

## Antony and Cleopatra

### SYNOPSIS

#### *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra*

Following the assassination of Julius Caesar and the defeat of Brutus and Cassius, Mark Antony, Octavius Caesar and Lepidus, the triumvirate, are the joint rulers of the Roman world. Antony, however, is fascinated by Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt, and prefers to spend his time with her in Alexandria, neglecting his military responsibilities. This scandal is the talk of Rome and has created a division between Antony and Octavius. When news arrives that Antony's wife has died, his lieutenant Enobarbus recalls Antony's responsibilities in Rome. The power of the triumvirate is being challenged by Pompey. Against the wishes of Cleopatra, Antony returns to Rome.

In Rome, Antony agrees to cement his alliance with Octavius by marrying his sister, Octavia. When this news reaches Cleopatra she is furious. Antony and Octavius make peace with Pompey, but shortly afterwards Antony learns that Octavius has attacked Pompey after all, has spoken in public against Antony, and has imprisoned Lepidus. Antony sends his new wife Octavia to negotiate with her brother while he returns secretly to Alexandria. When the news reaches Rome that Antony and Cleopatra have crowned themselves in Alexandria, Octavius declares war on Egypt.

Antony follows Cleopatra's advice to fight at sea, but her ship immediately runs away during the battle of Actium, and Antony, in despair and shame, follows her. However, hearing that Octavius has offered to make a secret treaty with Cleopatra, he fights a land battle against the Roman forces and wins. Before a third battle, Antony's soldiers are nervous and fear bad omens. Even the faithful Enobarbus leaves him and joins the other side. The Egyptian fleet surrenders, and Antony accuses Cleopatra of betraying him.

She hides in her tomb and sends out a false report that she is dead. Hearing this, Antony is sorry and tries to commit suicide. He is brought to Cleopatra's tomb to die in her arms. Although Octavius promises to respect Cleopatra, she does not want to become a captive and slave of the Romans and has a snake smuggled into her room, which she uses to kill herself. Octavius (Augustus) returns in triumph to Rome.

**Media:****DVD:**

*The Spread of the Eagle* (BBC TV 1963), dir. Peter Dews (mini-series covering 4 Roman plays)

*Cleopatra* (1963), dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz, with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton (big-budget historical epic, not the Shakespeare play)

*Carry on Cleo* (1964), dir. Gerald Thomas, (unsophisticated comedy based on Shakespeare's plot)

*Antony and Cleopatra* (1972), dir. Charlton Heston

*Antony and Cleopatra* (1974), dir. Trevor Nunn, with Janet Suzman

*Antony and Cleopatra* (BBC TV Shakespeare 1979), dir. Herbert Wise

*Antony and Cleopatra* (1981), dir. Jonathan Miller

*Antony and Cleopatra* (1983), dir. Lawrence Carra, with Lynn Redgrave

**CD Audio:**

*Antony and Cleopatra* (The Open University)

*Antony and Cleopatra* (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare)

[Michael Mitchell]