WHAT THE POET SAW:
OCTAVIAN'S TRIPLE TRIUMPH, 29 B.C.
JEREMIAH MARKLAND'S CONJECTURES
AT PROPERTIUS 3.11.52-53

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ABSTRACT
Most commentators assume that the lines 'Bracchia spectavi sacris admorsa
colubris/et trahere occultum membra soporis iter' refer to the poet's own
presence at Augustus' triumphal procession in 29 BC and that the object of
his gaze is the tableau (attested in Plutarch's Life of Antony 86.6 and Dio
51.21.8) depicting the death of Cleopatra. The notion of the poet's actually
'seeing' the effect of the poison, tracing its course up the arms of an effigy, is
difficult to understand, as many have noted; also, the first-person intrusion
into a sequence of apostrophes disrupts the logical structure and diminishes
the impact of the 'Cleopatra vignette'. Moreover, 5.52, 'accepere tuae
Romula vincla manus', contradicts historical evidence. Cleopatra killed
herself rather than process in chains.
Jeremiah Markland's long-neglected conjectures, 'spectasti' for 'sp ect-
tavi', in line 53 (adopted only by Goold in the 1990 Loeb edition) and
'accepere' for 'accepere' in line 52 (in no other edition), are not only pa-
leographically plausible, but also make better sense in the context and more
clearly define Propertius' stance in relation to contemporary attitudes.

On three successive days, beginning August 13, 29 BC, Octavian celebrated
a triple triumph to commemorate his victories in the Balkans, and over
Cleopatra at Actium and Alexandria. According to Plutarch and Dio,
on the last day—the most memorable (xóAureAcardrrq'6' oho xoL xpexsa~&rq a8rq J1 ASyuxria.)—in lieu of the enemy leader herself, a repre-
sentation of her suicide was e~hibited.~ In the so-called 'Cleopatra-elegy'
1. For all the sources and a recent full account and discussion of the event, see R.A.
Gurval, Actium and Augustus: The Politics and Emotions of
Civil War (Ann Arbor 1995) Chapter 1, especially 25-36 and 178.
2. Plutarch, Life of Antony 86.6 (ἐν γὰρ τῷ γιορμό τῆς Κλεοπάτρας κινεῖται ἡ ἀκολο-
ουσία τῆς κάθε ἀκολουθίας, καὶ τῶν συνεργῶν). We do not know
whether a statue or a tableau (cf. App. Mith. 117) was carried in the procession.

171
of Propertius (3.11), lines 52-54, as an apostrophe to the dead queen, are almost universally interpreted as the poet's reference to his own presence at the event:3

You, for all that, fled to timid Nile's wandering streams: your hands received Romulus' chains. I watched your arms bitten by sacred serpents, and your limbs draw in the hidden course of sleep.

In his Loeb edition of 1990, however, George Goold adopts the conjecture of the 18th century scholar Jeremiah Markland: 'spectasti' for the manuscript-tradition's 'spectavi'. Without commenting on or justifying this reading, Goold translates as follows:4

Yet you fled to the wandering outlets of the craven Nile: your hands received the Roman fetters. You endured the sight of your arms bitten by the sacred asps and your limbs channeling the stealthy route of the numbing poison.

No recent treatment of 3.11 as a whole, or of this passage in particular, to my knowledge, has discussed the implications either of Goold's text or of his translation. This is the purpose of my study.

The Propertian text is notoriously problematic. Even by the most conservative estimates, at least 600 corruptions have been acknowledged.5 Apart from usual errors in transmission, editors have to contend with their predecessors' sometimes clumsy attempts to find immediate sense in the poet's allusive and (apparently) disjunctive style as manifested in the received text.6 Even in the oldest manuscript, and in the archetype.

2. See, for instance, W.A. Camps, Propertius Elegies III (Cambridge 1966) 109, note ad 53: '[A]s a spectator he saw carried in the triumph a picture of Cleopatra's death'. Also, J.K. Newman, Augustan Propertius (Hildesheim 1997) 226: 'Cleopatra was made, together with her image, part of the triumphal procession in Rome, where the poet was a loyal spectator' (note ad 53); and P. Fedeli, Propriens: Elegie, Libro II (Bari 1983) 384, note ad loc.: 'Propriens si limita a portare la sua testimonianza di spettatore durante il trionfo...'


6. A style, it seems, in total contradiction with the judgement of ancient critics, as was demonstrated decades ago. Cf. M. Hubbard, Propertius (New York 1975) 2, and recently Butrica (note 5: 1997) 179.

172
itself, there are transpositions, dislocations and word-substitutions. We might then legitimately conclude with J. S. Phillimore: "Propertius' Textual critic's nightmare" though Elegy 3.11 may be the text for lines 51-54, as printed in most standard editions, and as their apparatuses reveal, has not provoked much comment. Nevertheless, many commentators are puzzled by the apparent inconsistency of the poet's attitude regarding the Battle of Actium. In this instance the tone is almost panegyric, while in Books 2 and 4 the poet's references to the civil war, and in particular to the Battle of Actium, reflect a uniformly critical attitude. Commentators have also remarked on the obscurity, if not inappropriateness, of certain individual words and phrases in these lines. Precisely what Propertius' attitude was towards the Battle of Actium and Augustus himself is strenuously debated and is open to interpretation. My reason for interrogating the text at this point, however, is based on the poet's representation of historical events—the suicide of Cleopatra and how it was presented in Augustus' triumphal procession. For the received text...
contradicts the testimony of the historiographical evidence and makes no historical sense as it stands.

First we must examine the context of these lines. The theme of the elegy is as follows: Why blame me for being in bondage to a woman (the elegist asks), when Jason, Achilles, Hercules and the Babylonian Persians were all dominated by women? Nay, even Jove disgraced himself. You Romans are fine ones to talk, who were recently enslaved by the terror inspired by Cleopatra’s empty threats. It’s a good thing she was only a drunken tart and that you had Augustus around to protect you—he certainly showed her who was master!

The elegy falls into four main sections, the third of which, the longest and most complex, may be further subdivided into four distinct parts. Section A (lines 1-8), the proemium, sets out the theme of the poem: domination by a woman. The reader will learn from the poet’s example. Section B, the praeambula (lines 9-28) demonstrates, by listing mythical examples, Medea, Penthesilea, Omphale and Semiramis, the power which women have exerted over men, whether as individuals or as nations. The fifth example, a historical figure, and one firmly implanted in the popular imagination, Cleopatra, forms Section C (lines 29-56), the main part of the elegy. Its four thematic subdivisions are as follows: the first part (lines 29-38) forms a prelude—the poet introduces, in contrast to the mythical catalogue, Cleopatra, here nameless—a woman (‘femina’), who gives her body to her servants, demands Rome and its rulers as a price for her disgusting union with an unnamed partner (in the light of the above catalogue, we would expect the name of an individual—Antony!), and who is linked to Egypt, the symbol of treachery.14 In the second part (lines 39-46), her identity is made even more explicit by the proper phrase ‘the harlot queen’. Three successive couplets, with obvious allusions to Vergil Aen. 8.626-728 and Horace, Ep. 9 and C. 1.37,15 reflect Octavian’s pre-Actium propaganda as expressed in his Memoirs. Although this work is no longer extant, it obviously forms the basis of the speech which Dio attributes to him before the Battle of Actium (50.24-25).16 In corresponding pairs the poet

13. The noun ‘coniugium’ (line 31) does not mean ‘marriage’ here, as most translators render it, since in Roman eyes Antony and Cleopatra were not legally married. On the negative connotations of Egypt for the Roman, see M. Wyke, ‘Augustan Cleopatras: Female Power and Poetic Authority’, in A. Powell, Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus (Bristol 1992) 105-107.

14. The phrase ‘meretrix regina’ (39) continues the mercenary motif of ‘pretium poposcit’ in line 31.


16. See Mader (note 15) 196, and below, note 9, for specific instances. On the relative chronology of the poems and their relationship to Augustus’ propaganda, see A.
lists the terrors that confront Rome: that is Cleopatra’s absurd ambitions aimed against, respectively, religion, the army and law—the very pillars of Roman civilization. These are (a) her setting the yapping Egyptian dog-god, Anubis, against Jupiter, and the timid Nile-god against the Tiber;17 (b) opposing the martial trumpet with the rattling sistrum, and pursuing warships with barges18 and (c) covering the Tarpeian rock with awnings, and issuing laws among the warlike symbols of Rome’s power.19 Part three of Section C (lines 47-50) is a rhetorical interjection which prepares the way for the denouement. ‘Was liberation from king Tarquinius to no avail if Rome fell under the rule of such a woman? Of course not! Augustus was at hand; Rome should seize her triumph and be grateful to her saviour’. The fourth part (51-56), the _pevipeteia_, the aftermath of the unexpected collapse of her plans and ambitions, is expressed in a threefold apostrophe, addressed to Cleopatra, modified and reinforced by the adversative adverb ‘tamen’: (a) ‘You (nevertheless) fled to the frightened Nile, (b) you were put in chains; (c) I saw your arms bitten by the sacred serpents and the void being absorbed by your limbs’. The poet then quotes the queen’s last words, uttered in a drunken stupor, acknowledging her victor’s superiority.20

Tronson, ‘Vergil, the Augustans and the Invention of Cleopatra’s Suicide—One Asp or Two?’. _Vergilius_ 44 (1998) 31-50; 46-47.

17. Lines 41-42: ‘_omnia, ut nostris intratentem opposuisse Aramis_ / et Tiberiim Nilis cognoscre nuncio’. Cf. line 51, ‘_timent Nilis_’ and _Dio 30.24.6_ (Octavian’s Speech): ‘_ati_’, _Reisch_. ‘_Alexandriae ut et Augustus arma_ . . . _et ut arma fuerant et_ / _vix_ _in_ _re_ _Nile conobo._ . . _See also_ Vergil, _Aen_. 8. 986f._

18. Lines 43-44: ‘_Romanamque turbam crepitandi pelle is altera_ / _barbarus et contine nostris Liberisque._’

19. Lines 45-46: ‘_forfæque Tarpeia conspisura tendere saxo_ / _latis et ete etestis inter et arma Man_.’ _Cf_. _Dio 30.3.4_: ‘Cleopatra or influenced Antony and his circle’, _fort_ sicily and more’._ _Pausanias_ 9. 5. 3. ‘_in Turin_ _in_ _confabulation, intenta in davinci, manubrii, id id_ _in_ _vulgare tabula hoos._’ _De proprie here to release the popular opinion in_ _Spadaubigio and_ _one_. Again, it is evident that Divus and Propertius versions originate in Octavian’s propaganda. Mars is an excellent symbol for ‘the set of values which is in every way diametrically opposed to Cleopatra’s hoped for rule’. (Marko [note 15] 206, who also cites other works in which Mars is denoted as a symbol for Roman masculinity and for the ‘ancient military tradition’).

20. ‘. . . _non hic, Roma, si_ [thus] _tanto_ _tile_ _esse verum_.’ _dixit et audios os_ _Magni_ _sequulae novae_. The manuscript reading, ‘_fuit_’, may be erroneous (by homoioteleuton), since it not only weakens the sense (cf. Butler and Barcher [note 15] 251), but also creates difficulties with identifying the subject of ‘_fuit_’, unless ‘_fuit_’ is a corruption of ‘_habeo_’, referring to Cleopatra, and with Horace we read ‘_dixit_’ for ‘_fuit_.’ The suggestions of Campi (note 3) 109 and D.R. Shackleton Bailey, _Propertiana_ (Amsterdam 1967) 172, who follow this route, make no noticeable improvement, except to render a rather unusual (but by no means unparalleled)

175
The conclusion, Section D (lines 57-72), assuming that Passerat’s simple and plausible transposition of lines 59 and 60 after line 68 is correct, catalogues the great leaders, enemies and battles of the past in two clearly demarcated series. With such a history, affirms the poet, Rome had no cause to fear its latest enemy. He mentions Apollo who will inscribe the Battke of Actium, or, by virtue of his statue/shrine will be its monument (‘memorabit’ has both meanings) and the closing couplet, harking back to the sailor-motif of line 5, a neat ring-composition, refers ambivalently to the benefits of the Pax Augusta (or possibly the looming presence of the Princeps).

As we have seen, then, although some scholars are puzzled about the precise meaning of lines 51-54, they do not doubt the integrity of the received text at this point. Smyth’s *Thesaurus Criticus* cites nine conjectures, which include Markland’s, for these two couplets. Moreover, the passage is deemed by many scholars to make some degree of sense in the context, and scholars are notorious for consecrating the traditional interpretations of literary works, the *communis opinio*. If our passage is specifically compatible with the historical accounts of Plutarch and Dio, why change it? The question which should be posed, however, is: what kind of sense does it make, and is emendation necessary or justifiable? J. Butrica’s caveat should be taken seriously: ‘How is it possible not to be excessively critical in a text so ravaged by errors?’ At the same time, however, our zeal for emendation should also be restrained by Butler’s caveat: wholesale transposition of couplets cannot be justified without some reasoned explanation based either on mechanical grounds or some

21 See the comments of Butler and Barber (note 11) 159ff. and Fedeli (note 3) 384, note ad loc. This relatively simple emendation (easily explained paleographically) restores perfect symmetry to this section: that is the statement of the fact (lines 57-58), followed by two couplets comprising a series of historical examples (lines 61-64), followed by another statement of fact (59-60)—a parenthesis which responds to the ‘fear’ expressed earlier (57-58)—then another two couplets comprising a series of historical examples (57-60 and 59-60) and a statement that Apollo will record, or bear witness to the battle (69-70); then, as a coda, the poet’s admonition to the sailor (71-72). We thus have the pattern A-BB-A-BB, plus coda.


23 W.R. Smyth, *Thesaurus Criticus ad Sexti Propertii Tezzum* (Leiden 1970) 196; none of which (except for Goold in the case of Markland’s at 15) modern editors have seriously considered.

24 Butrica (note 5: 1992) 276; a principle he has recently restated more forcefully (note 5: 1997) 188: ‘The text of Propertius is so corrupt that an editor must indeed suspect everything, and must go “hunting” for corruptions rather than wait for them to present a calling card’. 176
definite theory. The same principle, of course, applies to the emending of single words in the text; and in the work of a 'poeta doctus' every word, phrase and whole must constantly be tested against its context.\textsuperscript{25}

The Cleopatra vignette, because of its patent and deliberate verbal echoes, has been correctly interpreted as a direct comment on Vergil's and Horace's heroic treatments of the theme, both of which reflect and respond to the sentiments of the official version.\textsuperscript{26} Vergil's ekphrasis \textit{Aen.} 8. 675-728, one of the earliest extant reflections of the Actium-myth, portrays the queen as a demonic figure who is defeated by a more than human Octavian (678: 'hinc Augustus agens Italos in proelia Caesar').

\begin{quote}
\textit{regina in medias patria vocat agmina sistro}
\textit{ipsa videbatur ventis regna vocatis velas dare}
\end{quote}

(696 and 707-8)

Horace C. 1.37 also portrays her as 'no ordinary woman'—a worthy opponent for Augustus:

\begin{quote}
\textit{ausa et inventus sivee regiam}
\textit{velut sereno, fortis et asperus}
\textit{tractare serpentis, ut atrum}
\textit{corpore combiberet venenum.}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textit{deliberata morte ferocior}
\textit{nuovis Liburnis acclin et invensas}
\textit{privata docti superbo}
\textit{non humilis mulier triumpho.}
\end{quote}

This notion (originating from official propaganda) is reflected in Velleius, Suetonius, Florus and Dio, authors who either approved of the Augustan system (Velleius and Florus) or who had access to official documents (Suetonius and Dio).\textsuperscript{27} According to Propertius, however, instead of a virago, Octavian only defeated a weak, inebriated woman. Thus, by diminishing his enemy's stature, Propertius tacitly criticizes Augustus.\textsuperscript{28} This inter-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} Butler and Barber (note 11) 119.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Mader (note 25) 188; Toynbee (note 1) 109, note 44.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Vell. 2.87; Suet. \textit{Vit. Aug.}, 17.11; Florus \textit{Ep.} 2.21.10; Dio II.13.5. Each of these authors (two of whom had official positions) mentions at least one of the following elements: Cleopatra's ingenuity in arranging her suicide, her bravery and loyalty to Antony, and Octavian's desperate efforts to reverse the effects of the venom. The image of Cleopatra that emerges after her death, then, is much more positive than that presented before Actium. Was Octavian, perhaps, trying to save face?\textsuperscript{28}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Propertius has a dig at what may have been the official explanation for Cleopatra's absence from the triumph at 4.6.65-66.
\end{itemize}
pretation has formidable support, which the elegy is panegyrical and patriotic, is still influential.

Goold's emendation, however, alters the whole thrust of lines 51-56 and calls into question the traditional interpretation of the elegy. Instead of the poet's referring to his own presence at the triumphal procession and to his sight of the queen's effigy, he presents the reader with the bizarre picture of the doomed queen as a spectator of her own demise. Goold, however, adopted only one of the two conjectures that Markland made for these couplets: the 'nec cepere' for 'accepere' in line 52. For the poem to make proper sense, I believe that both emendations should be adopted.

R. Smyth indicates that these conjectures are found in a copy (presumably Markland's own) of an edition of Propertius, Catullus and Tibullus, published in Paris in 1722 by M. Brochard, and refers to P. Burman's comments on and refutations of Markland in his 1780 edition of Propertius. On line 52 Markland argued on sound historical grounds that Augustus (sic) was unable to capture Cleopatra and take her to Rome, because she committed suicide by snake-bite to avoid disgrace. Burman refutes this argument on the grounds that Propertius is obviously referring to Cleopatra's effigy which was displayed on the third day of the triumph; he then cites the passages from Plutarch and Dio, and he refers to a work by the Renaissance doctor, Giovanni Battista Morgagni, who wrote an account of the nature of Cleopatra's death in which he mentions an 'ancient statue' of the queen with an asp attached to her arm, and bound by chains like the one carried at Augustus' triumph and to which Propertius...

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29. An approach first argued at length by E. Paratore, L'llegia 111 (Palermo 1936) 48-51 and later followed by Nethercut (note 15) 186-87 and Gurval (note 1) 202-3.

30. See above note 11 and below note 64 for the supporters of this view.

31. Both corruptions can be explained by simple palaeographical errors early in the history of the text. In this instance the cause of the corruption is obvious. The initial 'n' of 'nec' could have fallen away. (J. Butrica informs me that initial letters are often set off in medieval poetic manuscripts). See also below.

32. Theocritus 106, cf. 188.


34. Ibid. 'Nec cepere conjecerat ~Marklandus, & alterum falsum esse notaverat, quia nempe Augustus Cleopatram in triumphum ducere quidem cognitum, sed vivam Roman deferre non potuit'.

35. Ibid. '... response Propertii ad id quod Plutarchus in Antonio pag. 955 s. Dio Cassius Lib. L. cap. 19 & 21 traditur'.

178
refers.30 However, neither Plutarch nor Dio mentions any chains on the effigy, and Plutarch alone refers to an asp. We have no idea about the date or provenance of the statue to which Morgagni refers. In short, the only argument that can be produced for accepting the manuscript-reading 'accepere' is that we know that a representation of the queen's death was exhibited in the triumphal procession, that one of the ancient sources refers explicitly to a representation of a male, and that the passage as it stands makes reasonably good sense. Against the accepted reading we have the verdict of history. Cleopatra was not bound in chains by merely confined to her quarters;31 the image carried in the procession, according to the historical sources, did not depict her in chains; and we have the acknowledged fact that she committed suicide expressly to avoid such a fate—one which even Burman seems in his refutation of Markland.32 Moreover, many scholars find themselves constrained to explain and rationalize the anomalous interpretation of 'accepere ... vincis'. Burman, for instance, while granting that Cleopatra was not led captive in chains, says that 'vincis' should not be taken literally, but that the term refers to defeat and suicide, 'forced on her by desperate circumstances'. Max Rodetziel explains that 'one ought not to think of actual fetters', but that the poet means merely that Cleopatra was Augustus' prisoner.33 G.J. Matlor explains that what Propertius describes is not literally true, but that the passage in this sentence make it very difficult not to take it literally, as I shall demonstrate below.

Lct us now consider Markland's second conjecture, 'spectasti' for 'spec-

30. Ibid. p. 537. [Sed plumbus hic de re egi eruditionem & celebrarem Medicens abscisse Antonianus Jo. Baptista Morgagnus, Eugenius Epistulis, in quibus de generi mortis Cleopatrae observavit, post Eius Opera: Mothos, pag. 21-22, ad mentem scintae antiquae, in qua quam locum ejus religiosa, & vivi reclamationes ad monum nummum complexit, quodam Cleopatrae imaginem, Augusti triumpho gestatam, indicare faci Prospicia miniman!

31. Plutarch, Life of Antony 78-93; Dio 51.11.16.

32. Burman (note 18) ad 53. Verum, non captivi in manus Romanorum, non incident Cleopatra, quia tres in triumphum ducta ad, non tamen lux similitudine captivi operis, sed in Romanum victor, exemplar, & ad voluntarie medicus desperationem fuisse voluit, indicat, sed potius prospicit Trojanorum ad id, quod Plautus ... & Dio Cassius. [Sedat triumphum, equester Cleopatrae, ejusque mortis in imagine felonius imaginem inter ceteros captivi in triumpho poneeque circumstantes forma, qua, ut levis desiderio ...]. He then quotes Horace C. 1.47, lines 25-28 (quoted above) and the Scholiast's note ad loc., which cites a lost fragment of Livy: 'Livy refer Cleopatra, quae ad Augusto capita, indigentissimae in domino luctuaerat, diem accipit. Non triumphabat ...'. On the manner in which Cleopatra was kept 'under house arrest', see the references in note 35.


35. Routh (note 15) 198.
tavi' in line 53. First, the paleographical corruption ('spectasti'... 'spectavi') is easy to explain as a gloss on the less familiar syncopated second person singular aorist that crept into the archetype ousting the correct form. A copyist familiar with the accounts of Octavian's triumph and assuming that the elegist was describing the scene as an oikhos, could readily have made such a slip.31 The sudden intrusion of the first-person voice at this point of the elegy, however, disrupts the sense. Markland noticed this32 and modern critics have admitted that such a reading creates serious difficulties.44 Moreover, the idea of a spectator actually seeing the venom, or its hidden effects, tracing an invisible course up the arms of a picture or effigy is hard to accept, even granting Propertius' allegedly quirky style. L. Richardson remarks: '... [T]he poet pictures an effigy which he does not identify as an effigy... ', while M. Wyke supposes that '... the narrator claims to have witnessed the physical effects of the venom on the queen's body'.44 According to Gordon Williams, the poet '... visualizes the poison moving unseen through her veins with progressive paralysis'. This extraordinary image is unparalleled in Propertius, despite Williams's attempt to prove it otherwise.46 Gural notes that 'something strange and surprising has happened in these verses'. Suddenly the poet elicits sympathy for Cleopatra.47 Gurval's otherwise convincing interpretation of this part of the elegy is marred by his acceptance of the manuscript tradition, since he has to acknowledge a moment of 'melodrama', before the queen's drunken utterance 'suddenly brings us back to reality'. Apart from...

41. Propertius elsewhere suggests his own presence at the procession, e.g. 2.1.31-34.
42. See above, note 12.
43. Wyke (note 13) 105, argues that Propertius does this deliberately and by referring to the simulacrum, depersonalizes his subject.
44. He cites as a parallel metaphor 3.14.5:
45. Gurval notes that 'something strange and surprising has happened in these verses'. Suddenly the poet elicits sympathy for Cleopatra. Gurval's otherwise convincing interpretation of this part of the elegy is marred by his acceptance of the manuscript tradition, since he has to acknowledge a moment of 'melodrama', before the queen's drunken utterance 'suddenly brings us back to reality'. Apart from
the fact that Propertius would not want to parrot Horace's (sympathetic) version of Cleopatra's death, but rather respond to or react against it, there is no contextual justification for this sudden reversal of attitude. After so ferocious an attack on Cleopatra, why go to the trouble of briefly eliciting the reader's sympathy before hammering home the final slanderous image? Cleopatra has no redeeming qualities in Propertius' treatment of her.

Let us sum up so far and test the plausibility of the orthodox interpretation:

1. Cleopatra fled to the obscure reaches of the Nile (vaga Jumina Nili): this is true;
2. Her hands were bound by chains: this is contrary to fact;
3. The poet saw her arms bitten by snakes: this is possible if we assume that he is referring to a statue or picture;
4. The poet watched the numbing poison creeping up her arms: this is physically impossible in a representation as much as in real life, and as a metaphor it is a very strange and daring one which the context does not warrant.

No modern scholar, since Burman, has responded to, challenged, or refuted Markland's objection. In short, the orthodox interpretation of lines 51-54 hinges on a blatant factual error, on an elaborate and unparalleled metaphor which the context does not demand, and on the presupposition that the elegist is referring to what he himself saw at the procession. The following analysis of the text will demonstrate that Markland's emendations not only remove the major interpretative difficulties which the accepted text poses and solve the anomalies in vocabulary and usage, but also support the argument that the poet's criticism is aimed at the Roman People, not at Cleopatra, and that the sense of the poem is wholly consistent with his critical attitude towards the Battle of Actium and Augustus' victory in the Civil War.

Now let us examine lines 51-54 in their immediate context as well as in the context of the elegy as a whole. After the catalogue of supposed terrors confronting Rome, we have the rhetorical exclamation (lines 47-50) which constitutes the third part of Section C: 'What point in expelling the tyrant if Rome has to endure a woman? Seize your triumph, Rome!'

47. Burman's refutation (festa 33, 597) note ad loc.) is inadequate. He cites almost the same reasoning as he does for his argument against 'sec cernere' (cf. above, note 38): '[Red note Benedictus refert at ipsum Propertius, ut dicit: re imaginem illum in Augusti triumpho circumlatum vidisse, qua referrebas statim brachio Cleopatrae admotum'.

48. The manuscript reading 'cape', rather than Camps's bland (but influential) emendation 'cane' (note 31 108, adopted by Goold) should be retained, given the context. See also Gurval (note 1) 200.
You have been saved! Long live Augustus! Now we have the climactic apostrophe, a device which Mader decisively proves regularly marks the apex and conclusion of a series, introduced by the verb and its adverb "tamen". This marks both the end of the preceding series and a strong contrast, which Nethercut refers to as "a reversal of tone" and which, according to the orthodox opinion, he interprets as follows:

Earlier we saw the alien queen, endowed with the magic of her sex, presuming to defile Roman civilization, we now see her routed into flight, her suicide, and we are reminded of the unheroic qualities of her life.

Interpreted in this way, the Cleopatra-sequence expresses the classic ἔτραχνα / perspective motif: presumption before a fall — thus the canonical interpretation of the elegy. We should not, however, forget that the exclamatory sentence (lines 47-50) intervenes. What effect does it have on the standard interpretation? Should not this sentence — as a parenthetic addendum to the series — also be affected by the force of "tamen", which immediately follows it and is logically connected with it? The apostrophe, then, as I read it, caps and contrasts not only with the series of presumptuous threats (lines 39-46) but also, even more, with the exclamatory injunction for Rome to seize her triumph and to be grateful to Augustus, that is the sentence which immediately precedes and is syntactically connected with it.

We now must examine in greater detail the sequence of ideas in Section C (lines 29-56). After the preamble (the first subdivision), in which the poet describes the nature of the threat and of Rome's shame, he lists Cleopatra's absurd ambitions, the grounds for Rome's servitium terroris (39-46). Each one of these empty threats is self-defeating; setting a dog against Jupiter, a temple-rattle against the military trumpets, a barge against a warship, a canopy draped over the Tarpeian Rock, and so on. These three couplets reveal that Cleopatra is not the demonic or heroic figure she is in Vergil or Horace, but that she is simply deluded and that her defeat is a foregone conclusion — a motif which Propertius states explicitly in a later elegy. Cleopatra might have been confident but the Romans should have known better. The next sentence (lines 47-50) tells us as much. The Romans...

49. Mader (note 22) 17.
51. See Stahl (note 1) 244; Mader (note 15) 200; Gurrall (note 11) 160, note 44; Tronson (note 16) 49.
feared that the expulsion of Tarquinius had been in vain—but thank the gods for Augustus! Yet, in the light of the ludicrous and self-negating nature of Cleopatra's so-called threats, this effusive outburst is surely ironical. Following immediately after this emphatic exclamation the force of 'tamel' has its full effect—but only if we adopt Markland's conjecture. The poet then addresses Cleopatra: 'You, after all, fled... you escaped capture and its expected consequences (... nec cepere tuae Romula manus...). The chains in this context obviously refer to those worn by a defeated leader in the triumphal procession. The imperative 'cape' in line 49 and 'cepere' in line 52 link notionally, thematically and by position the ideas of Rome 'seizing' her triumph and that of the hands of the enemy leader 'receiving' ('cepere') the chains of Romulus. 53 In reality, of course, the hands of the captured leader do not 'receive' the chains. With this kind of emphasis, the poet must be referring to the literal triumph, not vaguely to the notion of conquest and detention. 54 The language is far too concrete, too specific, to be merely metaphorical. Cleopatra simply was not in the procession! In this context, 'nec cepere' makes perfect sense.

Now let us examine the implications of Markland's second conjecture. The couplet (lines 53-54) 'bracchia... iter', also modified by 'tamen', if we read 'spectasti' for 'spectavi', would mean that Cleopatra watched her arms bitten by 'sacred' serpents (Propertius' snakes, in contrast to Horace's 'asperas... serpentes' (C. 1.37.26f.) are benign and suggest that her suicide is a kind of religious act) 55 and that, with the detachment of a spectator at a triumph, 56 she watched the (invisible) course of the poison as it was absorbed into her bloodstream. The line suggests a languorous sensuality—a quasi-erotic pleasure—associated with the effects of the cobra-venom, such as the fragmentary Carmen de Bello Actico attests, describing the execution of prisoners in Alexandria by means of asps being attached to them. 57

53. Cf. 2.1.33.

54. Romulus instituted the triumphal procession. See e.g. Plist. Romulus 17. For Propertius' use of the uncompounded 'cape' for 'accipere', cf. 4.1.48; 4.5.60; 4.9.49.

55. The verbs 'cape', 'spectare', 'trahere', the nouns 'vincla' and 'iter' and the adjective 'Romula' all suggest notions that are associated with a triumphal procession: 'capture', 'watching as a spectator', 'dragging', the 'chains of Romulus' and a processional 'route' even if they do not have these precise meanings in the present context.

56. See above, pp. 177-178.


58. Cf. above, note 55. The use of 'spectasti' also enhances the alliterative-onomatopoeic effect of the line and, in this respect, perhaps even improves over Horace!

59. The allegedly 'pleasurable' nature of death by the bite of the Egyptian cobra was
The sense of the two couplets (lines 55-56), if we adopt both of Markland's conjectures, is therefore as follows: 'For all the absurd threats, the Romans' unfounded fears and Augustus' implied heroics, you, Cleopatra, escaped; you fled like a coward to the hidden reaches of the Nile; you did not appear as a captive in the procession, being dragged off to execution. Instead, you tipsily witnessed your own execution as you gradually lost consciousness.' In short, Cleopatra got off lightly. There was nothing heroic about her suicide. The protagonist's dying words always have a solemn significance in literature, yet here Cleopatra is so drunk (Horace's Cleopatra suddenly becomes sober when her end is imminent) that it is only her disembodied wine-sodden tongue which appears to confess that Rome had nothing to fear with a citizen such as Augustus at head. This implies that since her mind was inebriated, she was not fully aware of what she was saying. Moreover, the battle is not mentioned in the context of the elegy, only the preliminary threats and the aftermath. This is hardly a commemoration of a glorious victory.

In the final section (D), lines 57-72, which rehash the grave dangers that Rome had faced in the past, and had overcome, Properties heightens his criticism and mockery of the Roman citizens for being enslaved by fear of a drunken tart, unmindful of their previous victories. Unlike Jason, Achilles, Hercules, and the Babylonians, not to mention (by implication) the elegist himself, whose women are at least noble and worthy, the Romans have no excuse for their abjournedness. 'Fearing or yielding to what (or who) is superior is not cowardice but prudence' (Gurval 192). There is nothing prudent, however, in fearing Cleopatra.

well known in antiquity. For ancient accounts of the symptoms of cobra-bite, see Tronson (note 16) 43-45. The vocabulary for the physical symptoms of erotic passion described, e.g., in Catullus 51 (cf. Sappho, fr. 59, Bergk), is remarkably similar to the ancient descriptions of the symptoms of cobra-bite.

60. E. Courtney, FLP, 334 (col. 6-7).
61. C. 1.37.14-16: mentemque lymphatam Mareotico redegit in veros timores Caesar, . . . . . .
62. The poet's reference to Augustus as a citizen (not a commander!) may be as much a nod to the emperor's insistence on his humble political title as it reflects his awareness of the latter's limited military capabilities.
63. Just as the poet distinguishes between the 'good' and 'bad' forms of female domination, he also distinguishes between the justifiable fear of the soldier or sailor, which contributes to his self-preservation (lines 5-6), and the irrational and unjustifiable fear that the Romans had for Cleopatra. See Gurval (note 1) 203.

184
To conclude: 3.11 is not, as some critics have argued, a panegyric, nor is it a spontaneous outpouring of the poet's patriotic fervor. Moreover, it does more than simply undermine Octavian's victory by diminishing the stature of Rome's last enemy. It effectively deconstructs the whole Actium myth as a non-battle and empty triumph: It is a battle won by default, by the enemy's retreat (verses 51-54); this is what Apollo will commemorate. In accordance with his recurring anti-war stances, especially evident in Book 2, Propertius upholds the Romans for being terrorized into civil war by the Cleopatra myth and Octavian's propaganda. Marxkhold's conjectures thus illuminate our understanding of 3.11 in three ways: they resolve the interpretative difficulties of lines 51-54; they validate the interpretation that the elegy is not panegyrical but critical of Augustus and the Romans, since they drastically shift the emphasis of the poem from an attack on the queen alone—her infamy and moral degradation—a more trope, to one on the Roman people, which allowed itself to be enslaved by fear of Octavian's monster. Far from being a playful exercise and a flippant subversion of the official Augustan version of events, the elegy has a serious moral and political purpose. Finally, I suggest that the crowning jewel of Augustus' propaganda campaign, the powerful ideological message conveyed by the tableau displayed on the last day of the festival, had such an effect on the popular memory, that it conditioned the interpretation of the text at an early stage of its transmission—early enough to have appeared in the archetype. Elegy 3.11, then, is not a testament to Propertius' visual reaction to Octavian's triumph; the poet is not describing (as many have thought) what he saw. Rather, the long-accepted (mis)reading of lines 51-54 testifies to the potency of Augustan ideology, and the lasting impression on the Roman mind. For at least eight hundred years—the latest possible date of the archetype—or perhaps much longer, the memory of a vulgar political display has obscured the poet's subtle insight into the flimsy pretenses of a political myth.

This article was first delivered at the Biennial Conference of the CASA at the University of the Western Cape in January 2000. I am much indebted to my South African colleagues for their valuable insights, and particularly to James Butrica who provided

64. Cf. Holland (note 6) 106: "... a handsome panegyric of Augustus... It is not intended to indicate the poet's explicit enthusiasm for A., and... his preoccupation with the rescue affected by the victory. This is clearly expressed and A., its authorship...". Harries (note 12) 229 maintains that it was written for the first anniversary celebration of the battle of Actium, in 24, which he (and others) assumes celebrated the victory at Actium. Coak (note 41) 245, note 2, agrees. For arguments against this notion; see Gurwal (note 1) 119-123 and 191. 65. See Vamp (note 1) 264, also Nethercut 415 (note 9) for pretensions.
66. Cf. note 29 above.
67. Gurwal (note 1) 205.
me with a copy of Burman's commentary on the lines discussed above and explained some of the problems in the Propertian manuscript tradition. The interpretation and any errors are my own.
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