

Tyranny & Revolution in the Ancient World

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What is a Tyranny according to Aristotle & Plato?



Aristotle's View of Tyranny

In *Politics*, Aristotle presents tyranny as the worst form of government, characterised by the self-interest of the ruler rather than the welfare of the state. However, Aristotle also acknowledges that tyrants can be cunning and pragmatic, using populism and spectacle to maintain control.

Plato's Concept of Tyranny

In *The Republic*, Plato describes tyranny as the degeneration of a just political order. A tyrant emerges when a ruler prioritises their desires over the common good. They would often rely on manipulation and fear to maintain their power.

Key Differences

Origin:

- **Aristotle:** Tyranny is a distinct form of monarchy.
- **Plato:** Tyranny arises from democracy.

Nature of the Tyrant:

- **Aristotle:** Tyrants rule for personal gain, opposing the common good.

- **Plato:** Tyrants are morally corrupt and driven by their biggest desires.

Governance:

- **Aristotle:** Tyranny is maintained through fear and oppression, contrasting with just governance.
- **Plato:** Tyranny leads to a society of fear and injustice.

Both philosophers agree that tyranny harms society but approach its definition and implications differently.

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Ancient Egypt

For my presentation I have chosen to critically assess, Cleopatra and her role in Ancient Egyptian history. I choose her because she is one of the most well-known female historical figures who was presented as a tyrant by her enemy but used them to cleverly achieve her goal for more than 20 years.

In the presentation, I plan to critically assess Cleopatra's reign in the frame of:

- Who was Cleopatra?
- What Type Of Ruler Was She?
- Did Rome influence her? **Or** Did She Influence Rome?
- Cleopatra in Comparison to Plato & Aristotle
- Conclusion

Who was Cleopatra?



Cleopatra, one of the most well-known female historical figures of the modern day, was born in 69 B.C. She was part of a dynasty of Macedonian rulers founded by Ptolemy.

Cleopatra is a descendant of Ptolemy I (1st) Soter, a General to Alexander the Great and the founder of the Ptolemy dynasty. The Ptolemaic dynasty, a Hellenistic royal family, ruled Egypt from 305 BCE to 30 BCE. The dynasty is renowned for its cultural achievements, including the Library of Alexandria and advancements in astronomy, mathematics, and medicine. Cleopatra and her father, Ptolemy XII (12th) Auletes, played a crucial role in shaping the Ptolemaic dynasty.

Cleopatra was known for her intelligence. She could speak multiple languages and was highly educated in astronomy, philosophy and mathematics.

For over two decades, Cleopatra fiercely advocated for her kingdom's independence and took decisive action to restore the legacy of her ancestors.

Cleopatra's life became complicated when she engaged in well-known

relationships with Roman leaders Julius Caesar and Mark Antony.

She eventually became the last ruler of the Ptolemaic dynasty when she was defeated by Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus, also known as Octavian, who later became the founder of the Roman Empire. Her death in 3 B.C. ended Egypt as an independent kingdom and the line of successors to Alexander the Great.

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What Type Of Ruler Was She?

What Type Of Ruler Was She?

For Cleopatra, her title was passed down through her family for many generations. Her ultimate goal was to re-create the empire once ruled by her ancestors and for the independence of Egypt.

She worked alongside her father to understand his political role and in particular, his struggles and ambitions. At 18, her father died, so her ruling became complicated by becoming a joint ruler of Egypt with two of her brothers whom she married. She knew marrying them would bring together countries and territories and potentially bring them together as a family; however, that was not the case.

When Cleopatra and Ptolemy XIII (13th) were ruling together, she attempted to claim sole power of the kingdom as she was classed as Queen consort and wanted to be 'king'. Her brother did not make it easy for her, and family rivalry and disagreement eventually led her to be exiled. She later returned to Egypt with an army to commence a civil war. That's where Julius Caesar comes into the picture but I will get into him in a few moments.

She later marries her youngest brother, Ptolemy XIV (14th); despite being hard for her, it brought together countries that had been separated for a matter of years. This, for her, was a political gain.

When Cleopatra regained control of Egypt, she would try to gain loyalty from her father's supporters in specific areas by listening and acting. In one instance, she commissioned a statue of a Buchis Bull (a sacred animal in Egypt).

It is believed that Cleopatra was involved in the deaths of her brothers, Ptolemy XIII (13th) and Ptolemy XIV (14th) and her sister, Arsinoe, who all were potential threats to her and the complete control of the throne she desired. This suggests that she would do anything to get what she wants.

Cleopatra would use her beauty and sex appeal as a political weapon; however, she used her intelligence to do so as well. Evidence of this is in known relationships with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. She reportedly turned up to Caesar's private quarters wrapped up in a carpet. For Antony, she presented herself as the goddess Aphrodite on a golden barge with silver oars and purple sails.

Cleopatra had children with both Caesar and Anthony; both Caesar and Antony recognised their children with Cleopatra as their own and fought for them to be recognised as heirs.

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Did Rome influence her or did she influence Rome? I feel this is a great area to assess as truly, she left her mark on Roman history.

From research, it seemed Cleopatra had a soft spot for Rome from early on in her reign; however, this could be because her father did also.

As mentioned, she is known for her relationships with Roman leaders Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. Caesar and Antony were both highly involved in Roman politics. Caesar was a Roman general/ dictator, whereas Antony was a senior Roman consul.

Cleopatra would spend time in Rome with Caesar, and due to her being his mistress, he would parade her around. The Roman people did not like Cleopatra and were portrayed negatively in Roman propaganda—often as manipulative, little did they know that she was a capable leader. By the time Caesar's death, the people found that she had left her mark on the city because of her beauty and style. It was reported that Cleopatra was in Rome at the time of his assassination and had to flee with their son.

Shortly after Caesar's death, Cleopatra casted her eyes for Mark Antony. It is believed that they fell head over heels for each other and spent long periods together but also a part. She was pardoned for actions in the Civil War and Antony arranged for her sister to be killed. They joined forces to defeat Octavian however in a desperate attempt, Antony left his naval fleet to be with Cleopatra in Egypt so they could end their lives.

In both instances, with Caesar and Antony, she would involve herself in their battles or politics and celebrate their successes. In one case, Caesar left Egypt, leaving a force of 4 legions of 22,000 soldiers to support and protect Cleopatra and to thank her for her loyalty. Cleopatra created the Caesareum in Alexandria. The Caesareum was a grand temple she designed and created in Egyptian and Greek style to celebrate her ancestors and her connection and loyalty to Caesar, especially for his support for her regime. Cleopatra never completed the Caesareum but was later completed by Octavian when he was known as Roman Emperor Augustus.

And in another case, Antony arranged for coins to be minted in various cities. These coins prominently displayed the images of both Cleopatra and himself, accompanied by their respective Roman military titles, thereby symbolising the political and military alliance between them.

With this in mind, Cleopatra demonstrated military leadership in addition to her diplomatic efforts. She in particular, participated in campaigns alongside Antony and took decisive actions to defend her kingdom against external threats. Cleopatra led a naval fleet to try and defeat Octavian (Caesar's successor and rival), which failed and eventually resulted in her suicide.

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Cleopatra in Comparison to Aristotle & Plato

Aristotle's View of Tyranny

Cleopatra's Use of Spectacle: Cleopatra presented herself as a goddess (Isis-Aphrodite) to legitimise her rule, reflecting Aristotle's idea that tyrants use spectacle to inspire loyalty—her grand entrance meeting Antony on a grand barge as Aphrodite exemplifies this.

Populism and Governance:

Tyrants, according to Aristotle, align with prevalent causes to gain support. Cleopatra emphasised Egypt's wealth and independence from Rome to position herself as the nation's protector despite her autocratic power.

Plato's Concept of Tyranny

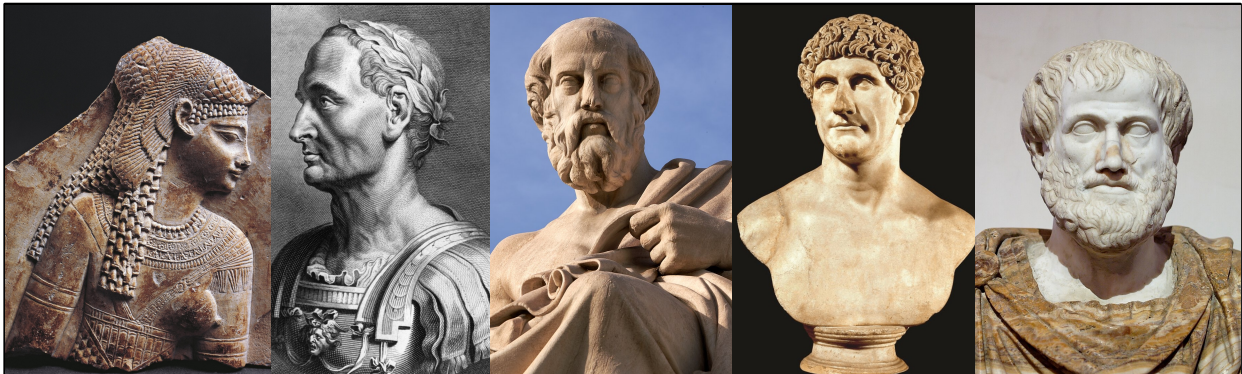
Cleopatra and Self-Preservation: Cleopatra's alliances with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony can be seen as strategic moves to protect her power and that of Egypt. Plato defines a tyrant as one who uses others for personal gain, a view echoed by Roman critics who labelled her a manipulative seductress.

Rule by Passion: Plato argues that true desires lead tyrants. Roman propaganda depicted Cleopatra as a ruler motivated by passion in her relationships with

Caesar and Antony, yet this oversimplifies her political intelligence and strategic acumen.

The Romans, in particular Octavian leveraged the tyrannical views of Ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle as propaganda to justify their campaigns against Cleopatra. This appealed to Roman audiences by relating it to Greek philosophical ideas. They based them on the grounds of:

- A ruler driven by personal ambition.
- A destabilising force for Rome through her relationships with leaders Caesar and Antony.
- A representation of excess and moral corruption typical of tyrants in classical philosophy.



Conclusion

Cleopatra's political reign was genuinely outstanding. As we know, evidence from that era is somewhat limited. Nevertheless, I do not believe she was a tyrant however according to Aristotle and Plato it looks like she does.

According to sources, Cleopatra faced persistent threats from tyrannies throughout her reign, from both sides: her family and the nearby other Roman Leaders. They perceived her as a treat. This was either because of her potential leadership capabilities or for the potential scope of Egypt's wealth while Rome took part in civil wars.

The Romans negatively portrayed Cleopatra in their propaganda as a tyrant. Despite this, she continued to display her leadership capabilities by introducing economic reforms, formulating diplomatic relationships, and engaging in military campaigns.

Cleopatra cleverly used intelligence, charm and charisma to gain and secure support, which proved highly beneficial as a strategic move, stabilising and safeguarding her rule and protecting Egypt from Roman invasion. She left an unforgettable mark on Roman history but ultimately became their most

significant threat, leading to her death, which also marked the end of the Ptolemaic dynasty.

More than 2,000 years after her birth, Cleopatra remains one of the most famous women in history; for many years to come, people will continue to remember her. This is probably her greatest victory.

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