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ACADEMIC WRITING



“Do Modern Understandings of Sexuality Help or Hinder our Interpretations of Sexuality in Ancient Greece and Rome?” by Lucia-Allegra Perricone

“Sweet mother, I can’t do my weaving—
Aphrodite has crushed me with desire
for a tender youth” (Frag 22.)

Sexuality in Ancient Greece and Rome continues to captivate our imaginations and influence modern society. However, attempts to compare these societies can often be fraught with difficulties, particularly in terms of male sexuality. The significant changes in the definition of male sexuality over time make it challenging to accurately understand and appreciate the sexual practices of ancient men without modern preconceptions. In contrast, such comparisons can be useful when exploring female sexuality in ancient Greece and Rome. Female homosexuality is often overlooked in favour of heterosexual or male-homosexual relationships. Additionally, many of the sources that contribute to female sexuality are documented by men, rather than women themselves. This problem still exists in different forms today such as the misrepresentation of ‘lesbians’ in pornography. Therefore, societal attitudes towards women and sex have shifted over time, or in some cases have remained similar. I will explore the potential benefits and drawbacks of comparing ancient Greek and Roman sexuality to more recent societies, arguing that while such comparisons may be unhelpful for male sexuality because of the drastic change in definition, they can be valuable for our understanding of how female sexuality was viewed in these ancient cultures.

Whilst sexuality in ancient Greece and Rome was defined by the position one occupied during sex, in the modern day it is understood according to whom you are typically attracted. This is illustrated in the Eurymedon vase, which depicts a barbarian bent forward in a submissive stance waiting to be penetrated.¹ By making the foreigner the receptor, it gives the impression the artist is emasculating him and mocking his culture in tandem. The Greek man is given power merely through his position as the penetrator because this signifies masculinity and status. This highlights that it is natural for a man of higher nobility to be dominant if engaged with someone of lower status, but the lines are blurred between men of the same status, since one partner is vulnerable to a feminising role which violates the submissive-dominant dynamic. This dynamic is fundamental to respecting the strict rules that must be obeyed to uphold Greek values. However, the discussion of gender being irrelevant does not equate to the Greeks reflecting modern values of acceptance of homosexuality. Foucault emphasises this when he says: “Greeks could not imagine that a man might need a different nature in order to love a man”.² Therefore, the

¹ Smith, 1999, pp. 128

² Foucault, 1985, p. 192

nature of an individual is not understood by their sexual preference towards another individual of the same sex, but rather it is valued according to if it complies with the

rules of power and positions. By contrast, in Roman society, the emphasis shifted to this desire to be manly which was not associated with sex between two men. This is conveyed in Ovid when he writes: “But as for the rest, leave that for wanton girls and for those hardly men who seek to have a man”.³ This suggests that Ovid intends to ward men off overdone grooming as this could liken them to girls or effeminate men. Additionally, the label “hardly men” alludes to the category of men who desire to be a receptive role in penetrative acts implying that as a result their identity as men is less accepted. For this reason, the question of position in sex remains crucial and to even imply that a man has played the receptive role was a distinct assault on his masculinity.⁴ Ultimately, comparisons to western ideas of sexuality do hinder our understanding of ancient Greece and Rome because our definition of sexuality has evolved so drastically. Therefore, our need to have a classification of genders to define sexuality does not reflect the same concerns that they had regarding sexuality in the ancient world.

Though pederasty is not accepted in contemporary society, it played a relevant role in sexuality in the ancient world. This is described in Plato’s *Symposium*: “For I myself cannot say what is a greater good for someone, just as soon as he reaches boyhood, than a worthy lover”.⁵ By making this claim in a persuasive tone, Plato makes it seem as if his statement is undisputable and shows how he admired it as the greatest form of love. The suggestion that it is desirable for “boyhood” implies that it was believed to provide education and guidance for the *eromenos*, and it was considered a natural and fundamental part of Greek upbringing.⁶ However, while pederasty was widely accepted in Greek society, the same cannot be said for Roman culture. Instead, Roman society idealised male-female sexual relationships and discouraged Greek-style pederasty. According to Williams, this was because they were concerned with preserving the virtue of free-born males.⁷ This was reflected in the implementation of the *Lex Scantinia*, which penalised a sex crime against free-born male minors. It is unclear if the law also punished men who took the passive role during sex with another man which could emphasise the preference towards heterosexual relationships in Rome.⁸ Comparisons to recent societies have led to arguments such as Bloch’s who believes the practice constitutes exploitation by someone in a position of power over a trusting victim, which likens the practice to paedophilia.⁹ While this viewpoint is certainly valid, it is important to be careful not to hold an ancient Greek practice to a modern moral code. Therefore, if one wants to understand sexuality in ancient Greece and Rome, it is required that our contemporary values are set aside. Consequently, comparisons act as a hindrance because understanding the cultural context and beliefs of ancient societies

³ Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, 1.505-24

⁴ Williams, 1999, p. 179

⁵ Plato, *The Symposium*, 178A-180B

⁶ Foucault, 1985, p. 194

⁷ Williams, 1997, p. 96-97

⁸ McGinn, 1998, p. 140-141

⁹ Bloch, 2001, p. 193

independently is vital to gaining a deeper understanding of their attitudes towards sexuality.

On the other hand, love between women is largely invisible in the ancient world and it is rare that we have female accounts of their experiences. There is significantly more evidence surrounding male homosexuality as opposed to female. This is not a coincidence; it is because love between women did not serve as an instrument to form the citizen and therefore was of no interest to the city.¹⁰ However, Sappho is our primary source for female homosexuality in Greece. In her poetry, she describes her love as all encapsulating: “cold sweat covers me and a trembling takes a hold of me all over: I’m greener than the grass”.¹¹ The suggestion is that Sappho’s love has become so nerve-wracking that it has caused a physical effect on her. According to Devereux, these are emotions brought on by anxiety attacks from pederastic, not heterosexual, love.¹² Whilst I think it is unlikely that Sappho had an equivalent of pederastic relationships with girls, I think Devereux is correct in his suggestion that Sappho is referring to a form of romantic true love. It is worth noting that sex between women takes place on an equal basis and does not involve submission as required for penetrative acts between men. Therefore, homosexual love offered Greek women aspects of love such as passion, affection, and the freedom to choose the object of one’s desire which was rare for them to acquire inside their marriages. Dover furthers this idea by claiming that homosexuality was a type of ‘counter-culture’ for those women, and they received from their own sex what segregation and monogamy denied them from men.¹³ This interpretation could be viewed as androcentric because it denotes that women love women because they are seeking something they cannot have with their husbands. This rejects the modern notion that lesbians have no attraction to men, and their sexuality is something they do not have a choice over. Ultimately, though there is the suggestion that love between women existed it does not necessarily fit under our modern understanding of lesbianism. Although it can be tempting to look for verbal equivalents to modern concepts in scholarship, this is dangerous because these labels carry connotations of a distinct culture that this twentieth-century usage evokes, not the ancient world.¹⁴

Most historical sources surrounding female sexuality are created by men, which gives us more indication of how female sexuality was viewed in the ancient world by the male gaze. For instance, symposiac vases often depicted erotic images of women such as one which shows three naked women pleasuring themselves with *olisboi* (leather dildos).¹⁵ Immediately, this vase subverts contemporary social expectations merely through the lack of a male presence. This is significant as women are functioning entirely independently and are satisfying fundamental sexual needs without the help of a male citizen. Though there is no clear answer to if this vase is lesbian in theme, it does present a picture which is unnerving to a male viewer. This vase acts as a reminder of the dangers of ‘wild’ female desire and emphasises the need for male

¹⁰ Cantarella, 1992, p. 78

¹¹ Powell, 2007, p. 11

¹² Devereux, 1967, p. 42

¹³ Cantarella, 1992, p. 86

¹⁴ Rabinowitz, 2002, p. 211

¹⁵ Kilmer, 1993, p. 241

dominance.¹⁶ Similarly in Rome, the idea of the sexually active woman who takes pleasure in sex is considered monstrous and masculine.¹⁷ For example, the act of oral

sex being performed on a woman was considered polluting because the pleasure surrounds the woman rather than the man. The sexual act rears away from men in the dominant role and places the woman in the position of power. Additionally, Roman sources do not understand lesbians in the way that we do in contemporary society. However, they construct a practice called the *tribades*. It is described as a type of fake intercourse: in which the women either rub their vulvas together or use a dildo on each other.¹⁸ This highlights that female pleasure cannot exist without some sort of phallic object involved resembling the *olisboi* mentioned previously. Also important is that if there is no male involved, it is deemed as fake or not truly satisfactory underlining the phallocentric model dictating society. Even in contemporary society, we tackle the same problem but in the visual representation of sexuality in pornography. According to Bensing, one of the main issues with pornography is how the visual representation of sexuality is determined by the imperatives of white male heterosexual desire.¹⁹ This reflects the ancient attitude of female gratification and desire being narrated by men and as a result catered to men. Ultimately, the influence of the male gaze in the representation of female sexual desire is present in both ancient and contemporary societies which only better our understanding.

The portrayal of female sexuality in ancient Greek plays, such as Aristophanes' 'Lysistrata', differs significantly from modern-day strikes used as a tool for empowerment. Whilst the protagonist Lysistrata may be seen as using the withdrawal of sex as a weapon to achieve her goals, she should not be viewed as a role model for women today. Arguably, Aristophanes' characters are not what the Greeks consider women at all; Instead, they are mere reminders of the chaos and destruction that can be caused by the rule of women. For this reason, they are used to justify women's exclusion from political activities in real life and encourage the rule of men. This sheds light on Aristophanes' intent for the play to be viewed through a comical lens as it inverts the expected female behaviour of the time. Beard suggests that these women would have been acted out as "pantomime dames", rather than women who are taken seriously for their fight for peace.²⁰ This contradicts the suffering Leymah Gbowee describes women faced in her Liberian sex strike, with many women attending meetings with bruises on their faces after being beaten by their husbands for taking part in the fight.²¹ Therefore, comparing Lysistrata to the Liberian sex strike belittles the severity of the suffering endured by these women. Drawing comparisons could be viewed as a direct abuse of modernity as an ancient text is deployed in a manner that trivialises the modern political debate and silences

¹⁶ Stansbury-O'Donnell, 2011, p. 181

¹⁷ Holt N. Parker, 2020, p. 59

¹⁸ Holt N. Parker, 2020, p. 59

¹⁹ Bensing, T, 1992, p. 76

²⁰ Beard, 2017, p. 74

²¹ Morales, 2014, p. 293

modern political agents.²² Even the idea that women in contemporary society are having to resort to tactics such as a sex strike just to be heard by men shows that this is an ongoing problem that is rooted in ancient cultures. The important difference is that in recent societies the idea that women have control over their bodies is not a trivial matter or used for entertainment. However, comparing this to Aristophanes'

work helps us better understand the different motivations behind this ancient text that certainly did not work towards women's rights.

In conclusion, comparing ancient Greece and Rome to more recent societies can be both helpful and hindering. On the one hand, comparisons for male sexuality can be unhelpful because of how different our meaning is. This poses problems as one must try to set aside a modern moral code to understand practices that have no place in society today. On the other hand, modern comparisons to notions of sexuality in ancient society can be beneficial for our understanding of how female sexuality is viewed by men in these ancient cultures. However, even with first-hand female accounts such as Sappho's, it is difficult to distinguish what this relationship was. To try we apply labels that fit modern society such as 'lesbian' to better understand sexuality. However, this is an anachronistic term that does not belong in ancient cultures. But in terms of ancient art and theatre, the comparisons to the modern-day offer us a clear indication of just how secondary female sexuality was considered to male sexuality. Therefore, while comparisons can offer insight into how ancient female sexuality was viewed by men, understanding ancient society's beliefs and values independently is crucial to gaining a deeper understanding of male sexuality.

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²² Morales, 2014, p. 294

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Discuss how the dialogue form shapes Plato's argument in the *Euthyphro*. Refer to at least two passages.

The purpose of this essay is to examine the literary form with which Plato so effectively fashions a model exposition of philosophical discussion. In exploring the features of the Platonic dialogue within the *Euthyphro*, we will be able to gain a greater understanding of the meticulous methodology that allows Plato to construct an intricate synthesis of philosophical and intellectual inquiry. My discussion investigates these attributes through the analysis of three fundamental components within two decisive passages of Plato's dialogue. These are firstly, the end of the dialogue's introduction and request for definition (4e4-5d8); and Euthyphro's second attempt at the definition of *τὸ ὅσιον* leading into the main philosophical argument (9c1-10d7). Here, we see Plato's use of the literary form to exhibit the dramatic qualities and style of the dialogue, namely his manipulation of characterisation and dramatic irony. Then, in looking at the way in which Plato's use of the satirical tone amplifies his philosophical discourse, I examine the crucial utilisation of transition in the dialogical debate and the role this plays in both framing and advancing Socrates' dialectic. Finally, I evaluate the ambiguity of the dialogue form, in regard to the presentation of Socrates' argument and the use of philosophical logic, so as to demonstrate further the pivotal function of the philosophical dialogue in engaging its audience. In doing so, this investigation also hopes to present Plato's ability to produce a rich and distinct discussion of not only the essence of piety, but the nature of other significant intellectual arguments and the philosophical concepts with which he is so concerned.

Plato's composition of idiolect towards the end of the introductory conversation encapsulates the ironic structure of the dialogue. He presents Socrates praising Euthyphro in his verbose speech: *ὦ θαυμάσιε...Εὐθύφρονα ὁμολογεῖς σοφὸν εἶναι τὰ τοιαῦτα*.²³ The complimenting vocative address is intensified by the intellectual commendation Socrates bestows on Euthyphro, although clearly ironic. Plato's incorporation of vocative interjection is a frequent component of the conversational style of the dialogue, not least his characterisation of Socrates in speaking to his other interlocutors. As Nightingale recognises, "Plato's Socrates tends to pour on the praise when he encounters pretentious people such as Euthyphro",²⁴ and although this is clearly seen here, there is an extra note of irony due to the additional honour of *σοφὸν*. This amusingly ties in with the prior depiction of Euthyphro setting himself up in a particularly overambitious manner. This is achieved though Plato's humorous comparison of the different forms of knowledge, when Socrates asks Euthyphro whether *ἀκριβῶς οἰεῖ ἐπίστασθαι*,²⁵ with Euthyphro replying that *τῶ ἄν διαφέρῃ Εὐθύφρων τῶν πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων, εἰ μὴ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα ἀκριβῶς εἰδείην*.²⁶ Plato's handling of dialogical comedy, combined with a sophisticated comment on the different types and consequences of knowledge, is marvellously captured in this ironic exchange. Socrates uses the passive verb, *ἐπίστασθαι*,

²³ Plato, *Euthyphro* 5a3...5a6-7.

²⁴ Nightingale (1995) 114.

²⁵ Plato, *Euthyphro* 4e4-5.

²⁶ Ibid., 5a1-2.

expressing a form of knowledge that requires empirical experience, whereas, Euthyphro describes a more general sense of knowledge, *εἰδέναι*. Plato's parallelism of these forms is made more significant through the lexical symmetry by which they are portrayed, both adjoined by the intensifying adverb, *ἀκριβῶς*, emphatically marking the ironic tone of Euthyphro's misunderstood exclamation. However, underlying the humorous and ignorant characterisation of Euthyphro, Plato provides an insightful comment on the concept of knowledge. Emlyn-Jones summarises the issue aptly: Plato raises the question of whether "a teacher, not his pupil, is responsible for the consequences of knowledge imparted" and when it is exercised.²⁷ Thus, it is evident that Plato's manufacturing of the dialogue form in the *Euthyphro* possesses the capacity for numerous intellectual debates, a sympathy which allows Plato to explore many avenues of philosophy, all whilst compelling the attention of his readers by often leading to no conclusion. This is what Plato provides in this passage, an appropriate foundation for the discussion on piety that is to follow and, through his use of the dramatic form of comedy, a basis for philosophical discussion. This concept is extended through the intellectual relationship in which Socrates wishes to position himself, declaring that *μαθητῆς δὴ γέγονα σός*.²⁸ The dialogue form plays a major role in the portrayal of Socrates as a questioner, specifically through discourse to depict this inversion of intellectual standing. Stavru notes that "a Socrates who professes ignorance is also one we find in many Platonic dialogues...of the early period",²⁹ and the Socrates of the *Euthyphro* not only adheres to this designation but is stimulated further, as the inclusion of only one other interlocutor, allows this inversion to be utilised to its fullest. Plato introduces this image through the term for pupil, *μαθητῆς*, which refers to a learner of theoretical knowledge, the very thing Euthyphro struggles to grasp throughout. In claiming this status, Socrates distances himself from the role of the teacher for the purpose of taking up the position of philosophical navigator, shifting the responsibility onto Euthyphro. Plato immediately paints Euthyphro as a fallible and opinionated teacher. The incredibly powerful assertive, *Ναὶ μὰ Δία*, bolstered by the *ἄρα*, here acting as a strengthening conjunction within the future less vivid conditional,³⁰ demonstrates his arrogance and naivety at the situation he is putting himself in. Although the philosophical argument has not yet started, Plato is carefully setting the scene for the interrogation to follow, foreshadowing Euthyphro's inevitable humiliation through the pervading irony. Furley analyses the character of Euthyphro and rightly suggests that Plato uses his character, within the ironic structure of the dialogue, as a warning against the dogmatism and complacency of an older custom. He states that "Euthyphro's position is that of one cleaving to a tradition which has begun to come under fire from progressive thinkers" such as Socrates.³¹ In establishing the foundations for the argument that is to follow, Plato constructs the dialogue to produce different characters whose comprehension of philosophical logic is drastically different, men from completely different socio-intellectual backgrounds. This grants the reader the opportunity to witness a range of different

²⁷ Emlyn-Jones (2001) 60 *ad loc.*

²⁸ Plato, *Euthyphro* 5a8.

²⁹ Smith in Stavru (2018) 611-612.

³⁰ Plato, *Euthyphro* 5b8.

³¹ Furley (1985) 203-4.

perspectives and interpretations on these various issues and to reflect on these distinct characterisations of philosophical thought.

This then brings us to Socrates' request for a definition of piety and the transition into the principal philosophical argument. However, Plato ensures that the dramatic irony remains, although now using the technique to magnify a structural function. Billings' *The Art of Transition in Plato*, an older yet still highly significant work, introduces the reader to Plato's organisation of the coherent movement of the dialogue throughout the dialectic method. He notes that Plato, in initiating a new inquiry that requires "explicit reference to the discussion", uses verbs of exhortation such as "forms of...λέγω...combined with inferential particles like οὖν or δὴ".³² Although Billings notes this appears in the Euthyphro, he misses the very apparent example here, where Plato portrays Socrates, in his formal appeal for definition, using the exhortative combination of Λέγε δὴ.³³ However, what is of particularly interest is what we see within the framework of the dialogue form, visibly Plato's ironic parallel of Euthyphro's answer, directly mirroring Socrates, with the combination Λέγω τοίνυν.³⁴ This is in keeping with the satirical undertones of this passage, as the discourse particle τοίνυν carries a logical force,³⁵ yet one that is weaker to the powerful causal sequence understood in οὖν and certainly οὐκοῦν, which we observe Socrates use so frequently later on in the dialogue.³⁶ This distinction in the idiolect of the two figures, not least the clever arrangement of a key element of the dialogue form, highlights Plato's expertise in managing the fluidity of this literary genre. This enables Plato to shape the philosophical argument and initiate the progression of Socratic dialectic.

In the opinion of Emlyn-Jones, a significant piece of Plato's successful conversational style and shift through the philosophical argument is the image of Socrates "launching into elaborate parenthesis in order to follow the shifting train of improvised thought."³⁷ We have already seen this represented in Socrates' speech at 5a3-b7, but it can be seen again, most prominently in the beginning of the second passage, here a Socratic parenthetical discussion exploring the force of imaginary conversation.³⁸ Emlyn-Jones' comments are surely a development of Billings' work, who suggests the use of digressions are for "eloquent moral reflection which serves to vary the monotony and relieve the strain of a difficult argument."³⁹ Plato's artistic narrative prose plays a crucial role in fulfilling this function, evident in his employment of the traditionally poetic technique of synchysis. The interlocking pattern of τόδε...σου ἐνενόησα...λέγοντος mimics the psychological state of Socrates' thought,⁴⁰ one predominantly focused on his own philosophical inquiries, mixed with the short and ineffectual contributions of Euthyphro, a detail which makes Socrates' speech here all the more satirical. However, this speech also holds a significant role in mirroring the dialogue's systemic Socratic method, in accordance with Bensen's view that Socratic argumentation is in itself a psychological model which possesses

³² Billings (1920) 53.

³³ Plato, *Euthyphro* 5d7.

³⁴ Ibid., 5d8.

³⁵ See Denniston (1954) 571, for a comprehensive discussion on the type of inferential particles seen in this passage.

³⁶ Ibid., 9e4; 10a10; 10c6; 10d1.

³⁷ Emlyn-Jones (2001) 19.

³⁸ Plato, *Euthyphro* 9c1-9d5.

³⁹ Billings (1920) 97.

⁴⁰ Plato, *Euthyphro* 9c1-2.

three key components: “refutation, truth-seeking and persuasion”.⁴¹ This is an essential structural design which is inextricably bound to the Platonic dialogue form and is cleverly symbolised here. Plato’s disguised outline begins with the initial elenctic function of cross-examination, conveyed by Socrates’ rhetorical question, *τί μᾶλλον ἐγὼ μεμάθηκα*.⁴² The aspectual force of the perfect tense of the verb, not only signals Socrates’ disapproval with the current debate, but indicates the present necessity to return the discussion back to the appropriate question on *τί ποτ’ ἐστὶν τὸ ὁσιόν τε καὶ τὸ ἀνόσιον*.⁴³ Then, Plato reveals the prerequisite for the epistemic part of a dialogical argument, that is the desire for theoretical knowledge to be made clear. This is achieved through the rhetorical device of this semantic field, emphasised through the repetition of the passive verb *ἐφάνη...ἐφάνη*.⁴⁴ And finally, the protreptic function of argument, which is seen through the pairing of two direct questions, persuades Euthyphro to engage in Socrates’ line of argument: *ἀλλ’ ἄρα τοῦτο...ἄρ’ οὕτω...*⁴⁵ The combination of particles is assertive in *ἀλλ’ ἄρα*, where each particle maintains its separate force, a general adversative and an interrogative particle, contributing to the insistent and persuasive tone of Socrates’ questioning. This formulated arrangement of the Socratic method pictured in the dialogue’s transitional digressions, establishes the literary form as a significant device in not only controlling the fluency of philosophical argument, but in defining and shaping the intellectual progression of the discussion.

However, Plato’s philosophical exchange now reaches a stage of development that has been the centre of much scholarly debate on the effectiveness of Socrates’ philosophical argument. Thus, this raises the question of whether Plato’s dialogue form in the Euthyphro is able to produce a coherent and well-constructed investigation. Let us discuss the views of Cohen and Allen in arguing against the ambiguity of Socrates’ argument, put forward by Brown. The latter, whilst regarding Socrates as a “tactician of debate” states that “the logic of the passage is less commendable” describing it as “fallaciously equivocal”.⁴⁶ Yet, Cohen rightly opposes this view, through examining the structure of the dialogue, namely Plato’s specific use of two forms of *ὅτι*, one introducing reason and the other, a logically sufficient condition.⁴⁷ Brown, unaware of this, mistakenly assumes the negation of the statement, *ὅτι φιλεῖται, διὰ τοῦτο ὁσιόν ἐστιν*,⁴⁸ which is inferred by Socrates from the statement, *Διότι ἄρα ὁσιόν ἐστιν φιλεῖται (διὰ τοῦτο ὁσιόν ἐστιν)*.⁴⁹ Cohen identifies that there is “no reason to suspect that some inference in the argument is equivocally fallacious”,⁵⁰ showing that the dialogue’s conversational form successfully stands up against rigorous philosophical elenchus. This instance of Socrates’ argument has proved to be difficult to interpret for commentators. However, what has perhaps caused more ambiguity is the earlier discussion involving passive and active forms. Allen provides the accurate explanation, stating that Socrates is not concerned with the symmetry of verbal voices but rather an

⁴¹ Bensen (2007) 3.

⁴² Plato, *Euthyphro* 9c4-5.

⁴³ Ibid., 9c5-6.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 9c7-8.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 9d1...4.

⁴⁶ Brown (1964) 2.

⁴⁷ Cohen (1971) 12.

⁴⁸ Plato, *Euthyphro* 10d6-7.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 10d6.

⁵⁰ Cohen (1971) 12.

“asymmetry” that means to “exhibit a priority in the structure of facts.”⁵¹ The use of the passive and active voices, such as *φερόμενον* and *φέρον* show that the latter is prior to the former,⁵² a priority that is not temporal but conditional, a simple solution to what appears overly intricate. Although the argument includes some aspects of philosophical logic concerning counterpart theory and an early form of logical equivalence that deals with converse and inverse statements, the literary form successfully facilitates this. Therefore, although the argument may seem dense and complex, very possibly an intentional rhetorical technique used by Socrates, the dialogue form artfully shapes and enhances this philosophical discussion.

The relationship between this philosophical ambiguity found in Plato’s argument and the dialogue form can be explored once more in this passage. This time, Plato takes a unique approach to the use of philosophy in promoting the essential engagement of the reader. Firstly though, we must explore the method with which Plato exploits this reaction. The dialogue’s central argument deals with the already ambiguous neuter singular adjective expressions of *τὸ ὄσιον* and *ἀνόσιον*, each substantivized by the article. This instantly raises numerous complications, since this construction can be interpreted in multiple different ways, a challenge supplemented by Euthyphro’s own inaccurate attempts to define the terms, leaving him a subject to Socrates’ ruthless philosophical interrogation. Euthyphro’s confusion is clearly illustrated by the dialogue form, especially Plato’s control over the length of exchanges from each participant, Euthyphro being reduced to short monosyllabic utterances, opposed to the longer more detailed examinations of Socrates. The series of phrases such as *Πῶς γὰρ οὐ;... Πάνν γε... Ἐγώ γε... Πάνν γε... Ἀνάγκη* exemplifies the theologian’s confusion.⁵³ The first instance of this series is a frequent particle construction found in Platonic dialogue: the use of *γάρ* as an answer in the form of an elliptical question which confirms a positive statement. This style of question is another representation of the dialogue’s comedic inclinations. Plato’s dynamic characterisation of Euthyphro implies his newfound lack of apprehension, a decline in understanding which Plato visibly displays through Euthyphro’s now more cautious answer of *Ἐγώ γε μοι δοκῶ μανθάνειν*,⁵⁴ implying the ironic opposite. Perhaps, rather, Plato here is presenting, as Blondell declares, “two of the most conspicuous and inarguable functions” of the dialogue form: avoiding “Platonic dogmatism and to draw in the reader as a participant in the discussion.”⁵⁵ Euthyphro’s discourse or rather lack thereof, provides the reader with a foundation for their own argument. Plato ensures that every remark of his protagonist incites a solicitation of a response, yet when Euthyphro fails to meet this standard, it is left for the reader to argue on his behalf, ultimately executing the principal aim of the dialogue, epitomising the duty of the philosophical tool which is best carried out through conversation.

In conclusion, Plato successfully utilises his unique literary form to shape the *Euthyphro*’s philosophical discourse into a dramatic interplay between two diametrically opposed characters, an interaction which culminates in the formation of a complex intellectual discussion. Whether it is through the use of dramatic irony and humour, evident in both Plato’s diligent handling of narrative style and explicit

⁵¹ Allen (1970) 40.

⁵² Plato, *Euthyphro* 10a6.

⁵³ Ibid., 10a12; 10b6; 10c5; 10c8; 10c12.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 10a9.

⁵⁵ Blondell (2002) 39.

characterisation, or the skilful manipulation of the dialogical progression of Plato's philosophical argument, the form of the dialogue grants Plato the license to construct a nuanced exploration of philosophical capacity through the primary examination on the nature of piety. Yet, it is the complex and rigorous structure which Plato adopts in his dialogue that provides the most significant examination of this philosophical thought. Through the ambiguity this system produces, Plato generates the most dynamic and engaging discussion, one which the reader themselves is provoked to experience and which stimulates a greater understanding of these intellectual challenges that Plato examines so thoroughly in the dialogue of the *Euthyphro*.

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Historical Precedents: Was Julius Caesar's assassination in 44 BCE justified?

Introduction

The assassination of Julius Caesar on 15th March 44 BCE marked a turning point in Roman history and the transition from Republic to Principate. Highly controversial at the time, Caesar's assassination was viewed by some as a necessary measure to restore the Republic to working order, while others saw it as an unjust and violent act against a man looking to strengthen the Roman political system. For ancient Roman society at this time, though uncommon, the assassination of ambitious politicians was not unheard of, and certainly not as unexpected as it would be today. This essay will aim to show that the assassination was justified to preserve the Republic and followed historical precedents, evaluating Caesar's portrayal as a regal figure, his corruption of power and the political system, and finally his assumption of the title *dictator perpetuo*.

A Regal Figure

One of Caesar's greatest threats to the Republic, and an indication of his intent to seize ultimate power was the presentation of himself as a royal, or even divine, figure. The most notable incident in which Caesar appears to test public support for a *rex* of Rome is at the Lupercalia in February 44 BCE. Plutarch details Mark Antony's attempt to crown Caesar with a diadem to gauge public approval for a king, but emphasises the uncertainty of the crowd, who applauded when Caesar rejected the coronet.^[131] This event and the people's approval at his rejection of the crown is further corroborated by Cicero.^[132] Although a contemporary source, it is important to note that Cicero wrote this account in hindsight of the assassination, aware that Caesar had taken the title of *dictator perpetuo* and therefore might have wished to emphasise the Lupercalia as an earlier attempt to seize power. As North notes, it was not the throne and robe that seemed to cause an issue for the Roman people, but the diadem which was seen as the true mark of kingship.^[133] The Roman *populus* had severely disliked the title and position of *rex* following the expulsion of Tarquinius Superbus in 6th century BCE and the foundation of the Republic.^[134] Believing themselves to be a political system founded on public representation, the insinuation that Caesar was looking to assume the title of king and hold dominant power over Rome, not just in a temporary *dictator* position, was deeply unpopular for many.

Plutarch further details how some men placed crowns on the statues of Caesar "hoping to induce the multitude to address him as king instead of dictator".^[135] The suggestion here is that there were perhaps some amongst the plebeian rank who viewed Caesar as a king and wished that he would assume such a title. Yet there were messages directed at Brutus questioning, "art thou asleep?" and "thou art not really Brutus", implying others opposed his extreme power and control.^[136] This conflict in public opinion is made clearer by Suetonius' claims that some believed Caesar should be granted the title of *rex* in order to conquer the Parthians, but that it was this which "led the conspirators to hasten in carrying out their designs".^[137] There appears

to have been a divided opinion amongst the *populus* with some supporting Caesar's power and others wishing to see the return to the traditional form of the Republic.

At this point, it is worth examining the Gracchi brothers as an earlier historical precedent to the dislike of kingship and the distrust and suspicion that accompanied such allegations. The Gracchi "had been suspected of craving royal rule", particularly Tiberius.^[138] Eudemus of Pergamum had presented him "with a royal diadem and purple robe, believing that he was going to be king of Rome".^[139] In the second century, the idea that one man may hold so much power that foreign dignitaries viewed him as a potential King was extremely threatening. It cannot be overstated how suspicious the Roman people were of kingship and how much of a threat this must have appeared to other senators. Whilst Tiberius Gracchus' land reforms were certainly the main motivation for his eventual assassination, the offering of a crown and purple robe, the stereotypical image of a King, did not alleviate his threat towards the senate and the wider system of the Republic.

Yet in the case of Caesar, as Goldsworthy argues, the position he held within the Republic was personal to him and "as yet he had no real successor to inherit the kingship".^[140] Although later audiences to this period of history would have been aware of the rise of Augustus and the power he held as *princeps*, at the time of Caesar's death he was largely insignificant to the Roman population. Especially in the months and years leading up to Caesar's assassination, Octavian was an irrelevant relation who would have only inherited his estate and wealth upon his uncle's natural death, not his political position.^[141] It was Octavian's decision to avenge his adopted father and follow in his footsteps to fill the power vacuum left upon his death which ultimately allowed Octavian to seize the monarchical rule which evaded Caesar. Though Osgood argues that Caesar "almost certainly had no interest in taking the title of king", he was granted virtually every other power and benefit given to a such a figure.^[142] Suetonius even goes as far as claiming that the honours gifted to Caesar were "too great for a mortal man".^[143] Caesar held ultimate rule in a system that was meant to be governed by the people. During times of crisis, such as the civil war, the system could bend to allow one man to lead them through the troubles, however, this was no longer sustainable once the civil wars had ended. As Caesar refused to relinquish the power and looked to solidify his role as sole leader within the Republic, either he had to be assassinated or the system had to be reformed.

Corruption of Power

Throughout his political career, Caesar can be accused of several charges of political corruption most especially during the civil wars and in his aspiration to be elected to the consulship in 49 BCE. Caesar clearly hoped for a second consulship to be granted to him *in absentia*, so that he could retain his province and army whilst still holding a powerful political position within the Republic. In a letter to Atticus, Cicero suggests that Pompey regards this as "a subversion of the constitution" even if he gives up his army.^[144] It is understandable why many senators must have held this view and seen Caesar's unwillingness to give up the Gallic province as a corruption of the established system. Already, there is a sense that Caesar was looking to gain greater power within the Republic than anyone else, believing that the system would bend to his desires, without him foregoing the power he achieved in the provinces.

Although these are the opinions of members of the Pompeian faction, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that these sentiments may have begun to be felt amongst Caesarean supporters as well.

By the advent of the civil war in 49 BCE, the Pompeian faction were deeply suspicious of Caesar's power and considered his corruption to be potentially deadly to the Republic and its citizens. Though this kind of opinion is of course to be expected from his enemy, it does provide an insight into the extent of power Caesar seems to have already achieved by this time. Cicero implies that neither one of the leaders provides a good outcome for Rome, with both putting "personal power and private advantages before the safety and honour of their country".^[145] Though Caesar certainly did bring advantages to the people of Rome, such as leaving them his gardens and three hundred sesterces each in his will, pursuing power and his own political agenda cost the lives of many Romans during the civil wars, including senatorial elite.^[146] Though it could be argued that this was no longer an issue with Pompey dead and the civil wars ended, this ruthless political agenda and striving for personal power at the expense of the people of Rome certainly contributed to his assassination in 44 BCE.

Cicero, in his *In Catilinam*, justifies the potential execution of Catiline for plotting to kill senators through comparison with the actions of Scipio in his assassination of Tiberius Gracchus.^[147] The Romans often looked back to history to justify their actions or inform their decisions. In this way, by comparing the motivations of Caesar's assassination with that of Catiline, the murder was easily justified. Catiline was accused of merely plotting to kill other senators. By comparison, Caesar had launched a civil war and in doing so, caused the deaths of many Roman citizens, including senatorial elite. Added to this, by crossing the Rubicon and with the senate fleeing Rome, Caesar contributed to throwing "the constitutional machinery of the state into complete confusion", upsetting the entire functionality of the Roman Republic.^[148] Considering Catiline was condemned for a plot to kill senators, it seems justified that Caesar might also have been assassinated for causing the actual deaths of many Roman citizens.^[149] Furthermore, his actions in the provinces, carried out in the name of *senatus populusque Romanus* have been considered a genocide by modern scholars, with estimates that he contributed to casualties amounting to possibly 25% of the Gallic population.^[150] It is perhaps therefore unsurprising that Cato suggested Caesar be surrendered to the Gauls for his actions in the provinces.^[151] Though this brutality may have been less shocking to a Roman audience, with violence much more prevalent in their society, these events portray an ambitious individual, who looked to exploit the resources and people of his provinces and launch a civil war to advance his own career.

It is certainly the case that by the time of the assassination, the Liberators aimed to present the murder as collective decision, done in the wider interest of the Republic. As Cowan notes, the individual narratives are "never allowed to detract from the overall picture of collective tyrannicide" with its "shared initiative and shared action".^[152] The conspirators certainly looked to justify the assassination through the idea of protecting the Republic and restoring power to the people, albeit the senatorial elite.

Dictator perpetuo

Caesar's assumption of the title *dictator perpetuo* was the final reason the Liberators needed to justify his assassination. This action indicated his refusal to relinquish the supposedly temporary role of *dictator*, and suggests his aim is to take ultimate power in Rome, against the principles of the Republic. With "more than sixty" senators joining the conspiracy to murder Caesar,^[153] it validates the idea that this was a "collective tyrannicide", involving a large proportion of the senators.^[154] The lack of planning on behalf of these conspirators, beyond the assassination of Caesar, suggests that the motivation for his assassination was first and foremost the removal of the *dictator* and the re-establishment of the Republic.^[155] As Goldsworthy indicates, the Liberators were likely not looking to kill Caesar due to his personality or individual dislike, but that they were unable to ignore was his sole rule and assumption of power.^[156] Whilst there were almost certainly some personal motivations behind this restoration of power to the people, including their own career progressions, it cannot be denied the Republic could not exist with Caesar alive once he had assumed the title of *dictator perpetuo*.

Sulla also assumed the power of *dictator* for several years but "laid down his office of dictator and put the consular elections in the hands of the people" as promised, following the completion of his reforms and the revival of the state's prosperity.^[157] This was the major contrast between the two men's actions, and why Sulla was able to retire, whilst Caesar was assassinated. It was Caesar's assumption of *dictator perpetuo* which pushed the Liberators to act against him, as his term for absolute power now had no end, other than his death. Had Caesar relinquished the power as his predecessor did, the Republic could have returned to consular elections, and he almost certainly would not have been assassinated. Whilst he may have been forgiven for his attitudes towards the consular election of 49 BCE, the civil war and the stylisation of himself as a regal figure, it was the assumption of sole power without an end which sealed his fate. It was impossible for the Republic to survive without the death of Caesar.

It is also important to remember that there is no extant contemporary literary evidence from the triumviral age.^[158] As a result, events are seen with the knowledge that following Caesar's assassination, the government of Rome underwent a shift from Republic to Principate. It is easy to forget that this was not an inevitable transition. Though it is arguable the system of the Republic was failing by the mid-first century BCE and was in dire need of reform, the transition of power to a sole rule was not inevitable at this point. This idea of monarchical rule was still yet to be established, so for the Liberators looking to preserve the Republic, Caesar's assumption of the title *dictator perpetuo* compelled them to assassinate him to protect the system.

Conclusion

The assassination of Julius Caesar was justified to protect and preserve the principles of the Republic. Although there was an immergence of men taking more and more individual power for themselves, the defeat of the Liberators and the establishment of the principate less than 20 years later often makes it difficult to remember that the inevitable progression from his assassination was not the principate. If the Liberators

had won against the triumvirate and returned power to the people, it is highly probable that Caesar would have been viewed as another ambitious politician, trying to seize control, and killed for the good of the Republic. He would have been viewed in a similar light as figures such as Catiline. Instead, promoted by Augustus, the image of Caesar as a martyr-like figure, unjustly killed, prevailed. Despite the view of later sources, it is important to remember that the assassins were looking to restore a system which had not yet collapsed and could have been sustained for a while longer, without transition to monarchical rule. Caesar's presentation of himself emulating a king-like figure, as well as his thirst for power and wanting to bend the constitution to benefit his own political agenda and motivations, further justifies his assassination. In a system where the power was supposed to be divided amongst the people, or at least the elite, Caesar's obsession with becoming the most important and undisputed figure is highly problematic. Caesar was not the only individual to try and gain more power under the Republic, but the historical precedent showed that it was the duty of other politicians to remove these individuals. In assassinating Caesar, the Liberators were following a well-established tradition of returning power to the people and protecting the Republic.

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The Creation-Chaos Collision: The Intersection of Creation Narrative and Chaos Monster Mythology in Ancient Near Eastern Textual and Pictorial Traditions, and the Old Testament.

Etymologically, the term “Chaos” derives from Greek mythology according to which Chaos was both the unformed mass of primeval matter and origin of all subsequent forms of being. The rich, generative term signifies immeasurable space, the vast void, as well as the initial, confused state of creation.^[78] In the ancient narratives depicting the emergence of order from this state of Chaos, it is common for the primeval forces to be embodied by a monstrous creature, the “Chaos beast”. In considering the biblical, particularly psalmic realisations of this phenomena, conceptual points of contact can be identified with deeply rooted ancient Near Eastern conceptions, motifs and mythologies surrounding creation, chaos, and the cosmos.

Ancient thought was largely occupied by an endeavour to explore and express the fundamental mysteries connected with human life, as can be seen in examining those narratives concerning the gods, the cosmos, and the origins of the world.^[79] Central to understanding ancient Near Eastern cosmological conceptions is the tripartite expression, the heaven above, the earth beneath, and the water under the earth.^[80] This vision of the cosmos outlines the heavenly domain of the gods, the earthly realm, and the netherworld. The final changeable element, often considered synonymous with the subterranean waters, is integral in examining ancient ideas of primordial Chaos. Indeed, this flexible, variable component can stand for the ancient waters, the seas, as well as the world of the dead. Such conceptions are largely reminiscent of Hebrew cosmology and its picture of primeval water. The earliest extant evidence of this threefold cosmological division can be identified in Egypt at least from the time of the New Kingdom and can be seen in iconography of the period.^[81] Eventually, Semitic colonists on the Egyptian border adopted Egyptian symbolism in depicting both the origin legends and characteristics of the native gods to whom they were alleged.^[82] In addition to Egyptian influences, analogues to the biblical creation accounts can be identified in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, Ugaritic *Baal Cycle*, and in Hittite mythologies. Indeed, Old Testament texts can be considered, imbedded in a broad stream of traditions, carried by the powerful current of conventions in force for centuries.^[83]

Ancient conceptions of water are paramount in examining the intersection between Chaos monster mythology and the accounts of creation. The disorderly, primordial monster appears, presiding over his kingdom: the netherworld, the realm of darkness, envisioned in ancient thought through the vast seas, the watery abyss, and the miry depths. The overwhelming significance of the aquatic setting in interpreting ancient conceptions of Chaos is compounded through the beast’s depiction as a physical entity. Not only does the bodily form of the beast engage with the shapes of the waves, the swelling, oscillating waters, but the influence of the aquatic can also be recognised in the babbling, gurgling, burbling noises omitted by the beast. Ultimately, the overarching function of the Chaos monster lies in the physical realisation of the supreme power of unruly primordial forces. Subsequently, in the

ancient creation narratives, the complex form assigned to the beast allows for the fulfilment of its symbolic role as antitype to the creator god and his ordering power. When examining ancient Near Eastern creation mythologies in accordance with Old Testament texts, an intriguing network of connection, associations and resemblances is generated.

The Dwelling of the Chaos Beast.

The collection of settings: the sea, the watery abyss, darkness, and the miry depths engage profoundly with the power of the realm of dead. In ancient thought, these are the dwelling places of the Chaos monsters. Primarily, the classic manifestation of primordial Chaos is the sea. Psalm 104 presents the “sea” as “great and wide”, a space where “creeping things [are] innumerable, living things both small and great” (Psalm 104, Verse 25). The adjectives “great and wide” evoke the vast and unknowable qualities of the aquatic realm. Its function as habitation of the monstrous is made clear through reference to the “creeping things”, those beasts occupying the miry depths. Comparatively, as seen in figure 1, a painting of the Tomb of Siptah, the sun disc, identified by the ram-headed man, drives away the Chaos beast, expelling it to the borders of the cosmos, communicated pictorially as the aquatic beast dives into the depths of the waters.^[84] Furthermore, expressing the multitude of creatures as “innumerable” compounds the disorderly, incomprehensible, incalculable nature of the realm. Here, the sea houses the “Leviathan” (līvyāṭān),^[85] the monstrous sea serpent: the cruel enemy of the creator deity.^[86]

The Soundscape of Chaos.

In Psalm 104 the sea is presented as the space in which the Leviathan “sports” or “laughs”.^[87] The sound made by the beast is significant, for the motif of the beast emitting a “babbling” noise recurs in Near Eastern mythology, serving as the antithesis of the ordered language of the structured world.^[88] Perhaps here, the nonverbal, inarticulate noise of the Leviathan: the laughing, howling and roaring, signifies the dominance of disorderly power in this realm as the beast taunts and goads, “making sport” (Psalm 104, Verse 26). In considering the etymology of the Hebrew term “Tehom” (ṭḥôm),^[89] denoting the deep, the great seas and oceans, a primordial strength pervades. Tehom stands for the primeval ocean, the waters enshrouding the earth after creation that continually threaten the cosmos.^[90] Indeed, the deluge narrative in Genesis, Chapter 7 reveals how even post-creation, the primordial waters persist as a threat.^[91] In Verse 11, “the fountains of the great deep (ṭḥôm) burst forth”, generating an image of the earth, encompassed by noxious waters seeking to submerge it. As asserted by Tromp, the water of the deluge is the return of the primeval ocean.^[92] Furthermore, Tehom facilitates the equation of the chaotic ocean with the world of the dead,^[93] the perilous, disorderly waters capable of absolute destruction. As articulated by Wensinck, the reign of Chaos is the reign of Tehom.^[94]

In Genesis Chapter 1, the chaotic character of the deep is intensified by the presence of darkness, another infernal element. The severe, unknowable depths of the seas and oceans evoke an extreme darkness as well as distance, perhaps into chaos, or annihilation, an image synonymous with depictions of the city of the netherworld surrounded by the waters of Chaos.^[95] Comparatively, in the *Egyptian Book of Gates*,

the dead are referred to as the “drowned ones”, receiving the word of Horus in Nun. They are the “denizens of the nether world”.^[96] Significantly, in Egyptian myth, the darkness is closely associated with the monstrous serpent Apep, the one who was “spat out”, the product of the goddess Neith’s saliva in the primeval water.^[97] Apep, the embodiment of the dark sea was principal amongst those forces capable of wreaking cosmic devastation, endangering the solar boat’s journey through the netherworld on its path to the dawn of the next morning.

The Cistern Symbol.

In the Psalms, the primeval waters and the netherworld are frequently presented as synonymous. This is best exemplified through references to the dying as descending into the pit or the cistern. The cistern functions as a critical underworld symbol: comparable in outward form to a grave, the space occupied by the dead, the cistern is designed in such a way that water flows in and remains.^[98] Therefore, in employing the symbol of the cistern, the psalms unite Sheol (š’ôl),^[99] the underworld in Hebrew thought, and Tehom, signifying descent below the surface of the earth, and ultimately reception into the chaotic subterranean waters. Comparatively, figure 2 from the Middle Babylonian-Kassite period presents a vast, fort-like structure, with a serpent beast coiling about its foundation.^[100] Keel proposes that the mighty citadel represents the city of the netherworld, positioned below the heavenly and earthly realms, surrounded by the waters of Chaos, symbolised by the beast.^[101] In Psalm 40, the infernal quality of the subterranean waters is made explicit as the Lord, acting upon the desperate cry of the suppliant “drew up” the individual “up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog” (Psalm 40, Verse 2). The phrase, “desolate pit” or “pit of destruction” derives from the Hebrew “shaon”,^[102] suggestive of an uproar or crash.^[103] Perhaps here, the realm of the dead is characterised by the noises emitted by its aquatic inhabitants: the Chaos beasts.

The Physiology of the Chaos Beast.

The cistern also serves simultaneously as a symbol for the world of the dead and the realm of the floods of Chaos in Psalm 69, Verses 14-15 as the suppliant appeals to the divine to be “rescue[d] from sinking in the mire”, imploring to “be delivered from . . . from the deep waters”, pleading to the deity to “not let the flood sweep over me or the deep swallow me up or the Pit close its mouth over me”. Interestingly, here, the image of the mouth of the pit, the entrance to the netherworld, engages with the physiology of the Chaos beast whose great jaws “swallow” the dead, confining its victims within its monstrous maw. In Egypt also, the realm of the dead can be seen to be portrayed as a great mouthed monster.^[104]

The interconnected network of motifs encompassing the primeval waters, death, and the netherworld is of undoubted centrality to the Ugaritic *Baal Cycle*. Indeed, Baal, the god of rain, strives for supremacy in the universe. After defeating his competitors, Yam, god of subterranean waters, seas, and wells, and Athtar, god of springs and wells, Baal faces the ultimate rival, Mot, god of death and drought.^[105] Affinities emerge in the Old Testament texts, particularly through the personification of death as a voracious monster with dangerous jaws: an all-consuming beast.^[106] For example, in Exodus, Chapter 15, Verse 12, depicting the demise of the Egyptians, “the underworld swallowed them”, they were covered by the sea, the waters of chaos, and

swallowed by the netherworld,^[107] entering into the land of no return, the realm of darkness and Chaos. The monsters of the primordial sea, residing within the bowels of the earth, can be considered endowed with the destructive powers of the chaotic waters.

In ancient Near Eastern iconography, the corporeal form of the Chaos monster engages with the properties of their watery dwelling. Primarily, in Egyptian myth, the body of the serpent Apep is often stylised in pictorial representations as winding, looping, and meandering, much like the waves of the sea. Likewise, as seen in a late version of the Hittite myth of the Illuyanka in figure 3, the form of the great, coiled monster interacts with the aquatic realm, its body reminiscent of the breaking of the mighty waves.^[108] Indeed, the winding, twisting serpentine form is frequently integrated into the physical form of the ancient Near Eastern Chaos beasts.

The Serpentine Form.

Formatively, serpents featured significantly in ancient Egyptian art and religion, principally through depictions of Apep, the primary threat to the divine principal of Ma'at: order, control, and balance.^[109] Apep predominantly appears as a long serpent but in some pictorial depictions can be seen to assume the form of Uroboros, the great sea serpent, encircling the cosmos, who exhibits the form of a “wreath” so that its tail is perpetually fleeing from its own biting mouth.^[110] The motif of the circular, self-consuming serpent can also be identified in connection to the biblical sea monster, “Leviathan”, a term deriving from the root (lavah), “to twine, to join”, “wreath” or “wreathed”.^[111] In the biblical texts, the label “Leviathan” is employed to denote a pantheon of twisted animals but is particularly applicable to the tenants of the waters: the great marine serpents and crocodiles. For example, in Isaiah Chapter 27, Verse 1, Leviathan is a serpent, characterised by the epithets “fleeing” and “twisting”. These terms are suggestive of a distorted shape, a warped, uncomfortable form, largely concordant with the disorderly setting of the primeval waters.

Hybrid Monsters.

Although the serpentine form as a single corpus recurs in ancient Near Eastern depictions of Chaos monsters, the beast also appears as an amalgamation of components from other creatures. Such hybrid beasts were common in the mythology of the ancient world. For example, the curious monster that features on the Akkadian plaque in figure 5 has seven heads, with flames, rising from its back.^[112] In this manifestation, the beast's necks and heads resemble those of serpents, but it has a distinctly feline body.^[113]

Perhaps the most striking example of a hybrid Chaos monster in the biblical texts is the depiction of the Leviathan in Job, Chapter 41. Critically, the description of the beast employs the language of divine theophany. This is particularly illuminating in considering the function of the Chaos beast as divine warrior. Primarily, Verse 18 reveals how the beast's “sneezes flash forth light, its eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn”. The simile “like the eyelids of dawn” appears again in Proverbs Chapter 4, Verse 18, depicting the celestial path of the righteous, erected by Yahweh which “is like the light of the dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day”. Furthermore, Verse 19 compounds how “from its mouth go flaming torches: sparks

of fire leap out. Out of its nostrils comes smoke. Its breath kindles coals, and a flame comes out of its mouth". The fire and smoke emitted by Leviathan is largely evocative. Indeed, as asserted by Pope, infernal and photic symbolism is often used in biblical texts to describe the divine theophany, the manifestation of the deity.^[114] In 2 Samuel Chapter 22, Verse 9, smoke comes out of the Lord's nostrils and fire proceeds from his mouth. Again, in Psalm 18, Verse 8, "smoke went up from his nostrils and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him". As noted by Habel, the flames that issue forth from Leviathan's mouth and the smoke, steaming from his nostrils resembles depictions of Yahweh's majestic fury.^[115]

Cosmic Battle.

Such a blazing, intense exhibition of divine might and prowess can be considered a common mythological motif. Indeed, in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, fire blazes forth from the lips of Marduk when he first manifests his glory. Moreover, the messengers of Yam in the *Baal Cycle* flash forth fire when they make their appearance.^[116] The fire emanating from the Leviathan situates the Chaos monster as a potentially divine being, the evil counterpart to the creator deity. Furthermore, the body of the Leviathan features impenetrable shells and scales which can be envisioned, perhaps, as theophanic attributes of the antagonistic divine warrior.^[117] Here, the Leviathan is marked for "its mighty strength" and "splendid frame" (Job 41, Verses 13-14). The beast is heavily armoured, sporting a protective "outer garment" in addition to its "double coat of mail". Furthermore, "its back is made of shields in rows", an interlocking armour, "shut up closely as with a seal" (Job 41, Verses 15-17), the sheathing, forged in such a way that the armoured fragments clasp each other: inseparable. In this text, the theophanic significance of the armour of the Chaos beast is striking. Indeed, Perdue notes that Leviathan's "frame is likened unto a warrior's armour, with an impenetrable hide of mail and rows of shields covering his back . . . only Yahweh as Divine Warrior has the power to defeat Leviathan".^[118] In the Psalm 104, Verses 1-2, Yahweh can be seen to prepare to battle with the personification of Chaos, "clothed with honour and majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment", the deity appears, enshrouded in heavenly light. Verse 4 further details the celestial instruments wielded by the deity, "fire and flame [his] ministers". Ultimately, the form of the Chaos beast functions to reinforce the status of the monster as supreme emblem of negative agents.^[119] Not only does the beast engage with the destructive powers of its tumultuous dwelling, but it can also mirror, match, and rival the celestial authority of the creator deity. Subsequently, the primordial cosmic battle seems balanced, or equalised, as Yahweh, the ordering creator god, is matched against his disorderly antagonist.

In the early iterations of the Chaos monster myths, humankind and gods were equally terrified at the monster's appearance. To deliver the land from the beast's clutches, a representative of the gods ventured out to destroy it. Consequently, the tradition accentuates the beast's enormous size and terrible appearance.^[120] It is in the ancient Mesopotamian *Enuma Elish* that the Chaos beast explicitly enters the domain of creation narrative. Indeed, in the Semitic-Babylonian version, the creation of the world is presented as the result of conflict. Order emerges from chaos: the result of the personal triumph of the creator god.^[121] Marduk, the God of Babylon, is provided with the opportunity of being a creator of the world as the result of a

successful conflict against Tiamat, the personification of the sea.^[122] In Egypt, the myth of the overthrowing of Apep, the enemy of Ra presents a close parallel to that of Tiamat. In the Ugaritic *Baal Cycle*, it is Baal and the great antagonist Yam, the sea, who engage in cosmic battle. Baal recounts his great deed in slaying Yam, boasting, “did I not destroy Yam? Was not the dragon captured [and] vanquished? I did destroy the wriggling serpent, the tyrant with seven heads”.^[123] Strongly reminiscent of the Ugaritic myth, Yahweh fulfils the role of Baal, overmastering his enemy Sir Sea, a chaotic power. Psalm 74, Verse 13 celebrates Yahweh’s “dividing the sea by [his] might”, he “broke the heads of the dragons in the waters”, and “crushed the heads of Leviathan”. Indeed, in the psalmic material, the violent power of the waters of chaos is broken and subdued by Yahweh, who in this sense has taken over the function of Baal.

In the biblical texts, the battle between the creator god against the raging primordial waters is depicted as a clash between divine monarchs, reigning over the opposing forces: order, and chaos. The celestial king of the heavens is pitted against the beast, described in Job, Chapter 41, Verse 26 as the “king over all the children of pride”, leader of negative agents. As considered by Habel, “Leviathan is king of Chaos”.^[124] The thought that Chaos may break free and reestablish dominion filled men with horror. A sense of this anxiety prevails in Psalm 104, Verse 9, which references the “bound” constructed by Yahweh to prevent the Chaos waters from “pass[ing] so that they might not again cover the earth”. Perhaps in response to this anxiety, ancient narratives tend to compound the convincing, incontestable victory of the deity over the Chaos powers. This assertion of divine might can be identified in Psalm 77, Verses 16-19, delineating how at Yahweh’s “rebuke” the waters “flee”, accentuating the capacity of the deity in quelling, directing, and controlling the passage of the waters. Indeed, “when the waters saw” Yahweh “they were afraid; the very deep trembled. The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered; your arrows flashed on every side. The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightning’s lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook. Your way was through the sea, your path through the mighty waters”. Comparatively, the Akkadian icons on the stone cylinder seal in figure 7,^[125] display the storm god Adad, in a heavy, four wheeled chariot traveling across the vault of heaven,” again, his whip is the lightning that commands the Chaos beast and the stratospheric elements are envisioned as divine instruments.

The Accoutrements of Celestial Contest.

The biblical texts allude to the existence of an entire divine arsenal employed by the deity to “vanquish” the Chaos beast. Similarly, in figure 8, the icons on the Assyrian cylinder seal present a multitude of weapons employed in the attack of the serpentine monster including swords, arrows, staffs, as well as ammunition.^[126] Primarily, in ancient thought spear hunting displayed control over Chaos and the taming of the wild. In Job, Chapter 41, Verse 7, the beast’s skin is “fill[ed] with harpoons” and “its head” with “spears”. Likewise, in the Egyptian iconography of figure 10 from the Papyrus of Heruben,^[127] Seth can be seen standing on the prow of the boat, his arms raised above his head, driving a spear into Apep’s mouth.^[128]

Furthermore, a staff or sceptre, the symbol of mastery, can be seen to befit the conqueror of the beast. In *Enuma Elish* IV.37, Marduk holds a club in his right hand.

Ultimately, in IV.130, this weapon is used to defeat Tiamat.^[129] Perhaps it could also be suggested that Jewish apocryphal accounts were also familiar with this motif. Indeed, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, as Yahoel informs Abraham of the duties in restraining the Leviathan, the angel holds a golden rod in His right hand. Interestingly, baton symbol appears as weapon against the Leviathan, not only in the Book of Job, but also Qallir's *Piyyut*, and *Pesikta d-Rav Kahana*.^[130]

Job, Chapter 41 provides an asyndetic list, compiling the various ways Yahweh asserts dominion over the beast. Primarily, Verse 1 reveals that Yahweh can “draw out Leviathan with a fishhook”. Notably, the “fishhook” appears in the scriptures, used figuratively as an instrument of control. For example, in Amos, Chapter 4, Verse 2, the symbol appears after the analogy of animals, tamed by putting rings and hooks in their noses. Immediately following the description of the fishhook, it is asserted that Yahweh can also “press down its tongue with a cord”, perhaps suggesting the capability of the divine in silencing the disorderly “gibbering” of the beast. Ultimately, in Verses 4-5, the monster is “put on a leash” and “taken as [His] servant forever”. The unique power of Yahweh as master over the Chaos powers is accentuated through the pair of rhetorical questions in Verses 10-11, “No one is so fierce as to dare to stir it up. Who can stand before it?”, “Who can confront it and be safe? - Under the whole heaven, who?” As crystalised in Psalm 93, Verse 4, “More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea majestic on high is the Lord”.

Ultimately, the depictions of the Old Testament Chaos monsters can be considered, engaged in dialogue with deeply rooted ancient traditions, conceptions, and motifs. This is particularly relevant in considering the entwining of the once separate mythologies of the ancient Chaos monster and the creation accounts. The Chaos beast emerges in the biblical texts exhibiting influences from a plethora of ancient Near Eastern traditions and conceptions, as the embodiment of the disorderly, unformed mass of primeval matter, the confused state of creation. The beast is subsequently depicted, presiding over his kingdom: the nether world, the realm of darkness, envisioned in ancient thought through the vast seas, the watery abyss, and the miry depths. Although the form of the monster can be seen to embody aspects of these settings, it functions ultimately to reveal the supreme power of the unruly primordial forces. Thus, the appearance of the monster crystalises its status as counterpart to the creator god and his ordering power. Indeed, the Chaos monster assumes a warrior role in the cosmic battle against the celestial deity. However, subdued and not necessarily conclusively slaughtered, the Chaos beast endures as symbol of the threat posed by the forces of disorder to the structured, ordered earthly and heavenly realms.

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Liver Regeneration: An Actualised Case of Literary Extispicy

The curious motif of liver regeneration shows up twice in Greek myth; yet, we have no indication that the Greeks knew of the liver's regenerative capacity, and neither was this medical phenomenon scientifically discovered until the early 19th century. Still, it seems improbable that the Greeks should identify by pure chance the one organ in the body capable impressive partial regeneration. The liver in the Greek consciousness was a profoundly charged image and organ, defined alternatively as the source of life or even as the seat of the human soul; a close examination of Greek literature suggests that the ancients had conceived of a now medically proven behavioural shift in those with liver disease that formed the basis of the myth.

The Intersection of Philosophy and Medicine

The intersectionality of early Greek thought and medicine is well documented; Burnet claims, in fact, that it is impossible from Empedocles onwards “to understand the history of philosophy... without keeping the history of medicine constantly in view⁵⁶.” Many influential philosophers – Democritus, Empedocles, Plato, Aristotle – attempt to explain biological processes through philosophical means⁵⁷, and we are told by later testimonia that Pythagoras had a keen interest in medicine (D.L. 8, 33, 35). Already we see the pre-Socratic philosophers Empedocles and Democritus trying to offer explanations for the biology of sense perception in the 5th and early 4th centuries; Empedocles suggests that sensory organs are porous and receive the impressions given by things (92A), while Democritus and Leucippus suggest the senses are created by an interaction of the atoms of the sensory organs and the object being sensed (68A). By the time Plato and Aristotle were active, medical texts from the Hippocratic corpus were most likely widely disseminated, and a considerable part of the Greek library would have been comprised of medical texts⁵⁸.

The central tenets of the series of associations that would later make the liver the Greek organ of the so-called genesis of life become traceable in the Classical Era, in Plato. By this point, medicine has started to transcend its folk origins, and is being discussed as an actual metier; Plato himself speaks of skilled people in the field of medicine (*Pol.* 259A). Many early Hippocratic texts betray their oral nature and were likely given as lectures; the roughly contemporaneous *On Ancient Medicine* makes a distinction between the ones that have elected to speak (λέγειν) and to write (γράφειν) on medicine, identifying not only two distinctly different and prevalent medical skillsets but also confirming the presumably more accessible dissemination of medical knowledge as speech (1,1.570L). Hippocratic texts identified with this group of works include *Ancient Medicine*, *The Art*, *Breaths*, and *Nature of Man*⁵⁹. Therefore, we should not be surprised that the *Regimen for Health* advises the

⁵⁶ Burnet 201

⁵⁷ Debru 263

⁵⁸ Morgan 200

⁵⁹ Jouanna 41

skilled and knowledgeable man to care for his illness in his own capacity⁶⁰; medicine had long become part of the greater backdrop of Greek thought, influencing and being influenced by the contemporaneous developments in philosophy. Aristotle tells us that philosophers not only discuss medical matters (*De sensu* 436a) but also that “the most refined philosophers by nature end up discussing the principles of medicine” (*De resp.* 480b).

We can best trace Plato’s engagement with medicine in the *Republic*. Challenged by Glaucon to give an account of the true nature of justice and its benefits, Socrates uses the famous health analogy: ἀρετὴ μὲν ἄρα, ὡς ἔουκεν, ὑγίειά τε τις ἂν εἴη (444d). Being just is subsequently identified as the harmonious state of the three parts of the soul: the appetite (ἐπιθυμητικόν), the mind (λογιστικόν), and the spirit (θυμοειδές). The same tripartition is repeated in the *Phaedrus*, where the components of the human psyche are compared to a chariot; the mind is the chariot driver, while appetite and spirit are the two horses (246aff.). In another important text, the *Timaeus*, Plato identifies the parts of the body relating to each spiritual component: the rational part is contained in the head, the passionate in the chest, the appetitive in the stomach (69d ff.).

This is where we can start to trace the generally prevalent trend from the fifth century onwards to identify philosophy essentially as the spiritual counterpart of what medical therapy is to the body. As it was not uncommon for philosophers to write on health, it was not uncommon for doctors to write on the concept of the soul and its reflections in health and biological functions. Asclepiades of Bithynia, Soranus, and Sextus Empiricus all wrote treatises on the spirit⁶¹; it was also not uncommon for doctors to concern themselves with maladies of the soul, such as melancholy or insanity, evident as early as the Hippocratic texts *The Sacred Disease* and *On the Nature of Woman*. Galen suggests “the best doctor is also a philosopher” (*quod optimus medicus sit quoque philosophus* 1.53–63); he also holds that a doctor must engage with the care of the soul as the philosopher does (*De Sanitate Tuenda* 6.40).

Unsurprisingly, in Galen we start to find a purposeful and academically ordered intersection between the philosophical and medical, as he puts Plato’s tripartite system to use in his physiology; in his *De Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*, he attempts to demonstrate the anatomical justifications for Platonic tripartition. Perhaps the identification of the rational with the brain and the thymos with the heart is uncomplicated and straightforward, but Galen’s identification of the appetite with the liver – a distinct improvement on Plato’s earlier identification with the stomach – is a rather more difficult leap, as most of the metabolic processes undertaken by this organ are difficult to observe; therefore, Galen’s work is particularly revelatory about how the Greek consciousness had come to conceive of the liver.

⁶⁰ Frede 226

⁶¹ Frede 227

The liver's physiological duties as described by Galen are fascinatingly complete. It is one of few organs capable of "active movement;" that is, unlike some structures, like

bones, that are put in motion by other organs, it has its own capacity for *generating* movement. It is credited with the formation of the veins, the production of blood, and the transmission of nutrients⁶²: it is essentially responsible for the anatomical creation of life. The liver is "what provides the whole body with the matter suitable for nourishment, the source of the power of nutrition and growth" (*PHP* 5.533); the blood produced by the liver travels to the distant parts of the body through the veins – also its own production – and has the capacity to nourish them "by transforming itself into the substance of the different parts⁶³." So singularly important is its influence that any involvement of the heart, which can intuitively be recognised as a vascular organ, is ruled out (*PHP* 5.534); in fact, the first stage of embryonic development, wherein the three organs pertaining to the soul become apparent, starts with the formation of the liver, and the foetus has no heart or brain "until the division of the veins from the liver is completed" (*Foet.Form.* 3.4.667). Galen also adds here that the liver produces blood and in so doing controls the animal as if it were a plant; the liver is identified as the first organ, almost a primogenitor of the human body. Not only is this a departure from the Platonic model where the mind would and should be in control of the body of ideal health, it is also a far less obvious observation to make about the human body compared to the obvious claims of the heart and brain, who become by virtue of pulse and thought the intuitive centres of the human body. So, then, how did this unlikely view of the liver as a primordial organ arise?

The Liver's Claim on Religion and the Future

The importance of the liver starts to manifest itself earlier in Greek religion than it does in Greek thought; indeed, perhaps its counterintuitive prominence in medicine can be traced back to its religious use and significance. The most important form of divination in the Greek world, apart from oracular consultation, was extispicy⁶⁴, i.e. the observation of the innards and their qualities. The sacrificial animal's innards would be examined for omens, and although the practice pertained to other organs as well, the liver was examined first. Most often, texts concerning extispicy only regard the observations of the liver to hold any importance⁶⁵, already implying the organ's strange pre-eminence.

The prevalence of extispicy is generally accepted to have been transferred from the East, likely originating in Mesopotamia with the Babylonians and Assyrians, although scholars disagree about the exact route by which the practice made its way to Greece. An Etruscan bronze liver found at Piacenza can be compared with an Assyrian clay liver held in the British Museum to an astounding degree. Another extraordinary piece of material evidence comes from an Etruscan mirror from Vulci, on which we find an image of a winged Calchas examining the liver of a sacrificial

⁶² Debru 266

⁶³ Debru 275

⁶⁴ Collins 320

⁶⁵ Collins 320

bird. Some, such as Burkert, have argued that hepatoscopy might have made its way from the Euphrates to Etruria directly⁶⁶. Burkert compares the Greek terms of the

diviner to their Akkadian counterparts to show the string of transmission; both languages identify a “gate,” “head,” “path,” and “river” in the liver. The binary division of hostile and auspicious sections of the liver, as well as general interpretive associations, such as a missing “head” signifying trouble for a leader and country, or the presence of two “heads” indicating two rivals for power, are all shared elements of Mesopotamian and Graeco-Roman hepatoscopy⁶⁷.

That being said, the correspondence is not exact. Burkert himself notes that the strict division of the liver into ten parts in Mesopotamian practice has no parallel in Greek extispicy⁶⁸, and indeed the correspondence of Mesopotamian and Greek sources has been challenged extensively by Bacharova⁶⁹. Bacharova points out that the inspection of the liver’s surface is distinctly different in Akkadian and Greek practices; additionally, the open-ended questions of the Akkadian practice have given way to the yes-or-no of the Greek practice, and the order of the liver inspection has changed. She proposes instead the theory that Akkadian divination was adopted by the Hittites first, that this secondary version eventually made its way to Greece via Cilicia and Cyprus. The importance of Mesopotamian extispicy for Greek practice and their intersectionality have more recently been re-examined by Furley and Gysembergh, who introduce three previously unknown papyri fragments and argue on this new basis that Mesopotamian extispicy must have had a major influence on Graeco-Roman divination, as suggested by a number of shared terms, euphemisms, and practices⁷⁰. Regardless of how the transmission has occurred, it is safe to say that extispicy originated in the East, and indeed the material record seems to prove this; while curiously no liver models have been found in Greece, dozens have been found in the Near East, Palestine, Syria, Anatolia, and east of Euphrates⁷¹. Though there is little scholarly credit to it, Herodotus also remarks that the practice came from Egypt (*Hist.* 2.58).

What we know for sure is that extispicy was an important fixture of Greek divination. A significant number of seers employed by the elite and the state were well-educated citizens of high standing themselves⁷², and various Greek texts, literary and historical, attest to the importance of the craft. Plato notes in the *Phaedrus* that extispicy was held in higher regard than oionomancy (244c) and Xenophon mentions several sacrifices and readings made before battle for determination of the expedition’s favourability (*Hell.* 3.1.17-8); even the natural philosopher Democritus is said to have believed that “the general condition and the colour [of the innards] are sometimes prophetic of health, sometimes of sickness, and sometimes also of whether there will be sterility or fertility of the fields” (*Cic. De. Div.* 1.57). Plutarch records that Alexander received hepatoscopic omens during his campaign against

⁶⁶ Burkert 48

⁶⁷ Burkert 50

⁶⁸ Burkert 50

⁶⁹ See Bacharova 2012

⁷⁰ See Furley and Gysembergh 2015

⁷¹ Collins 325

⁷² Furley and Gysembergh

Babylon; ravens attacked each other and two fell at his feet, the following sacrifice revealing a liver without a lobe, a bad omen⁷³ (*Life of Alexander* 73.4-5).

It is interesting that literary evidence of hepatoscopy does not come from early hexameter poetry. While Burkert has argued that the Homeric word θυοσκοός may be referring to a specialist conducting extispicy on sacrificial animals⁷⁴, there is no explicit evidence that this pertains specifically to extispicy, since other aspects of sacrifice were also believed to have mantic significance, and indeed West alternatively suggests the word could be referring to the reader of burnt offerings⁷⁵. Still, it would be reductive to read this absence as proof that extispicy was not practiced in Greece at this time. It should be noted that birds are still considered ominous, though there is no instance of extispicy (*Il.* 10.254, 13.821, 24.265, 24.299ff.).

The most complete re-enactment of hepatoscopy in literature comes from Euripides' *Elektra*. The usurper Aegisthus is found offering a sacrifice to the Nymphs as Orestes and Pylades enter his house in disguise. Orestes slaughters the animal, a sacrificial calf, for the ritual (826-33); the messenger recounts that:

ἱέρα δ' εἰς χεῖρας λαβὼν
Αἰγισθος ἢ θρεῖ. καὶ λοβὸς μεν οὐ προσῆν
σπλάγχνοις, πύλαι δὲ καὶ δοχαὶ χολῆς πέλας
κακὰς ἐφαίνον τῷ σκοποῦντι προσβολάς.
χὼς μεν σκυθράζει, δεσπότης δ' ἀνίστορεῖ
Τὶ χρημ' αἰσμεῖς; ὦ ξέν', ὀρρωδῶ τινα
δόλον θυραῖον. ἐστὶ δ' ἐχθιστος βροτῶν
Ἀγαμέμνονος παῖς πολέμιός τ' ἐμοῖς δόμοις.

Again, we find the absence of a lobe in the liver. Aegisthus immediately interprets the omen to be bad, as the “gates” and “dochai” are next to the gallbladder; of course, he is right, in that this greatest enemy he names is currently next to him, standing knife in hand. Euripides, with his characteristic flair for tragicomedy, transfers the dramatic irony of the myth – the knowledge that Aegisthus will be killed by Orestes – to the practice of hepatoscopy. This presupposes that the technical terms of extispicy will be recognized by the audience at least as well as they recognize the myth itself, further proving the prevalence and recognizability of the practice.

The other major instance of extispicy in tragedy comes from the *Prometheus Bound*, controversially – and most likely wrongly – attributed to Aeschylus. The importance of the liver itself in the myth will be separately examined later, but a note on the description of hepatoscopic practice is required here (493-95):

σπλάγχνων τε λειότητα, καὶ χροία τινὰ
ἐχούσ' ἅν εἴη δαίμοσιν προῖς ἡδονὴν
χολή, λοβοῦ τε ποικίλην εὐμορφίαν

⁷³ Xenophon *Hell.* 3.4.15; 4.7.7

⁷⁴ Burkert 50

⁷⁵ Martin West 241

Again, we see literature list the common concepts from which Greek extispicy draws – smoothness, the orientation of the gallbladder, the shape of the lobe; the practice is also implied to be a *techne*. Interestingly, Prometheus suggests that these aspects

should “be a certain way” to “please the gods,” suggesting that the aspects of good omens were a simultaneous pleasure of the god. This could possibly be identified with the Mesopotamian practice, where the major indicator of good luck was the manzazu, a sign on the left lobe of the liver that was identified with the “presence” of the god for whom the sacrifice was being conducted⁷⁶. We also find liver omens and readings in Sumerian and Akkadian texts: *In Naram-Sin and the Enemy Hordes*, the titular Naram-Sin receives a liver omen advising him not to attack his enemies, which he denies only to lose his entire army⁷⁷; in a fictional letter attributed to Ibbi-Sin, again a liver omen is used to attest to the favour of the god Enlil (CKU 24.31.45)⁷⁸, which Schaudig argues is a misinterpretation that is meant to characterize the king Ibbi-Sin as an incompetent seer.

Subsequently, we notice that the Greek conception of and attitudes towards the liver were far older than the strictly medical texts available to us. While we cannot find instances of extispicy in early hexameter poetry, we do find bird omens; equally, it seems highly unlikely that Aeschylus and Euripides would be able to use a ritual with such specific language and detail on stage without presuming definite audience familiarity with them. The practice of hepatoscopy was far older, and it seems plausible that it was adopted by the Greeks significantly earlier than extant Attic tragedy, perhaps during the “orientalising” period. Therefore, it would be reductive to limit the interpretation of the liver regeneration motif to a reflection of objective medical truth; other factors were already informing the Greek consciousness regarding the properties of the organ and are likely to have played a part in the conception of the myth pattern.

The Mythical Regeneration of the Liver

Prometheus Bound brings us back to the original question: what possessed the ancients to stumble upon the medical reality of hepatic regeneration? Hepatic regeneration is found in two Greek myths – Prometheus and Tityus. They share the same rough structure: an immortal – the titan Prometheus or the giant Tityus – commits some transgression against Zeus, for which he is punished, immobilized, and condemned to have his liver eaten by a bird as it constantly regenerates.

The Prometheus myth, as told by Hesiod, tells us that he obtained the punishment of having “a long-winged eagle set on him, which would eat his immortal liver” (*Theo.* 522-4) every day, even though “by night the liver would grow as much again as the long-winged bird had devoured in a whole day” (524-6). This is the price he pays for tricking Zeus an impressive two times (535ff.). First, he changed the customs of sacrifice to favour mortals, burning instead the fat and bones for the gods and saving

⁷⁶ Furley and Gysembergh 9

⁷⁷ Schaudig 155

⁷⁸ Schaudig 261-9

the prime meat; then, when Zeus retaliated by taking fire from humanity (564-5), Prometheus stole it back by disguising it in a fennel stalk (565-6). It should be noted that a close parallel to this is found in a Mesopotamian myth, told in the 18th century

Akkadian epic *Atra-Hasis*⁷⁹, discussing the great flood. The chief-god Enlil is displeased at the noise caused by human overpopulation, and makes various attempts to curtail the problem, all of which are anticipated and countered by Enki's clever counsel to his protégé Atra-Hasis. The first plague is avoided by building a new temple to Namtara, the plague god, who is flattered enough by the gesture to end the plague. Then, Enlil bans rain – once again, the storm god Adad is brought around to cause plenty of dew to keep the crops alive. After this, however, Enlil calls the gods together to keep a close watch, and it is after this point that the direness of the situation manifests itself: after six years, “they served up a daughter for a meal, served up a son for food; only one or two households were left” (II.v). Once again Enki intervenes, even though he breaks his oath, by bringing down rain to rejuvenate the crops (IIvi). Enraged, Enlil decides to set the great flood upon humanity; Enki once again seeks out his worshipper Atra-Hasis and warns him about the coming flood, advising him to build a boat to conserve the humans and the “copious birds and fish” (III.I.14ff.). While Enki himself is not punished, Enlil does punish humanity somehow: child mortality rates are increased, and women attached to temples are forbidden from childbearing. The motif of the philanthropic god defying a stronger sky deity through tricks and crafts is certainly a close parallel; this is supplemented by an echo of Enlil's female-oriented punishment in the unleashing of Pandora in Hesiod (*Theo.* 570ff.).

The *Prometheus Bound* offers the same narrative, though with a significantly different ethical frame and characterization. It has been suggested that the elevation of the Hesiodic common trickster Prometheus into the sophisticated and sympathetic figure of the *Prometheus Bound* might be an influence of the Enki myth⁸⁰; it has even been suggested that Prometheus might be a translation of Atra-Hasis, “exceedingly wise.” West suggests he might have prevented, like Enki, humanity's total destruction in the great flood, which has a Greek counterpart; the heroic Atra-Hasis of the Greek version, Deucalion, is sometimes identified as Prometheus' son (Apollod. 1.7.2.1-4). We are not told if it was a flood he prevented, but Prometheus does tell us he alone stood between humanity and certain destruction, as he alone stood up against the council of the gods (230-4): yet another parallel to Enki.

Like Enki, Prometheus too is credited with providing humanity the skills and means by which they are to survive (545ff.), from the ability to build houses to recognizing the seasons. Of these, the more notable in the play – as well as for the purposes of our examination of the liver – are his teachings on medicine and extispicy (478-95):

τὸ μὲν μέγιστον, εἴ τις ἐξ νόσον πέσοι,
οὐκ ἦν ἀλέξηναι οὐδέν, οὔτε βρώσιμον,
οὐ χριστόν, οὐδὲ πιστόν, ἀλλὰ φαρμάκων

⁷⁹ Translations courtesy of Stephanie Dalley

⁸⁰ Stephanie West 139

χρεῖα κατεσκέλλοντο, πρὶν γ' ἐγὼ σφισιν
ἔδειξα κράσεις ἡπίων ἀκεσμάτων,
αἷς τὰς ἀπάσας ἐξαμύνονται νόσους.
τρόπους τε πολλοὺς μαντικῆς ἐστοίχισα,
κᾶκρινα πρῶτος ἐξ ὄνειράτων ἄ χρῆ

ὔπαρ γενέσθαι, κληδόνας τε δυσκρίτους
ἐγνώρισ' αὐτοῖς ἐνοδίους τε συμβόλους:
γαμψωνύχων τε πτῆσιν οἰωνῶν σκεθρῶς
διώρισ', οἵτινές τε δεξιοὶ φύσιν
εὐωνύμους τε, καὶ δίαιταν ἦντινα
ἔχουσ' ἕκαστοι, καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους τίνες
ἔχθραι τε καὶ στέργηθρα καὶ συνεδρίαί:
σπλάγχχνων τε λειότητα, καὶ χροιάν τίνα
ἔχουσ' ἂν εἴη δαίμοσιν πρὸς ἡδονήν
χολή, λοβοῦ τε ποικίλην εὐμορφίαν.

Here we see the myth intersect with both the religion and philosophy around the liver: the recipient of the archetypical liver punishment is invariably tied to the practices that most exalt the organ, prophecy and medicine. Indeed, Prometheus' identity as a seer is at the forefront of the whole *Prometheus Bound*; we are told his mother was a seer (205), we watch him identify the events past and present leading up to Io's predicaments (823ff.) as well as the events that will follow it (700ff.), and, most importantly, we witness as the punishment to have his liver torn out and regenerated falls upon him due to his unwillingness to share the oracle regarding the successor who will best Zeus (913-5, 1021-7). There is a cyclical nature to this that is evocative of the theme of regeneration. Zeus too is a recent successor (224-7, 389) displaying arrogance towards the gods of old (404-5, 439), the young symbol and leader of a new era. On the other hand, he too will not rule eternally (519), and will eventually fall from autocracy (755-6) at the hand of a son terrifyingly superior to him (768, 919ff.), just as his father at his hands and his grandfather at his father's. The cycle of transgression is "regenerated" while a new ruler is "generated;" the pain Prometheus experiences due to hepatic mutilation and regeneration echoes the mental anguish he feels over having been supplanted by the "new gods" (439).

The Tityus myth is less famous, though it too makes an appearance in early hexameter poetry. Tityus appears twice in the *Odyssey*; he is simply mentioned by name at 7.323, while at 11.577ff. we learn of his misfortunes from Odysseus, who saw him in the underworld:

καὶ Τιτυὸν εἶδον, Γαίης ἐρικυδέος υἱόν,
κείμενον ἐν δαπέδῳ: ὁ δ' ἐπ' ἐννέα κεῖτο πέλεθρα,
γῦπε δέ μιν ἐκάτερθε παρημένῳ ἦπαρ ἔκειρον,
δέρτρον ἔσω δύνοντες, ὁ δ' οὐκ ἀπαμύνητο χερσὶ:
Λητὼ γὰρ ἔλκησε, Διὸς κυδρὴν παράκοιτιν,
Πυθῶδ' ἐρχομένην διὰ καλλιχόρου Πανοπῆος.

Exactly who punished Tityus is left unclear here; we assume it is Zeus, as it is his wife against whom the slight was committed. In one account Tityus is slain by Artemis for

the pursuit of her mother (Pindar *Pyth.* 4.90-91), while in a much later account the punishment is dealt by Zeus himself (Hyginus *Fabulae* 55). Either way, the account of Tityus' punishment leaves a rather less sympathetic impression on the audience; unlike Prometheus, he has actually committed a moral wrong to obtain the torture. He is no respectable figure of medical and oracular knowledge like Prometheus, and

the only tenuous link we may make to a connotation of seership comes from the much later account of Hyginus, where he is being preyed on by a snake instead of a vulture as in the *Odyssey*. The imagery of a snake has oracular associations; in *Fabula* 140, Hyginus credits Python with giving oracular responses before Apollo, who, in slaying Python, supplants him. In both cases, we see the possessor of the oracular imagery – the imagery being the serpent and the liver – receiving punishment for pursuing the same female figure, Leto (*Fabulae* 55, 140), and both transgressive figures are chthonic, confined to the underworld. Again, we encounter the theme of a change in authoritative power – Python to Apollo – and a parallel punishment for the supplanted figure, although this figure is not Tityus.

It is the “appetitive” character of the liver that links the mythical to the philosophical sources in the case of Tityus. It has been observed and suggested that the word “ἥπαρ” may come from the same root – ἥδονη – as ἥδαρ, providing an etymological suggestion for the association of the appetite and liver⁸¹. Regardless of the veracity of the etymology, we know that it was widely considered to be true from the 4th century BCE onwards; one example comes from a fragment of Democritus, where the liver is called ἐπιθυμίας αἶτιον (68C 23.7). The transgression of Tityus is an example *par excellence* of unchecked appetite: his sin is one of excessive desire, eros, the cognitive capacity associated with the appetite. It should be noted that Greek erotic curses mention the burning and destruction of the liver to rid one of desire⁸², strengthening the notion that a crime of desire accounts for the liver motif in the Tityus myth: this is essentially a spiritual castration. We can also identify a link between the Tityus myth and Prometheus; in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius, Prometheus is freed by a grandson of Tityus, Euphemus (1.179ff., 2.1249ff.). *Prometheus Bound*, on the other hand, has Prometheus prophesy his release at the hands of a member of Io's line (869ff.), implying Heracles, who frees him in the *Theogony* (526-8).

This section has aimed to demonstrate that the backdrop of philosophical, religious, and social cognition of the liver complements our understanding of the literary motif of liver regeneration. While there are copious similarities between the Enki and Prometheus myths, the liver mutilation and regeneration remain exclusively Greek; why is this? It is possible that the same people that disseminated the practice of hepatoscopy also disseminated the Enki myth and caused the combination of the two⁸³ – indeed, this seems to be a likely explanation for at least the Prometheus myth. On the other hand, the Tityus myth suggests the Greek conception of the liver and its relation to the appetite plays an equally major role in making up the gnomic message of the myth to keep one's appetite and ambitions in check. How, then, is this related to the *regeneration* of the liver?

⁸¹ Collins 328

⁸² Tiniakos et al. 358

⁸³ Stephanie West 144

Various efforts have been made to pinpoint the medical observations that prompted the ancients to discover liver regeneration, from supposing the means to have come

anywhere from animal resections to examination of battle wounds; none of these attempts, as of yet, have established a convincing link⁸⁴. I suggest that link may in fact reside in the understanding of the liver as the seat of appetite, and more broadly as the emotional centre of the body. This medical fact about the liver has been proven and researched even more recently than liver regeneration; disruption of liver function is identified with a number of negative emotions, such as anger, bitterness, depression, anxiety, and insomnia⁸⁵. If the actual regeneration was not observable, these psychological and behavioural symptoms certainly would have been. Rather than theorizing from the biological, the Greeks may have theorized from the emotional; conceiving of the liver as the emotional centre of the body meant conceiving of emotional problems as hepatic problems.

We have copious evidence that the liver was identified with many such negative human emotions indicative of psychological distress. Archilochus writes that anger resides in the liver (ἐφ' ἥπατι, *fr.* 234 West), Aeschylus that pain may come upon the liver (ἐφ' ἥπαρ, *Aga.* 792), Euripides that fear rests under it (ὕφ' ἥπατι, *Supp.* 599), Sophocles that lamentation can rush into it (πρὸς ἥπαρ, *Ajax* 938). More interestingly, *deserved* reproach stings the liver (ἄλγησον ἥπαρ ἐνδίκους ὀνειδέσιν, Aesch. *Eum.* 135) and disastrous events burn the liver (ὕφ' ἥπαρ θερμὸν ἐξαυδόμενος, Aesch. *Choe.* 272). Hippolytus, hurt emotionally by Theseus' base view of him, laments “αἰαῖ, πρὸς ἥπαρ” (Eur. *Hipp.* 1070); this seems like the ancient Greek iteration of our modern English colloquialism, “right in the chest.” As strange as it now seems to us, it is evident that the liver was conceived of as the emotional centre of the body.

Bile (χόλος) was believed to flow from the gallbladder (χολή) into the liver; in fact, χόλος is rarely used to mean bile in the biological sense, and is encountered mostly in its metaphorical definition, anger: a function of the liver has literally rendered its name unto this emotion. Anger is sometimes described as this bodily fluid acting up in some way; bile can be “inflamed” (ἐπιζεῖν τὴν χολήν. Aristoph. *Thes.* 468), for example, which seems to have the same meaning as the English “boiling blood;” helpfully, we know bile can also boil (χολήν κινεῖν Id. *Th.* 468). In the *Iliad*, Achilles enlists a curious turn of phrase regarding his harsh nature: “let no man say... ‘Cruel son of Peleus, surely it was on bile that your mother reared you, you pitiless man’” (16.200). Bile is substituted for breastmilk, another bodily fluid; although this obviously is not implied to have really occurred, we can still observe bile is meant to be associated with piquant temperament. The proverbial χολῇ ἀλείφειν means to inspire disgust in someone; it is suggested that this comes from the “practice of weaning children off breastfeeding by putting gall on the nipple”⁸⁶. Perhaps this proverbial use is what Achilles draws on here; if this is the case, we may take being

⁸⁴ Tiniakos et al. 358

⁸⁵ See Chang et al.

⁸⁶ See LSJ; χολή

“raised on bile” as not getting enough maternal care – being weaned early – and thus growing up to become cold and stern. Once again, we see that negative emotional states are inherently connected to liver imagery. It is doubly significant that this appears to be a permanent temperament rather than a feeling that comes and goes; this describes a soul with too much appetitive pull and thus disharmonious thinking.

The most famous instance of rage in hepatic imagery also comes from the *Iliad*, where Hecuba expresses her wish to sink her teeth into Achilles’ liver to avenge the killing of her son Hector (24.212-3). This is a loaded line; the imagery of cannibalistic omophagy inspires a certain level of barbarity that parallels Achilles’ own threat towards Hector before his killing (22.347), bringing the two unlikely figures together in a powerful duality of wrath and vengeance. This duality is juxtaposed with the parallel Achilles finds in Hector’s other parent, Priam; they, conversely, find common ground in the lamentation following vengeance, displaying the destructive quality of unchecked appetite. It is significant that Priam finds closure, while Hecuba does not. Hecuba’s desire to tear out Achilles’ liver is deeply appetitive; in turn, it is a threat to deprive Achilles of his appetite and vivacity, which have caused the loss of Hector’s own. This is essentially a “regeneration” and relocation of the anger, not a termination; anger is just transferred into its next host.

A link between the medical “regeneration” of the liver and the emotional state of the mind is found in Plato’s *Timaeus*, in a cryptic passage that shares some language with hepatoscopy. The appetitive part of the soul, between the midriff and navel (70e), is described as a wild and untrustworthy thing; it has been bound down like a savage creature (70e) and is especially easy to bewitch by images and shades (71a), which is why the liver is fashioned as a sort of oracular companion to lead it. This results in a series of states in the liver:

...ὁπότε μέρει τῆς πικρότητος χρωμένη συγγενεῖ, χαλεπὴ προσενεχθεῖσα ἀπειλῇ, κατὰ πᾶν ὑπομειγνύσα ὀξέως τὸ ἥπαρ, χολώδῃ χρώματα ἐμφαίνοι, συνάγουσά τε πᾶν ῥυσὸν καὶ τραχὺ ποιοῖ, λοβὸν δὲ καὶ δοχὰς πύλας τε τὸ μὲν ἐξ ὀρθοῦ κατακάμπτουσα καὶ συσπῶσα, τὰ δὲ ἐμφράττουσα συγκλείουσά τε, λύπας καὶ ἄσας παρέχοι, καὶ ὅτ’ αὖ τάναντία φαντάσματα ἀποζωγραφοῖ πραότητός τις ἐκ διανοίας ἐπίπνοια, τῆς μὲν πικρότητος ἡσυχίαν παρέχουσα τῷ μῆτε κινεῖν μῆτε προσάπτεσθαι τῆς ἐναντίας ἐαυτῇ φύσεως ἐθέλειν, γλυκύτητι δὲ τῇ κατ’ ἐκείνο συμφύτῳ πρὸς αὐτὸ χρωμένη καὶ πάντα ὀρθὰ καὶ λεῖα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐλεύθερα ἀπευθύνουσα, ἱλεῶν τε καὶ εὐήμερον ποιοῖ τὴν περὶ τὸ ἥπαρ ψυχῆς μοῖραν κατωκισμένην, ἐν τε τῇ νυκτὶ διαγωγὴν ἔχουσιν μετρίαν, μαντεῖα χρωμένην καθ’ ὕπνον, ἐπειδὴ λόγου καὶ φρονήσεως οὐ μετεῖχε.

The liver is literally compared to a mirror of the soul, reflecting the tribulations and trials that the soul faces in its own anatomy. Stern thinking causes liver bitterness, bilious colouring, and a shrivelled and rough surface; surface quality and colouring are also qualities observed in hepatoscopy. This then causes liver pain and distress. On the other hand, if one is engaged in harmonious thinking – which we know to be governed by intellect in Plato – then the liver employs a sweet quality, appearing smooth and free, and the appetitive soul around the liver becomes calm and cheerful; being thus delighted, “it has a measured course at night,” which is to say the body sleeps well, “engaging with divination in its sleep,” no doubt referring to the common conception of dreams as oracular portents. In modern terms, an anxious mind, or a

mind not thinking in moderation and harmony, is connected with hepatic irregularities; a healthy liver is connected with contentedness and good sleep, just as our modern science shows. The “regeneration” of the liver can be read as the restoration of the liver’s natural healthy qualities rather than our modern notion of

the organ’s capacity to “regrow”; this certainly would have been observable in the hundreds of years of hepatoscopy that preceded Plato’s text. Of course, the latter ability derives from the former, but the liver’s ability to restore surface damage, so thoroughly well catalogued in hepatoscopy, will have been easier to observe in the context of Greek divination and medicine.

Given the prevalent understanding that the various facets of the soul are invariably connected to the health of the body, liver regeneration functions as a metaphor for the reharmonizing of the soul itself; the soul, momentarily indulging too much in the appetite, becomes reordered as the surface of the liver returns to its natural quality. We can see this appetitive transgression in both the Tityus and Prometheus myths; the constant regeneration and re-mutilation in these myths, in turn, points to the perpetual disorder of the soul. Tityus, already by virtue of the crime he commits, betrays appetitive excess; in the case of *Prometheus Bound* this is more complicated but well-examined still through Prometheus’ displays of excessive bitterness and anger. He rebukes even the friendly Oceanus when he comes to visit him, hoping to help his situation: “What is this here? (...) How did you dare to leave the stream (...), Have you come to see what has happened to me?” (298ff.). To the chorus that laments his fate, he responds, “My heart is eaten up with brooding when I see myself treated so outrageously” (438-9), obviously foreshadowing the actual “eating up” of his innards. Prometheus’ inability to accept his situation is causing him to harbour negative, appetitive feelings; he feels shamed that he should be seen by anyone else (156-7), “audacious and unyielding in the face of bitter pains” (178-9), serving “the wages of an over-arrogant tongue” (316-7), deeply insulted by having his position challenged by the “new gods” (438-9). The chorus says it perfectly: “having been subjected to a painful degradation, you are mentally straying, robbed of your wits like a bad doctor who has fallen sick; you are in despair, and unable to discover by what remedies your condition is curable” (472-5). If not for his bitterness, Prometheus could easily give into Zeus and remedy his punishment; yet it is this very bitterness that, rather ironically for one so well-versed in the oracular arts, blinds and binds him. In him we have a perfect example of the consequences of the appetite taking control over the rational mind: even Prometheus, the archetypical man of craftiness, is not immune to its destructive influence. Rather, Prometheus is confined in a cycle of suffering of his own making; the more he remains bound, the more he despairs, and the more bitter still he becomes. His liver gets regenerated only to be torn up again – he can never achieve the emotional and mental stability of a well-ordered psyche – and eventually, his liver turns black (1024).

Omophagy and bewitchment: What has the liver to do with Dionysus?

As in the *Timaeus*, we are told in the *Prometheus Bound* that the subject of hepatic dysfunction has lost his wits; perhaps a unifying conclusion may be made between the omophagy of the liver in *Il.* 24.212-4 and the propensity of the liver to be “bewitched both day and night by images and phantasms” (Plato *Tim.* 71a). The link

between the two happens to be the gift of the vine; indeed, we might even expect intuitively that hepatic trouble and emotional turbulence manifest themselves within some shared sphere of alcohol consumption. The physical symptoms associated with hepatic dysfunction in the *Timaeus* – the toughening, the biliary colouring, the

unevenness of the surface and upper abdominal pain – are obvious signs of actual liver disease. Excessive drinking is a deeply appetitive quality (*Rep.* 8.561); Xenophon and Plato both frown upon wine being consumed undiluted, which was representative of the proper decorum of their time⁸⁷. Finally, we have stumbled on the link between the physical and the emotional; appetitive disorder causes excessive drinking, which causes hepatic irregularity, which causes more appetitive disorder, and so on and so forth. This is the same vicious cycle of regeneration that torments Prometheus and Tityus.

While the altered states of Tityus and Prometheus are not caused by alcohol, nevertheless this link is interesting to exploit. Many Bacchic myths are intimately concerned with the typical lapse of judgement that follows excessive consumption of alcohol; being “under the influence” is metaphorically represented by being under Dionysus’ influence. One example is the story of King Icarius, the first King of Athens to receive Dionysus into the city; as his people don’t yet know that wine must be diluted before consumption, they get excessively drunk in a manner evoking maenadic ritual, throwing him into a well as they assume he has poisoned them (Apollodorus *Bib.* 3.14.7). Apollodorus has also recorded a similar story that he claims is from Hesiod, regarding King Proteus of Argos; first his daughters and then the whole female population of his city go mad under the power of Dionysus (2.2.2). Of course, the most famous example must come from Euripides’ *Bacchae*, which also displays this motif of the city’s princesses losing control; Agave and her sisters tear Pentheus apart with brute force in an altered state, mistaking him for a mountain lion (1278), so far from rationality that they cannot even recognize his severed head. Pentheus himself experiences this altered state; towards the end of the play, he is clearly out of his wits, seeing two suns (919), recognizing nonchalantly Dionysus’ terrifying form with horns (920ff.). Of course, we cannot know how this was originally staged and whether it was visually enforced for the audience with a change of masks, but if not, this is even more evocative of his daze. Interestingly, we are able once again to see the recurrent motif of change in power. Dionysus goes from “the Stranger” to proven deity while Pentheus loses every facet of his identity; he is neither kingly nor manly as he admires his Bacchic tunic folding around his ankle. Dionysus proves his paternity and thus establishes his power over Thebes (1, 1341, 143, 1349), while Pentheus loses his power and vivacity at his mother’s hands (1118-21). His initial appetitive disorder, a morbid longing to see the maenads performing their ritual (810ff.), causes him to be overpowered by Dionysus’ rule over the appetite. A new god is established in the land of Thebes.

The Hecuba line from the *Iliad* is similarly evocative of Bacchic imagery. Omophagy is accepted to be a part of the lore around Bacchic ritual; while there is no solid evidence that omophagy was ever undertaken by worshippers of Dionysus⁸⁸, they

⁸⁷ Hanson 3

⁸⁸ Henrichs 121-169

were certainly associated with the act. The *Bacchae* mentions the “joy of omophagy” in the parodos (139), which is a rite of passage in the soul’s initiation; it is likely to be connected to the god’s relation to the concepts of death and rebirth due to the circumstances of his birth⁸⁹. In the *Bacchae*, Dionysus is a “regenerated” figure; he is

“killed” once by the smiting of his mother, Semele, and “born again” by being sown into the leg of his father, Zeus (Eur. *Bacch.* 89ff.). Caballero rightly directs the attention to the significance of Dionysus’ “gestation;” this is surely not a necessary event. In the myth of Asclepius, for example, which also has the mother burn to death with the infant still in the womb, Asclepius is rescued as an infant, with no need of foetal gestation⁹⁰. The element of gestation is purposefully placed in the myth; the interrupted generation of the child is actualized with “regeneration.” Other accounts of the myth are even more brutal and obvious in their association with omophagy. Many Orphic texts concern Dionysus’ death and regeneration; notably, some accounts list him as the son of Persephone and Zeus, Dionysus Zagreus, already possessing a chthonic relation⁹¹. In this version, the infant Dionysus, playing with the portents of his divinity on his father’s throne, is approached by the Titans on Hera’s bidding. The Titans proceed to boil, grill, and eat the child; in retaliation, Zeus destroys the Titans and creates humans out of their ashes⁹², yet another instant of regeneration-generation. What happened to Dionysus afterwards is less straightforward; in most versions of the story, he gets restored somehow. In Proclus’ account, Semele becomes pregnant with and gives birth to him by drinking a tonic with remnants of his heart (*OF* 327 II); according to Diodorus Siculus and Philodemus, Rhea or Demeter piece him back together from his remains (*OF* 59 I–II).

A final link thus manifests itself in the association of Dionysiac regeneration with hepatic regeneration. This is of course exploited in the motif of liver regrowth but extends even further; both Tityus and Prometheus are stuck in a similar duality of dead-alive, neither one nor the other. While they meet their punishments due to an overactivity of the appetite, they are deprived of all things pleasing to it; while they regenerate and keep their “vivacity,” they are denied all tenets of “living.” Tityus is alive and immortal, yet he dwells in Tartarus with the dead in the *Odyssey* (11.577ff.). There is probably some merit in examining his parentage as well; his mother Elara was buried in the earth when she was pregnant with him (Apoll. Rho. *Argo.* 1.761ff.): like Dionysus, he too was in a state of unborn death.

The language of the *Prometheus Bound*, too, betrays intimate awareness and concern over this duality. The very opening emphasizes the desolate landscape; “We have reached the land at the furthest bounds of earth,” Power says, “the Scythian marches, a wilderness where no mortals live” (1-2). There are no mortals in the Scythian plane, but there are no dead either. Crucially, Prometheus is not cast into Tartarus as Tityus is – he may be on the very edge of the earth, yet he is still on it. Prometheus *wishes* he were “cast below the earth, below Hades who welcomes the dead, into boundless Tartarus” (153-5), though he maintains that it is not his fate to die (752-5). A similar

⁸⁹ Henrichs 222

⁹⁰ Caballero 128

⁹¹ Corrente 70

⁹² Corrente 70

effect is achieved by Io's mad ravings, where she describes Argus: "He is on the move, keeping a crafty eye, even though he is dead, the earth cannot cover him – *he crosses over from the underworld*" (571-3). Io herself wishes to be burnt with fire or buried in the earth (583), practices of a funeral and formal death; she too is denied this reprieve. Pseudo-Aeschylus fashions a no-man's-land in the tragic landscape of

Prometheus Bound, blurring the lines between life and the underworld. It is in this landscape that the mutilation and regeneration of the liver occurs, condemned to suffer the same ambivalence: the liver will never heal, spiritual harmony will never be restored, the uncertainty of Zeus' rule will never be uncovered.

Conclusions: the Liver in the Human Experience

Just as material and philosophical evidence can be used to reinforce the points raised by ancient literature, so literature must be seen as an essential part of the wider cultural web of ancient Greece. The lack of a medical text or material evidence on the beginnings of the Greek conception of liver regeneration can be compensated with the help of literary sources. These reveal a rich and complicated understanding of human emotion, conflict, and physical experience that contextualises one of the most accurate predictions that Greek medical literature somehow happened to make centuries before its scientific discovery. It shows once again that these stories were born of thousands of years of observation regarding the human condition, coming eventually to reflect it in the unlikeliest and most appropriate ways possible.

This essay has not meant to suggest that the similarities between the texts handling the liver, medical practice, or maenadic ritual were connected intertextually; on the contrary, the aim was to show how one single unified human experience – liver disease – could manifest in a number of different texts that have the capacity to intersect thematically. This is not because they derive from a common textual parent or bear obvious traces of interaction with one another; rather, the similarity results from the fact that the texts were composed in a shared cultural environment, drawing from the same human experience observed across countless centuries and cultures. We achieve here a reconstruction of sociology, not intertextuality.

This reconstruction suggests that the emotional states associated with alcohol overuse, which we already know to be a significant taboo in Greek society, forms the backbone of the association of the liver with the appetite, and therefore its symbolic meaning in the regeneration motif. Those who drink in excess are emotionally unstable, and emotional instability leads to yet more indulgence; to abstain from the volatility of unstable behaviour eases the physical symptoms along with restoring mental harmony. In myth, these observations necessarily become entangled with gnomic wisdom; myths of liver regeneration warn us against excess and the vexation caused by shifts in political power. In examining the philosophical and literary treatment of the liver and myths of liver regeneration, we trace the realities of modern biology in ancient literature.

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‘Apo Mēkhanēs Logos’: How Machine Learning May Help Scholars Decipher Linear A

Introduction

Based on the archaeological record, writing developed during the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age to record administrative information for an increasingly growing human population, and was only later adapted to record syntactically-complex content such as poetry and philosophy.⁹³ Some writing systems are still in usage, like the Latin alphabet and Japanese katakana, while others, like Etruscan and Linear A, have been lost to time and are now considered “undeciphered”.

Scripts transcribe languages⁹⁴. A script is considered undeciphered if the language it transcribes is unknown, if the script is unknown, or if both the language and script are unknown. Famous decipherments, such as of Linear B, a Bronze Age script recording an early form of Greek, have been successful generally *after* the underlying language of the script has been determined.⁹⁵ Until the researcher understands the language, the script — though it may be phonetically legible — will read like garbled nonsense.

In the growing field of computational linguistics, Artificial Intelligence has been applied to the statistical analysis of ancient writings.⁹⁶ Groumpos defines Machine Learning, Neural Networks, and Deep Learning as subsets of Artificial Intelligence.⁹⁷ While there are subtle differences between them, these fall beyond the scope of this paper, and subsequently I will refer to them all as “Machine Learning” (henceforth ML) for the purposes of my discussion. (“Artificial Intelligence” is too broad of a category to use in every instance.) A ML model is trained with a known dataset to “learn” skills through observation and is regularly tweaked by a human researcher with the aim of producing the most accurate results to problems; the model is then tested on its responses to novel situations.⁹⁸ In linguistics, this may manifest as a model “learning” to glean patterns in a corpus of sentences during the training period and then being tested on its ability to produce new sentences according to those patterns.

I will argue that ML is a powerful tool for researchers who favour an interdisciplinary approach to decipherment.⁹⁹ Firstly, I will highlight the strengths of computational approaches to linguistics and the importance of computer-expert pairings. Secondly, I will discuss how ML works, with a particular focus on decipherment. Finally, I will discuss computational approaches to the undeciphered Linear A script from Crete and consider the potential usage of the ML adversarial learning technique in its

⁹³ Cooper, 2004, 71-72.

⁹⁴ Fox, 2013, 44-45.

⁹⁵ Fox, 2013; Robinson, 2020.

⁹⁶ Groumpos, 2023, 200-201.

⁹⁷ Groumpos, 2023, 201.

⁹⁸ Mantovan and Nanni, 2020; Groumpos, 2023.

⁹⁹ Sommerschield et al., 2023, 728; Assael et al., 2022, 283.

decipherment.¹⁰⁰ ML may inform scholars of the grammatical nature of Linear A and possibly of the underlying “Minoan” language.

Part I: How machine learning is used in the humanities

Recent increases in data digitisation, scientific breakthroughs in Artificial Intelligence, and improving computational power have made ML a rapidly growing field of study.¹⁰¹

Linguistic investigations that use ML techniques yield more accurate results than those undertaken solely by human experts.¹⁰² This is not to say that Artificial Intelligence necessarily produces better results than human beings; rather, Artificial Intelligence’s primary strength is its ability to alleviate stress from human researchers— a principle that has been true for automata since ancient times and that, coincidentally, is not far removed from the administrative purposes of early writing, which recorded information that could not be remembered easily in one’s head.¹⁰³ Even amateur investigations into the power of ML for decipherment showcase the transformative power of Artificial Intelligence in linguistics.¹⁰⁴

Alongside the stress-alleviating potential of ML, Sommerschild and her colleagues highlight the importance of computer-expert pairings.¹⁰⁵ After all, human experts are typically more well-informed about the context of inscriptions, and therefore may provide the best solution to a linguistic challenge (such as reconstructing a damaged text). Figurative and metaphorical language are also not a machine’s strong point, as shown by mistranslations and pronunciation mistakes made by automated systems.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, Qian and her colleagues note that ML models struggle with the following elements of language on the Internet: slang, abbreviations, confusing punctuation conventions, scribal errors, and omitted words.¹⁰⁷ The same concerns apply to ancient linguistic corpora. For example, a scribal error in a Classical Greek passage may be taken seriously by a computerised model that does not know any better, and the model may produce an erroneous translation. It is up to the human expert to ensure this error is not carried forward into further textual analysis.

Moreover, the ethical concerns of using Artificial Intelligence are an increasingly popular subject due to recent developments in the field. Whenever one uses a computer to process data, one must consider potential biases in the dataset.¹⁰⁸ In computational linguistics, this may come down to the quantity and type of data, and in the case of ancient texts, which types of information are most likely to a) be recorded and b) survive:¹⁰⁹ political inscriptions on stone are far more likely to survive until the present day than poorly-stored papyri used for correspondences

¹⁰⁰ Goodfellow et al., 2014.

¹⁰¹ Sommerschild et al., 2023, 705-728; Assael et al., 2022, 280.

¹⁰² Assael et al., 2022.

¹⁰³ Mayor, 2018, 152; Cooper, 2004, 72.

¹⁰⁴ Albertson, 2023.

¹⁰⁵ Sommerschild et al., 2023, 727-728.

¹⁰⁶ Maxi, 2023.

¹⁰⁷ Qian et al., 2019.

¹⁰⁸ Fry, 2018, 76-83; Maxi, 2023.

¹⁰⁹ Matthews, 2013, 72.

between family members. Such biases impact interpretations and subsequent conclusions about ancient texts, so one must be aware of them.¹¹⁰

In this section, I have aimed to briefly describe the benefits and the ethical concerns of a semi-computational approach to linguistic tasks. In the following section, I will expand upon how a computer is helpful in decipherment tasks involving a big dataset.

Part II: How machine learning works, for humanities researchers

Where there is linguistic data of sufficient quantity and variety, computational techniques are well-suited to textual reconstruction, clarification, and decipherment.¹¹¹ For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on decipherment.

To begin with, I will outline the importance of establishing chronologies for linguistic corpora. Before undertaking decipherment tasks, human researchers classify documents according to their geographical and historical context.¹¹² Once a mysterious text has been classified accordingly, further analysis based on contextual factors can occur: local languages, trade routes, key events, and so on.¹¹³ In the case of decipherment, one would expect this step to narrow the list of candidate languages. Without knowing what era the document in question is from (even roughly), one might as well assume a Middle Egyptian Hieroglyphic text transcribes modern French. Context-based classification may even reveal loan words and underlying grammatical structures as a result of known, universal patterns of phonological and syntactic constraints.¹¹⁴

Hauer and Kondrak used contextual classification in their investigation of the language of the Voynich Manuscript, whose undeciphered script appears to be unique.¹¹⁵ Once a statistical analysis of the text had confirmed that the script did indeed transcribe a language — and was not an elaborate hoax — the manuscript's age (early 15th century CE) indicated Latin and Italian as possible candidates. Though it was concluded that the language was most likely a contemporary Hebrew dialect due to the grammatical patterns in the text, this study highlights that contextual clues are key to analysis, and, to refer to my previous section, that human experts are invaluable for their contextual insights— at least, while Artificial Intelligence is at its present stage.¹¹⁶

Of course, ML models can help with the classification process provided they are trained on lots of labelled linguistic data. Ithaca, a model developed in recent years for the reconstruction of Classical Greek texts, bases its conclusions on Greek textual data from the seventh century BCE to the fifth century CE.¹¹⁷ When collaborating with experts, the restorations completed by Ithaca are 72% accurate compared to

¹¹⁰ Fry, 2018, 76-83.

¹¹¹ Cowen-Breen et al., 2023, 171; Assael et al., 2022, 280; Bogacz and Mara, 2022.

¹¹² Lin, 2021.

¹¹³ Sommerschild et al., 2023, 727-728.

¹¹⁴ Luo et al., 2021.

¹¹⁵ Hauer and Kondrak, 2016, 76.

¹¹⁶ Sommerschild et al., 2023, 727-728.

¹¹⁷ Assael et al., 2022; Cowen-Breen et al., 2023, 171.

when it works alone (62%) or when experts work without Ithaca's aid (25%).¹¹⁸ Ithaca is not designed for decipherment tasks, but it highlights the strengths of ML modelling when establishing the context of an unknown text.

Having discerned the importance of situating a text within a chronology, I will turn to the primary strength of ML: pattern recognition. As is the case with any kind of decryption, finding patterns is crucial to establishing what undeciphered texts contain.¹¹⁹ Turing's famous decryption of encoded German messages during World War II was made possible by regularities across the reports— in particular, that every German message opened with an encrypted account of the local weather.¹²⁰ Computational analysis of letter frequency, compositional patterns, and informed attempts to partially decipher scripts help with holistic language identification and decipherment.¹²¹

Robinson writes that the relationship between the languages of two undeciphered scripts is theoretical — even irrelevant — until the grammars are shown to follow similar patterns.¹²² He refers to Linear A and B, two Bronze Age syllabic scripts from Crete, the latter of which was ultimately deciphered by Michael Ventris in 1952.¹²³ The former remains undeciphered. I will return to it in the following section.

Robinson highlights that decipherment is based on pattern-recognition. In the case of Linear B, regularities in the texts — including place names and the repetition of important administrative terminology such as 'to-so' (meaning "total") — aided the researchers during its decipherment.¹²⁴ Eventually, Linear B was concluded to transcribe a form of Greek due to corresponding grammatical patterns of noun declensions and the regularity of syntactic relationships between word groups.¹²⁵

In the same vein, Corazza and his colleagues very recently conducted a ML investigation into instances of the Cypro-Minoan script found at Cypriot and Lebanese sites.¹²⁶ Prior to their work, it was held that the Cypro-Minoan script was divided into three sub-groups corresponding to local dialects. Based on a ML model's analysis of regular patterns and resemblances between sets of neighbouring syllabograms across the dataset, it was concluded that internal differences within the script were the result of stylistic variation, and that the belief that the script had three sub-groups was most likely invalid.¹²⁷ This study utilised a relatively small dataset due to the limited number of Cypro-Minoan inscriptions currently available, but the conclusions are located within an appropriate historical and cultural context, and the researchers analyse the script without making bold claims about the underlying

¹¹⁸ Assael et al., 2022, 282.

¹¹⁹ Fox, 2013, 54-64.

¹²⁰ Inman, 2020.

¹²¹ Hauer and Kondrak, 2016, 77-85.

¹²² Robinson, 2020, 198.

¹²³ Fox, 2013.

¹²⁴ Hooker, 1980, 31.

¹²⁵ Fox, 2013; Robinson, 2020; Hooker, 1980, 28.

¹²⁶ Corazza et al., 2022.

¹²⁷ Corazza et al., 2022, 8.

language.¹²⁸ Therefore, I would argue that their technique is reliable and appropriate for datasets of greater sizes due to its pattern-based approach.

Pattern-based decipherment without the help of Artificial Intelligence is certainly possible, as was the case with Linear B,¹²⁹ but machines can rapidly compute large quantities of data without getting tired, unlike humans; hence, “brute-force” approaches — where the model works with a large quantity of data and relieves human workloads — are favourable to linguistics researchers.¹³⁰ By filtering through thousands of possible solutions quickly, a ML model automatically completes the taxing work of classification and leaves the delicate task of sifting through computer-analysed data to human experts who understand the subject better.¹³¹

Here, I have attempted to highlight the benefits offered to linguists by the pattern-finding skills of ML while underscoring the need to supervise computerised models during the decipherment process; though the machine can analyse thousands of data, the researcher must use their academic expertise to make final decisions.¹³² In the next section, I will focus on Linear A. So far, it has evaded decipherment due to the low quantity of legible samples. However, recent interdisciplinary collaborations suggest it might nevertheless be decipherable — even partially — if we use ML.

Part III: Linear A

ML is a powerful tool for researchers of ancient linguistics where the dataset is large, but it is also useful where the dataset is smaller, and pattern recognition is more difficult as a result. As already stated, I will focus on Linear A due to its similarities to Linear B, which has been deciphered.

Linear A is an undeciphered script of Cretan origin. It employs roughly 80% of the same signs as Linear B, a deciphered script used to transcribe an early form of Greek.¹³³ Scholars have taken the scripts’ similarity as evidence that early Greeks (henceforth, Mycenaeans, after the citadel of Mycenae on mainland Greece) invaded Crete during the Bronze Age and adapted the local script for their own purposes.¹³⁴ Based on archaeological evidence, Linear A and B were used alongside one another before they both fell out of usage during the Greek “Dark Ages”.¹³⁵

Scholars have transliterated some syllabograms of Linear A according to the phonetic values of parallel Linear B syllabograms.¹³⁶ This is because of the prevailing theory that Linear B appropriated Linear A syllabograms.¹³⁷ However, the validity of these transliterations is currently unclear. Scholars have limited contextual knowledge of the era and therefore can construct patterns of linguistic change merely tentatively.

¹²⁸ Fox, 2013, 197.

¹²⁹ Robinson, 2020; Fox, 2013.

¹³⁰ Mayor, 2018, 152-153; Manning, 2015, 703; Kohari, 2023.

¹³¹ Groumpos, 2023, 198.

¹³² Sommerschild et al., 2023.

¹³³ Robinson, 2020, 191-192; Daniels and Bright, 2022, 132.

¹³⁴ Fox, 2013.

¹³⁵ Hooker, 1980, 11-15.

¹³⁶ Robinson, 2020.

¹³⁷ Hooker, 1980; Robinson, 2020.

Furthermore, Linear A is far-removed from Linear B in morphology, employs fractional quantities while Linear B does not, and has a different word for “total” (likely ‘ku-ro’; compare this with Mycenaean Greek’s ‘to-so’), thereby indicating that the language of Linear A might belong to a non-Indo-European language group.¹³⁸

The underlying language is unknown but shall be referred to as “Minoan” in this paper because it was used by the Minoan people. It might be a dialect of Greek, Egyptian, Akkadian, West Anatolian, or, according to a particularly absurd claim, a language distantly related to Hungarian, to name a few candidates.¹³⁹ Most are reasonable guesses given the script’s context, but many may arise from scholars finding non-existent patterns in the data.¹⁴⁰

The principal barrier to decipherment is the lack of linguistic data for Linear A.¹⁴¹ Inscriptions are few (numbering merely 1,500, compared to Linear B’s 5,000) and often damaged.¹⁴² Nevertheless, Karajgikar, Al-Khulaidy, and Berea suggest a novel ML technique for analysing Linear A texts.¹⁴³ They aim to reconstruct damaged Linear A symbols using *n*-gram analysis and to highlight grammatical structures in the Minoan corpus by grouping symbols according to regular patterns found using neural modelling techniques. Put simply, they investigate whether regularities can be found in the small Linear A dataset. They conclude that the Minoan language is “consistent[ly] unstructured”.¹⁴⁴ The lack of grammatical structure indicated by their work may suggest that Linear A is merely a complex tallying method that does not reflect a spoken Minoan language. On the other hand, the consistent patterns they have found overall indicate that the script follows a logic which could be further analysed in future research.

In an earlier paper, a group of researchers suggested approaching the analysis of Linear A by using a modified computer model that was originally developed for Linear B, due to the stylistic similarities between the scripts.¹⁴⁵ (However, one must note that this paper presents a potential design for a software application that is not yet operational.) The authors propose conducting multiple tests using the model, with each test corresponding to a major candidate language. In the paper, the key candidate languages are Akkadian, Aeolic Greek, and languages from the Western Anatolian language family (Luwian, Lycia, Carian, and Lydian). It is also proposed here that the Minoan language may be a local Aegean dialect,¹⁴⁶ but this is difficult to verify since no languages related to Minoan are definitively known. Though it looks promising, it is unknown whether a model originally built for analysing Mycenaean Greek will be effective when applied to its Minoan cousin.

¹³⁸ Hooker, 1980; Fox, 2013, 127; Robinson, 2020, 186–191.

¹³⁹ Mantovan and Nanni, 2020; Robinson, 2020, 199; Revesz, 2017.

¹⁴⁰ Fox, 2013, 197.

¹⁴¹ Hooker, 1980, 11–16.

¹⁴² Robinson, 2020, 185.

¹⁴³ Karajgikar, Al-Khulaidy, and Berea, 2021.

¹⁴⁴ Karajgikar, Al-Khulaidy, and Berea, 2021, 14.

¹⁴⁵ Mavridaki, Galiotou, and Papakitsos, 2020.

¹⁴⁶ Mavridaki, Galiotou, and Papakitsos, 2020, 167.

I have discussed two computerised approaches to the limited Linear A corpus. Now, I will propose that small linguistic datasets spawn unfounded conjectures that are given more credit than they are due, since they are impossible to verify or falsify because of limited evidence.¹⁴⁷ To illustrate my point, I will discuss two studies of the Minoan language with a particular focus on the flawed methodologies of the researchers.

The first study, by Yao, Perono Cacciafoco, and Cavallaro, claims the Minoan language may be a dialect of Ancient Egyptian (probably Middle Egyptian, which was a contemporary of Minoan).¹⁴⁸ The paper begins with a review of other languages that Linear A may possibly transcribe, and it discusses their credibility according to historical and cultural clues; Gordon's suggestion that Minoan is related to the Semitic language group is viewed with particular merit due to clear, archaeologically-apparent trade links between Crete and the Eastern Mediterranean,¹⁴⁹ which is a hypothesis which I academically respect due to its evidential support.

The writers then express their own hypothesis that Linear A records Egyptian.¹⁵⁰ Citing Bietak and Bradley, they consider Minoan material culture (particularly ornamentation, artistic patterns, and pottery) excavated at Egyptian sites including at Tell el-Daba, Aswan, and sites by the Nile Delta, and confirm that Crete and Egypt had trade relations.¹⁵¹ They also note stylistic similarities between Linear A and the contemporary Egyptian script (namely, syllabograms and ideograms) and claim this as evidence of idea flow between the two cultures.¹⁵² Though this could well have been the case, I see no reason to assume Egypt was responsible for the birth of the Linear A script— especially not when the written word has arisen independently in multiple cultures across the globe, such as in China and in the Americas.¹⁵³

Nevertheless, the researchers hold fast to their claim. Their methodology removes all the vowels in Linear A (since Egyptian does not transcribe most vowels) and rearranges the Linear A syllabary in accordance with Egyptian sound values. Then the researchers attempt to show that four Linear A inscriptions are written in Egyptian. They conclude that there is strong evidence supporting the hypothesis that Linear A is related to the Egyptian language.

However, I have two issues with their study. Firstly, the researchers seem to be holding onto their initial claim that Linear A transcribes Egyptian without clear academic justification.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, during the decipherment of Linear B, scholars argued for a variety of underlying languages and would often present strong evidence

¹⁴⁷ Groumpos, 2023, 204.

¹⁴⁸ Yao, Perono Cacciafoco, and Cavallaro, 2022.

¹⁴⁹ Gordon, 1966; Yao, Perono Cacciafoco, Cavallaro, 2022, 458–459.

¹⁵⁰ Yao, Perono Cacciafoco, Cavallaro, 2022, 460–470.

¹⁵¹ Bietak, 2010; Bradley, 2014, 50.

¹⁵² Yao, Perono Cacciafoco, Cavallaro, 2022, 461.

¹⁵³ Senner, 1989.

¹⁵⁴ Fox, 2013, 197.

for their cases; unfortunately, most were seeing relations where there were none because they wanted to show their hypotheses were correct.¹⁵⁵

My second concern is the poor quality of their translations into Egyptian.¹⁵⁶ Each of the four inscriptions — which in itself, is not a sufficiently large number — is translated in multiple ways because there are several possible translations for every word. Furthermore, Yao, Perono Cacciafoco, and Cavallaro interpret these translations based on limited evidence of the Minoan culture; in multiple instances, they claim the inscriptions they have “translated” are libation formulas mostly on the basis of what they believe the inscriptions say, and, to a lesser extent, the object on which the inscription was found— neither of which suggests a holistic understanding of Minoan culture because their conclusions rely on extremely limited evidence in both cases. While it may turn out that Minoan is, indeed, an Egyptian dialect, the methodology of this study is poor, and I favour instead the hypothesis that Linear A transcribes a Western Anatolian language.¹⁵⁷

The second study is by Revesz.¹⁵⁸ He proposes that Minoan is part of the Uralic language family, which coheres with the non-Indo-European grammar of Linear A, as indicated by its lack of inflections.¹⁵⁹ Revesz claims that Greek and Semitic words which other scholars, such as Gordon, have found in the Linear A script are merely cultural borrowings;¹⁶⁰ thus, Revesz posits that Minoan is related to Hattic (a language spoken in Anatolia during the Bronze Age) and, distantly, to Hungarian and Finnish.

Though the claim that Minoan is related to Finnish may appear ridiculous initially, it is not impossible: the non-Indo-European structure of Minoan and the trade links between Crete and Anatolia suggest that Linear A may, indeed, have transcribed a Uralic language¹⁶¹.

However, Revesz’s methodology relies upon finding visual similarities between the signs used to transcribe Carian and Old Hungarian (both Uralic languages) and Linear A. He employs a computer to do a feature analysis of Linear A symbols based on which of the following thirteen stylistic features each contains:

(o \ || × ^ ∨ > | / \ /\ - Δ²¹⁶²

He completes the same analysis for the Carian and Old Hungarian alphabets, finds similarities, and concludes that Linear A must be their precursor. Shortly afterwards, Revesz presents a tenuous list of cognate terms that suggests Hungarian, Finnish, Khanty, and Mansi vocabulary terms are related to their Greek equivalents— which is absurd, since Minoan does not appear to be a Greek dialect, as Revesz himself admits.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁵ Fox, 2013.

¹⁵⁶ Yao, Perono Cacciafoco, Cavallaro, 2022, 464-470.

¹⁵⁷ Robinson, 2020, 199.

¹⁵⁸ Revesz, 2017.

¹⁵⁹ Fox, 2013, 127.

¹⁶⁰ Revesz, 2017, 306.

¹⁶¹ Robinson, 2020, 199.

¹⁶² (where Δ² is two triangles, typically directly next to each other)

¹⁶³ Revesz, 2017, 313-317.

To offer a further criticism, Revesz does not discuss that visual similarities between different scripts are not necessarily indicative of related underlying languages. For instance, the alphabetic sign ‘H’ makes a /h/ sound in English, an /ε:/ sound in Classical Attic Greek, and a /n/ or /ni/ sound in Russian. While these languages are all Indo-European, the variations between their spoken forms clearly indicate that a stylistic analysis of Linear A signs is not a valid way of finding parallels between spoken Minoan, Carian, and Hungarian. As with the study by Yao, Perono Cacciafoco, and Cavallaro, Revesz seems to be reasoning in circles on the basis of tenuous links in linguistic data.¹⁶⁴

Such poorly founded conjectures are ultimately made because the Linear A corpus is smaller and more damaged than other ancient scripts, such as Linear B.¹⁶⁵ However, until more inscriptions are found by archaeologists and the Linear A corpus grows, it may be possible to expand the data scholars have by creating a synthetic dataset. I will outline my idea for the rest of this section.

Adversarial learning is a relatively recent ML technique.¹⁶⁶ It involves two elements of a computerised system: a generator and a discriminator. They are trained on a segment of the same linguistic dataset, in accordance with ML procedure outlined in Parts I and II. Then, during the testing period, the generator produces new data and the discriminator guesses whether these could conceivably be part of the dataset on which the model was trained. As the testing period continues, the generator gradually learns to fool the discriminator by producing synthetic data of increasingly higher quality.

This approach may prove useful in the case of Linear A. The Linear A data created by the generator cannot be tested for accuracy and validity since the original linguistic corpus is limited,¹⁶⁷ but the adversarial learning model may nevertheless produce new strings of data with syntactic information that has gone unnoticed by human researchers for decades.¹⁶⁸ This could be a step towards Linear A’s decipherment.

In this section, I have given an overview of scholarly hypotheses about the nature of the Minoan language, which is transcribed using the Linear A script, and have suggested that adversarial learning would be interesting to apply to the dataset that is currently available. Nevertheless, one must remember the accuracy of such research cannot be determined absolutely due to Linear A’s limited corpus.¹⁶⁹

Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed the applicability of Artificial Intelligence to ancient linguistics, with a focus on the decipherment of Linear A. I have discussed the strengths of computer-expert pairings and why computational pattern-recognition is useful in ancient linguistics. Furthermore, I have offered an idea (which, to the best of my knowledge, has not been considered for studying Minoan prior to this paper)

¹⁶⁴ Fox, 2013, 197.

¹⁶⁵ Hooker, 1980; Robinson, 2020, 183-199.

¹⁶⁶ Goodfellow et al., 2014.

¹⁶⁷ Groumpos, 2023, 204.

¹⁶⁸ Goodfellow et al., 2014.

¹⁶⁹ Groumpos, 2023, 204.

for the decipherment of Linear A; developments in ML suggest scholars might make headway with the existing corpus.

Interdisciplinary collaboration between computer scientists and historians of the ancient world is crucial to developing this field of study.¹⁷⁰ Future investigations could explore the ethical concerns of AI for decipherment, which is a complex topic beyond the scope of this paper. For instance, they could consider whether AI of this kind might be modified to decrypt private Internet data, which would undermine cybersecurity measures worldwide. Alternatively, they might explore whether the analytical strategies outlined here are applicable to languages and scripts with grammatical patterns different to Greek dialects and Minoan, such as Māori or languages spoken in the American Arctic, and, furthermore, how ML approaches should be modified to decipher pictorial, syllabic, and alphabetic scripts.

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¹⁷⁰ Manning, 2015, 703; Assael et al., 2022, 283; Sommerschild et al., 2023, 728.

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What mattered most in Alexandria, knowledge or power?

The ancient world, particularly Alexandria, was defined by the interplay between knowledge and power. While these concepts are often understood as being dichotomously opposing, this essay argues that they were instead deeply intertwined throughout the historical discourse of Alexandria in which one cannot be seen without the other. This essay offers that the Library of Alexandria is as a physical manifestation of this relationship. The library was established as part of the Hellenistic tradition within Ptolemaic Egypt, representing power through the symbolic value of knowledge. Thus, as the city flourished the acquisition of knowledge had become the primary focus. Ultimately, the decline of the library mirrored the dissolution of the Ptolemaic dynasty, illustrating the inextricable link between knowledge and power. This essay adopts the perspective that power and knowledge exist on a spectrum, with one sometimes outweighing the other. At no point were they completely disconnected in the context of ancient Alexandria. Comparatively, they were inherently linked, each shaping and reinforcing the other throughout the city's history.

To determine the significance of knowledge versus power in Alexandria, it is best to examine the historical context leading up to the establishment of the Library of Alexandria to understand the political and historical climate in which the establishment of Alexandria was situated.

Alexandria was founded in 331 BCE under the rulership of Alexander the Great.¹⁷¹ Following his death in 323 BCE there lay an opening of power within the Mediterranean which is best illustrated in the account of Quintus Curtius Rufus that which he describes the corpse of Alexander lying untouched as it was debated over who should assume the rulership.¹⁷² Whilst it should be noted that Quintus Curtius Rufus is often considered an unreliable source noting his work having been produced centuries after Alexander's reign in the first century AD. Thus, the narrative he creates is built primarily from second-hand narratives, a point problematic when considering the alterations an author may have enacted for a multitude of reasons. Nevertheless, this is not to invalidate the work offered as it is unsurprising that uncertainty would have existed within the empire of this time, one which Ptolemy capitalised upon.

Ptolemy I utilised the current climate of the Macedonian Empire to further his power, considering that while the satrapal position was powerful it was not by any means the same as the pharaonic position that Ptolemy would later assume. Therefore, when considering the political climate and Ptolemy's political aspirations, his conception of a plan to steal the corpse of Alexander from its hearse as it was transported from Babylon to Macedon.¹⁷³ In this sense, we see the ascendance of Alexander's physical and mortal power to the symbolic power that could be

¹⁷¹ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 26

¹⁷² Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander* 10.X.9

¹⁷³ Aelian, *Historical Miscellany* 12.64

transferred to others. Regarding Ptolemy, by burying the body of Alexander there is a symbolic transference of power through the assumption that lineage is created over burial rites. When outlining the pre-establishment and beginning of the Ptolemaic rule it becomes apparent how knowledge lacks significance and seems completely absent from the historical narrative at this point. When we look to the beginning of the establishment of the Ptolemaic rule it becomes vastly apparent how power is the driving force behind Ptolemy's actions: the power of a ruler compared to that of a governor and the power of what Alexander's corpse symbolises.¹⁷⁴ However, it should be made clear that the Ptolemaic line was not instantly stabilized by this act. It was frankly the opposite, as culturally Alexandria seemed to hold little of its own and could not compare to its Mediterranean counterparts who were rich in culture as well as influence. Therefore, the initial Ptolemaic Pharaohs had to establish a way in which to tie back to their Greek heritage, thus leading to the creation of the Library of Alexandria.¹⁷⁵

After the Ptolemies had inserted themselves into power, it was vastly apparent the cultural void that existed within their society, one created by Alexandria being a newer city in comparison to its older and more established Mediterranean counterparts. To fill this void Ptolemy I sought to establish Hellenistic tradition and connect themselves to the wider Mediterranean basin. This was particularly established through the construction of libraries, buildings which have often symbolized the prestige and power of the city and its subsequent ruler.¹⁷⁶ In a literal sense, it seems that power in the ancient world was associated with knowledge best explained through the idea that knowledge has financial repercussions. This means that significant investments are needed in the building process of a library and the collection of books, therefore, only the wealthy could establish such institutions due to the financial necessities. The Hellenistic tradition that libraries evoked enabled those of Greek heritage, either having migrated or simply inhabiting Alexandria, to reconnect individuals to their culture which had been fragmented in the geographical shift.¹⁷⁷

In addition to this, as discussed by Turner, the ruling elite of the city were solely ethnic Greeks. Therefore, from a political perspective, it is logical to provide comfort to those who have the wealth to fund such traditions and other areas of the Ptolemaic rule, such as the taxation that funded the royal household.¹⁷⁸ However, this is not to insinuate that it was a Ptolemaic idea, instead as Baine offers, the elite also continued 'Greek language and traditions'.¹⁷⁹ Here it could be seen that Alexandria became an extension of Greece, which does not seem illogical when those who had the funds helped to carve out the identity of the city.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, the Library becomes a symbol of how knowledge and power were interlinked within the city. Through the idea that Ptolemy utilised what knowledge symbolised, prestige and Greek culture, to help aid in building his power. This meant being recognised by not only other cities

¹⁷⁴ O'Connor (2009) 44

¹⁷⁵ Attar (2014) 29

¹⁷⁶ Thompson (1994) 67

¹⁷⁷ Berti and Costa (2010) 5

¹⁷⁸ Turner (2021) 7

¹⁷⁹ Turner (2021) 7

¹⁸⁰ Erskine (1995) 42

within the Mediterranean but by the people within his city, those whom he would need when political situations would occur, such as war. Therefore, the establishment of the city, the physical symbol of intellect enables culture thus enabling power.

Once Alexandria had become more established in its position, both culturally and in the pharaonic position, the Library of Alexandria did not lose its prominence within ancient Alexandria. Instead, it appears the opposite occurred as the Library of Alexandria became more established and its collection grew, the importance only seemed to increase. Therefore, it could be understood that if adopting a balancing metaphor, knowledge began to outweigh power within ancient Alexandria. This is explicitly expressed when discussing the volumes of the library, which has become the most prominent discussion within the topic of the library and how it operates. This is because the volume of the library was prone to exaggeration to demonstrate the power of the Ptolemies at this time. It is within Tzetzes where we are given the number of '42,800 in the outer library and '400,00 mixed rolls and 90,000 rolls of single authors' in the palace.¹⁸¹ A similar hyperbolism is given in the *Letter of Aristeas* in which it is remarked that 'more than two hundred thousand' papyri comprised the library's collection.¹⁸² Yet this is not the largest estimation given as Epiphanius writes of a collection of sum 'fifty-four thousand eight hundred books'.¹⁸³ However, due to the existence of the library, or lack thereof, the number of papyri within the Library of Alexandria is highly speculative and must be treated with scepticism.

This is an important note, especially when understanding that throughout the study of the library and this area, in particular, the number of books given by ancient sources has rarely been criticised and often accepted. Tzetzes himself was writing in the twelfth century, therefore he cannot have such knowledge of the library's contents when he physically could not have been alive to witness it. He may, more understandably, have been responding to the numbers given by Epiphanius but a similar problem is raised. This being *Weights and Measures* was written 500 years later, long after the Library of Alexandria had been destroyed. The *Letter of Aristeas* is the only one that was written during the time frame for the author to have had a first-hand experience. Yet, this should not be taken for credibility and lack of bias, noting this letter has often been noted for its historical inaccuracies.¹⁸⁴ Within modern scholarly literature, these approximations have begun to be treated with warranted scepticism with Bagnall especially coming to mind with his critiquing of Tzetzes.¹⁸⁵ Yet, whilst this area should be treated with the utmost scepticism, it is imperative to note that it is not the literal number of books that is the most important but rather what the hyperbolism represents.

The hyperbolic approach to the Library of Alexandria's collection demonstrates the deep rooted connection between knowledge and power within ancient Alexandria. By

¹⁸¹ Tzetzes, *Prolegomena de comoedia Ariophanis Proemium*; II.4

¹⁸² *Letter of Aristeas*; 9-10

¹⁸³ Epiphanius, *Weights and Measures*; 9

¹⁸⁴ De Crom (2021) 2

¹⁸⁵ Bagnall (2002) 349

overstating how many books were within the library the city was able to demonstrate the vast amount of knowledge they had. This specifically refers to the concept of the universal library, which is a library consisting of all known existing knowledge. Moreover, this seems to refer to the concept of Hellenistic tradition, as through the Ptolemies increasing funds for their collection and expanding their library they are thus increasing their prestige by Hellenistic standards. Furthermore, the intellect established by the library continues to consolidate the identity that they had begun with the establishment of the library.¹⁸⁶ This means that the library consolidated culture and thus power as the two are inextricably tied. The power of the city, or the Ptolemies, provides wealth which then goes on to fund the library thus furthering their knowledge. Which furthered their power due to the Hellenistic tradition adopted by the Ptolemies. Therefore, it does not seem like one mattered more than the other but rather that there seems to be a cycle in effect, from power to knowledge to power.

The final overall manifestation of knowledge and power, and the way the two are interconnected, can be found when the cycle is broken when the Library of Alexandria began to decline. Within scholarly literature, the decline of the Library of Alexandria has often been regarded as a consequence of two factors: a lack of interest in the library and the decline of Ptolemaic power within Egypt during the second to first century BCE.¹⁸⁷ This, again, is another area that highly involves scholarly debate, as, just like the establishment of the library, we have no concrete evidence of the decline of Alexandria. Therefore, we are left to hypothesise in a highly speculative area thus what is discussed should be done so with caution. With that being said, it is commonly accepted amongst scholars that the physical destruction of the Library of Alexandria occurred during Caesar's besiegement within Alexandria. This was after supporting the insertion of Cleopatra VII to the Ptolemaic throne, surpassing her brother. It was commonly said that to prevent the Ptolemies from reaching areas of the city, Caesar created a barrier of flame, but this fire spread out of control and destroyed the library.¹⁸⁸

However, this narrative is problematic in its own right as although the technique of fire as a way to divide was a military technique of the time, this is not the last time that the Library of Alexandria is written of, as it is still operational during the Domitian rule.¹⁸⁹ So, it is believed that although a fire was utilised it did not destroy the library.¹⁹⁰ This is just one of many stories that have been purported, each being problematic individually and in conjunction with another because to believe one is to disbelieve another due to the disconnecting ideas said regarding the destruction. However, scholars such as Schironi have purported the idea that it was long before this physical destruction that the library was facing a destruction of sorts. This refers to the decline of the overall importance of the Library within the Ptolemaic rule. Schironi, 2019, suggests that within the second century BCE, the later Ptolemies

¹⁸⁶ Schironi (2019) 4

¹⁸⁷ Schironi (2019) 16-17

¹⁸⁸ Plutarch, *Life of Caesar*; 49

¹⁸⁹ Suetonius, *Domitian*; 20

¹⁹⁰ Bagnall (2002) 357

began to lose interest in the institution and as a result, it began to lose its standing as an academic institution.¹⁹¹ Suggesting that knowledge, symbolised by the physical

embodiment of the library, was only important due to the beliefs and motifs of the earlier Ptolemies. Therefore, once the motives and personal values of the rulers had changed the library was to face irreversible damage.

However, this decline was not just an accumulation of individualistic values of the later Ptolemies. Instead, it must also be taken into regard the historical and political climate that the decline of the Library of Alexandria was situated within. Within the mid-second century BCE, conflict arose over the throne after Ptolemy VI, Philometer had died in Palestine and Ptolemy VII, Euergetes II presented himself as a contender for the position of Pharaoh.¹⁹² Therefore, with the monarchical position under threat, interest had to be placed in other areas to preserve power. This is because there was not the issue of cultural capital or identity, but instead a conflict of succession. Therefore, it seems Schironi's hypothesis becomes most logical after having understood the historical events occurring within the second century BCE which would have led to such a decline. Yet, this was only the beginning as the ever-growing Roman power had meant that Egypt's had begun to diminish. This is perhaps best illustrated during the Caesarion destruction story mentioned above when the library was burnt due the Roman involvement in Greek affairs. It seems instead that the burning becomes a grave marker of Alexandria, symbolising the death of what once was, both the shift in Ptolemaic power and interest as well as the Library of Alexandria as an academic institution.

To conclude, whilst we have little evidence that may accurately represent the ancient Alexandrians' attitude to what mattered most within their society, knowledge or power. It would not be illogical to think that the two are intrinsically and explicitly linked within the evidence we do have. That being that the establishment of the library following Hellenistic tradition purports the ideology that knowledge equals power. By utilising such traditions, the early Ptolemies were able to stabilise their position by connecting to the Greek heritage of Alexandria's past, through Alexander the Great, as well as the elite class, who were predominantly of Greek descent. It seems here that knowledge purported power. Once the Ptolemaic dynasty was stabilised, we can see how power purports knowledge through the acquisition of papyri. Although this has often been a subject of hyperbolism, it becomes apparent how important knowledge came to be. This is through its ability to project the characteristics of wealth by being able to afford such physical emblems of knowledge. Finally, it is within the decline of Alexandria where we see the grand finale of power and knowledge and power, as without the other it seems that they cannot exist. Therefore, we can see through institutions such as the library, how traditions are connected to knowledge aided in power. Moreover, whilst it could have been argued that knowledge is a by-product of a need or want for power, it is also shown how knowledge itself was highly valued and could create power itself.

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¹⁹¹ Schironi (2019) 16-17

¹⁹² Bevan (1985) 306

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Sappho the lesbian Lesbian and Anne Carson's *If not, winter: fragments of Sappho*

Introduction

The poetry of Sappho has become synonymous with lesbianism in recent times, with the translation by Anne Carson permitting such a reading through the careful, neutral translation of her fragments. This understanding is an emotionally charged one, especially with regard to the history of queer erasure surrounding her poetic reception. Answering why Sappho the lesbian Lesbian matters is no simple feat: the visceral response is oftentimes an emotional one, which is not hugely persuasive in scholarly spheres, however this element of the poetry must be relevant to the interpretive framework that the more stringently academic exploration will follow. Ella Haselswerdt explores the emotional impact of a lesbian, or not lesbian Sappho in the work entitles “Re-Queering Sappho”¹⁹³, “Why did I care so deeply? Why do I so badly want a female Sappho? And why do I so badly want a lesbian Sappho?”¹⁹⁴ My own answer to this question would be as such — looking back through centuries of a literary canon and academic structure ruthlessly dominated by men and irreparably marred by the patriarchal heteronormative agenda, and seeing a woman who was, against all odds, a lover of other women, with such exquisite portrayal of this love, is beautiful. This idea, or desire, does not hold up against any scholarly investigation, yet it underpins most every argument for or against a lesbian Sappho: classical receptions are necessarily biased, moreover one charged with such emotion seems fraught, but this is not grounds for dismissal. I will endeavour to present an exploration of Sappho the lesbian Lesbian¹⁹⁵ which supports her as lesbian through the lens of intersectional reception theories, biographical and social context for Sappho, and exploration of the erotic lyric genre and evidence for female homosexuality in ancient Greece. An understanding of the history of Sappho’s reception, and the queer erasure and misappropriation that this entailed is also necessary for an exploration of a lesbian Sappho. Finally an analysis of the translation of Sappho’s poetry by Anne Carson¹⁹⁶, as one presented with a refreshing neutrality, widening the scope for interpretation, shedding many of the homophobic, patriarchally marred receptions of the poet.

Of course, as with any assertion regarding the ancient world, there is the caveat of the inescapable *not-knowing*, the impossibility of certainty regarding a society so distant from our own and handed down to us in tantalising fragments. The conclusion that Sappho was certainly a lesbian is impossible, in just the same was as knowing who Homer the individual was, or whether Aspasia truly loved Pericles is. What is endowed to us is a twisted history of mistranslation and misappropriation that it is paramount the scholar resists — an intersectional classics outside of the

¹⁹³ Haselswerdt, *Re-Queering Sappho*.

¹⁹⁴ Haselswerdt, *Re-Queering Sappho*.

¹⁹⁵ Here, ‘lesbian’ refers to the sexuality, whilst the capitalised “Lesbian” refers to the condition of being from Lesbos.

¹⁹⁶ Carson (2002).

norm, or at the extreme edges¹⁹⁷ is essential. The scholar must be aware of the privilege of certain groups throughout history which still affects, in a rather insidious way, perceptions of the ancient world.

A disclaimer is necessary pertaining to the definition of the term lesbian, which is in many spheres contentious, so for the purposes of this essay I will use the term lesbian to refer to women who loves other women with an acknowledgement of the complexity of these terms.

Reception theory

Martindale explores reception through what can be broadly described as a rejection of positivism, presentism and historicism, seeking instead some mediated middle ground, citing that “part of the potential virtue of receptions is a commitment to pluralism.”¹⁹⁸ Here, perhaps our ontologies diverge, since I would not necessarily find value in a historical reception based not on fact but on some past act of presentism. The understanding of Sappho by Wilamowitz¹⁹⁹, for example (which will be explored further in the third segment of this essay) is an example of absurdly blatant presentism with little to no regard for the actual evidence surrounding the ancient poet. To Martindale, it seems that the commitment to pluralism necessitates the inclusion and consideration of all past receptions. However, it may well appear more reasonable to dismiss such interpretations as that of Wilamowitz²⁰⁰, not from academic consideration entirely (it is entirely relevant in explorations of Victorian reception), but at least from academic discussions surrounding the reality of Sappho. In his brief reference to Sappho, Martindale concludes his discussion of popular attitudes towards the poet with the sweeping statement “Whatever the case in Archaic Lesbos, the certainty is that Sappho is now a lesbian.”²⁰¹ This statement chimes as extremely reductive. As parts of classics move into the mainstream, constructions of these certain elements of antiquity (to name a few, the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, Homer as an individual author, Sappho as a lesbian) become absolutes colloquially; part of the issue Richardson calls to mind in his work on reception, “Classics *in extremis*”²⁰² concerning what constitutes classicism in that elitist institutions are not accessible to all, and yet municipal understandings of the ancient world frequently deal in unrealistic absolutes which lack the nuance developed through formal study. In fact, this more widespread reception of Sappho as definitively a lesbian could reasonably be called presentism, however it may not warrant the mocking tone Martindale employs, and more significantly does not undermine the wholly separate academic inquiry into a lesbian Sappho, especially through the models of scholars such as Richardson and Hardwick, concerned with emphasising previously marginalised groups within the discipline of classics. Martindale also questions how one might know when some original artefact is discovered through removing “anachronisms.”²⁰³ The answer is that one cannot.

¹⁹⁷ Richardson (2019).

¹⁹⁸ Martindale (2006), 11.

¹⁹⁹ Parker (1993), 313.

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*

²⁰¹ Martindale (2006), 12.

²⁰² Richardson (2019).

²⁰³ Martindale (2006), 12.

However this sort of dismissive thinking by groups well represented in the history of classical study (like Martindale) unfairly closes opportunities for critical study of the motivations of the most dominant ideas within classics by similar individuals, who have didactically ruled intellectual culture and misappropriated the lives and works of individuals who did not precisely reflect their values. Those examples of such blatant and crude presentism (in Wilamowitz's "Sappho Schoolmistress"²⁰⁴ for example) should not continue to influence contemporary understandings of, here, Sappho, when an increasingly tolerant society with increasingly accessible annals for formal classical study widens the scope of reception in such a wonderful way. This is not to dismiss the work of Martindale on receptions, or to impose upon him some responsibility for the historical repression of views outside the mainstream, but is only to highlight the elements of his work that may in fact themselves dismiss the work of scholars moving towards an inclusive study of what classics has been. Page DuBois, in the introduction of her extensive work on Sappho's reception "Sappho is Burning"²⁰⁵ encapsulates quite succinctly and accurately the work of a classicist in rejecting the heteropatriarchal understanding of the poet which has dominated the classical canon — particularly since the Victorian era — which is to find that balance in between Martindale's so hated presentism and historicism: to work to "not obliterate their otherness while still allowing for the possibility of communication."²⁰⁶ Sappho is entirely other, in a fundamental and undeniable way: a woman of Lesbos who lived and wrote for her lyre more than 25 centuries ago, who invented the plectrum²⁰⁷, who wrote poems which survive to us on scraps of papyrus and in the writing of ancient male writers; and yet through her work she speaks to individuals in the 21st century in the most profound, personal, ecstatic, exquisitely painful way. A group oppressed within a group oppressed — queer women — who seek and have sought *people like us* for centuries, find in Sappho a reflection, distorted through the kaleidoscope of history, but *like us* nonetheless. As put by DuBois, "Sappho's voice presents a powerful challenge to what has often been seen as a monolithically phallic economy"²⁰⁸ with Carson's translation allowing these more diverse concepts to flourish.

Sappho's context

Sappho wrote in the lyric genre in Archaic Greece on the isle of Lesbos where she lived, a cultural and literary context so far removed from today that it seems almost mythic. Very little is known about the society in which Sappho existed, however it is pertinent to establish as much of a framework as is possible within which to understand her work as a poet and as a woman.

Freeman, in his work "Searching for Sappho"²⁰⁹, compiles as much information as is extant concerning the poet's biography: she was from an aristocratic background, was married, had a daughter and was at some point in her life exiled to Sicily.²¹⁰ Moreover, Freeman also mentions the "tremendous intellectual, social and

²⁰⁴ Parker (1993), 313.

²⁰⁵ DuBois (1995).

²⁰⁶ DuBois (1995), x.

²⁰⁷ Freeman (2016), xi.

²⁰⁸ DuBois (1995), 11.

²⁰⁹ Freeman (2016).

²¹⁰ Freeman (2016), xvii.

commercial”²¹¹ upheaval which coincided with Sappho’s life in the seventh and early sixth centuries BCE. The issue with constructing a biography for Sappho is that of the slippery slope from inferences into fanciful receptions. As DuBois understands it, “Many have attempted to construct biographies on these magnificent ruins, to invent reassuring narratives of teaching, motherhood, heterosexuality... such narratives are based on little evidence, on projections based on her poetry, on the accounts of poets and writers who wrote hundred of years after Sappho’s death.”²¹² An acceptance of what is *not known* seems to be more productive than inferences based on what scant evidence is.

Lyric poetry has been more recently posited as a method of socio-political criticism and consequently a great deal of contemporary scholarship aims to “analyse and interpret this critique, particularly in terms of sexuality.”²¹³ There is then an uncontested erotic theme within Archaic lyric poetry, evident in the works of male poets whose works have been more successfully transmitted, and so the claim that Sappho’s work contains sexual content could not be convincingly contested. The potential political charge is significant in terms of the framework in which one can situate Sappho’s poetry, however, as put by Rawles and Natoli in their work on Erotic Lyric and Sappho specifically, “the procedure involves combining evidence from the fragments with (selected) testimony and comparison with phenomena elsewhere.”²¹⁴ This is not to imply that these endeavours are not important, considering quite how little of Sappho’s work and biography is extant, contextual evidence seems vital to create a framework within which to situate the poet, however the poetry we have seems the most important evidence. In this way Carson’s translation does not disregard potential framework, but chooses to centre the actual words of the poet and allows for various interpretations.

The issue that is frequently taken historically — and indeed contemporarily — is the notion that female homosexuality or lesbianism is a modern phenomena. Further exploration within Section 4 on receptions explores semantic issues in greater depth, however here in order to establish some context for female homosexuality I would refer to the writing of Plato. In his *Symposium*, he refers to women with no interest in men, and love only for women, since before Zeus wrent in twain the threatening four limbed human there were indeed beings composed of two women, and well as one man and one woman, and two men.²¹⁵ From this it is possible to infer that the notion of female homosexuality was familiar, at least to Plato, and was perceived to be in some way natural, since it was part of the original condition of humanity.

Reception history

The history of misinterpretation and misappropriation which Sappho has endured from the very ancient to the very modern has created a scholarly canon that is deeply biased, and is often taken as fact when in actuality a great deal of it is fiction (or at

²¹¹ Freeman (2016), xvii.

²¹² DuBois (1995), 3-4.

²¹³ Rawles and Natoli (2014), 343.

²¹⁴ Rawles and Natoli (2014), 343.

²¹⁵ Plato, *Symposium*.

least basic presentism) — “The accumulation of assumptions [legacies of receptions taken without critical thought] is millennia deep and includes Greek comedies, Italian novels, and French pornography.”²¹⁶ One of the most pernicious, and perhaps well known constructions, is that of Wilamowitz, and his “Sappho Schoolmistress.”²¹⁷ The Victorian classicist’s endeavours to present an interpretation of Sappho and her works in such a way as to dismiss any inkling of homosexuality, following in the footsteps of Muller and Gottlieb Welcker²¹⁸ through their presentation of the poet as a teacher. In this way, Wilamowitz transposes a Victorian system onto Archaic Greece based on the three percent of Sappho’s work which reaches us. Wilamowitz also changes the pronouns within Sappho’s most overtly homoerotic fragments to male, constructing heterosexuality²¹⁹ — this is perhaps his most brazen act of manipulation and fabrication concerning his reception of Sappho, not only asserting a differing interpretation but changing the very nature of what little remains of the poet. Wilamowitz’s reception is a blatant example of presentism, and yet has cemented itself in the mainstream understandings of Sappho²²⁰ through his mistranslation of the texts and application of Victorian morality to the ancient world. Parker’s work demonstrates the absurdity, and the weak nature, of this interpretation and the legacy it endowed, one “familiar to feminists: the wholesale restructuring of female sexuality and society on the model of male sexuality and society.”²²¹

More modern receptions are not necessarily perfect in terms of progression. Though there exists an acknowledgement of the existence of same-sex female attraction, there nonetheless appears to be an ingrained reluctance to apply the term *lesbian* to any ancients — “scholars of ancient sexuality have been emphasising for more than twenty years that modern categories of sexuality do not match those of the ancient world.”²²² However, I would maintain that the issue with the retrospective application of more modern terms to refer to ancient sexuality is exclusively applied to the term *lesbian* by Boehringer, and as such the complaint is both entirely semantic and moreover is inconsistent. *Homosexuality*, *homoerotic* and *pederasty* (the latter applied to men and young boys whom they pursued) for example, are modern terms describing what Boehringer’s logic should therefore find to be a modern phenomena, and yet these terms are liberally applied to the sexual categories and acts of the ancient world, with all of these used by Boehringer herself. The author also refers to the geographical meaning of the term *Lesbian*, though this is specious — words can have the same etymological root and diverge on meaning, the differentiation between the two is *Lesbian* (from Lesbos) is capitalised and *lesbian* (homosexual) uses lowercase. A different historical use for the term *lesbian*, or *lesbianism*, is hardly relevant to Sappho, who would not have known the term either way, as these more recent reception scholars are so eager to point out. Boehringer’s next, quite bizarre, assertion is that the very concept of female homosexuality has not existed for more than 120 years.²²³ There is a notable absence of intersectional or

²¹⁶ Parker (1993), 312.

²¹⁷ Parker (1993), 313.

²¹⁸ Parker (1993), 313.

²¹⁹ Kamil, *I Shall* — #\$\$% You And *@\$# You.

²²⁰ Parker (1993), 313-8.

²²¹ Parker (1993), 322.

²²² Boehringer (2014), 154.

²²³ Boehringer (2014), 154.

critical thought about historic language demonstrated in this assertion, as well as a misunderstanding of marginalised groups and the basely fluctuating nature of language which simply does not mean that certain categories of people, here queer women, did not exist. An absence of widely known language is not important, the impossibility of having an ancient term for *lesbian* transmitted from the Archaic or even a later classical time, a word which would concern only a particularly marginalised group of women, when the scant evidence of Sappho's work comes from the lines men felt worth writing down, is clear. Boehringer's insistence on using terms such as "female homoeroticism"²²⁴ as opposed to *lesbian* betray the semantic nature of her argument.

The work of Boehringer demonstrates the general scholarly disposition to Sappho's work, thereby demonstrating the difficulty in establishing an ancient queer context. Ironically, Boehringer's critique is (in its colloquial sense) archaic, as put by Haselswerdt — a classicist who receives Sappho as a queer woman — "These critiques betray a narrow and masculine misunderstanding of the nature of queer female erotics, a condescending assumption of naïveté about the nature of identity and identification, and the uncritical transmission of the deeply misogynist ancient reception of the Poetess."²²⁵ In efforts to counteract presentism, Boehringer only manages to track a strange path, one foot with Wilamowitz and one with Haselswerdt (in her admittance of "female homoeroticism"²²⁶). Receptions of Sappho by more queer-positive classicists, such as Haselswerdt and saliently here Carson, allow for this lesbian Sappho, though arguably in disparate ways.

Carson's work is, foremost, an act of translation as opposed to interpretation or reception. From the faith to the language and form (insofar as form can be retained in such fragmentary poetry), to the temporal gaps and brackets to indicate where the poems have not survived. In her introduction to the translation Carson emphasises her desire to present as inherently unbiased a translation as possible, perhaps to remove her work from the viscous contention surrounding Sappho's sexuality and centre instead the faithful translation of the poets work: "I like to think that, the more I stand out of the way, the more Sappho shows through."²²⁷ This deceptively simple act of reexamination and rejection of these past receptions which muddy the waters, obscuring elements of Sappho's work and restricting interpretation, serves to allow for a fresher study of the poet, where the scholar is free to conclude with Sappho the lesbian Lesbian, or indeed not.

Anne Carson's Sappho

Carson does not necessarily posit a queer Sappho, aside from her brief allusion to sexuality in her introduction — "It seems that she knew and loved women as deeply as she did music"²²⁸ — there is not a great deal of time given over to such discussions, an obvious departure from the work of Victorian translators, for example. This neutrality (with this term applied with an understanding of the necessarily biased

²²⁴ Boehringer (2014), 156.

²²⁵ Haselswerdt, *Re-Queering Sappho*.

²²⁶ *ibid.*

²²⁷ Carson (2002), x.

²²⁸ Carson (2002), x.

understandings that comprise translations, from the dictionaries consulted to the unconscious biases of the translator) creates a less contorted Sappho than previous translations have allowed.

Fragment 94²²⁹ is an intensely personal poem, for though it is written in the first person in the lyric tradition, Sappho also employs speech in this lamentation for what seems to be a retrospective on lovers parting ways. The emotional impact of the poem is clear from the first two lines we have (though the beginning of the work is lost²³⁰), describing the anguish of both Sappho and the woman who leaves her, though it is not known what for.

*I simply want to be dead.
Weeping she left me*

Use of the term *O'* in the following line, a term used most frequently in Homeric epic to invoke a god demonstrates the intensity of feeling that these women share. That the person Sappho is speaking of is a woman seems undeniable, through both the feminine gender of the ancient greek employed consistently through the poem, and through the description of the woman.

*and many woven garlands
made of flowers
around your soft throat
And with sweet oil
costly
you anointed yourself*

These actions are unmistakably feminine, with such evocative language once more denoting the intensity and delicacy of emotion between the women, whilst contrasting the wilder emotions that begin the fragment. The poem becomes erotic, perhaps combining these two seemingly disparate emotions into one, passionate act.

*and on a soft bed
delicate
you would let loose your longing*

There is no mistaking the nature of this relationship which Sappho so artfully reconstructs. Carson's translations make space for Sappho herself to be self evident, widening the channels of conventional reception and loosing the poet from the weight of misappropriation and fiction in reception. Fragment 1²³¹ contains similar themes, with a lovelorn Sappho invoking Aphrodite, goddess of love, for help.

*Deathless Aphrodite of the spangled mind,
child of Zeus, who twists lures, I beg you
do not break with hard pains,*

²²⁹ Carson (2002), 185-6.

²³⁰ Carson (2002), 370.

²³¹ Carson (2002), 3-4.

Once more there seems little space for a platonic interpretation of this poem, and with the ancient Greek feminine employed for the subject, as well as significant inversions and altogether abandonment of gender roles within romantic pursuits, there is an inescapable connotation of lesbianism.

*Who, O
Sappho, is wronging you?
For if she flees, soon she will pursue.
If she refuses gifts, rather will she give them.
If she does not love, soon she will love
even unwilling.*

Aphrodite's response to Sappho inverts the gender norms of a courtship, whereby women are pursued by men, and instead sees both women adopt both roles in turn, and indeed invert the very genders concerned within the courtship. Once more it appears that Sappho, as presented by Carson, is inescapably a lesbian. Whether analysis of the poems content as heterosexual is viable or not, the fact still remains that in the tragic fragmentation of Sappho's life and works, what reaches the twenty first century is not enough to assert a definitively lesbian Sappho. All is not lost, however, since this fragmentation is not only a loss but an invitation. It is tantalising, Fragment 36²³² for example says only:

I long and seek after

Who or what might Sappho have been seeking? What might she have been longing for? The possibility for imagining what more there might have been is not necessarily only frustrating, it could also be exciting, through succumbing to this temptation of imagination. Haselswerdt describes this inclination wonderfully in their article on queer Sappho, "Rather than identification with an imagined biography, I find in Sappho an ethical, aesthetic, and affective complex that is meaningfully familiar. Softness and abundance, beautiful textiles, blossoms, overripe sweet apples, the flash image of a woman's ankle — Sappho's fragments show us *eros* and pleasure for their own sake, not as an exchange of property, the exploitation of one for the sake of the other, or in order to achieve virtue in the eyes of a moralising philosopher like Plato or Aristotle."²³³

Haselswerdt captures so articulately what draws queer women to the poetry of Sappho, initially because there is overtly lesbian content from millennia ago, and laterally because the presentation of lesbianism is quite so exquisite.

Conclusion

The history of Sappho's reception demonstrates a common theme amongst the work of ancient writers who did not fit sociopolitical criteria of the receiving group or individual. Though these bastardisations certainly warp perceptions and become

²³² Carson (2002), 73.

²³³ Haselswerdt, *Re-Queering Sappho*.

adopted uncritically into their canon, recent reception theories in the work of Richardson, Hardwick, Stray and Martindale bring an understanding of the need for reexamination of the marginalised voices in classics, including Sappho's. Although it is not possible, nor would it be sound or productive, to posit a lesbian Sappho, through Anne Carson's accurate, nuanced translations of the ancient poets poetry, I would offer a Sappho who is entirely removed from Wilamowitz's, or Boehringer's, or any classicist who has attempted to sloppily apply heteronormative tradition onto Sappho. Intersectional thought about the transmission and historic misappropriation of Sappho is truly integral to fully comprehending and rejecting just why these previous receptions are quite so damaging, and why Sappho the lesbian Lesbian is such an important, and viable, reality.

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Whose account of Cleopatra VII, if any, can we trust?

Introduction:

No account contemporary account of Cleopatra VII (69-30BCE) is to be fully trusted. Although work from contemporary writers such as Virgil and Horace or even the ways in which Cleopatra presented herself may give us some indications as to her true actions, beliefs, traits or nature – this essay will argue that ultimately the closest we can get to any indicated depiction of Cleopatra that can be trusted is through the P-25-239 Berlin papyrus she is thought likely to have signed with her own hand in 33BCE.

Notable for her infamous interactions with Rome – namely through her professional and personal relations with Julius Caesar (100-44BCE) and Mark Antony (83-30BCE), Cleopatra is exploited both in her the presentations of her immediately after her death and in her attributed literary legacy through the work of 1st century BCE Roman poets, who often belittled her nature and power in contrast to that of Rome and its traditional values for the purpose of exemplifying the victory or nature of Octavian (later called Caesar Augustus) and Rome itself.²³⁴ In such contemporary work and that of later antiquity, the portrayal of Cleopatra is complex yet salacious and overall enclosed in a defamatory tone – though this is useful to ascertain how these writers, their society and their rulers wished to see her portrayed. In contrast, the way Cleopatra presents herself in reliefs and coins denotes a powerful and politically-minded woman ruling Egypt with prowess – this is useful to ascertain what Cleopatra wanted to be viewed as in the presentation of herself she wanted people to subscribe to. Although in this way, the auto-biographical presentations Cleopatra created still augment reality to some extent, one which is difficult to determine, therefore the functional and administratively private nature and purpose of administrative documents that we believed her to have signed with her own hand allows us to infer a presentation of Cleopatra that is much freer from intentional shaping or bias. Though this work still relies on our own inference that – as fairly argued by Martindale 1993 – is not free from the “chain of receptions” we have inherited through our education or societally-influenced assumptions,²³⁵ I believe that evidence which was created with such a private, functional purpose allows us to get as close as we can to a trustworthy account of the woman behind the fabled name of Cleopatra VII.

Accounts from contemporary writers:

Even accounts provided by contemporary Roman writers such as Virgil (70-19BCE) and Horace (65-8BCE) are never trustworthy in portraying what can be accepted as a wholly reliable presentation of Cleopatra. This section will look at what impression

²³⁴ Diana E. E. Kleiner, “*Cleopatra and Rome*” (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2009. <https://doi-org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/10.4159/9780674039667>) 2

²³⁵ Charles. Martindale, “*Redeeming the Text : Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception*” (Cambridge ;: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 7

their depictions of Cleopatra create, then discuss theories that will provide context for what agenda the author was approaching his description of Cleopatra with and why this is significant in reducing the reliability of the account overall.

Virgil is wholly undermining of Cleopatra's power in Book 8 of his *Aeneid* (written and published between 29-19BCE); with the lines "on the other side with barbarous arms and a motely array, Antony returned... [he] brought Egypt into battle... while (for shame!) an Egyptian wife followed behind"²³⁶, Virgil not only removes agency from Cleopatra by attributing her criticised and othered forces to Antony and refusing to refer to her by name, thus suggesting her insignificance, but further depicts her implied weakness by suggesting that she could not provide anything useful (like worthy troops or resources) for her and Antony's side of the battle – in contrast to the powerfully depicted forces under Octavian. The fact that Cleopatra is portrayed as trailing behind Antony here also suggests that Antony is, or at least should certainly be, ashamed of his association with her and implies that she is cowardly and not equal in power or authority to Antony – an idea disproved by the equal portrayal of Antony and Cleopatra together in the material record of recovered coinage from this time.

These belittling ideas are furthered in Horace's subsequent description of the Battle of Actium in his *Odes* 1.37 (23-13BCE) - "that queen was plotting demented ruin for the Capitol, planning our empire's funeral rites....diseased by vice, herself without restraint in hoping for what she fancied and drunk with fortune's sweetness".²³⁷ With hindsight, these ideas seem somewhat ironic as although Cleopatra did benefit from the support in political autonomy and vantage by the Roman Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, it was the Romans who hoped to benefit from the collapse of Cleopatra's power in order to expand their empire, influence and acquire resources – rather than it being the ambition of Cleopatra to go further than defending her land by destroying Rome itself.²³⁸ Furthermore, by portraying Cleopatra as lacking self-control in her drinking, Horace presents her as one enjoying opulence to excess, implying the right of Rome to take and redistribute the excess of resources while also undermining her decision-making ability and position as a ruler by depicting her not behaving in moderation or in an appropriate way. Though Horace also takes a slightly different approach to Virgil – he recognises that she possesses some degree of (characteristically disruptive) power by suggesting that she is a threat or at least wishes to endanger and make threat to Rome itself; by doing this, Horace by implication portrays Octavian as Rome's saviour. In relation to this, Lowrie's (2007) interpretation - "in *Odes* 1.37, the omission of Antony and the focus on Cleopatra presents the battle of Actium as a foreign war"²³⁹ - is highly persuasive; Horace's decision to align with propaganda in favour of Octavian here in promoting Actium as a foreign conflict against Cleopatra rather than a civil war against Antony helps to support and preserve Octavian's standing – it suggests that Octavian is a bringing of

²³⁶ Virgil *Aeneid* 8.675-7B [LACTOR]

²³⁷ Horace's *Odes* 1.37, MGL, Cooley, (ed.), Wilson, WJG (trans.), "*LACTOR 17: the Age of Augustus*" (London: London Association of Classical Teachers, 2013)

²³⁸ Francine. Prose, "*Cleopatra: Her History, Her Myth*" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022) 8-9

²³⁹ Michèle. Lowrie, "*Horace and Augustus*." Chapter. In *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, edited by Stephen Harrison, 77–90. Cambridge Companions to Literature. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. doi:10.1017/CCOL0521830028.007) 82

stability and safety to Rome rather than being someone who is perpetuating Rome's civil wars. This would have been important in flattering and useful for Octavian (soon to be Augustus) as after Actium, he still needed to establish his own power fully in Rome and this approach also helped to avoid antagonising any of Antony's ongoing sympathisers in Rome to what could become a threatening extent to Octavian's ambitions to rule. These ideas are also relevant in the portrayal of Cleopatra as a prey animal versus Octavian as a predator in *Odes* 1.37, suggesting Octavian was strong in comparison to a weak Cleopatra and indicates the natural nature of Octavian's victory – Octavian thus restoring the natural and social order by putting Cleopatra in her place; this idea of Octavian's civilising Roman force is reiterated by the resolution of the lexical field of drinking in this Ode, Cleopatra is presented in a nobler tone towards the poem's end as Horace has depicted Octavian as civilising her to now drink in moderation at the correct time (as opposed to her uncivilised drinking at the poem's start) – it is appropriate for her to 'drain' or 'drink' the snake poison through her vein which Horace suggests killed her.

These ideas are concurrent with the persuasive argument of Lowrie (2007) who posits that: "intervention in the world of politics is figured as socially dangerous. Caesar can both attack and protect poets, and the remedy is tact. Poetry must be offered... [with the situation it discusses] properly to preclude an adverse reaction".²⁴⁰ In this way and supported by the ideas presented in their work, Virgil and Horace both purport Augustan propagandist ideas in their depiction of Cleopatra as they vie for their patrons' and ultimately Augustus' validation and potential rewards (or alternately, writing in fear of Augustan disapproval and subsequent consequences) by undermining and weakening ideas of Cleopatra and her power, while in doing this better reflect the power, strength and virtue of Rome and thus Octavian. Therefore, as both writers are producing with an agenda that thoroughly influences how they decide to portray Cleopatra, despite the valuable nature of their work in indicating how Octavian wished Cleopatra to be portrayed to the masses after Actium, neither Virgil nor Horace provide trustworthy accounts of Cleopatra.

Autobiographical presentations of Cleopatra:

Another valuable set of evidence to look at when investigating accounts of Cleopatra includes examples of how Cleopatra chose to present herself. Although this removes the presence of Roman bias to a much greater extent, we also must consider that the choices Cleopatra made in presenting herself may not be fully accurate to the reality of what she was actually like - this indeed forming another layer of separation between us and what could be described as an 'accurate' account, however this still provides a useful contrast to contemporary Roman sources and gives us another side to the story of Cleopatra.

Appendix 1 - Relief from the back wall of the temple of Hathor, Dendera. Photography credit: Peter Clayton



²⁴⁰ Lowrie, "Horace and Augustus." Chapter. In *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, 81

This relief from the temple of Hathor at Dendera, down the Nile from Alexandria, was produced sometime during Cleopatra's son Caesarion's lifetime, likely once he became joint ruler with his mother therefore approximately after September 44BCE but certainly before their deaths in 30BCE.²⁴¹ It depicts Caesarion (the only son of Julius Caesar) as the Pharaoh with his mother standing at a comparable size just behind him worshipping the divine Hathor with additional subtle reference to the divine mother-son duo of Isis and Harsomtut.²⁴² By the presentation of Cleopatra worshipping Hathor – a goddess who represented many elements but was often seen as being the divine mother of the Pharaoh – her and her son's divine connection and thus power is highlighted; this is even more potent when considering the Roman context of the posthumous deification of Julius Caesar in 42BCE – presenting Caesarion as the son of two divinely-connected parents, and divine himself as Pharaoh. By commissioning a relief that presents the pair in this way, Cleopatra highlights her extensive understanding of public image and politics, and despite her Macedonian Greek ethnicity, her explicit worship of Egyptian deities here further connects her into the people of the land she rules – this relief would undoubtedly be a striking illustration of Cleopatra's strength, confidence in her lineage, security and power in the face of the Romans who had assumed Egypt as a client state. Her choice to present Caesarion in this way also sends a clear message to onlookers both Egyptian and Roman alike – she maintains a clear connection to their revered leader Julius Caesar who was truly fathered by Caesar, unlike Augustus; although this potentially sets Caesarion up as a direct threat to the ruling ambitions of Octavian, this relief validates and thus elevates the image of Cleopatra and Caesarion as divine-supported monarchs above the rank and status of a Roman man such as Octavian.

Furthermore, Cleopatra's use of coinage during her reign provides a valuable insight into how she wished to present herself.



Alloy coin: GC7 (BMC Greek (Ptolemies)) (123) (5) (123)

²⁴¹ Mary. Hamer, *"Signs of Cleopatra : History, Politics, Representation"* (London: Routledge, 1993), 6-8

²⁴² Ibid.

This coin minted by Cleopatra in the early years of her rule depicts her profile in accordance with the Ptolemaic convention copied from Alexander the Great of presenting the monarch's head, thus also showing Cleopatra linking herself with her ancestor's connection to Alexander.²⁴³ This provides an account of Cleopatra demonstrating her desired associated ethnicity and heritage – the use of coins itself was a Hellenistic tradition, introduced formally to Egypt by Cleopatra's ancestors, the Ptolemies.²⁴⁴ By continuing in this tradition and commissioning a profile Hellenistic in style, similar to images of her Ptolemaic ancestor queen Arsinoe III and featuring a diadem indicating her status as ruler²⁴⁵– Cleopatra asserts herself as Macedonian Greek in ethnicity and associates herself with her direct heritage of nearly 300 years of Ptolemaic rule in Egypt and the implicit political strength of this.

In short, as these artefacts indicate choice from Cleopatra in how to depict herself, I only partially disagree with Roller (2011) that the material culture from Cleopatra's auto-biographical efforts are "some of the most unbiased evidence from Cleopatra's own era"²⁴⁶ – as I will go onto explain, these aforementioned pieces of evidence are undermined in their trustworthiness by their purpose of depicting what Cleopatra chose as her auto-biographical image, therefore evidence that was not meant for public consumption and had a purely administrative function allows us to make closer inferences about Cleopatra, dissipating some of the smoke and mirrors of bias, thus providing a more trustworthy account.

The account created by the Berlin papyrus:

The closest we can currently get to a somewhat trustworthy account of Cleopatra is through the private product of her own hand, produced purely to fulfil internal administrative functional means – namely the P-25-239 papyrus currently held in the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung in Berlin, found in a mummy cartonnage amongst other administrative office documents written in Greek from Alexandria, dating from the reign of Cleopatra and the Augustan period.²⁴⁷ The papyrus, translated by Van Minnen (2000), can be viewed in full in this essay's *Appendix 1*.²⁴⁸

The papyrus is a note inscribed with a royal ordinance, received by part of the Alexandrian administrative body in February 33BCE (two years before the climax of Roman-Egyptian tension in the 31BCE Battle of Actium), which exempts Publius Candidus, his descendants and the residents of his property from paying taxes on a number of interactions – on the annual exportation of up to 10,000 artabas of wheat, the annual importation of up to 5,000 coan amphoras of wine, property tax, land taxes and exemption from contributing financially to military demands to Cleopatra or her successors. The note sets these details out and instructs the administering recipients to inform those implicated of the above concessions; the named recipient

²⁴³ Hamer, "Signs of Cleopatra: History, Politics, Representation", 6-8

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Duane W. Roller, "Cleopatra: A Biography" (Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2011)

²⁴⁷ Peter van. Minnen, "AN OFFICIAL ACT OF CLEOPATRA (WITH A SUBSCRIPTION IN HER OWN HAND)." (Ancient Society 30 (2000): 29–34. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44079804>.) 29

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

of the concessions in question – Publius Candidus – was a key general in Antony’s armed forces. Contrary to Virgil and Horace’s later presentations of Cleopatra’s lack of authority and agency, we can confidently infer Cleopatra’s involvement in the political and military strategy in the years prior to the Battle of Actium. This indicates that Cleopatra was a conscious negotiator, politically-minded and strategic in her decision to generously reward and provide incentive to Candidus for his ongoing loyalty to her and Antony – also demonstrating a cognizant awareness of and sensitivity towards the great personal risk Candidus is taking in choosing to side with her and Antony over Octavian.²⁴⁹

The most significant aspect of the papyrus is the singular word written by one of the three handwriting styles present – the imperative “γινεσθωι” (“make it happen”), which we can confidently ascribe to the hand of Cleopatra. The nature of the note being a royal ordinance, lack of cover letter and simple non-calligraphic letters indicate that it was a direct note from the monarch to their administrative departments.²⁵⁰ The nature of the royal ordinance and her personal signature on it goes to demonstrate the true authority of Cleopatra, despite the belittling legacy left by the Romans - only her assent is needed on this ordinance to bring it into action, highlighting her separation in authority and maintenance in political autonomy from Antony, and also exemplifies that she was the one who controlled Egypt’s resources and made economic decisions such as those regarding taxation.

[Office note:] Received: Year 19 = 4, Mecheir 26

[Address:] To [].

[Text of the royal ordinance:] We have granted to Publius Canidius and his heirs the annual exportation of 10,000 artabas of wheat and the annual importation of 5,000 Coan amphoras of wine without anyone exacting anything in taxes from him or any other expense whatsoever. We have also granted tax exemption on all the land he owns in Egypt on the understanding that he shall not pay any taxes, either to the state account or to the account of me and my children, in any way in perpetuity. We have also granted that all his tenants are exempt from personal liabilities and from taxes without anyone exacting anything from them, not even contributing to the occasional assessments in the nomes or paying for expenses for soldiers or officers. We have also granted that the animals used for plowing and sowing as well as the beasts of burden and the ships used for the transportation (down the Nile) of the wheat are likewise exempt from «personal» liabilities and from taxes and cannot be commandeered. Let it be written to those to whom it may concern, so that knowing it they can act accordingly.

[Subscription by Cleopatra:] Make it happen.

The fact that this note was for purely functional, internal administrative use, thus not requiring alteration in accordance with Cleopatra’s desired public image, frees us from much of the auto-biographical bias that would be present in the

²⁴⁹ Van Minnen, “AN OFFICIAL ACT OF CLEOPATRA (WITH A SUBSCRIPTION IN HER OWN HAND).”, 29-34

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

aforementioned cases of the coins or Dendera relief; this is significant in validating our confidence in the trustworthiness of this source.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, although no contemporary account of Cleopatra is to be fully trusted due to the inherent bias of Roman sources such as that of Virgil and Horace writing under the victorious adversary of Cleopatra, Octavian, and even of Cleopatra's own auto-biographical material presentations on reliefs and coins, we can make confident inferences from sources such as the Berlin papyrus who's private, functional nature lacks the bias that we would observe on aforementioned Roman or auto-biographical accounts of Cleopatra's nature. Although our account of Cleopatra develops from our own inferences due to the nature of such a source, this is the closest we can get to a classically unbiased, trustworthy account of Cleopatra.

Appendix:

Appendix 1 – Berlin Papyrus P-25-239, trans. P. van Minnen (2000)

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Relief from the back wall of the temple of Hathor, Dendera. Photography credit: Peter Clayton

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- [203] Groumpos, 2023, 200-201.
- [204] Groumpos, 2023, 201.
- [205] Mantovan and Nanni, 2020; Groumpos, 2023.
- [206] Sommerschild et al., 2023, 728; Assael et al., 2022, 283.
- [207] Goodfellow et al., 2014.
- [208] Sommerschild et al., 2023, 705-728; Assael et al., 2022, 280.
- [209] Assael et al., 2022.
- [210] Mayor, 2018, 152; Cooper, 2004, 72.
- [211] Albertson, 2023.
- [212] Sommerschild et al., 2023, 727-728.
- [213] Maxi, 2023.
- [214] Qian et al., 2019.
- [215] Fry, 2018, 76-83; Maxi, 2023.
- [216] Matthews, 2013, 72.
- [217] Fry, 2018, 76-83.
- [218] Cowen-Breen et al., 2023, 171; Assael et al., 2022, 280; Bogacz and Mara, 2022.
- [219] Lin, 2021.
- [220] Sommerschild et al., 2023, 727-728.
- [221] Luo et al., 2021.
- [222] Hauer and Kondrak, 2016, 76.
- [223] Sommerschild et al., 2023, 727-728.
- [224] Assael et al., 2022; Cowen-Breen et al., 2023, 171.
- [225] Assael et al., 2022, 282.
- [226] Fox, 2013, 54-64.
- [227] Inman, 2020.
- [228] Hauer and Kondrak, 2016, 77-85.
- [229] Robinson, 2020, 198.
- [230] Fox, 2013.
- [231] Hooker, 1980, 31.
- [232] Fox, 2013; Robinson, 2020; Hooker, 1980, 28.
- [233] Corazza et al., 2022.

- [234] Corazza et al., 2022, 8.
- [235] Fox, 2013, 197.
- [236] Robinson, 2020; Fox, 2013.
- [237] Mayor, 2018, 152-153; Manning, 2015, 703; Kohari, 2023.
- [238] Groumpos, 2023, 198.
- [239] Sommerschield et al., 2023.
- [240] Robinson, 2020, 191-192; Daniels and Bright, 2022, 132.
- [241] Fox, 2013.
- [242] Hooker, 1980, 11-15.
- [243] Robinson, 2020.
- [244] Hooker, 1980; Robinson, 2020.
- [245] Hooker, 1980; Fox, 2013, 127; Robinson, 2020, 186-191.
- [246] Mantovan and Nanni, 2020; Robinson, 2020, 199; Revesz, 2017.
- [247] Fox, 2013, 197.
- [248] Hooker, 1980, 11-16.
- [249] Robinson, 2020, 185.
- [250] Karajgikar, Al-Khulaidy, and Berea, 2021.
- [251] Karajgikar, Al-Khulaidy, and Berea, 2021, 14.
- [252] Mavridaki, Galiotou, and Papakitsos, 2020.
- [253] Mavridaki, Galiotou, and Papakitsos, 2020, 167.
- [254] Groumpos, 2023, 204.
- [255] Yao, Perono Cacciafoco, and Cavallaro, 2022.
- [256] Gordon, 1966; Yao, Perono Cacciafoco, Cavallaro, 2022, 458-459.
- [257] Yao, Perono Cacciafoco, Cavallaro, 2022, 460-470.
- [258] Bietak, 2010; Bradley, 2014, 50.
- [259] Yao, Perono Cacciafoco, Cavallaro, 2022, 461.
- [260] Senner, 1989.
- [261] Fox, 2013, 197.
- [262] Fox, 2013.
- [263] Yao, Perono Cacciafoco, Cavallaro, 2022, 464-470.
- [264] Robinson, 2020, 199.
- [265] Revesz, 2017.
- [266] Fox, 2013, 127.
- [267] Revesz, 2017, 306.
- [268] Robinson, 2020, 199.
- [269] (where Δ_2 is two triangles, typically directly next to each other)
- [270] Revesz, 2017, 313-317.
- [271] Fox, 2013, 197.
- [272] Hooker, 1980; Robinson, 2020, 183-199.
- [273] Goodfellow et al., 2014.
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- [275] Goodfellow et al., 2014.
- [276] Groumpos, 2023, 204.
- [277] Manning, 2015, 703; Assael et al., 2022, 283; Sommerschield et al., 2023, 728.
- [278] Burnet 201
- [279] Debru 263
- [280] Morgan 200
- [281] Jouanna 41

- [282] Frede 226
- [283] Frede 227
- [284] Debru 266
- [285] Debru 275
- [286] Collins 320
- [287] Collins 320
- [288] Burkert 48
- [289] Burkert 50
- [290] Burkert 50
- [291] See Bacharova 2012
- [292] See Furley and Gysembergh 2015
- [293] Collins 325
- [294] Furley and Gysembergh
- [295] Xenophon Hell. 3.4.15; 4.7.7
- [296] Burkert 50
- [297] Martin West 241
- [298] Furley and Gysembergh 9
- [299] Schaudig 155
- [300] Schaudig 261-9
- [301] Translations courtesy of Stephanie Dalley
- [302] Stephanie West 139
- [303] Collins 328
- [304] Tiniakos et al. 358
- [305] Stephanie West 144
- [306] Tiniakos et al. 358
- [307] See Chang et al.
- [308] See LSJ; $\chi\omicron\lambda\eta$
- [309] Hanson 3
- [310] Henrichs 121-169
- [311] Henrichs 222
- [312] Caballero 128
- [313] Corrente 70
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- [315] Burnet 201
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- [322] Debru 275
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- [343] Tiniakos et al. 358
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CREATIVE PIECES



Medea

Twisting the knife. It was not enough for Jason to abandon her, after she had sacrificed everything she knew, her home, for him. No, that was not enough. He poisoned the knife of betrayal and twisted it, rupturing her from the inside out. He must abandon her for another woman. She would, perhaps, understand it if her body was barren, a useless vessel, failing at the one task of womanhood. Medea had borne him two children - what more could be asked of her? She'd fulfilled her duties, painstakingly and loyally. What more could a wife do?

It was women who suffered the most, she thought. It was a blessing for the male sex, that they did not have to bear children. Visions of war and battles filled her head: slices of swords and stabs of spears, the acrid scent of blood in the air, stinging her nostrils, and the thick mud clogging her boots, mingled with the broken bodies of men. Then, she thought of birth, twice over. Was it not worse, then, to have your own blood fill the air, to be wounded from within? From war, men were rewarded with victory. From birth, women were rewarded with a lifetime of commitment towards another human being. A man returned home a hero, a trophy hoisted above his head, perhaps carried forth on the shoulders of his fellow comrades. A woman returned from birth a slave, with a babe in arms, and the knowledge that her body was no longer hers. It was a resource now. This was not enough - still. It was not enough for a child to claim her body, to nourish it from her breast.

No, there were expectations that she must repeat this, to bear her husband more children: a son. A daughter was useless, another possession to groom and sell off. A son was a person, a leader, someone to carry on Jason's legacy. A daughter was something to lose in a war; a son was a means of winning one. More painful than bearing children, though, was teaching her daughter to follow suit. Medea thought of her daughter reaching maturity, of the blood that would stain her thighs - the blood that was no match for the onslaught that would come with birth, or the blood that would blossom beneath her skin at the hand of her husband. It felt irritatingly cruel to raise her child, created from inside herself, knowing the fate that awaited her.

She taught her son to wield knowledge, a sword. Her daughter, though, Medea taught her to... What? To cook a decent stew? To sew buttons? To smile prettily when her husband beat her? To give up her body for a petulant infant? Was such a life not worse than death? A life of bleeding for others. Blood. Blood. Medea had ichor in her veins, golden and bright. She laughed at the irony. Godly blood had not saved her from this pitiful excuse of a life. The gift of prophecy that flooded her body seemed little more than a cruel joke. This gift had not foreseen that her beautiful Jason, who'd saved her as much as she'd saved him, would become this malevolent beast.

Prophecy could not unsex her. That was not her desire, though prophecy could not allow her the role of a male, either. Medea knew that she would rather the life of a poor man than a wealthy woman. The most pitiful male peasant in the world still had freedom - something a woman never would, no matter her status, power or wealth. A

poor man could leave his house when he became disillusioned with the company he kept. He could leave his house every sunrise and return after the sun had set, if he so wished. A woman, though, was forced to watch the rosy fingers of dawn nudge life into the world, and to watch the vast gloom of night fight them off again, all from the prison of her own home. A man could be alone, if he desired. A woman could not leave her children, for they needed her breast to survive, her hands to be cleansed, her arms to sleep, and her womb for life.

Medea thought of what she'd lost. Her family, her friends, her country, her body. She thought of the bands of peasant women she saw in the villages. They had what she did not: community. Love. They talked of their changing bodies, commiserating each sag, tear and line. They saw the flaws in each other, and loved them anyway. Medea knew nothing of love. She was a prize, a shiny, useful object that caught Jason's eye and slipped into his pocket. There was no love between them anymore. Jason had taken that from her too. Medea sneered when she thought of love. What was love, if not another bargaining chip? A father sold a daughter to a husband in the name of love. A husband forced himself between the legs of a wife to express love. A woman tore her body open for the love of a child. Love seemed full of pain, of injury, of death and of blood. Love was a commodity. She had traded her family for the love of a man. She had traded her body for the love of a child. Jason had traded her love for the love of another.

If love were tangible, she would have rolled it between her fingers, relished in its warmth. She'd have let her palms trace it over and over again. It would have been held against her chest, and kissed gently, the way the healer who oversaw her labour instructed her to do. Then, she thought, she'd throw it out of the tallest window she could find, and let it shatter on the stones. A woman scorned by love had more power than any man could imagine. Medea scoffed, and turned from the window.

Mother, Springtime

Your hair hides behind your neck
Some drapes over your shoulders
And though it is the same as mine
I'm scared to touch

I fear it will burn up
Or turn to dust
Or worse, that It will sit perfectly still
And I will feel nothing at all

Yes, it seems I do not love you

You are mine and I am yours
And yet I do not love you

The world spins
And flowers grow once more
And still, I do not love you

As you sleep my eyes travel across your face
Your round cheeks, your eyelashes
I look for something familiar,
For all that made you whole

I stare and I bear the weight of not loving you.

When I can no longer carry it, I hold it to my chest
And lower myself to the floor
I let my own hair drape itself across the cool tile
As indifference collapses my lungs

I sit as my eyes adjust to the darkness
and I pretend, once more, that I have lost you
Sunflower seeds lie buried in the cold earth
Leaves are taken by the wind
And neither expect to be born again
Not while I have lost you

Children wait patiently to be fed once more
But they expect nothing for as long as I have lost you

And with that, my heart warms
And my body aches
For as long as I am here, you are beside me
As long as I am here, I am in love.

Eurydice in the Dark

He does not sing duets. I
am a blank page for his words,
on which he writes himself a
“real woman.”

Relapsa. Revoluta.

I was dead. I was dead and
even then, he could not just
let me be.

When I tried to speak, blistered
words became ash in my mouth.
So I swallowed my tongue. I
did not weep.

I had a sweet soprano.
I died forgetting its sound.
Now I have no blood, no voice,
not for songs,

nor words. The only thing I
have done is die and he would
try and take that from me too.
Let me fall.

I did not trip. My voice is
lost. My blood circles the drain.
Who is the real woman—was.
Who was she?

Who was the real me? There must
have been one. Or maybe I
was already dead, as soon
as he touched

me, tearing away my last
breath for his own keeping. Now,
laying down in the space of
my silence,

at least I can still pretend
there is glory in this. At
least, in my dreams, I am the
death of him.

O Sappho

Hushed voices, stacked volumes, aged trollies and shining hardbacks flecked with dust.

Creaking floorboards, their voices hoarse with disuse, a sacrilegious sneeze, the thump of prose landing on oak.

Peering back through the miasma of one muse's long history, searching for love's companion.

Sticky strings of spider webs illuminated in that green hued light from the stained glass window.

Smudged ink, creased corners and browned paper softened with use, looking into the past and meeting mirrored eyes.

I remember her, in this distant time, just as I remember those violets and those soft throats, those pillows rising

to meet me, falling into tangles of women: hearts and minds and limbs.

Rosy fingers advancing so gently, a lyre taken up, desire pooling in the warm air around us: in absence, presence.

Howling into the night, the terribly fury of rage and hurt, Aphrodite and the absence of some golden house, love even unwilling.

She looks back at me, feeling the splintering wood beneath my palms and beneath her words.

She must hear the faint echoes of a church bell tolling, must see those etched initials on the sill, must understand

such a love echoed across oceans and centuries.

Find here recognition, invocation, frenzied desire:

Hear me, O Sappho, I want.