

Ancient rome and cleopatra essay sample

[History](#), [Ancient History](#)



Read the following passage carefully at least twice. What does it tell us about Plutarch's view of the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra?

For Plutarch peoples actions, however trite, were great indications of a person's moral character (Plutarch, 1914, p. 225). We can, therefore, assume that Plutarch would have placed great importance on the everyday activities of Cleopatra and Antony in reflecting the character of their relationship.

Plutarch wrote 150 years after the events of Cleopatra and Antony and was therefore heavily influenced by Roman views of, not only, the couple themselves but also by Roman's understanding and expectations of relationships, gender and race.

Plutarch highlights the inseparability of Cleopatra and Antony with his long list of the couple's activities. To the modern reader, this behaviour would likely be understood as "romantic love", the positive effect of two people having immense feelings for one another. Considering the Roman times in which Plutarch wrote, he would view these actions quite differently. The Roman moralising tradition of the time did not recognise love as a quality. In contrast, such an attachment as Cleopatra and Antony clearly had would be identified as a type of "bewitchment".(Moohan, 2008, p. 10-11).

Remembering this, we can decipher that the couple's closeness would not be viewed by Plutarch as a positive aspect of their relationship, rather one that is fanatical.

Plutarch suggests a relationship that is controlled by Cleopatra. The use of the word "tutelage" places authority with her and paints her like a prison warden constantly surveilling Antony (Plutarch, in AA100 Assignment

Booklet, 2011, p. 17). Antony is foolish and passive, whereas Cleopatra is composed and intelligent. He lacks astuteness as his illusional fishing trick is transparent to Cleopatra. In contrast, Cleopatra has great manipulative skills as shown when she cunningly turns the fishing trick around. This matriarchal relationship would be viewed by Plutarch as unnatural. In Roman society, a woman was viewed as the weaker sex that should be controlled by man (Cavazzi, 2011). So in Plutarch's eyes, Antony has failed to live up to his male role within the relationship.

Romans believed that " A man's whole being is moulded by the habits of his daily life" (Moohan, 2008. p. 27). To Plutarch, Antony's activities such as fishing indicates Antony's failure to live up to his honorable rank as a Roman general. He is clearly inferior to the man he once was when he hunted " cities, realms, and continents" (Plutarch, in AA100 Assignment Booklet, 2011, p. 17).

At times, Plutarch shows more concern with Antony's behaviour than Cleopatra's. Antony's actions are described as " mad follies" and, although Cleopatra participates, it is Antony's actions that lack reason, not hers (Plutarch, in AA100 Assignment Booklet, 2011, p. 17). Romans viewed Egyptian way of life as inferior and " barbaric" compared to the civility of Roman culture as was reiterated by many Roman historians such as Cassius Dio (Moohan, 2008. p. 27). Therefore, Plutarch is more concerned with Antony's actions as he expects more from a Roman man. As a woman and an Egyptian, Plutarch does not have such high expectations of Cleopatra hence why he is less focussed on her.

This passage underlines the relationship's negative influence on Antony and highlights the power dynamics of the relationship. Cleopatra is in control and outwits Antony, whereas he is powerless and idiotic. Plutarch makes sense of Antony's behaviour with a typical Roman view, he has been bewitched by Cleopatra and he is the victim because, being of a superior race and gender, he has more to lose than his female Egyptian partner.

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