

Cleopatra's Ring

Kathryn J. Gutzwiller

A QUATRAIN IN THE *Greek Anthology* describes a signet ring of amethyst that belonged to a Queen Cleopatra and was engraved with an image of the goddess Methe, or Drunkenness (Asclep. 44 G-P=AP 9.752):

εἰμι Μέθη, τὸ γλύμμα σοφῆς χερός, ἐν δ' ἀμεθύστω
γέγλυμμαι· τέχνης δ' ἡ λίθος ἀλλοτρίη.
ἀλλὰ Κλεοπάτρης ἱερὸν κτέαρ, ἐν γὰρ ἀνάσσης
χειρὶ θεὸν νήφειν καὶ μεθύουσαν ἔδει.¹

Amethyst was believed to be an antidote against inebriation.² In the belief system of the Persian Magi from which this superstition descends, stones were often engraved with a particular talisman thought to increase their beneficial power.³ But here there is a conflict between gemstone and figure, resolved in favor of sobriety when the ring is placed upon the hand of the queen. The epigram thus functions as a compliment to a royal patron.

In the *Anthology* the epigram is ascribed either to Asclepiades of Samos or to Antipater of Thessalonica, an epigrammatist of the Augustan age. If composed by Asclepiades, the poem can only refer to the Cleopatra who was the sister of

¹ "I am Drunkenness, the engraving of a skilled hand, but I've been engraved in amethyst. The stone is in opposition to its emblem. Yet the holy object belongs to Cleopatra, for on the queen's hand even a drunken goddess should be sober."

² Plin. *HN* 37.124 (*magorum vanitas ebrietati eas resistere promittit*); Nonnus *Dion.* 12.381. Theophrastus *Lap.* 31 (τὸ δ' ἀμέθυσον οἰνωπὸν τῇ χροῖ) shows the connection between amethyst and wine to be as old as the fourth century B.C.; cf. *HN* 37.121: *causam nominis adferunt quod usque ad vini colorem accedens, priusquam eum degustet, in violam desinat fulgor.*

³ Lapidary lore comes down to us through the Orphic poems (E. Adel, *Orphei Lithica* [Berlin 1881]). The earlier sources known to Pliny were Hellenistic works, apparently dependent on Persian texts: see T. Hophner, "Lithika," *RE* 13.1 (1926) 747-69; Bidez-Cumont I 128ff, 188-98; R. P. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* (Paris 1950) I 160-86.

Alexander the Great, murdered at Sardis about 308 B.C.⁴ It would then fix the birth of the Samian, mentioned by Theocritus as a poet of distinction (*Id.* 7.39ff), no later than 330 B.C.⁵ But Alan Cameron has recently argued that the author must be Antipater and the queen in question Cleopatra Selene, the daughter of Antony. He bases his argument on the claim that "the poem is in fact a rather silly, rhetorical ecphrasis on a gem. In both subject matter and style it is utterly unlike Asclepiades—or indeed any of his contemporaries."⁶ But

⁴ Cleopatra, the daughter of Philip II, was married to Alexander of Epirus and ruled Epirus after his death in 330. Later she was courted by all the would-be successors to Alexander, but did not again marry. She spent her last years in Sardis under the protection of Antigonos, who had her murdered when she decided to accept an offer of marriage from Ptolemy. See G. H. Macurdy, *Hellenistic Queens* (Baltimore 1932) 26, 30-39, 45-48; E. Carney, "The Sisters of Alexander the Great: Royal Relicts," *Historia* 37 (1988) 394-404; J. Whitehorse, *Cleopatras* (London 1994) 57-70.

⁵ Of course, his birth may be a decade or so earlier, but we do have an epigram in which he claims to be not yet twenty-two (15 G-P=AP 12.46). For the dating of Asclepiades' birth from the Methe epigram, see O. Knauer, *Die Epigramme des Asklepiades v. Samos* (Würzburg 1935) 27; W. and M. Wallace, *Asklepiades of Samos* (London 1941) ix; A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page, ed., *The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams* (Cambridge 1965) II 148; P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford 1972) I 557, II 795; G. Galli Calderini, "Su alcuni epigrammi dell' *Antologia Palatina* corretti di lemmi alternativi," *AttiNapoli* 31 (1982) 266. With some inconsistency, Gow-Page II 114f omit the Cleopatra epigram from their discussion of Asclepiades' life and opt for a birth date about 320. A birth no later than 330 gains support from J. Barron, *The Silver Coins of Samos* (London 1966) 137, who identifies as the Samian epigrammatist the Asclepiades whose name appears on coins minted just before 301 B.C.

⁶ "Two Mistresses of Ptolemy Philadelphus," *GRBS* 31 (1990: hereafter 'Cameron, *GRBS*') 292; the general argument is repeated in *Callimachus and his Critics* (Princeton 1995: 'Callimachus') 237. In identifying the queen as Cleopatra Selene, Cameron follows Conrad Cichorius, *Römische Studien* (Leipzig 1922) 331f. As his primary evidence for the authorship of Antipater, he offers the assertion (*GRBS* 293) that the quatrain is in the style of a couplet by Plato *junior*, a poet of the first century: ἡ λίθος ἔστ' ἀμέθυστος, ἐγὼ δ' ὁ πότης Διώνυσος· ἢ νήφειν πείσει μ' ἢ μαθέτω μεθύειν (*AP* 9.748). The repetition of the motif indicates nothing other than the variation of a well-known epigrammatist by a later poet—one of the most common characteristics of the *Anthology*. Two Latin epigrams on amethyst stone engraved with figures of Bacchus, perhaps translations of Greek originals, are found in the *Epigrammata Bobiensia*, nos. 20. 21. Nor is the reappearance of the metrical irregularity in line 3 in an epigram by Antipater (*AP* 9.215.2) a compelling

Cameron has overlooked a significant stylistic parallel, pointed out by Knauer,⁷ among the epigrams attributed solely to the Samian (Asclep. 32 G-P=AP 9.63):

Λυδὴ καὶ γένος εἰμι καὶ οὄνομα, τῶν δ' ἀπὸ Κόδρου
 σεμνοτέρη πασῶν εἰμι δι' Ἀντίμαχον·
 τίς γὰρ ἔμ' οὐκ ἤεισε; τίς οὐκ ἀνελέξατο Λυδὴν,
 τὸ ξυνὸν Μουσῶν γράμμα καὶ Ἀντιμάχου;⁸

In both epigrams a female speaker is impersonated (εἰμι Μέθη, Λυδὴ ... εἰμι); and in both the reader's delight derives from the gradual realization of the speaker's ambiguous status. Lyde, who at first appears to be Antimachus' flesh-and-blood mistress, is revealed to be the mere title of a book, and the personified Methe, though carved in stone, yet asserts herself to be a goddess. The quatrains display as well a certain similarity of rhythmical pattern. On stylistic grounds, then, we must concur with Gow-Page that "Asclepiades has much the stronger claim" to authorship.⁹

Nor is it true that the subject matter of the Methe epigram is utterly unlike anything found in the poetry of Asclepiades' contemporaries. It is well-known that Posidippus of Pella imitated a number of epigrams by Asclepiades, and the two epigrammatists are mentioned together in an inscription dating to ca 275 B.C.¹⁰ There has now come to light a papyrus of the late third century B.C. containing a collection of about a hundred epigrams by Posidippus, which includes a whole section on gems or stones (*P. Mil. Vogl. inv.* 1295). To date, the editors have published only three: one on a ring of Persian lapis lazuli given to a "dark-haired" girl in exchange for a kiss, one on the beauty of the commonplace rock crystal of Arabia, and one on

indication of authorship. As Cameron (*GRBS* 293) points out, "various easy corrections are possible."

⁷ Knauer (*supra* n.4: 27): "Das Wortspiel erinnert an das Spiel mit 'Lyde'."

⁸ "I am Lyde (Lydian) in origin and name, and Antimachus has made me the most revered of all women descended from Codrus. For who has not sung of me? Who has not read Lyde, the joint composition of the Muses and Antimachus?"

⁹ Gow-Page II 148. It is significant that Galli Calderini (*supra* n.5: 266ff) reaches the same conclusion in her stylistic analysis.

¹⁰ *FdD* III.3 192. For the details of Posidippus' imitation of Asclepiades, see Fraser (*supra* n.5) I 569f, II 813 n.145. It is surely significant as well that Meleager links the trio of Asclepiades (called Sicelidas), Posidippus, and Hedylus in a single couplet in the prooemium to the *Garland* (1.45f G-P=AP 4.1.45f).

a stone called *iaspis* (a kind of chalcedony) engraved with a flying Pegasus.¹¹ Not only does the papyrus document that epigrams on gemstones constituted a recognized subtype already in the third century, but the last poem, on an engraved gem, provides a significant parallel to the Methe epigram:

εὖ τὸν Πήγασον ἵππον ἐπ' ἠερόεσσαν ἴασπιν
 χεῖρά τε καὶ κατὰ νοῦν ἔγλυφ' ὁ χειροτέχνης·
 Βελλεροφόντης μὲν γὰρ ἀλήϊον εἰς Κιλικίων γῆν
 ἤριφ', ὁ δ' εἰς κυανῆν ἠέρα πῶλος ἔβη,
 οὐνεκ' ἀνηνιόχητον ἔτι τρομέοντα χαλινοῖς
 τοῦτον ἐν αἰθερίῳ τῷδ' ἐτύπωσε λίθῳ.¹²

The engraver has employed both hand and mind in creating his portrait of Pegasus ascending to his heavenly catasterism: not only has he skillfully suggested the bodily trembling of the animal as it flies bridled and riderless but his choice of gem adds to the effect of realism. According to Pliny (*HN* 37.115), one type of *iaspis* was called ἀερίζουσα because it resembles the blue sky. In the first line of the epigram, then, Posidippus' adjective ἠερόεσσαν refers to a kind of *iaspis* blue in color (cf. ἠερόεσσαν ἴασπιν, *Dionys. Per.* 724). In the second couplet he reveals the reason for this choice of gem by describing Pegasus' flight into the "dark blue air" (κυανῆν ἠέρα) and hammers his point home in the last line by referring to the *iaspis* as an "airy stone" (αἰθερίῳ ... λίθῳ). The engraver has thus cleverly enhanced the realism of his depiction by carving his flying Pegasus into a stone of sky-blue color. It is just this sort of connection between figure and ground that underlies the epigram on Cleopatra's amethyst ring, engraved with a figure of Methe.

A Posidippian epigram known from manuscript, and now found on the Milan papyrus, provides another parallel to the

¹¹ G. Bastianini and C. Gallazzi, edd., *Posidippo: epigrammi* (Milan 1993). The editors warn that this is a preliminary text, without marks indicating lacunae and doubtful letters. For a discussion of the division into epigram subtypes—a surprise in so early a collection—see "Il poeta ritrovato," *Rivista "Ca' de Sass"* 121 (1993). The other categories preserved on the papyrus are omens, dedications, epitaphs, sculpture, equestrian topics, shipwrecks, cures, and τρόποι or manners.

¹² "The horse Pegasus has been well carved on sky-blue chalcedony by a craftsman using both hand and mind. For Bellerophon fell into the Aleian plain of the Cilicians, but the steed flew up into the dark air. For this reason he molded the creature riderless, still trembling under the reins, on this airy stone."

poem on Methe.¹³ Tzetzes (*Chil.* 7.660–69) has preserved an epigram on a snake stone (δρακοντίτης, in Latin *draconitis* or *dracontias*), engraved with a tiny chariot (Posid. 20 G-P):

οὐ ποταμὸς κελάδων ἐπὶ χεῖλεσιν ἀλλὰ δράκοντος
εἶχέ ποτ' εὐπῶγων τόνδε λίθον κεφαλῇ
λευκὰ φαληριόωντα· τὸ δὲ γλυφὲν ἄρμα κατ' αὐτοῦ
τοῦθ' ὑπὸ Λυγκείου βλέμματος ἐγλύφετο
ψεύδει χειρὸς ὅμοιον, ἀποπλασθὲν γὰρ ὀρᾶται
γλύμμα, κατὰ πλατέος δ' οὐκ ἂν ἴδοις προβόλου.
ἦ καὶ θαῦμα πέλει μόχθου μέγα πῶς ὁ λιθουργὸς
τάς ἀτενιζούσας οὐκ ἐμόγησε κόρας.¹⁴

In elucidating the epigram, Gow explains that the tiny chariot had been engraved into one of the white flecks on the stone so that it could be detected only when a sealing was made.¹⁵ But no one, to my knowledge, has recognized that the poem's various references to the skill required in producing such a minuscule figure do more than just compliment the craftsman. They point the reader to the ancient belief that the snake stone had the property of improving vision. Ptolemy Chennos 5 (p.192.12–16 Westermann) even reports that Candaules' wife, who possessed a ring made of this substance, had a double pupil and was especially sharp-sighted; for that reason she was able to see Gyges leaving her room.¹⁶ From a knowledge of lore about

¹³ Bastianini has confirmed through private correspondence the report of L. Lehnus, "Posidippo ritorna," *RFIC* 121 (1993) 364, that the snake stone epigram has been identified on the papyrus. Though twentieth-century scholars have ignored the connection with Asclepiades' Methe epigram, it was noted by H. Ouvré, *Quae fuerint dicendi genus ratioque metrica apud Asclepiaden, Posidippum, Hedylum* (Paris 1894) 30: "facile crediderim Posidippum exemplo magistri concitatum, de lapide pretioso poema composuisse."

¹⁴ "No river sounding on its banks but the full-bearded head of a dragon once held this stone, flecked with white. The chariot engraved on it was carved by the vision of Lynceus to resemble a white mark on a nail, for the engraving is visible only when an impression is made and then you may see it on the seal's flat face. It's an amazing feat that the stonemason didn't harm his straining eyes."

¹⁵ "Asclepiades and Posidippus: Notes and Queries," *CR* 68 (1954) 197ff; Gow-Page II 500f. Gow's views are repeated by E. Fernández-Galiano, *Posidipo de Pela* (Madrid 1987) 126–29.

¹⁶ Philostratus (*VA* 3.8) claims that snake stones possess an incredible power like that in Gyges' ring, suggesting that they grant the power of invisibility (*cf.* *Pl. Resp.* 359d–60b, 612b). Philostratus' account seems an embellishment or misunderstanding of the version found in Ptolemy.

gemstones, the reader of Posidippus' epigram is to understand that the influence of the snake stone made possible the Lynceus-like eyesight of the engraver.¹⁷ Nor was the choice of the chariot arbitrary. Three sources—Plin. *HN* 37.158, Solin. 30.16ff, Philostr. *VA* 3.8—preserve the fantastic account of how the *draconitis* was obtained from the heads of large bearded snakes, or dragons, that lived in India. The earlier source for the story about the dragons, cited by both Pliny and Solinus, was Sotacus, a writer of the late fourth or early third century B.C., who composed a *Περὶ λίθων* concerned, in part, with the medicinal and magical properties of stones.¹⁸ Sotacus reported that the gatherers of the *draconitis* rode out in search of their prey in chariots (*bigis vehi*, *HN* 37.158). To preserve the magical power of the stones, they had to split open the heads of the dragons while still alive, and for this purpose they used drugs to lull the snakes to sleep. In all likelihood, then, the tiny chariot carved on the gem provided a reference to the difficult process by which the gem had ostensibly been obtained.

The parallels between Posidippus' epigram on the snake stone and the epigram on Cleopatra's amethyst are close and unmistakable. Both poems allude to the physical effect of the stone on its possessor, and in both instances the figure carved on the bezel is related to the type of stone being engraved. In fact, the parallels are so striking (note how Posidippus' repetition *γλυφὲν ... ἐγλύφετο ... γλύμμα* echoes Asclepiades' *γλύμμα ... γέγλυμμα*) that we are reminded a number of scholars have supposed paired epigrams by Asclepiades and Posidippus were published together in an early anthology.¹⁹ The pairing of amethyst and snake stone may reflect as well the associations made by prose writers like Sotacus. Just before his discussion of the snake

¹⁷ As in the case of amethyst, the etymology of *δρακοντίτης* from *δράκων* ("serpent"), which was derived from *δρακῶν* ("having seen"), is clearly connected with belief about the physical effect of the stone. Philostratus (*VA* 3.7), in discussing another kind of Indian dragon, claims its pupils consist of fiery stones possessing extraordinary powers.

¹⁸ Pliny cites him as "one of the most ancient authorities" (*e vetustissimis auctoribus*, *HN* 36.146); for Sotacus' comments on the special properties of stones, see 36.146, 37.135. The title of his work is preserved by Apollonius *Mir.* 36. See E. Kind, "Sotakos," *RE* 2 III.A.1 (1927) 1211.

¹⁹ R. Reitzenstein, *Epigramm und Skolion: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der alexandrinischen Dichtung* (Giessen 1893) 96-102, argued that the *Soros* (*ΣII* 11.101) was a joint compilation of epigrams by Asclepiades, Posidippus, and Hedylus. For a recent discussion of this influential theory, see A. Cameron, *The Greek Anthology from Meleager to Planudes* (Oxford 1993) 369-76.

stone (derived from Sotacus), Pliny describes the Dionysias, clearly not a form of amethyst but another stone that served as an antidote to drunkenness (37.157). And just as Asclepiades' amethyst graced the hand of Queen Cleopatra, so Sotacus reports that he saw one of the legendary snake stones "in the possession of a king" (*apud regem*, 37.158), quite possibly someone known to Alexander's sister, a woman courted by all the contenders to her brother's empire (Diod. 20.37.4ff).

Given the stylistic parallel to Asclepiades' Lyde poem and these striking similarities to epigrams on stones by Posidippus, the attribution of the Methe epigram to Antipater of Thessalonica, rather than the Samian, can in no way be sustained. But what significance would an amethyst ring engraved with a figure of Drunkenness have for the Cleopatra who was the daughter of Philip II of Macedon? To answer this question, we need to consider the artistic, literary, and political climate in which the epigram was composed.

The conquests of Alexander in India and other eastern areas brought to the Greek world an influx of precious stones, to supplement the semiprecious ones already in common use. In the words of Gisela Richter, "the hyacinth, garnet, beryl, topaz, amethyst [were] now eagerly sought after and skilfully used to gain the maximum effect of their brilliant colouring."²⁰ The fine art of miniature engraving in precious stones developed in the courts of Alexander and his successors, where gem carving, along with sculpture and painting, became a medium for royal iconography.²¹ Patronage in this art as in others was offered only to the most skilled craftsmen. Tradition recorded that, as Alexander reserved for Lysippus the right to sculpt his likeness in bronze and for Apelles the privilege of painting him, so he allowed only Pyrgoteles to carve his image in emerald (Plin. *HN* 7.125; 37.8). The official portraits of Hellenistic monarchs created by master engravers like Pyrgoteles were likely first developed on precious stones, in very limited numbers, and

²⁰ *Engraved Gems of the Greeks and the Etruscans* (London 1968) 134. A. Furtwängler, *Die antiken Gemmen* (Leipzig 1900) III 151, points out that the amethyst, which had fallen out of use, became popular again at the opening of the Hellenistic era. On the changes in gem carving brought about by the age of Alexander, see also J. Boardman and M.-L. Vollenweider, *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems and Finger Rings* I (Oxford 1978) 66-75.

²¹ For political iconography see in general J. J. Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge 1986) 19-46; for more detail, R. R. R. Smith, *Hellenistic Royal Portraits* (Oxford 1988), esp. 12 on gems and cameos; A. Stewart, *Faces of Power: Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics* (Berkeley 1993).

then disseminated through duplication on coins. Although few examples survive of the miniature engraving on gems produced for the Argeads, gems from the early Ptolemaic period offer direct parallels in both material and iconography for the ring belonging to Cleopatra. Two stones of dark amethyst, for example, bearing royal portraits are identified by Boardman-Vollenweider as representations of Arsinoe II Philadelphus and her brother-husband Ptolemy II (nos. 283, 285, dated 290–270 B.C.). The political imagery on signet rings included not only royal portraits but dynastic symbols as well. Examples produced for Ptolemaic royalty include a gem carved with a royal hawk, perhaps a sign of the king's courage, and the thyrsus knotted with a diadem, symbolizing Ptolemaic descent from Dionysus (Boardman-Vollenweider nos. 337, 340). Hellenistic monarchs likely used such seals as distinctive marks of their authority, just as later Sulla employed a signet ring representing the surrender of Jugurtha, Augustus a sphinx inherited from his mother, and Maecenas a frog (Plin. *HN* 37.9f). I suggest that Asclepiades' epigram offers evidence for such royal symbolism on gemstones even before the beginning of the third century.

Personified Drunkenness first appears in both literature and art in the second half of the fourth century. Menander wrote a play called *Methe* (fr. 264–67 K.–T.), in which Drunkenness spoke the prologue, probably to give background information about a rape by a drunken young man.²² Drunkenness became a topic of interest to philosophers in the closing decades of the fourth century, and a Peripatetic treatise entitled *Περὶ μέθης* circulated under the name of Aristotle.²³ In the realm of art, Praxiteles sculpted a *Methe* as part of a bronze statue group including also Dionysus and a satyr (Plin. *HN* 34.69), and Pausias painted *Methe* drinking from a glass phiale for the Tholos of the Asclepieion at Epidaurus (Paus. 2.27.3). Art historians have assumed that the latter provided the model for a

²² That Drunkenness had a speaking rôle in comedy is shown by Pollux 4.142, who mentions a mask of her.

²³ Arist. frs. 102–10 Rose. Zeno, who personally avoided wine drinking (*PCG* VII 273, fr. 88; D.L. 7.27), supposedly introduced the question of whether the truly wise man is capable of being drunk, and Philo (*De plant.* 142) reports many philosophers later took up the question. Posidippus, under Stoic influence, turned the topic to the erotic sphere, claiming that when sober (νήφω) he could resist Eros through reason but when drunk (μεθύωντ') he became the helpless victim of passion (7 G–P=*AP* 12.120; cf. νήφοντ' οἰνοθέεντ' 9.8 G–P=*AP* 12.168.8). This drunk-sober contrast offers yet another Posidippian echo of the *Methe* epigram.

nude female drinking from a cup found on a number of surviving gemstones,²⁴ stones that preserve the likely appearance of the Methe carved on Cleopatra's amethyst ring. But beyond this cultural interest in personified Drunkenness during the latter part of the fourth century, the choice of Methe as an emblem for the queen's ring is surely related also to the connection between the Argead dynasty and Dionysiac cult.

Macedonian monarchs were famous for their fondness of wine, sometimes drunk unmixed. Eugene Borza has even argued that the symposium, where kings exchanged frank talk with their friends over undiluted wine, assumed a quasi-official status in Macedonian government.²⁵ Certainly key events in the rule of the Argeads, such as Alexander's quarrel with his father on the occasion of Philip's marriage to a young Macedonian woman named Cleopatra, hinged upon an excessive consumption of wine. Even the deterioration of Alexander's leadership abilities in the latter part of his campaign was explained, at least by his detractors, by a new propensity to anger under the influence of drink.

Macedonian tradition presumably, then, influenced Alexander's choice of Dionysus as one of the heroic/divine figures with whom he was associated. And as he encouraged the report that his true father was Zeus by his visit to Ammon at Siwah, so he accepted comparison with various divinized figures who were sired by Zeus. The dissemination of these propagandistic associations took place through both literature and art. Curtius reports that a trio of sycophantic poets who followed Alexander—Agis of Argos, Choerilus of Samos, and Cleo the Sicilian—"opened heaven to him, boasting that Hercules, Father Liber (Dionysus), and Castor and Pollux were about to yield to a new deity" (8.5.8). Alexander's chroniclers detail various actions during the eastern campaign designed to foster an identification with the conquering Dionysus: Thais' komos leading to the destruction of Persepolis, the Bacchic revels in Carmania, the Dionysiac ritual performed at Nysa. Scholars continue to debate whether Alexander openly identified his conquests in the east with the mythical exploits of Dionysus or whether

²⁴ Furtwängler (*supra* n.20) II 209 on Taf. 43 no. 59; A. Kossatz-Deissmann, "Methe," *LIMC* VI.1 (Zurich 1992) 563.

²⁵ "The Symposium at Alexander's Court," in *Ancient Macedonia III* (Thessaloniki 1983) 45-55, and *In the Shadow of Olympus: The Emergence of Macedon* (Princeton 1990) 241f. For the thesis that Alexander eventually succumbed to alcoholism, see J. M. O'Brien, *Alexander the Great: The Invisible Enemy* (London 1992).

reports to this effect were embellishments motivated by the successors' later use of Dionysiac cult.²⁶ But even in a conservative assessment of the artistic evidence, Andrew Stewart finds an indisputable identification with Dionysus on a coin issued by Seleucus that depicts Alexander in a panther-skin helmet.²⁷ The coin dates to the years just before the battle of Ipsus (301 B.C.), and so is roughly contemporary with the Methe epigram. The association of Dionysiac imagery with the Argeads, though in all likelihood a continuation of Macedonian tradition, is thus documentable for the last decade of the fourth century.

But what association had Argead women with Dionysus? Though royal women presumably did not attend symposia, various reports attest a strong connection with Dionysiac cult. Plutarch (*Alex.* 2.7ff) records that Macedonian women were enthusiastically addicted to the worship of Dionysus and that Alexander's mother Olympias was a zealous participant in the rituals, handling serpents in Bacchic dances.²⁸ Evidence that her interest in Dionysiac religion served, at least in part, a state function comes from a letter quoted by Athenaeus (14.659F-60A), in which she advises Alexander to acquire a certain cook who is accomplished in "all his ancestral rites, both the Argadistic [perhaps to be emended to Argeadic] and Bacchic."²⁹ Athenaeus (13.560F) also preserves the story that Olympias decked herself out like a Bacchant to meet her rival Adea-Eurydice in battle, to the accompaniment of tambourines. His

²⁶ For a full discussion of Alexander's identification with Dionysus, see P. Goukowsky, *Essai sur les origines du mythe d'Alexandre II* (Nancy 1981); for Arrian's skepticism about reports of Alexander's Dionysiac reveling (reported as early as Cleitarchus), see A. B. Bosworth, *From Arrian to Alexander: Studies in Historical Interpretation* (Oxford 1988) 67-72; for Dionysus' association with various Hellenistic monarchs see J. Tondriau, "Dionysos, dieu royal," in Παγκάρπεια, *Mélanges Henri Grégoire* (= *AnnInstPhilHist-Orient* 9-12 [Brussels 1949-53]) III 441-66; on the relationship between Dionysiac cult and the Ptolemies, see Fraser (*supra* n.5) I 201-06; E. E. Rice, *The Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus* (Oxford 1983) 42-115.

²⁷ Stewart (*supra* n.21) 314ff; Smith (*supra* n.21: 37f) argues that the diadem, a central element in Hellenistic royal iconography and an attribute on early Alexander portraits, symbolized the Dionysiac model of military conquest.

²⁸ On the evidence for historical maenadism in the Hellenistic period, see A. Henrichs, "Greek Maenadism from Olympias to Messalina," *HSCP* 82 (1978) 121-60.

²⁹ On the textual problems in the passage, see E. Fredricksmeyer, "The Ancestral Rites of Alexander the Great," *CP* 61 (1966) 179-82.

source, Duris of Samos, served as tyrant of the Samians in the early years of the third century and was surely well-known to the aristocratic Asclepiades. The poet was clearly aware, then, that Macedonian queens, like their male counterparts, could draw political strength from Dionysiac imagery, though for royal women the traditional association was with maenadism, not with the symposium or even drunkenness. In the *Bacchae*, written during the dramatist's final years in the court at Pella, Euripides defends the holy Maenads against charges of both drunkenness and sexual promiscuity (314–18, 686ff).³⁰ For Cleopatra to use Dionysiac imagery to lay claim to her Argead heritage in the years following her brother's death was both politically advantageous and inherently problematic. The key to her survival, as the widow of Alexander of Epirus, was the possibility that she might marry one of the successors and bear him a male heir with a claim to the throne of Macedon. Any symbolic reminder of her status as a full-blooded Argead was useful in that regard. At the same time, it was essential that she maintain her respectability in order to hold herself out as a desirable mate for one of the successors, and that involved avoiding the kind of hostile criticism directed toward her mother, including stories of barbaric maenadism.³¹ For a number of years Cleopatra successfully maintained her precarious position by juggling her various suitors; it was only when she finally agreed to marry Ptolemy I that Antigonos ordered her murder (Diod. 20.37.3–6). In returning to a closer reading of the epigram, we shall see how brilliantly it responds to Cleopatra's political and propagandistic needs.

³⁰ While at *Bacch.* 317f (ἐν βακχεύμασιν οὐδ' ἦγε σῶφρων οὐ διαφθαρήσεται) Euripides is clearly fending off charges of sexual misbehavior, Longinus substitutes a reference to "sober intoxication" in his paraphrase (κἂν βακχεύμασι νήφειν ἀναγκαῖον, 16.4). The direct link between drunkenness and sex in Greek thought is illustrated as well by Pausias' dual paintings at Epidaurus of Methe and Eros (Paus. 2.27.3).

³¹ For the campaign of hostility directed toward Olympias, see E. Carney, "Olympias and the Image of the Virago," *Phoenix* 47 (1993) 29–55. Carney, "Women and *Basileia*: Legitimacy and Female Political Action in Macedonia," *CJ* 90 (1995) 388, also points out that "sexual fidelity is almost assumed for royal women in the fourth century." Plutarch (*Mor.* 818B–C) reports that Alexander, when told of a love affair his sister was having, remarked only that she should get some enjoyment from her royal position. Yet Plutarch clearly disapproves of Alexander's indulgence, and the general tenor of the story suggests that sexual activity for royal women, even in widowhood, was fraught with danger.

Galli Calderini (*supra* n.5: 266) has suggested that Asclepiades' epigram was composed to accompany the gift of an amethyst ring to the queen. More likely, I think, Cleopatra had commissioned a signet ring with an engraving of Methe as a symbol of her dynastic association with Dionysiac cult, and Asclepiades assumed the task of explaining in a memorable quatrain how the ring functioned as a suitable emblem for Alexander's sister. With typical economy, he states the essential in the first couplet: the speaker, Drunkenness, has been carved by a skilled hand—but carved in amethyst. In brief, the stone (ἀ-μεθύστος) is in opposition to the engraving (Μέθη). The resolution of the conflict, the counteracting balance of opposites, comes in the second couplet with the brief phrase ἀλλὰ Κλεοπάτρης ἱερὸν κτέαρ. Gow and Page (II 149) question whether the predicate should be taken as Κλεοπάτρης ("but a potent possession of Cleopatra's") or ἱερὸν ("but a possession of Cleopatra's has supernatural power"). Yet the phrase is a commonplace construction from Homer onward to designate something under the protection of a deity (ἄλσος ... ἱερὸν Ἀθηναίης, *Od.* 6.321f; ἄντρον ... ἱερὸν νυμφάων, 13.103f). This linguistic suggestion that Cleopatra possesses extraordinary powers is confirmed in the conclusion of the couplet as Methe, designating herself a goddess (θεόν), concedes that she yields up her own essential nature as drunkenness in the presence of the queen. As Methe is already opposed by the amethyst, this is not quite a statement that Cleopatra's powers reach the divine level. But the ambiguity of the language, the suggestion of a capacity beyond the human, is typical of the indirect praise directed to early Hellenistic monarchs, who looked forward to divine status after death.³² The clever rhetoric of the poem also manages to remind the reader that Cleopatra, as an Argead queen, shares in the divine status of her brother, the 'New Dionysus', while she maintains the respectability of a great lady who avoids the scandalous behavior associated with excessive drink. A sealing

³² For discussion of this technique in Theocritus, see F. Griffiths, *Theocritus at Court* (Leiden 1979). Asclepiades' Methe poem is apparently the model for Callimachus' sophisticated use of an inanimate object as the voice of praise for a queen, on which see K. J. Gutzwiller, "The Nautilus, the Halcyon, and Selenai: Callimachus' Epigram 5 Pf.=14 G-P," *ClAnt* 11 (1992) 194-209, and "Callimachus' *Lock of Berenice*: Fantasy, Romance, and Propaganda," *AJP* 113 (1992) 359-85.

made from the ring would show only Methe, a symbol of Dionysiac excess, but "on the queen's hand" (ἐν ἀνάσσης χειρί), as Asclepiades tells us, even this deity must yield to more temperate behavior.

A similar technique of praise is found in two other epigrams attributed to Asclepiades, though the authorship of both is disputed. One of these concerns Lysippus' famous bronze statue of Alexander (Asclep. 43 G-P=AP 16.120):

τόλμαν Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ ὅλαν ἀπεμάξατο μορφάν
 Λύσιππος—τίν' ὀδὶ χαλκὸς ἔχει δύναμιν—
 αὐδάσονται δ' ἔοικεν ὁ χάλκεος ἐς Δία λεύσσω,
 "γὰν ὑπ' ἐμοὶ τίθεμαι, Ζεῦ, σὺ δ' Ὀλυμπον ἔχε."³³

The epigram is ascribed alternately to Archelaus and Asclepiades. Although some editors have rejected the ascription to the Samian, much speaks in its favor. No other epigram in the *Anthology* is ascribed to Archelaus, and the only poet of this name from whom we have any epigrams wrote on zoological topics.³⁴ The subject of Lysippus' statue was treated also by Posidippus (18 G-P=AP 16.119), who may, once again, have been following Asclepiades' model. In addition, Plutarch (*Mor.* 331A, 335B) claims that the second couplet of the epigram was carved on Lysippus' statue. Although this statement is unlikely to be true, it suggests that the poem had become part of the tradition about the sculpted image of Alexander very early on, even that it was the model for the later epigrammatic variations of the theme. For our purposes, it is important to note how the last line of the epigram, as in the Methe poem, exalts Alexander beyond the merely human while avoiding direct equation with the divine.

³³ "Lysippus molded Alexander's boldness and his entire form. What power the bronze holds! The bronze statue, looking toward Zeus, seems about to say, 'I set earth under my feet, Zeus; you keep Olympus'."

³⁴ Archelaus, a writer of the third century B.C., is quoted by Antigonus of Carystus and Varro; his epigrams are cited in H. Lloyd-Jones and P. Parsons, ed., *Supplementum Hellenisticum* (Berlin 1983) frs. 125–29. See Gow-Page II 146f. Despite the lack of support for Archelaus as author of the epigram, Gow-Page II 147 are "loth to believe this commonplace rhetorical quatrain" to be the composition of Asclepiades. But Galli Calderini (*supra* n.5: 277–80) brings forward several points in favor of Asclepiadean authorship, including the popularity of the epigram as evidenced by an echo at *Ov. Met.* 15.858ff.

The other epigram, ascribed to either Asclepiades or Posidippus, concerns Berenice I, the wife of Ptolemy Soter (Asclep. 39 G-P=AP 16.68):

Κύπριδος ἄδ' εἰκὼν· φέρ' ἰδόμεθα μὴ Βερενίκας·
δυστάζω ποτέρᾳ φῆ τις ὁμοιοτέραν.³⁵

Cameron argues persuasively for the authorship of Asclepiades on the basis that Posidippus never employs the distich. But to fit his revised chronology for Asclepiades, he claims that the epigram cannot have been composed before the queen's demise in 280, as Theocritus (*Id.* 15.106ff, 17.36-52) mentions Berenice's assimilation to Aphrodite after death.³⁶ Although it cannot be proved that the living Berenice was identified with Aphrodite, it is highly unlikely that poets waited for her demise to explore suggestive comparisons between them. Philip II began the practice of erecting public statues to royal women by placing chryselephantine images of his wife Olympias and his mother Eurydice (together with statues of himself, his father Amyntas, and his son Alexander) in the Philippeum, constructed at Olympia after his victory at Chaeroneia (Paus. 5.17.4, 20.9f). Even though there is no evidence that the figures in the Philippeum were given divine honors, the building was set up as a temple, and the statues took the form usually reserved for gods.³⁷ More importantly, in the last decade of the fourth century Adeimantus of Lampsacus set up a Philaeum, honoring the Phila who was the daughter of Antipater and wife of Demetrius Poliorcetes, at Thria in Attica—and in it was a statue of Phila Aphrodite (Ath. 6.255C).³⁸ The same identifica-

³⁵ "This is a statue of the Cyprian. But come, let us see if it's not Berenice. I am uncertain which one to say it most resembles."

³⁶ Cameron, *GRBS* 294f, *Callimachus* 238f. Gow-Page II 143 and Fernández-Galiano (*supra* n.15: 25f with a full review of earlier scholarship) favor Posidippus, partly on the assumption that Asclepiades did not write court poetry.

³⁷ See E. Fredricksmeier, "Divine Honors for Philip II," *TAPA* 109 (1979) 52-58.

³⁸ On Adeimantus, a prominent political agent of Demetrius Poliorcetes and not an abject flatterer as Athenaeus has it, see L. Robert, "Adeimantos et la ligue de Corinthe sur une inscription de Delphes," *Hellenica* 2 (1946) 15-33. On Phila's identification with Aphrodite and contemporary parallels, see K. Scott, "The Deification of Demetrius Poliorcetes," *AJP* 49 (1928) 137-66, 217-39, esp. 151, 235; L. Cerfaux and J. Tondriau, *Le culte des souverains dans la civilisation Gréco-Romaine* (Louvain 1956) 176, 177 n.3; F. Taeger, *Charisma:*

tion with the Cyprian goddess is reported in a play of Alexis, where a character drinks a toast to the "savior gods," namely Antigonus, his son Demetrius, and Phila Aphrodite (Ath. 6.254A=PCG II 85, fr. 116). As Ptolemy Soter had married Berenice in 317 and she gave birth to a male heir in 308, it is entirely possible that she, like Phila, was assimilated to Aphrodite in public displays of statuary before the beginning of the third century. The conceit that Berenice cannot be distinguished from Aphrodite in appearance fits better a younger woman, and the tone of the epigram as a whole suggests a compliment directed to a living queen rather than celebration of one divinized in death. It is highly likely, then, that Asclepiades is the author of all three epigrams—that on Cleopatra's ring, on Lysippus' statue of Alexander, and on the statue of Berenice Aphrodite—and that all three date to the final years of the fourth century. Collectively, they offer evidence for the manner in which a talented literary artist devised praise for Hellenistic monarchs who wished their images constructed in the mold of the divine.

Although the Berenice epigram was clearly composed for the Ptolemies and the poem on Lysippus' statue could have found a welcome audience among any of the successors with an interest in promulgating the Alexander legend, there is no reason to doubt that the Methe epigram was written for Cleopatra. Like other Hellenistic royal women, Cleopatra was in a position to offer patronage to favored artists: we know, for instance, that she built a tomb on the road from Megara to Corinth for the Samian flute player Telephanes (Paus. 1.44.6).³⁹ Her brother Alexander had ordered the expulsion of the Athenian cleruchs from Samos and the return of the exiles, an order carried out after his death by Perdiccas. As a result, the returning Samians must have felt a special debt of gratitude to members of the Argead dynasty, and we have evidence for a Samian festival commemorating the restoration established in honor of Philip

Studien zur Geschichte des antiken Herrscherkultes (Stuttgart 1957) I 260f with n.42; C. Habicht, *Gottmenschentum und griechische Städte*² (Munich 1970) 63 n.22.

³⁹ For patronage by Ptolemaic queens see S. Pomeroy, "Charities for Greek Women," *Mnemosyne* SER. 4 35 (1982) 120–23, and *Women in Hellenistic Egypt from Alexander to Cleopatra* (New York 1984) 15f.

III and Alexander IV.⁴⁰ It was under these circumstances of political connection that the young Samian aristocrat Asclepiades composed an epigram on an exquisite amethyst ring possessed by Cleopatra, an epigram in which he complimented the queen by suggesting through his rhetorically clever impersonation of the carved goddess Methe that she shared, though in a manner appropriate to her sex, in the divine imagery accumulating around the figure of her brother. While Asclepiades' importance as the earliest erotic epigrammatist is commonly acknowledged, we can now begin to recognize that his formative contribution to Hellenistic literature extends as well to the development of subtle but sophisticated praise poetry.

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

July, 1996

⁴⁰ C. Habicht, "Samische Volksbeschlüsse der hellenistischen Zeit," *AM* 72 (1957) 160; see also G. Shipley, *A History of Samos: 800-188 BC* (Oxford 1987) 169.