back] across the canals that had been dug out [...] (OGIS 54; Austin 221)³⁰

The historicity of Ptolemaios III's conquests is doubtful, although Appian's claim that his armies advanced as far as Babylonia (*Syr.* 65) may now have found contemporary confirmation in a newly

³⁰ This document is in part reminiscent of preellenistic pharaonic rhetoric, notably the assertion that stolen 'sacred objects' have been returned; cf. OGIS 56, a decree of Egyptian priests in honour of Ptolemaios III and Berenike II, which states that 'the king on a campaign abroad brought back to Egypt the sacred statues that had been taken out of the country by the Persians and restored them to the temples' (line 11). On this aspect see

published cuneiform document from Babylon (BCHP 11).³¹ Still, Ptolemaios III definitely did not conquer the whole of Asia “as far as Baktria”, and whatever conquests he made, these were of short duration as he withdrew from Seleukid territory in 241 BCE on the pretext of a rebellion in Egypt (Just. 27.1.9). But Ptolemaios is probably not at all boasting that he really subdued so vast a territory with all its peoples. He merely claims that he considered the entire Seleukid empire *doriktētos chōra* (‘spear-won land’, i.e. war booty), meaning that the whole of Asia had become his own by right of victory over its previous master, the Seleukid king. This is reflected in Justin (27.1.9) who says that Ptolemaios conquered “the whole kingdom of Seleukos”. Ptolemaios’ propaganda resonates in several later writers: Catullus (66.36) says that Ptolemaios “conquered Asia”, and Polyaeus (8.50) speaks of conquest “from the Tauros Mountains to India”. Such phraseology links the victory stele of Ptolemaios III to the Donations of Alexandria, where Alexandros Helios was made king of Armenia and all the lands east of the Euphrates “as far as India”.

As far as India – As far as Baktria – As far as Ethiopia. These are standard claims, meaning no less than ‘as far as the ends of the (civilised) earth’. The idea that the aim of conquest is reaching a final frontier was also central in the propaganda of Alexander, who set up altars along the Indus just like the Assyrian kings erected statues and steles at the shores of the Mediterranean and in the highlands of Armenia. Indeed, Alexander’s determination to reach the limits of the known world stands in a long tradition which did not die out with him. We see it, too, in Appian’s account of the conquests of the first Seleukid king, Seleukos Nikator:

He conquered Mesopotamia, Armenia, Anatolia, the Persians, the Parthians, the Baktrians, the Arabs, the Tapyri, the Sogdians, the Arachosians, the Hyrkanians, and all the other peoples that had before been conquered by Alexander, as far as the river Indus. (App., *Syr.* 55).

Winnicki (1994). However, other aspects, notably the opening lines, are typically Greek, and taken as a whole this text is, if anything, a generic imperialist text, typically Hellenistic rather than Egyptian or Greek.

³¹ BM 34428 = BCHP 11.

Concerning another Seleukid monarch, Antiochos III, Appian writes:

He invaded Media and Parthia, and also the other countries that had revolted against his ancestors; and he performed so many glorious deeds that he was called Antiochos the Great. Elated by his success and the prestige that had given him, he invaded Koile-Syria and Kilikia, and took those lands away from Ptolemaios Philopator. (...) Filled with limitless ambition he advanced to the lands of the Hellespontines, the Aiolians, and the Ionians, as if these already belonged to him as king of Asia because they had always been ruled by the kings of Asia. Then he crossed over to Europe, subdued Thrace, and defeated everyone who would not obey him. (App., *Syr.* 11.1.1) ³²

Appian's narratives reflect official Seleukid propaganda: as the direct heir of Seleukos Nikator, Antiochos the Great was heir of his ancestor's entire empire, even if that empire had not remained intact in the intervening century. In this vein the royal progress known as the so-called 'Nile cruise' of Caesar and Kleopatra may be understood as well: when in 47 the two of them sailed up the river Nile, Suetonius comments that "they would have sailed ... as far as Ethiopia had not his soldiers refused to go on" (Suet., *Iul.* 52.1; cf. App., *BCiv.* 2.90) – an allusion to Alexander's retreat from India before having reached the Ocean.³³ Another interesting testimony concerning Kleopatra VII in this respect is Plutarch's report on her linguistic talent:

She also had a very pleasant voice; and her tongue was like a many-stringed instrument, for she could readily speak in whatever language she wished, so that in her dealings with barbarians she seldom had

³² Cf. *Judith* 2.4-7, reflecting Antiochos III's propaganda.

³³ Sailing up and down the Nile, making offerings in riverside temples along the way, was a Ptolemaic practice adapted from pharaonic tradition; it was meant to appease the Egyptians population and at the same time ritually make territorial claims. Perhaps the real final destination of Kleopatra and Caesar were the temples of Hathor and Isis at Dendera (Tentyris). On Ptolemaic visits to Egypt in general see Clarysse (2000).

need of an interpreter. She replied to most of them herself and unassisted, for instance in interviews with Ethiopians, Troglodytes, Hebrews, Arabians, Syrians, Medes and Parthians. They say that she knew the languages of many other peoples as well, although the kings before her had not even bothered to learn Egyptian and some of them even had given up their own Macedonian language. (Plut., *Ant.* 27.3-4)

Kleopatra's knowledge of Egyptian may be accepted as historical fact, but the other languages are puzzling. As queen of the Ptolemaic empire, Kleopatra naturally had dealings with Arabs, Syrians and 'Hebrews', but she did not rule over Medes and Parthians. It is also remarkable that the language of the principal conversation partners in Kleopatra's diplomatic relations, the Romans, is absent. Of course, Kleopatra needed not speak Latin because the Romans she met spoke Greek. But why then are the other languages included? Parthian envoys at the Ptolemaic court would have spoken Greek, too. In Palestine and Syria Greek was still the *lingua franca* of the upper classes as well as the language of diplomacy. And why would she bother to learn the language of the Ethiopians, let alone 'Troglodytes'?

As Plutarch makes clear that Kleopatra utilised her 'foreign' languages in official situations, it is possible that the image of Kleopatra as a linguistic genius was ultimately derived from the context of a court ceremonial in which the queen ritually welcomed ambassadors in their respective native tongues.³⁴ Plutarch's brief catalogue of languages is very similar to the land catalogues in Hellenistic propaganda we saw above. Given Plutarch's statement that his listing of languages is all but complete, it is possible to descry the outlines of the Mediterranean dominion genuinely claimed by the Ptolemaic dynasty (Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Nabatea), with references to the Upper Satrapies of the former Seleukid kingdom. Ethiopia and the land of the 'Troglodytes'—ultra-barbaric 'others' who dwelled beside the Red Sea in the southernmost part of Arabia—serve as symbolic world border. If this explanation is correct, it is also obvious why Latin is so conspicuously absent from the list.

³⁴ One may consider the possibility of a single (repetitive) ritual in which the queen addressed her audience in various languages, not unlike pope John Paul II pronouncing his Christmas blessing in virtually all national languages of the world as a ritualised act amounting to the universality of the Roman Catholic church.

Kleopatra's status as "Empress of the World"³⁵ was also inherent in her self-presentation as the new Isis. The Ptolemaic dynasty had more often integrated native Egyptian religious idiom in their imperial ideology by translating it into Greek forms (and *vice versa*). Identification with Isis had been crucial for Kleopatra's rule in Egypt. Now she elevated this powerful image to a wider Mediterranean context by linking up with the popular cult of the Hellenistic Isis, the supreme heavenly queen, "the ruler of all countries ... [who] showed the stars their path [and] ordered the course of the sun and the moon."³⁶

Kleopatra and Asia

The single most important aspect of the Donations of Alexandria was the assumption of the titles Queen of Kings and King of Kings by the royal couple Kleopatra and Caesarion. Below I will argue that the use of these epithets was intended to capitalise upon the prestige of the Seleukids.

Great King and King of Kings once formed the core of the Achaimenid complex of royal titles. There seems not to have been any formal difference between the two titles, both having the same connotation of unlimited power and overlordship.³⁷ The evidence for Seleukid usage is very uneven, at least until the reign of Antiochos III. The Seleukids sporadically employed Great King (*basileus megas*) in their Greek propaganda. Particularly in the third century we see the title in the Seleukids' correspondence with Babylonian cities. In cuneiform royal texts, various Akkadian titles pertaining to the same could be added, in accordance with Babylonian practice, for instance in the opening lines of an inscription of Antiochos I Soter from the temple Ezida in Borsippa, near Babylon (268 BCE):

³⁵ Bevan (1927), p. 377.

³⁶ From the Kyme Aretology (1st Century CE), Burstein (1985), no. 112; for the relevance of the Hellenistic Isis for Hellenistic kingship see Versnel (1990).

Antiochos the Great King, the Mighty King, King of the World, King of Babylon, King of Countries, caretaker of Esagila and Ezida, first son of King Seleukos, the Macedonian, King of Babylon, am I. (ANET 317; Austin 189)³⁸

Besides Great King, Seleukid kings presented themselves as Kings of Asia. This epithet of Greek origin had been introduced by Alexander to mark the beginning of a new imperial era (Arr., *Anab.* 2.14.8-9; Curt. 4.1-14; Plut., *Alex.* 34.1).³⁹ The Ptolemies, on the other hand, rarely used Great King as a title, presumably because it belonged to the Asian cultural sphere. Ptolemaios III called himself Great King in relation to his victories in Mesopotamia during the Third Syrian War, as an outright challenge to the

³⁷ Both titles were Mesopotamian in origin: *vazrka šah*, Great King, was the Middle Persian equivalent of the common Akkadian title *lugal galú*, whereas the Middle Persian *šāhān šah*, King of Kings, was taken over from Urartu. For the Persian titles see Wiesehöfer (1993), cf. Griffiths (1953).

³⁸ For a full discussion of this text see Kuhrt & Sherwin-White (1991); cf. Kuhrt & Sherwin-White (1993). Furthermore, Antiochos I Soter and Antiochos II Theos are both called 'Great King' in the Babylonian king list BM 35603, published by Sachs and Wiseman in *Iraq* (1954). The use of the epithet Great King (*lugal galú*) for Seleukid kings in Babylonian sources appears not to have been structural, and the title is not used for later Seleukid kings. It is remarkable that there seems to be no record of Antiochos III the Great as *lugal galú* in the cuneiform documents, since notably he appears as such in the Greek evidence.

³⁹ See Fredricksmeyer (2000), p. 136-6. Besides establishing the Greek origin of this title, Fredricksmeyer argues that it was meant to replace the Achaimenid title King of Kings / Great King in order to give the impression that Alexander was *not* the successor of Darius III. That Alexander would present his conquests as the beginning of a new era of imperial rule is evident from e.g. the introduction of the diadem to express the new rule, but since 'King of Asia' was a Greek title, he probably only used it *vis-à-vis* his Macedonian and Greek following. Whether or not Alexander at the same time presented himself as King of Kings / Great King *vis-à-vis* the Iranian elite is impossible to establish for lack of contemporary Persian sources, *pace* Brosius (2003), p. 173-6. The use of indigenous royal titles and ceremonial in specific cultural contexts was common practice in the Hellenistic monarchies, and it is very likely that Alexander did so too, since he appears as 'King of the World' in the Babylonian astronomical diary BM 36390/36716 (= SH I, no. 330) and as 'King of Countries' in the astronomical diary SH I, no. 329. Antigonos Monophthalmos was awarded royal honours by the Persian aristocracy when he entered the Persis in 316 BCE (Diod. 19.48.1); although Diodoros says that the native Persians accepted him as 'King of Asia', this probably meant that he was proclaimed King of Kings / Great King; cf. Bosworth (2002), p. 162 with n. 221. See Brosius (2003), p. 174 n. 9, for a summary of relevant literature.

Seleukids' reputation as the rulers of Asia; Ptolemaios IV used the title in Koile Syria.⁴⁰ Kleopatra likewise used the title Queen / King of Kings to challenge the Parthians and to present herself as successor to the kingship of Asia.

A mere ten years before Kleopatra's accession to the throne the last Seleukid kings had disappeared from the political scene.⁴¹ In the view of the Romans, the Seleukid kingdom had ceased to exist with the creation of the *provincia* Syria. But from an eastern perspective, the legitimacy of Roman rule in the east was questionable, and indeed may have been unpopular with eastern elites. In the course of half a millennium of continuous Persian and Macedonian imperialism, citizens and country-folk alike had become accustomed to the reassuring certainty of the constant presence of a world king. The eastern idea of the world as empire did not simply disappear with the coming of the Rome. Rather, the new power will have sought after means to integrate its presence in the pre-existing political and ideological order.

Indeed, Roman policy in the east initially was a continuation of age-old political practices rather than an attempt to transform the Hellenistic world into a Roman east. Rome's so-called client states were mostly pre-existing kingdoms, former vassals of the Seleukids. Since Seleukid power had rapidly declined after the death of Antiochos Sidetes in 129 BCE, the number of vassal kingdoms had multiplied

⁴⁰ An Egyptian equivalent of King of Kings (*nswt nswjw*) existed mainly as a title for Osiris; the title has been attested for Ptolemaios XII in Philai, cf. Hölbl (2000), p. 291-2, with further literature.

⁴¹ A precise date for the end of the Seleukids cannot be established. In 64 BCE Pompeius deposed Antiochos XIII Philadelphos 'Asiatikos' and annexed Syria (App., *Syr.* 49 and 70); Asiatikos was soon after murdered, but he was survived by Philippos II Philorhomaioi, a king from a rival branch of the Seleukid family who claimed the diadem as late as 56 BCE, cf. Bevan (1902) II, p. 268 and Bellinger (1949). Furthermore, the Seleukid claimant Seleukos (Kybiosaktes), perhaps a younger brother of Asiatikos, survived until 58 BCE (see below). Other descendants of Seleukos Nikator capitalised upon their status as heirs as well. Thus, when Mithradates I Kallinikos of Kommagene married Laodike Thea Philadelphos, daughter of the Seleukid king Antiochos VIII Kallinikos ('Grypos'), this marriage was "endlessly celebrated in the dynasty's inscriptions": her epithet Philadelphos "reminded contemporaries [that] the marriage also joined to this dynastic house her five brothers, all of whom reigned in the final years of Seleucid power": Sullivan (1990), p. 60-1. Several kings of Kommagene thereafter styled themselves *basileus megas* on their coins.

and their relative autonomy increased, making the Seleukids imperial overlords in name only. But these independent states remained, at least ideologically, part of the same imperial fabric nonetheless. Neither Pompeius nor Caesar nor Antonius, nor indeed Octavianus, endeavoured to fundamentally change this system; instead they sought after acceptance of Rome's position as the new hegemonic power by taking over the role of the Seleukids as suzerains guaranteeing peace and order, protecting local dynasts and kings, and championing civic autonomy. But how can a republic be a king?

Even before the extinction of the Seleukid line, the Armenian Tigranes the Great and various Parthian kings had claimed the title of Great King attempting to take over the role of the Seleukids as imperial overlords and to rally support among civic elites and local aristocracies.⁴² The Parthian empire-builder Mithradates II (123-87) was portrayed wearing a diadem on coins, with Greek legends calling him alternately Great King and King of Kings, together with a variety of other Hellenistic epithets. Apparently, Seleukid royal idiom inspired confidence even after the dynasty had disappeared from the scene in most parts of the Near East.

When the Seleukid line became extinct, the right to the Seleukid diadem passed to the nearest kin, and that was the Ptolemaic family.⁴³ Kleopatra VII and her children were the direct descendants of Antiochos the Great, whose daughter Kleopatra (I) had married Ptolemaios V Epiphanes in 193. Conversely, of the last twelve Seleukid kings, ten had Ptolemaic mothers.⁴⁴ These mothers were Kleopatra Thea (daughter of Ptolemaios VI), Kleopatra Tryphaina and Kleopatra Selene (daughters of

⁴² Huss (1977); Bivar (1983), p. 42; Sullivan (1990), p. 44 and 61. Cf. Wiesehöfer (1996).

⁴³ Central to Seleukid and Ptolemaic succession practice was the Macedonian custom to accept all male agnates in the patriline as equally legitimate claimants to the inheritance, though only one would become the new *kyrios* of the *oikos* and receive the title of *basileus*. The inheritance could also be transmitted via female agnates—both mothers, sisters and daughters—and could consequently end up in another family. On succession in the Hellenistic kingdoms see Strootman (2007), p. 108-111. The lack of univocal rules for the succession was a constant source of dynastic instability and conflict, which in turn was a major cause for the demise of the Seleukid kingdom, cf. Ogden (1999).

⁴⁴ The only exception is Antiochos X Eusebes, son of an unknown wife of Antiochos IX, who himself was the son of the Kleopatra Thea.

Ptolemaios VIII and Kleopatra III 'Kokke'). T.V. Buttrey argued that the 'elder' goddess implicitly referred to by Kleopatra VII's epithet *Thea Neōtera*, The Younger Goddess, on coins minted in Syria, Phoenicia and Kyrene was Kleopatra Thea, who had been the only other queen to use that title.⁴⁵ It seems probable that the name Kleopatra Selene for the daughter of Antonius and Kleopatra likewise referred to the Seleukid-Ptolemaic queen of that name; as regent for her sons Seleukos VII and Antiochos XIII, Kleopatra Selene struck coins in Kilikia as the legitimate Seleukid ruler during the period of usurpation by Tigranes the Great (83-69).⁴⁶ Thus, Kleopatra seems to have propagated her kinship with the Seleukid family.

An attempt to fuse the Ptolemaic and Seleukid royal houses had already been made shortly before the reign of Kleopatra, when her elder sister, Berenike (IV), who ruled in Alexandria during the exile of Ptolemaios Auletes between 58 and 55,⁴⁷ married a Seleukid called Seleukos, whom the Alexandrians nicknamed Kybiosaktes, 'Fish Peddler'; he may have been the same person as the Seleukid king Seleukos VII Philometor, son of Kleopatra Selene.⁴⁸ Via his mother, this Seleukos presumably was a grandson of Ptolemaios VIII. Significantly, Cicero (*Verr.* 2.4.27.) reports on two Seleukid princes, Seleukos (VII?) and Antiochos (XIII), who appealed to the Senate in 75-73 BCE to be recognised as heirs of both

⁴⁵ Buttrey (1953), p. 54-86; cf. Grant (1972), p. 168-9. The legend *Kleopatra Thea Neōtera* could also be read as 'The New Kleopatra Thea'. Kleopatra Thea was the most imposing female figure in Seleukid history, who struck her own coins and ruled the kingdom for many years as regent; on her rule see Macurdy (1932), p.93-100; Bellinger (1949), Whitehorne (1994), p. 149-63. The epithet *Thea* is also attested for her daughter, Laodike Thea, who was married to the Seleukid vassal Mithradates I of Kommagene. A slightly earlier date for these coins, *viz.* the celebration of the 'Donations of Antioch' in 37/6 BCE, is also possible, and perhaps more probable. Nock (1953) reacted to Buttrey by suggesting that *Thea Neōtera* can also be read as a separate cult name, and supposed that this referred to a Syrian or Phoenician 'Younger Goddess', for whose cult Moretti (1953) then provided evidence; cf. Schrapel (1996), p. 225-34. However, Nock's interpretation does not exclude Buttrey's, as it was in essence similar to what Buttrey had suggested, namely that the epithet linked Kleopatra to Asia. Cf. Bingen (1999), who also argued that Kleopatra presented herself as a Seleukid.

⁴⁶ Burgess (2004); cf. Kritt (2002).

⁴⁷ After the death of her sister Kleopatra VI Tryphaina in 57, Berenike became sole ruler with the throne name Kleopatra Berenike; on her short reign see Bloedow (1963), p. 68-71; Hölbl (2001), p. 227-9.

the Seleukid *and* Ptolemaic thrones (the latter request was turned down). Berenike's husband fell ill, however, and died soon after the marriage had been arranged, as Porphyry informs us, or was murdered by Berenike because of his bad manners, as Strabo and Cassius Dio prefer.⁴⁹ In c. 56 Berenike invited yet another Seleukid successor to become her consort, this time Philippos II Philorhomaios, who had more Ptolemaic than Seleukid blood in his veins. But the Roman proconsul of Syria, Aulus Gabinius, prevented the marriage.⁵⁰

Kleopatra VII became sole ruler in 44 BCE, a mere ten years after the fall of her elder sister Berenike. As during her reign no direct descendants of the Seleukid *genos* in the patriline were alive anymore, Kleopatra could maintain that now she, or at least her male offspring, was entitled to the Seleukid inheritance – a heritage including various royal titles as well as hereditary claims to all the lands that had once belonged to Seleukos Nikator, or had been claimed by him as his *doriktētos chōra*. It was exactly this which was proclaimed at the Donations of Alexandria when mention was made of “all the countries east of the Euphrates as far as India”, and by the use of the Asian title King of Kings (Dio Cass.

⁴⁸ Krit (2002).

⁴⁹ Berenike's first husband turns up as a nameless Seleukid in Porphyry FGrH 260 f 2.14 *ap. Euseb., Chron.* 1.167-8, as 'Seleukos' in Dio Cass. 39.57, and as 'Kybiosaktes' in Strabo 17.1.11. In the past it has sometimes been held—notably by Macurdy (1935), p. 182, and Bellinger (1949), p. 86, and accepted by Hölbl (2001), p. 227—that Porphyry's anonymous Seleukid is a different person than Strabo's Kybiosaktes and Dio's Seleukos, which would bring Berenike's attempts to marry a Seleukid to a total number of three. It is more likely, however, that Porphyry, Strabo and Cassius Dio speak about one and the same person. The identification of Kybiosaktes as a son of Antiochos Eusebes and Kleopatra Selene goes back to Babelon (1890), p. ccxii, and has been defended by Heinen (1968), but is not without problems.

⁵⁰ Porphyry FHG III 716; cf. Bevan (1902) II, p. 268; Bellinger, p. 85; Krit (2002), p. 26. Berenike thereafter married a certain Archelaos, a guest-friend of Marcus Antonius who claimed to be a son of Mithradates the Great, (Plut., *Ant.* 3.5-6), and thus a descendant of Seleukos Nikator in the matriline. When Aulus Gabinius violently restored Ptolemaios Auletes to the throne in 55, Berenike and Archelaos were killed; Antonius, who commanded Gabinius' cavalry, saw to it that Archelaos was buried in royal style, so that he “left a great name among the people of Alexandria” (Plut., *Ant.* 3.6).

49.41.1 and 3). Unlike Berenike, Kleopatra needed not marry an heir to the Seleukid throne to make such claims, as no such heir survived beyond herself and her offspring.⁵¹

Kleopatra and Rome

As we have seen, the empire envisaged at the Donations of Alexandria was not an ephemeral dream of world conquest. Neither was it an unhistorical *topos* devised by augustean propaganda-makers or writers from the imperial period. Instead, Kleopatra's mythical empire was firmly rooted in Hellenistic royal ideology. The pomp and circumstance of this ritual of inauguration, and the claims to territory that were made, were typical of Hellenistic kingship.

Like Pompeius and Caesar before him, Antonius had appointed minor rulers throughout the east. But his rearrangements lacked a unifying ideology. The Roman patron-client system would not do. Roman senators could use the patron-client metaphor to make sense of Rome's role in the east only for the sake of domestic ideology; in the east, it could never replace the age-old faith in universal kingship as the world's single most important principle of order. Thus, the most formidable task faced by Antonius was not the incorporation of the east in the Roman Empire, but the incorporation of republican Rome in the east, permeated as it was by monarchical beliefs. What Kleopatra had to offer Rome in return for a revived Macedonian empire (under Roman protection), was exactly what Rome needed most to become the new master in the east: royalty.

The new imperial order was not created by the introduction of a Roman system of patronage. It was essentially a revival of Hellenistic practice. In part it was also innovative. The innovation was the amalgamation of the Ptolemaic and Seleukid empires, which in turn were amalgamated with Roman rule by means of Caesar's paternity of Caesarion and Antonius' paternity of Kleopatra's other children, as was emphasised at both Antioch in 37/6 and Alexandria in 34. There could be no doubt who really was

⁵¹ The only legitimate rival claim came from the small kingdom of Kommagene, where Antiochos I Epiphanes (c. 69-36) emphasized his direct descent from the Seleukids on Nemrut Dağ and carried the title of Great King;

in charge. Antonius was not himself a king but he was the father of no less than three eastern monarchs, as well as stepfather and regent of the minor King of Kings, Ptolemaios XV, Caesar's son. The fact that Antonius donated land to the Ptolemaic kingdom in the name of Rome also made this clear.

Antonius acted in the interest of Rome. He did not foolishly give away Roman possessions to 'Egypt'. On the contrary, he aimed at bringing eastern royalty into the Roman sphere of influence. The status of Kleopatra as Queen of Kings was meant to give coherence to the complex of vassal states. Thus, Antonius aimed at uniting the east to secure Roman hegemony and rival Parthian claims to imperial overlordship in the same area. By reviving Ptolemaic and notably Seleukid prestige—also implicit in his own cult name *Neos Dionysos*—Antonius presented the Parthian king as an illegitimate usurper and hoped to mobilise support for his campaign against him.

Despite Antonius' defeat by Octavianus his reorganisation of the east proved to be successful. After Actium, Octavianus did not replace the vassal kings installed by Antonius, nor support new civic oligarchies. With the Ptolemaic kingdom abolished, and Ptolemaios XV murdered, the problem of republican rule over a monarchical world was now solved by the gradual monarchisation of Octavianus' own person, taking place more rapidly and explicitly in Egypt and the east than in the west, a process for which the ideological foundations had been laid by Antonius, who had been king in all but title. With all rivals out of the way, Octavianus was able to take the last step, replacing Kleopatra and Caesarion as the formal overlord of the vassal state system that would later become the Roman Near East.

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Kommagenian kings, notably Antiochos IV, styled themselves Great King.

Abbreviations

ABC	A.K. Grayson, <i>Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles</i> (Locust Valley, 1975).
ANET	J.B. Pritchard (ed.), <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (3rd edn; Princeton 1969).
Austin	M.M. Austin (ed.), <i>The Hellenistic World From Alexander to the Roman Conquest. A Selection of Ancient Sources in Translation</i> (Cambridge, 1981).
BCHP	R.J. van der Spek and I.L. Finkel, <i>Babylonian Chronicles of the Hellenistic Period</i> (forthcoming; preliminary online at www.livius.org).
CHI	<i>Cambridge History of Iran</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
SH	A.J. Sachs and H. Hunger, <i>Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia</i> . (3 vols; Vienna, 1988, 1989, 1996).

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