

DESPERATE HEROINES:  
GENDER AND POWER  
IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ITALIAN ART

by

Kirby M. Richards

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for Departmental Honors in  
the School of Art  
Texas Christian University  
Fort Worth, Texas

May 2, 2014

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Project Approved:

Supervising Professor: Babette Bohn, Ph.D.

School of Art

Amy Freund, Ph.D.

School of Art

C.D. Dickerson III, Ph. D.

Kimbell Art Museum

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examined the work of the seventeenth-century Italian artist Guido Cagnacci with particular regard to his paintings of Cleopatra VII, the ancient Egyptian queen. He returned to the subject several times across his career, providing a useful critical lens for assessing the evolution of his artistic approach. Cagnacci often imitated the style of more popular artists, but at the end of his life he created two of the most strikingly original depictions of Cleopatra of the seventeenth century. This thesis proposed that the late shift in his approach to style and iconography was a reflection of his environment. After moving from Venice to Vienna, where he worked at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I, Cagnacci was exposed to new artistic influences and a broader awareness of the political roles and authority of women. He combined Italian style with his new consciousness of Dutch and Flemish art to create two late depictions of the Egyptian queen that restore her dignity and reinterpret her suicide as an expression of power. I first considered Cleopatra as both a historical and legendary figure, exploring the verbal and visual manipulations of her narrative across the centuries. Then I engaged in a comparative analysis of four paintings of Cleopatra by Guido Cagnacci. Lastly, I investigated the emperor's court in Vienna, seeking to understand how Cagnacci's context could have prompted such an innovation interpretation of Cleopatra.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With a project of this size, there are always many people to thank. First and foremost, I would like to recognize my advisor and supervising professor, Dr. Babette Bohn, who has been an incredible mentor for the past four years. Thank you for the countless hours of conversation in your office and all of the memorable classes. I walked into your course my first semester at TCU and fell deeply in love with art history. Thank you for challenging me and encouraging my curiosity. I only hope that someday I can inspire someone the way you did for me. I would also like to thank Dr. Freund for graciously lending her time and critical skills to this project. And to Dr. Dickerson, thank you for taking me on as your intern two years ago. I have loved my time at the Kimbell, and I can't wait to see the exhibits I worked on with you come to fruition. I learned so much by your side and truly appreciate you taking an interest in my work. Last, but not least, I have to thank my family and friends, who do their best to keep me sane. Thank you for your endless love, support of my coffee habit, and understanding with regard to my ridiculous sleep schedule. I apologize for racking up such astronomical late fees at all of the libraries in the area and for accidentally napping through a number of important events. To everyone who has supported me throughout my TCU career – thank you. It has made all the difference.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
CLEOPATRA AND HER LEGACY .....	5
GUIDO CAGNACCI AND CLEOPATRA.....	17
GUIDO CAGNACCI AND THE VIENNESE COURT .....	34
CONCLUSION.....	51
ILLUSTRATIONS .....	53
WORKS CITED .....	59

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Guido Cagnacci, <i>Calling of St. Matthew</i> .....	53
Guido Cagnacci, <i>St. Anthony between Two Saints</i> .....	53
Guido Cagnacci, <i>Penitent Magdalen</i> .....	54
Guido Cagnacci, <i>Glory of St. Mercurialis</i> .....	54
Guido Cagnacci, <i>Glory of St. Valerian</i> .....	54
Guido Cagnacci, <i>David with the Head of Goliath</i> (private collection).....	55
Guido Cagnacci, <i>David with the Head of Goliath</i> (Columbia Museum of Art).....	55
Guido Cagnacci, <i>Human Life</i> (Nelson Shanks Collection) .....	55
Guido Cagnacci, <i>Human Life</i> (Fondazione Cavallini Sgarbi) .....	55
Guido Cagnacci, <i>Emperor Leopold I in Coronation Armor</i> .....	56
Guido Cagnacci, <i>Martha Rebuking Mary for Her Vanity</i> .....	56
Guido Cagnacci, <i>Cleopatra</i> (formerly Salamon Collection) .....	57
Guido Cagnacci, <i>Cleopatra</i> (private collection).....	57
Guido Cagnacci, <i>Cleopatra</i> (Pinacoteca di Brera) .....	58
Guido Cagnacci, <i>Death of Cleopatra</i> .....	58

## INTRODUCTION

The legacy of Cleopatra VII, the last pharaoh of Egypt who stood against the encroaching Roman Empire, has endured near-constant assault over the centuries. A historical figure shrouded in countless layers of myth and interpretation, she has often been overshadowed by the scale of her legend. Portrayals of Cleopatra across various artistic media have often contributed to a fundamental misperception of her character. The Italian painter Guido Cagnacci (1601-1663) created two late works that are arguably the most remarkable depictions of the Egyptian queen created during the seventeenth century. This thesis seeks to explain how and why Cagnacci, whose style had closely mimicked that of more popular artists for almost his entire career, suddenly produced such original interpretations. The sensitive approach to the female form and full appreciation of female authority expressed in these late works indicate that Cagnacci was an artist of depth and skill whose provincial reputation deserves to be reevaluated. Although he created several more conventional depictions in his early years, Cagnacci painted two astonishingly innovative pictures at the end of his life that reappraise Cleopatra and restore a sense of her dignity and power.

Guido Cagnacci was born in 1601 in the small town of Santarcangelo di Romagna, northwest of Rimini.<sup>1</sup> The son of a comfortably settled tanner, he appears to have pursued painting from an early age with the support of his family.<sup>2</sup> Arguably his first extant work, the *Last Supper* Cagnacci executed for the refectory of the Capuchin monastery in Santarcangelo has an illegible date next to his signature that has been read

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<sup>1</sup> This paper follows the thorough chronology presented in Daniele Benati and Antonio Paolucci, *Guido Cagnacci: Protagonista del Seicento tra Caravaggio e Reni* (Milan: Silvana, 2008), 338-344.

<sup>2</sup> Mario Zuffa, "Novità per Guido Cagnacci," *Arte Antica e Moderna* 24 (1963), 358.

as either 1615 or 1618.<sup>3</sup> From 1618-1621, the young Guido lived in Bologna with the family of Girolamo Leoni, a nobleman with whom his father had a business relationship. He was sent to the city to study in the workshop of an unknown artist, typically named by his early biographers as Guido Reni despite a lack of evidence.<sup>4</sup> Living with the Leoni family in their palace exposed the Cagnacci to a rich array of artwork, including paintings by Niccolò dell'Abate and a *Nativity of the Virgin* by Ludovico Carracci that is no longer known.<sup>5</sup> The Leoni also had two family chapels in Bologna, one with an altarpiece by Guido Reni. An inventory of the family's collection compiled in 1691 includes four works by Cagnacci, two of which have been linked to extant pieces. Stylistically they seem to date to the mid-seventeenth century, suggesting that Cagnacci kept in touch with the Leoni throughout his life.<sup>6</sup>

At some point while he was living in Bologna, Cagnacci visited Rome for the first time. His second sojourn to Rome lasted from 1621 through at least part of 1622, and was funded by his father.<sup>7</sup> He traveled to the city with Clemente Leoni, one of Girolamo's sons, who was in the service of Pope Gregory XV.<sup>8</sup> While there, Cagnacci does not appear to have received public commissions. He likely produced various sacred and profane subjects for general sale instead.<sup>9</sup> In Rome, Cagnacci lived with and studied under Guercino, an established artist with important connections throughout the city. Cagnacci absorbed a great deal from both his teacher's style and the influence of Caravaggesque trends. From 1622-1627, Cagnacci's whereabouts are unknown. Based on

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<sup>3</sup> P.G. Pasini, *Guido Cagnacci Pittore(1601-1663), Catalogo Generale* (Rimini: Luisè, 1986), 174.

<sup>4</sup> Zuffa, "Novità," 375.

<sup>5</sup> Raffaella Morselli and Anna Cera Stones, *Collezioni e Quadrerie nella Bologna del Seicento: Inventari 1640-1701* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 1998), 263.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>7</sup> Zuffa, "Novità," 358.

<sup>8</sup> Morselli and Stones, *Collezioni e Quadrerie*, 263.

<sup>9</sup> Benati and Paolucci, *Guido Cagnacci*, 339.

style, works such as his *Calling of St. Matthew* and *St. Anthony between Two Saints* (Figs. 1&2, both Museo della Città, Rimini) have been dated to this period.<sup>10</sup> From 1627-1628, he decorated a chapel for the Confraternity of the Sacrament in Saludecio. Cagnacci then apparently resided in Rimini from late 1628 to 1633, although he was plagued by issues stemming from a failed elopement. The widowed noblewoman involved, Teodora Stivivi, was confined to a convent by her family for several years, but the couple's illegitimate marriage proposal continued to cause legal problems.

Cagnacci escaped his troubles in Rimini for a while when he accepted a commission in 1634 from the guild of carpenters and blacksmiths in Sant'Arcangelo to paint St. Joseph and St. Eligius. He is recorded in 1637 in Urbania, where he executed a *Penitent Magdalen* for the Benedictine nuns of the church of Santa Maria Maddalena that remains there today (Fig. 3). Cagnacci was in Bologna in 1640 and in Forli two years later. His primary work in the latter city was the decoration of the drum and dome of the chapel of Santa Maria del Fuoco in the cathedral. Cagnacci was commissioned to produce two paintings, a *Glory of St. Mercurialis* and *Glory of St. Valerian*, (Figs. 4&5, both Pinacoteca Civica, Forli). After completing this pair, he abandoned the cupola fresco for unknown reasons, appearing in Cesena by late summer of 1644. Three years later, Cagnacci was in Faenza, where he completed two paintings for the Marchese Giueseppe Albicini of Forli and a plaque honoring Cardinal Bernardino Spada for the Elders of the City of Faenza. Cagnacci probably returned periodically to Bologna during this period. He can be securely placed in Venice by 1649.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Cagnacci spent the better part of a decade in Venice, reportedly living the entire time with a woman from Cesena named Maddalena Fontanafredda.<sup>11</sup> Although almost nothing is known about their relationship, it certainly hints at a pattern of unconventional social behavior and disregard for proper matrimonial expectations on Cagnacci's part. Another odd feature of the artist's time in Venice was his use of a pseudonym; he appears to have gone by the title of Signor Canlassi, *pittore bolognese*.<sup>12</sup> While it seems that Cagnacci ran a studio, little is known about his students. His artistic production during this period is almost entirely focused on secular subjects. Cagnacci's two versions of *David with the Head of Goliath*, (Fig. 6, private collection; Fig. 7, Columbia Museum of Art, South Carolina) are notable exceptions. In Venice, he often produced naturalistic, half-length female nudes depicting historical, mythological, or allegorical subjects. Cagnacci tended to return to the same themes, as evidenced by his numerous variations on *La Vita Umana* (e.g. Fig. 8, Nelson Shanks Collection, Pennsylvania and Fig. 9, Fondazione Cavallini Sgarbi, Ferrara). Most of his later paintings were probably produced for wealthy, educated private patrons from Emilia-Romagna or the Veneto.

Cagnacci's time in Venice ended under a cloud after his unconventional relationship with Maddalena was brought to the attention of the Venetian authorities. Apparently aware of impending legal action, he departed the city sometime around 1658-1659 to evade punishment.<sup>13</sup> Upon accepting an invitation to the court of the Holy Roman Emperor in Vienna, Cagnacci left Italy for good, arriving in Austria around 1659. Cagnacci's late production encompasses both standard court portraiture, such as his *Emperor Leopold I in Coronation Armor* (Fig. 10, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna),

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

and a number of highly original works that depict religious or historical subjects. The latter category includes pieces such as his *Martha Rebuking Mary for Her Vanity* (Fig. 11, Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena). Although Cagnacci died in Vienna in 1663, his handful of late works, including the two paintings of Cleopatra's suicide that are the focus of this paper, stand out as some of his most inspired creations.

### CLEOPATRA AND HER LEGACY

To understand the remarkable nature of Cagnacci's late vision of Cleopatra, it is necessary to engage with an explanation of the queen's historical context and the shifting trends in the interpretation of her narrative and character. Cleopatra's popularity was part of a broader resurgence of interest in antique heroines that began during the Renaissance. In response to Renaissance humanism, artists went back to classical and biblical texts to find subjects with dramatic potential. Popular figures during the period included Sophonisba, Artemisia, Lucretia, Susanna, Judith, and Esther. At times hailed as inspirational models of female virtue and surprising courage, these women were also sometimes distractingly eroticized.<sup>14</sup> As recorded in the apocryphal book of Daniel, Susanna was an honorable wife who was spied upon by two lecherous elders as she bathed. She staunchly refused their advances despite their threats to ruin her reputation, and was eventually vindicated during the court proceedings. Susanna was a model of marital chastity in early Christian catacomb frescoes and sarcophagi as well as Renaissance *cassone* paintings.<sup>15</sup> During the sixteenth century, however, the first nude depictions of Susanna appeared, heralding a new trend of eroticization.

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<sup>14</sup> Babette Bohn, "The Antique Heroines of Elisabetta Sirani," *Renaissance Studies* 16 (2002): 56.

<sup>15</sup> Kathryn A. Smith, "Inventing Marital Chastity: The Iconography of Susanna and the Elders in Early Christian Art," *Oxford Art Journal* 16, no. 1 (1993), 3-24.; Babette Bohn, "Rape and the Gendered Gaze: *Susanna and the Elders* in Early Modern Bologna," *Biblical Interpretation* 9 (2001), 262.

The shifting approach to Lucretia's narrative also followed this pattern. Lucretia, a virtuous and well-bred Roman wife, was raped by Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the last king of Rome. Rather than live with dishonor, she plunged a dagger into her heart and made a plea for vengeance that precipitated the downfall of the monarchy and the rise of the Roman Republic. While initially admired as a reflection of courage and determination, Lucretia's final act was increasingly reduced to a scene that simply provided the opportunity to paint a semi-nude female. By the time of Guido Reni, iconographic cues in paintings of antique heroines were often so minimal that it could be difficult to properly identify the subject, although this does not seem to have impacted their popularity with collectors.<sup>16</sup>

Depictions of Sophonisba and Artemisia also caused iconographic confusion due to their similarities. Sophonisba was a Carthaginian noblewoman who drank poison to avoid the humiliation of being part of a Roman triumph.<sup>17</sup> Artemisia II ruled the Greek region of Caria after the death of her husband Mausolus, and reportedly mixed his ashes into her drink as a symbol of her devotion.<sup>18</sup> A cup and elements of a classical setting are often the only identifiers for both women. By contrast, paintings of the Old Testament Apocrypha heroine Judith are easily recognized. Judith was a pious Hebrew widow who saved the people of her city from a siege by charming the Assyrian general Holofernes, getting him drunk, and then beheading him with his own sword.<sup>19</sup> Early and medieval Christians focused on her purity and chastity as a prefiguration of the Virgin Mary, while

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<sup>16</sup> Bohn, "Antique Heroines," 72-73.

<sup>17</sup> Titus Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita Libri*, XXX.12-15.

<sup>18</sup> Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, X.18.

<sup>19</sup> Morton Enslin, trans. *The Book of Judith*, ed. Solomon Zeitlin (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 109-179.

during the Renaissance Judith was linked to ideas about civic virtue.<sup>20</sup> Her courage and strength, as well as the unexpected physicality of her triumph, made Judith a fascinating figure for seventeenth-century artists. She also fared better in terms of gratuitous eroticization, perhaps because there was already such an exciting sense of drama to her narrative.

Esther, another Old Testament heroine, was also understood as a prefiguration of the Virgin Mary. The renewed emphasis on this connection is perhaps a reflection of the rising importance of Marian devotion in the Church following the Council of Trent.<sup>21</sup> Esther risked her own life to intercede with her husband Ahasuerus, the Persian king, in order to save the Jewish people from persecution. She was associated primarily with strength of religious devotion.<sup>22</sup> Esther was not generally depicted in the eroticized manner of some of the other heroines, which may have been due to the text pointedly specifying that she put on her royal robes to go before the king.<sup>23</sup>

There are many approaches to depicting antique and biblical heroines in evidence during this period. Some paintings adhered to textual sources, while others strayed toward more vague or salacious territory. Cleopatra was not exempt from this latter trend, as Renaissance and Baroque writers and artists perpetuated Octavian's distorted history of the queen, characterizing her as lustful, extravagant, avaricious, and distastefully foreign. Because of this ingrained perspective, the historical truth of Cleopatra's life was

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<sup>20</sup> Elena Ciletti, "Patriarchal Ideology in the Renaissance Iconography of Judith," in *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Marilyn Migiel and Juliana Schiesari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 41-3.; Nira Stone, "Judith and Holofernes: Some Observations on the Development of the Scene in Art," in *No One Spoke Ill of Her: Essays on Judith*, ed. James C. VanderKam (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 81-82.

<sup>21</sup> Babette Bohn, "Esther as a Model for Female Autonomy in Northern Italian Art," *Studies in Iconography* 23 (2002), 191-2.

<sup>22</sup> Bohn, "Esther as a Model," 190-92.

<sup>23</sup> Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, trans., *The Megillah: The Book of Esther* (New York: ArtScroll Studios Press, 1976), 5:1.

often buried, and Cagnacci's two late paintings are some of the earliest works that make any attempt to recapture her character.

Cleopatra VII was a member of the Ptolemaic dynasty of pharaohs, who were Greek in origin. She swiftly set herself apart by becoming the first member of her family to speak Egyptian. The queen was also reputedly a good scholar and a proponent of important public works projects, although her accomplishments in these areas were obviously inflated by later writers.<sup>24</sup> Under her rule, the country thrived economically and she appears to have been a careful manager of Egyptian affairs. The first century CE Jewish historian Josephus noted that she played an active role in the negotiation of several highly profitable treaties.<sup>25</sup> Initially, Cleopatra co-ruled with her father and then subsequently with two of her brothers, before taking sole control of the throne in 51 BCE. She engaged in extended affairs with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, both of whom were powerful Roman generals and statesmen, producing a son with the former and two sons and a daughter with the latter. Cleopatra visited Rome, weighing in on foreign policy matters and using her lovers to create political alliances that would be beneficial for Egypt. She also gained influence by portraying herself as a reincarnation of the goddess Isis. Julius Caesar even installed a gilded statue of her as Isis within the Roman temple to Venus Genetrix.

Unfortunately, Cleopatra's reign was unable to withstand her alliance with Mark Antony. The fallout from the naval battle of Actium in 31 BCE, when she and Antony suffered an ignominious defeat at the hands of Octavian's Roman forces, ultimately led to both her demise and the end of Egypt's hegemony. Increasingly desperate in the months

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<sup>24</sup> Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra: Histories, Dreams, and Distortions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 73-74.

<sup>25</sup> Flavius Josephus, *De Bello Judaico*, trans. William Whiston (New York: Harper, 1960), I.18.

after the disastrous battle, Antony was driven to commit suicide after being mistakenly informed that Cleopatra had been captured.<sup>26</sup> Following Antony's death, Cleopatra was indeed taken prisoner by Octavian, who intended to make the subjugated queen the centerpiece of his triumphal procession in Rome.<sup>27</sup> This fate was unacceptable, so Cleopatra devised a way to commit suicide, although the specifics of her death remain murky. As a historical figure, Cleopatra's biography displays so many inconsistencies, contradictions, and gaps that it seems unlikely that a full and accurate picture of her identity will ever emerge.

Cleopatra's story and image have been persistently manipulated to reflect the attitudes of later eras. This process of distortion began during her own lifetime, when Octavian cast her as an exotic, domineering temptress who had overcome Mark Antony and rendered him "un-Roman."<sup>28</sup> Characterizing Cleopatra as a dangerous influence who could unman even the staunchest Romans, including such leaders as Antony and Julius Caesar, was a shrewd propaganda tactic. Octavian's narrative was effective because it played to the xenophobia and misogyny of the Romans.<sup>29</sup> Cleopatra's power was dismissed as another symptom of her "foreignness," and her intelligence was ignored and replaced with the cunning of lascivious femininity.

Although occasionally depicted during the Renaissance, Cleopatra was a particularly appealing subject to Baroque artists, who capitalized on the potential to express both drama and luxury. The brazenly sexual nature ascribed to her also provided an excuse to present a sensuous female nude for the delectation of the male gaze. Artists

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<sup>26</sup> Plutarch, *Antony*, LXXVI.4

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, LXXIII.3; Dio Cassius, *Historia Romana*, LI.11.3

<sup>28</sup> Dio Cassius, *Historia Romana*, L.5, 27; Lucius Florus, *Epitome of Roman History*, II.21

<sup>29</sup> Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra*, 44.

throughout history have focused almost exclusively on just two moments from Cleopatra's life: the banquet she threw for Antony and her suicide. The latter narrative was far more popular during the Seicento. Although sometimes referenced in seventeenth-century works through the inclusion of a pearl earring, the banquet scene is rarely depicted prior to the eighteenth century, when it surged in popularity thanks to the influence of artists such as Giovanni Battista Tiepolo.

In the banquet story, which first appears in a text from Pliny the Elder written in the first century CE, Cleopatra claimed she could spend ten million sesterces on a single banquet in an attempt to outshine and impress Antony. He declared that such extravagance was not possible, so they made a wager on the matter. The next day Cleopatra threw a banquet that was lavish, but no more so than usual. Then her attendants brought her a glass of vinegar within which she dissolved one of her priceless pearl earrings. In drinking the mixture the queen was declared the clear winner of the bet. From the Western perspective, this story was essentially a trope intended to illustrate flagrant profligacy and a destructive love of excess. The same event is described in other accounts, including Seutonius' biography of the Roman emperor Caligula.<sup>30</sup> Eastern cultures, however, would have interpreted the story as evidence of Cleopatra's cleverness and supreme wealth.<sup>31</sup> In a similar manner, artists often misrepresented Cleopatra's suicide because they did not understand the context or significance of her actions. Cagnacci's late works are significant because they reflect a degree of respect for the queen and her authority that rarely appears in seventeenth-century depictions.

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<sup>30</sup> Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra*, 67.

<sup>31</sup> Mary Hamer, *Signs of Cleopatra: History, Politics, Representation* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 18-21, 30-33.

Varied accounts of Cleopatra's death are known. Her suicide is first mentioned in the writings of Strabo, a Greek geographer who may have been in Alexandria in 30 BCE. He mentions two versions of the event, one involving death by the bite of an asp, the other, a poisoned ointment.<sup>32</sup> The story was then taken up by the Augustan poets, including Vergil, Horace, and Propertius. As part of the extended *ekphrasis* in the *Aeneid* wherein Vergil describes the elaborate decoration of the hero's shield, Augustus' military triumph over Antony and Cleopatra as well as her death are described at length. His description of the latter scene seems to be the root of the writers' common conception of a suicide involving multiple snakes.<sup>33</sup> Plutarch, living over a century after the events unfolded, wrote arguably the most well-rounded account. The Greek biographer seems to have drawn on the writings of Cleopatra's personal physician, Olympus, in whom she supposedly confided during her last days.<sup>34</sup> Plutarch's text notes that two of Cleopatra's ladies-in-waiting were involved in a suicide pact with the queen. Galen is the only other classical writer to mention these attendants, stating that they were used to test the effect of the asp bite.<sup>35</sup> Plutarch also refers to two potential instruments of death – the snake, and some other sort of hidden poison.

The precise location of the bite is another contentious detail, although most sources at least imply that Cleopatra was infected through the arm. Cassius Dio, writing around the turn of the third century CE, gives a great variety of detail in his account of the Egyptian queen's death. He is the only writer besides Seutonius to mention that Octavian called for tribal healers skilled in the treatment of snakebites to attend

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<sup>32</sup> Adrian Tronson, "Vergil, the Augustans, and the Invention of Cleopatra's Suicide -- One Asp or Two?" *Vergilius* 44 (1998): 36.

<sup>33</sup> Tronson, "One Asp or Two?" 45.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

Cleopatra, presumably with the hope of preserving her to march in his triumphal procession in Rome. This anecdote is important because it implies that Octavian himself believed the suicide by poisonous snakebite story.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the truth of Cleopatra's death, a renewed awareness of ancient sources provided early modern artists with a compelling variety of iconographic material and offered wide latitude to create imaginative and appealing compositions. Despite the availability of classical works, the most influential Cleopatra source for Renaissance and Baroque art was actually from a much later author.

Octavian's version of Cleopatra's story continued to taint her legacy in both the art and literature of subsequent eras. The Renaissance saw a revival of interest in antiquity, which led to such works as Giovanni Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris*. Primarily written around 1361-62 and first published in 1473, the text was a collection of 106 biographies of famous women done in the style of Petrarch's *De Viris Illustribus*. Boccaccio, like many other Renaissance writers, was attempting to reconcile the classical world with Christian traditions. In this widely popular text he presented the narratives of important female figures from the ancient world, both historical and mythological, as models of either virtue or vice. This binary approach left little room for the nuances of a woman who was smart, powerful, and saw no need to legitimize her romantic relationships through marriage.<sup>37</sup>

Boccaccio's section on Cleopatra largely draws on the negative Roman perspective orchestrated by Octavian, citing her lineage and great beauty as the only

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>37</sup> Susan Walker and Peter Higgs, *Cleopatra of Egypt: From History to Myth*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 303.

redeeming qualities that offset her “universal reputation for . . . greed, cruelty, and lust.”<sup>38</sup>

He too suggests that the Egyptian queen was a scheming seductress driven by base desires. Boccaccio also describes Cleopatra’s suicide, stating that she put on her royal raiment and lay down next to Antony, her dead lover. She then “opened the veins in her arms and placed asps on the wounds.”<sup>39</sup> This point of historical accuracy was largely ignored in artistic depictions, which typically placed the snakebite on her breast.<sup>40</sup>

Although Boccaccio’s basic biographical facts are generally correct, the overall tone of his entry on Cleopatra is contemptuous and designed to provoke the reader’s disapproval. The popularity of Boccaccio’s text contributed to the rise of images that gave the queen a deviously seductive character. Cagnacci’s late works are exceptional because they turn away from this trend.

The standard for seventeenth-century depictions of Cleopatra was set by Guido Reni. He returned to the subject at least six times between 1625 and 1642.<sup>41</sup> Reni’s *Cleopatra with the Asp* from around 1628 (Royal Collection, London) showcases his typical approach to the subject. Close to the picture plane, the half-length figure bares a single breast to the bite of an asp she holds as delicately as the stem of a flower. Draped in rich fabrics, the queen lifts her eyes heavenward with parted lips and turns her palm up in a gesture of supplication. Reni’s suicidal heroines never meet the viewer’s gaze, adding psycho-sexual undertones of voyeurism while also creating a sense of distance

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<sup>38</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *De Mulieribus Claris*, trans. Virginia Brown (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 178.

<sup>39</sup> Boccaccio, *De Mulieribus Claris*, 183.

<sup>40</sup> For a Renaissance example, see *The Death of Cleopatra* (Musée du Louvre, Paris) by Giovanni Pietro Rizzoli, also known as Giampietrino.

<sup>41</sup> For a thorough account of Reni’s known Cleopatra paintings and copies, see D. Stephen Pepper, *Guido Reni: A Complete Catalogue of His Works with an Introductory Text* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), nos. 106, 111, 136, 181, 189, 210.

that minimizes their availability and receptivity to male viewers' desire.<sup>42</sup> Cleopatra has a soft shapelessness and generalized, idealized features. Reni particularly failed in the naturalistic depiction of female anatomy, especially breasts. The queen's alabaster skin is touched with a rosy, feminine flush. Once again, the setting is an indeterminate, yet obviously private space. The pearl earring creates a small, striking highlight against the dark background, further emphasizing the queen's vulnerable neck. Reni created pictures of a variety of antique heroines that are largely variations on the same theme.

Often the only specific elements of Cleopatra's iconography are the asp and the pearl. As discussed above, however, there were so many conflicting theories about the precise nature of the queen's suicide that artists simply selected whichever narrative strain best suited their purposes. Even in death scenes, Cleopatra was often depicted wearing a pearl earring, an obvious allusion to the banquet episode, as in Guercino's *Death of Cleopatra* of 1648 (Palazzo Rosso, Genoa). The half-nude female figure is propped up to give her neck and torso maximum exposure to the strong, clear light that cuts through the rich draperies of the bed. Prominently highlighted against Cleopatra's pale neck is a single, large pearl earring, which contrasts dramatically with the simplicity of the white sheets that swathe her form. Guercino's depiction of Cleopatra is quintessentially Baroque. The theatrical bed hangings part the shadowy intimacy of the bedroom to reveal a queen who is elegant even in death. Her eyes gently closed, she turns her head away, focusing the viewer's gaze on her proffered breasts. With the same intent of penetration, the lithe asp draws a visible drop of blood. Guercino's use of *chiaroscuro* creates a powerful image, but Cleopatra herself remains stripped of purposeful authority.

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<sup>42</sup> For further discussion of Reni's Cleopatra paintings, see Richard Spear, *The "Divine" Guido: Religion, Sex, Money, and Art in the World of Guido Reni* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 82-98.

Female artists, on the other hand, sometimes approached Cleopatra from a different perspective. Around 1604, likely sometime after her arrival in Rome, Lavinia Fontana produced a work unlike any other representation of the subject (Galleria Spada, Rome). For one, the queen is entirely clothed and veiled, creating an impenetrable barrier against the viewer's gaze. Cleopatra's garments are arrayed in such a way as to provide not even the slightest hint of breasts or womanly curves. She wears a dark coppery brown long-sleeved garment over a simple short-sleeved tunic. The vibrant orange-red outer layer displays little adornment besides the multiple rows of button fastenings down the center and on the sleeves. In her left hand, the queen holds the bottom of her bordered and striped white veil, which wraps around her forehead, neck, and chin in such a way that only a small portion of her face is visible. A bejeweled, conical hat is secured to Cleopatra's head by the veil. Her highly unusual style of dress and the objects in the room, such as the elaborately decorated wardrobe in the background, are intended to evoke the exotic East. Fontana's attention to representing foreign details has been related to a renewed interest in the Eastern world prompted by the conflict with the Turks throughout the 1570s and the naval victory at Lepanto.<sup>43</sup> Cleopatra lifts the lid of a metal urn, out of which an asp winds itself. She appears utterly unmoved by her situation, in contrast to the almost violent emotion that threatens to consume many antique heroines.<sup>44</sup>

Elisabetta Sirani also painted an innovative Cleopatra much later, around 1662 (Flint Institute of Arts, Flint). In a rare choice prior to the eighteenth century, she selected as her subject the moment from the banquet when Cleopatra dropped her pearl earring in a cup of vinegar in order to win the bet. Sirani presents a half-length figure set close to

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<sup>43</sup> Vera Fortunati, *Lavinia Fontana of Bologna, 1552-1614* (Milan: Mondadori Electa, 1998), no. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Bohn, "Antique Heroines," 57.

the picture plane and sharply illuminated by a clear, even light. While the queen's head is tilted, her gaze and posture do not indicate submission. Instead, her eyes are bright and steady, and the ghost of a smile plays about her closed mouth. She is neither vulnerable to the viewer nor presenting an overt challenge. Instead, Sirani directs Cleopatra's boldness toward someone out of frame, most likely Antony. Her garments are perfectly modest, with not even a hint of cleavage, and her hair is hidden under a turban. In a welcome change, Sirani de-emphasizes Cleopatra's sexuality and returns to her a sense of lively intelligence.

Artemisia Gentileschi, however, took an approach that largely embraced the standard eroticized Reni model. The attribution of the *Cleopatra* in the Amedeo Morandotti collection in Milan has been a topic of frequent debate, with some scholars ascribing it to Artemisia, and others to her father Orazio. The argument has been problematic to the point that the co-authors of a major exhibit wrote two entirely separate entries on the piece, with different attributions.<sup>45</sup> Artemisia's later approach to the same subject in a private collection in Rome, likely dating from the 1630s, involves more iconographic detail. In a rare point of alignment with classical sources, the asp is not attached to Cleopatra's bare breasts. The artist also includes the two female attendants that are mentioned in a few accounts of the queen's death. While Artemisia does not go so far as to place the crown on Cleopatra's head, or to remove her from the passive, sexual context of lying in bed, she does provide a slightly expanded context for the queen's death.

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<sup>45</sup> Keith Christiansen and Judith Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 97, 302.

Each of these artists approached the subject of Cleopatra from a different angle, demonstrating the almost boundless artistic potential of her story. Like many of his contemporaries, Guido Cagnacci was attracted to the dramatic possibilities of her death scene, returning to the subject multiple times across his career. However, while his earlier compositions are blatant imitations of popular styles, his two late versions of Cleopatra turn against the trend of depicting antique heroines solely as erotic objects. In his Vienna Cleopatra paintings Cagnacci did retain some conventional Baroque elements, but ultimately improved upon the standard type through his talent for naturalism and innovative iconography.

#### GUIDO CAGNACCI AND CLEOPATRA

The evolution of Guido Cagnacci's approach to depicting Cleopatra provides a compelling lens through which to view his entire artistic career. Taking just this one subject, it is possible to watch as he absorbs and reflects the styles of prominent artists until the end of his life, when he finally finds his own approach. Cagnacci's artistic education gave him an excellent foundation of skills, but also seems to have stimulated wholesale replication of style rather than unique development. His time in Rome during the early 1620s was formative. He studied under Guercino and responded to the Caravaggesque influences in the city. This paper will engage with four Cleopatra paintings by Cagnacci, produced between 1622 and 1662. Although there are a few additional Cleopatra paintings attributed to Cagnacci and a number of related copies, the ones discussed here can be considered a representative set.<sup>46</sup> Comparing his approach to the same figure across a forty-year period allows for meaningful discussion of trends and

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<sup>46</sup> For discussion of additional Cleopatra paintings and copies not included here, see Daniele Benati and Marco Bona Castelloti, *Guido Cagnacci* (Milan: Electa, 1993), Cat. 17, 18.

influences. Cagnacci's first two depictions of Cleopatra display his shift from Caravaggesque drama and light to the delicate classicism of Reni. In his two later attempts as a mature artist, he completely reinvents the composition and projects a different message through his stylistic and iconographic choices. His female figures are impressively naturalistic, which may have been the result of drawing from life. Cagnacci's final approach to Cleopatra used a variety of tactics to assert her power as a ruler. As the following comparative analysis shows, at the end of his career Guido Cagnacci combined technical skill and an unexpected degree of invention to create one of the more unusual and complex depictions of Cleopatra from the Seicento.

His first *Cleopatra* has been dated to the period immediately after his time in Rome, perhaps late 1622 or early 1623 (Fig. 12).<sup>47</sup> The lack of setting and dramatic chiaroscuro reflect Caravaggio's influence on the young Cagnacci, as does the heightened emotion of the scene. In this work, against a backdrop of total blackness, the pale figure of Cleopatra is silhouetted by a stark, clear light from above. The contrast draws attention to the queen's nudity and illuminates the action of the scene. With her rich outer garment seemingly thrown off, her only covering is a simple white shift bunched across her lap. Cleopatra clenches both of her hands, grasping fabric on the left and the energetically wriggling asp on the right. She actively strains beyond the confines of the chair as if fighting the invisible, internal force of the poison. Although there is a soft roundness to the forms of her figure that contradicts the muscular tension necessary for this pose, Cagnacci already displays a greater talent for naturalism in depicting the female nude than many of his contemporaries. Particularly convincing is the juncture of her right arm

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<sup>47</sup> Oil on canvas, 174 x 116 cm, sold by the Salamon Gallery in Milan; Benati and Castelloti, *Guido Cagnacci*, 64.

and torso, as well as the weight of her right breast. Her body creates a diagonal that is slightly interrupted by the jutting points of her right elbow and knee. The vibrant orange drapery ripples with dynamic motion as well. Some have suggested that the discarded suit of armor lying at her feet belongs to Mark Antony.<sup>48</sup> The significance of this odd, and possibly unique, detail is not immediately clear. Armor can be a symbol of war, leadership, protection, and strength. Cast to the side on the ground, it was perhaps intended to reference the queen's recent military failure at the Battle of Actium, a key part of the decline in fortune that eventually resulted in her suicide.

The issue of death by one's own hand has been a source of conflict throughout history. The word "suicide" actually does not appear until the mid-1600s, and was rarely used for at least the next century.<sup>49</sup> In the ancient world, suicide was generally related to the preservation of honor. The external pressure of shame was a strong source of motivation, and the distinction between courageous and cowardly self-destruction was of the utmost importance.<sup>50</sup> The Stoic philosophers also contributed to an understanding of suicide as a noble choice for a man dealing with insurmountable or unbearable circumstances.<sup>51</sup> In her own time, Cleopatra's decision would largely have been seen as a clear political response. The rise of Christianity in subsequent centuries, however, shifted the dominant perspective on suicide toward a much more negative view. By the Middle Ages, bodies of suicides were publicly degraded and the Church promised eternal damnation.<sup>52</sup> With the arrival of the Reformation and its emphasis on personal

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<sup>48</sup> Benati and Castelloti, *Guido Cagnacci*, 62.

<sup>49</sup> A. Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (New York: Random House, 1972), 49-51.

<sup>50</sup> Elise P. Garrison, "Attitudes toward Suicide in Ancient Greece," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 121, (1991), 2.

<sup>51</sup> Georgia Noon, "On Suicide," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 39, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1978), 374.

<sup>52</sup> Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Le suicide au Moyen Age," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 31, No. 1 (Jan. - Feb., 1976), 18.

responsibility and intellectual examination, judgment on suicide became more convoluted. In the Catholic stronghold of Italy from which Cagnacci hailed, however, the prevalent view in the seventeenth century would still have aligned with the vicious condemnation of the Church. The staunchly Catholic court of the Holy Roman Emperor would have shared this perspective, so the air of dignity Cagnacci gave to his Viennese representations of Cleopatra's suicide makes them even more intriguing and unusual, given their context.

In the version he executed several decades before going to the Austrian court, Cleopatra appears to be writhing in her death throes, with her head rolled to one shoulder, leg lifted, and spine slightly arched. Unlike Cagnacci's two late visions of Cleopatra, this queen is not going quietly and peacefully to her death. Although she is alone, there is little sense that she is drawing on her own strength to execute a pragmatic and decisive response to the threat of being used as part of Octavian's political agenda. Cleopatra's body language is an outward manifestation of inner conflict. Her eyes strain to gaze upward, and there is a tension around her eyebrows and forehead that conveys an expression of pain. On the other hand, her soft, open mouth somewhat contradicts this impression. Whether she is in ecstasy or genuinely suffering, Cagnacci has certainly captured the Baroque fondness for the theatrical and the erotic with this painting. A young artist from a small town, Cagnacci was in thrall with the Caravaggesque works he must have seen in Rome, so it is logical that he would have focused more on imitation than ingenuity. His inclusion of the armor does, however, indicate an early capacity for innovative iconography and an awareness of symbols of power that would reappear again in his last version of Cleopatra's suicide.

Moving more than two decades into the future, Cagnacci's work looks completely different. Now middle-aged, the artist had moved somewhat away from the dramatic Caravaggesque tendencies of his youth. Cagnacci's *Cleopatra* from around 1645-50, now in a private collection, closely follows the standard type for antique heroines that was popularized by Guido Reni (Fig. 13).<sup>53</sup> Cagnacci depicts Cleopatra as a half-length figure close to the picture plane, gazing up to the heavens with an asp delicately held to her bared breast. The muted, solid-color background sets off the vibrant peach, gold, cream, and coral tones of the central figure. Cleopatra wears two large pearl earrings in reference to the bet about the banquet she made with Mark Antony. Soft light falls on her from above, giving her bare skin a compelling luminosity. Unlike his first attempt, here the softness of Cleopatra's figure is not balanced out by a sense of tension or dynamic movement. She is also alone, but has been removed from any sense of a powerful context. This Cleopatra is entirely passive, delicately handling the fatal instrument and waiting to receive her death with apparent equanimity. She is elegantly attired, and her limited nudity is carefully orchestrated. Here, the queen placidly bares a single breast and looks beyond herself, as if for salvation. Cagnacci was quite successful at executing the limpid, precise beauty of Reni's style, but lost the engaging tension and drama that infused his earlier depiction of Cleopatra. Cagnacci still surpasses Reni in terms of naturalism, however, and has a much more convincing grasp of female anatomy. As will be discussed later, it is possible that Cagnacci drew female nudes from life, which may have contributed to his sensitive depictions of women.

Late in his life, Cagnacci found new depth artistically. He was still quite capable of imitating others and confining himself within expectations, but his two late Cleopatra

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<sup>53</sup> Oil on canvas, 95 x 75 cm, acquired by the present owner at auction in 1988.

paintings demonstrate an untapped and far more exciting approach to iconography and style. Once in Vienna at the court of Leopold I, the Holy Roman Emperor, Cagnacci must have encountered an environment that encouraged him to pursue greater innovation. Leopold I was the second son of Ferdinand III, Holy Roman Emperor, and Maria Anna of Spain. Born in 1640, he was initially intended for the Church, and only became heir apparent upon the death of his elder brother in 1654. Leopold was strongly influenced by his Jesuit education. One of his teachers was Philip Miller, a former professor of moral theology, philosophy, and mathematics who cultivated the young Hapsburg's interest in natural philosophy. He was an excellent scholar, a hunter, a capable painter and carver, fascinated by mechanical gadgetry, and highly musical. Leopold clearly believed in the value of the arts, going so far as to pay his musicians first when the court strained the limits of its coffers.<sup>54</sup> The Hapsburgs traditionally encouraged a strong culture of artistic patronage, which benefitted Cagnacci and many other artists during the family's reign in Vienna.

Cagnacci may have found new inspiration through his exposure to the impressive collection of the emperor's uncle, Archduke Leopold Wilhelm, which included the work of many northern European artists that Cagnacci probably would not have seen before. He also may have been affected by the nature of the Viennese court as a cross section of broader European ideas and trends.<sup>55</sup> Both the single-figure *Cleopatra* and the multi-figure *Death of Cleopatra* were probably produced between 1659 and 1662, when the influential art patron Archduke Leopold Wilhelm died. The two Cleopatra paintings were

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<sup>54</sup> John P. Spielman, *Leopold I of Austria* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1977), 33-34.

<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of the cultural environment in Vienna during the period, see Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister, and City: The Art and Culture of Central Europe, 1450-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 256-281.

added by a later hand onto the end of the inventory of Leopold Wilhelm's collection, which was compiled in 1659, indicating that the compositions post-date the creation of the list.<sup>56</sup> Given the Archduke's major role in commissioning works, and the fact that Cagnacci's pieces are listed in the inventory of his personal collection, it seems likely that he, rather than Emperor Leopold I, was the patron of these two late Cleopatra paintings. Although the precise order of the two works is debated, it seems probable that the single-figure composition has a slightly earlier date than the multi-figure composition.

In the simpler of the two late Cleopatra paintings, Cagnacci depicts a lone female figure relaxed into a chair with her garments bunched around her hips, radiating an air more akin to the peace of sleep than the angst of suicide (Fig. 14).<sup>57</sup> The artist once again displays his talent for naturalism, capturing the supple roundness of the woman's body and the weight of her flesh sinking into her seat. Unlike his earliest Cleopatra, however, here the diagonal arrangement of her figure echoes the chair, as opposed to struggling against its limits. The dark, neutral background gives only the barest hint of an interior setting. Against that dullness, the deep red of the chair and the rich blue and crisp white of her rumpled garments stand out, setting off Cleopatra's exposed flesh. Soft yellow light falls across the painting from the upper right corner, imbuing the woman's flesh with a glowing sense of warmth that is completely incongruous with the situation. Indeed, the viewer might be forgiven for entirely failing to recognize the figure as Cleopatra. The only piece of iconography included is the asp, which is subtly placed beneath Cleopatra's right forearm and nearly disappears among the coppery brown

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<sup>56</sup> Benati and Paolucci, *Guido Cagnacci*, 318.

<sup>57</sup> Oil on canvas, 120 x 158 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

shadows. Were it not for that single detail, the subject of this painting would be highly ambiguous.

In Cagnacci's complex multi-figure composition, however, the asp is highlighted, and the artist includes additional symbols, such as the tiara and the pearl earring, that clarify the identity of the central figure as Cleopatra (Fig. 15).<sup>58</sup> The asp still winds its way around her right forearm, but the coloring and light are both engineered to draw attention to the snake's head and the site of the bite. The light brown snake stands out against the queen's pale flesh, and its body is hit with a strong white highlight.

Cleopatra's hair is gracefully pulled back to draw attention to the single pearl earring that rests against her cheek, another allusion to the banquet story. The decision to include a delicate, jewel-encrusted tiara on her head is quite intriguing. While Cleopatra was sometimes depicted with jewels or a headpiece adorning her hair, only rarely is she given such an overt symbol of power. Cagnacci's inclusion of this element may reflect an awareness of classical sources, several of which describe Cleopatra deliberately donning her royal raiment before she committed suicide. Even in her last moments the queen was acutely aware of the importance of her public image. Cleopatra used her attire to convey a final expression of her power, enabling a reading of her suicide as a decisive and authoritative act rather than as a capitulation to overwhelming circumstances.

If he was familiar with the ancient descriptions of the scene, however, Cagnacci must also have made conscious choices to contradict that narrative. The most obvious issue is the inclusion of six female attendants. Only a few classical sources mention the presence of other people at her death, and no one refers to more than two. Such a departure from the conventional depiction of the suicide scene must have been highly

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<sup>58</sup> Oil on canvas, 153 x 168.5 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

intentional. Further questions arise from the fact that the painting is actually in seven pieces, and that the nail holes in the frame clearly indicate that the central figure of Cleopatra was once its own work. The attendants are painted over the seams of the additions, and the paint composition is different.<sup>59</sup> Cagnacci's reason for altering the composition is unknown, but it changes the entire tone of the work. Some have proposed that the central panel with the figure of the queen was painted in Italy prior to Cagnacci's departure, and that the surrounding figures were added either at the request of Leopold Wilhelm or on the artist's own initiative.<sup>60</sup> If Cagnacci painted the main part in Venice before taking the piece to Vienna and adding the attendants, it could explain the variation in materials. For the most part, however, the artist's motives remain unclear.

The complicated compositional arrangement of this version is crucial to Cagnacci's interpretation of Cleopatra. Six attendants cluster around the enthroned queen, creating a semi-circle that draws the viewer into the scene as a participating observer. Although the scene does not extend all the way to the right edge, the woman on that side leans around the throne and out toward the picture plane, opening the painting into the viewer's space. The heads of all but one of the women create a strong horizontal delineation between the empty top fourth of the painting and the action below. A leading line stretches on a slight upward diagonal from the right hip of the attendant with her back turned, across the hand gestures near the queen's arm, and up Cleopatra's left shoulder to the praying hands of the woman on the right. All of the attendants' bodies are at least partly obscured due to the overlapping figure arrangement, which creates a sense that they are a collection of interchangeable parts. The spacing of the six waiting women

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<sup>59</sup> Benati and Castelloti, *Guido Cagnacci*, 170-72.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

creates strong vertical divisions. Resting on both arms of the chair, Cleopatra sinks into the right side of the throne, curving into a backward C-shape. She is set apart from the rest of the composition by the solidity of the chair, which creates a barrier that the attendants will touch, but not cross. Cagnacci's design is both inclusive and divisive. His compositional arrangement emphasizes Cleopatra's supreme authority, even in death, and emotionally engages the viewer as a bystander within the scene.

Each woman displays an entirely individual reaction to the unfolding event, although it is difficult to assess the precise moment captured in this painting. The attendants are clearly already in mourning and Cleopatra's skin has taken on an ashen cast, but the asp is still sinking his fangs into Cleopatra's arm. It seems unlikely that the snake would have remained frozen in place long enough for the queen to die and her attendants to discover the suicide. The continued presence of the snake can probably be dismissed as a requirement of iconography. Leaning in protectively around the vulnerable queen, the attendants convey distress, surprise, confusion, concern, and grief with furrowed brows, clasped handkerchiefs, worried gazes, and reactive hand motions. The painting seems to depict the discovery of Cleopatra's body mere minutes after her death. Through gestures and facial expressions, these women each convey a particular feminine emotion and role. The attendants are shown being spiritual, compassionate, motherly, and practical. One prays, one looks away weeping, one calls attention to the snake, one frets over the bite, and two others simply regard the situation with interest and concern. Their actions are wholly unproductive. None of them project a sense of agency; they are simply followers and observers who turn to heaven and each other for guidance. The painting emphasizes their inability to affect the situation, and contrasts their passivity with the

strength of Cleopatra by having them clustered around and laying hands on the throne that supports her dead body. Cagnacci created a fascinating visual extension of the multifaceted nature of womanly expression. Two of the attendants have their garments around their waists, which may relate to some sort of mourning ritual. In any case, their nudity does not seem designed to titillate the viewer as in so many other seventeenth-century scenes from antiquity.

Cagnacci's naturalistic approach to the female nude seems to suggest that he had a greater degree of familiarity with the female form than many of his contemporaries. Although he never married, he was embroiled in an affair with a noblewoman that culminated in a failed elopement, which seems to indicate an impulsively amorous nature. He also lived with Maddalena Fontanafredda for the duration of his time in Venice, and perhaps longer. Questions of sexual morality aside, his ability to capture the folds of the torso, the gentle roundness of the belly, and the settling of the breasts indicates an intimate understanding of women's bodies. There are a few extant red chalk drawings attributed to Cagnacci that suggest he may have achieved this knowledge by studying the female figure from life.<sup>61</sup> Although this practice was not nearly as widespread as drawing male nudes, it did happen, and the high number of courtesans in Venice would probably have offered a larger selection of models. Given Cagnacci's residence in that city for the better part of a decade, it is certainly possible that he may have developed a habit of drawing figure studies of female nudes from life. His nontraditional relationship with Maddalena, outside the bonds of marriage, could also

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<sup>61</sup> Other potential examples include a traditionally attributed *Female Nude* in red chalk in the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago. See Cat. 35 in Giulio Bora, Maria Teresa Caracciolo, and Simonetta Prospero Valenti, *I Disegni del Codice Bonola del Museo Nazionale di Belle Arti di Santiago del Cile* (Rome: Palombi, 2008).

potentially have allowed him the opportunity for study. If he did make drawings from life of nude female models, this practice would certainly have informed the naturalism of works such as his two late Cleopatra paintings.

There is a two-sided drawing attributed to Cagnacci in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York that includes a *Standing Female Nude Figure* on the recto and *Studies of a Kneeling Nude Female Figure and of a Man's Head* on the verso.<sup>62</sup> The artist's naturalism and anatomical accuracy are particularly impressive on the recto. He skillfully modeled the curves and musculature of the woman's body and captured a delicate, individualized face. On the verso, the artist executed a less finished sketch. With fewer lines and more minimal shading, he seems focused on quickly capturing the basics of the pose. The head is a simple oval with a few linear indications for features, and the artist scribbled lines over everything above the woman's elbow. Both sides of the sheet seem as though they were drawn from life. He captures the particular features of each convincingly female body with precision, even despite the swift, momentary quality of the verso drawing. Although some scholars have questioned the attribution of this sheet, it currently retains its traditional attribution to Cagnacci.<sup>63</sup> These types of drawings, with their varying degrees of finish, are important for understanding the artist's methods. He studied poses, individual figural elements, and compositional arrangements.<sup>64</sup> Due to the limited number of securely attributed Cagnacci drawings, however, it is difficult to assess

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<sup>62</sup> Red chalk on beige paper, 49.4 x 32 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 62.120.9.

<sup>63</sup> See Cat. 67 in Mimi Cazort and Catherine Johnston, *Bolognese Drawings in North American Collections, 1500-1800* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1982); the stylistic affinity to Carlo Cignani is also affirmed in Dwight Miller's review of the exhibition (see Dwight Miller, "Ottawa: Bolognese Drawings in North American Collections, 1500-1800," *The Burlington Magazine* 124 (1982), 261.)

<sup>64</sup> For a brief discussion of Cagnacci's drawings, see Babette Bohn, *Le "Stanze" di Guido Reni : Disegni del Maestro e della Scuola* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2008), 100-101, 151-152.

his preparatory process or form definitive conclusions about how and when he drew from life.

The artist's skill in depicting naturalistic female nudes is apparent throughout his career, including early works such as his *Penitent Magdalen* (Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome). Dated to around 1626-27, the painting includes a half-length reclining nude female that recalls both Caravaggio and Guercino.<sup>65</sup> Her arms rest in her lap with soft weight, and the artist accurately captured the effect of gravity on the position of her breasts. There is no evidence that Cagnacci drew from life to produce this painting, but this work seems a more likely candidate for such study than others with similar poses, such as Guercino's *Death of Cleopatra* of 1648 (Palazzo Rosso, Genoa). Although Cagnacci's female nudes consistently display a high degree of naturalism across his career, he seems to have honed his approach during the decade he spent in Venice.

The most obvious evidence of his commitment to individualized figures is that, out of the many semi-nude allegorical and historical figures he depicted during this period, no two women have the same breasts. His *Allegory of Time (Human Life)* (Fig. 9, Fondazione Cavallini Sgarbi, Ferrara), *Allegory of Spherical Astrology* (Musei San Domenico, Forlì), and *Allegory of Vanity and Penitence (Human Life)* (Fig. 8, Nelson Shanks Collection, Pennsylvania) illustrate this diversity. Each woman has a particular body type, with breasts in varying sizes and shapes. From the visual evidence it seems possible that Cagnacci was working from a number of female models, either courtesans or perhaps the woman with whom he lived at the time. The anatomical variety within his depictions of female nudes, despite the popularity of standard iconographic types, indicates that he was rather more experimental as an artist than some of his

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<sup>65</sup> Benati and Paolucci, *Guido Cagnacci*, 154.

contemporaries. Cagnacci's talent for naturalistic nude female figures, evident at varying levels throughout his career, seems to have fully developed in Venice and continued as a signature feature during his work in Vienna.

Cagnacci's ability to portray flesh convincingly also reflects a careful awareness of color. He retained the flair for dark, solid color backgrounds and dramatic lighting that he picked up from his youthful study of Caravaggesque works, but tempered it with a more nuanced approach to coloring. This component of his style was well-developed by the time he left Venice, having been exposed to the ideas of the school of *colore* for nearly a decade. In both of his late Cleopatra paintings Cagnacci drew on a rich palette of bold jewel tones. He infused the light and flesh with yellow and peach, and modeled his figures with dusky gray-brown shadows and rust-colored outlines. Cagnacci envisioned Cleopatra as a contemporary European woman, giving her creamy skin and blond, copper-touched hair – an unlikely coloration for an Egyptian with Greek ancestry. The vibrant blue and crisp white of her artfully ruffled garments help frame Cleopatra's body against the deep red of her throne.

In both late compositions, the queen's chair is a fascinating element. Although Cagnacci had also used this type of chair in his earliest *Cleopatra* painting, its significance was dwarfed by the deep shadows and emotional melodrama. In line with the general simplicity of his late, single-figure *Cleopatra* the chair is more basic than the one in the multi-figure *Death of Cleopatra*. Both are red leather with metal studs, and have nearly identical wooden arms. However, the back of the more elaborate chair is elongated, and the carved details are more intricate. Similar types of chairs appear in paintings from various areas, including several official portraits of Venetian doges. In

Filippo Zaniberti's painting *The Banquet of Giovanni I Cornaro* from around 1625 (Palazzo Ducale, Venice), all of the seats at the doge's table are high-backed and made of red leather with studded borders and carved wooden finials at the top. Cagnacci was likely familiar with these types of chairs from his time in the city. Since similar pieces of furniture appear in paintings from across Western Europe during the period, he may have been trying to reference more broadly recognized symbols of power, or at least of wealth. The chair matches Italian types from the period, reflecting the predominant aesthetic of the seventeenth-century Viennese court.<sup>66</sup> In the same way that the artist added Cleopatra's jewelry in the later composition, he also embellished the earlier chair so that it could be considered a throne. By enthroning the dead Cleopatra, Cagnacci projected an entirely different narrative than his contemporaries, and his own earlier efforts.

Although depictions of Cleopatra on a throne were quite rare, Cagnacci may have been acquainted with portraits of more contemporary women who exercised political power. Caterina de' Medici wielded a great deal of influence as queen and then regent in France. Around 1585, Santo di Tito painted a portrait of her seated in a red and gold chair (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence). Maria de' Medici also exercised authority as queen and regent in France. Frans Pourbus the Younger depicted her around 1606, standing with her hand resting on an embellished red throne (Museo Bellas Artes, Bilbao). Elisabeth of France, Maria's daughter who became queen of Spain, also appears in variations on the same pose. Rodrigo de Villandrando used this type of portrait for her in 1620 (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid), as did Diego Velázquez in 1632 (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna). Anne of Austria, who would rise to be a powerful force at the French

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<sup>66</sup> See, for example, fig. 435 in Frida Schottmüller, *Furniture and Interior Decoration of the Italian Renaissance* (New York: B. Westermann Co., 1928), 183.

court, first as queen consort and later as regent, was the aunt of Cagnacci's patron Leopold I. Around 1620-25, Peter Paul Rubens painted a portrait of her, now lost, which is known through a copy in the Louvre. Anne is seated on a low-back, decorative red chair in an exquisitely detailed gown. Maria Anna of Spain, Leopold I's mother, appears in a similar manner in a portrait from 1634 painted by an anonymous Austrian artist (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna). This painting also included her young son Ferdinand, however, projecting a message more focused on her ability to produce an heir than on her personal power. In his late paintings of Cleopatra, Cagnacci seems to have referenced contemporary trends in royal portraiture to convey female authority in a way that seventeenth-century viewers would have immediately understood.

Guido Cagnacci's two late Cleopatra paintings both emphasize female power. In the single-figure composition, the woman's head tilts up toward the light, while her barely-open eyes gaze down in front of her. Languid and utterly calm, she is unconcerned by the possibility of the viewer's gaze. Cagnacci's presentation is more reminiscent of Flemish still life paintings than the typical approach to antique heroines, which often reduced them to coquettish objects through overt eroticization and the reduction of iconographic detail and setting. This Cleopatra is, of course, highly sensual, but the artist's naturalism takes away the distracting sense of artifice that often affects seventeenth-century depictions of female nudes. She seems thoroughly comfortable in her own skin, and is captured with a clarity that has been compared to the style of Vermeer.<sup>67</sup> Depicted without the jewels, attendants, and delicate, lace-trimmed clothes that Cagnacci would later bestow upon her, this Cleopatra could easily be mistaken for a much more common woman. Although the artist did depict a few other women with

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<sup>67</sup> Benati and Paolucci, *Guido Cagnacci*, 314.

similarly plain appearances, such as his *Penitent Magdalen* (Santa Maria Maddalena delle Benedettine, Urbania) and his *Lucretia* (Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna), none quite match this Cleopatra's level of authentic humanity. If indeed Cagnacci did make nude female figure studies from life, this painting and a number of others may well reflect more about his models than his conception of traditional subjects. The confident ease of this Cleopatra is almost conspiratorial, as if she were acknowledging her role in the artistic process. Regardless of how Cagnacci's Cleopatra came by her attitude, it undermined her passive surface and gave the artist an idea of how to evolve his interpretation further.

In his final exploration of the subject, Guido Cagnacci delivered an even more powerful subversion of the typical Cleopatra narrative. While his painting does not explicitly refer to anything beyond the two traditional stories from her life, he made several artistic choices that acknowledge an expanded concept of her character. His *Death of Cleopatra* is decidedly a depiction of a queen. The imposing chair and finely-wrought diadem are clear symbols of strength and wealth, and the bevy of women fretting over her is another obvious signifier of status. All of the attendants stand in her presence, either at her side or behind her, but never in front. Although two of the women lay a hand on the throne, no one touches Cleopatra herself or the tiara, the more intimate symbol of her authority. Even though she is surrounded, the function of the waiting women is to observe and react, rather than to support or act. The woman to Cleopatra's right in green makes a very deliberate gesture, pulling back both hands with her open palms angled toward the queen. She seems to signal both her surprise and emphatic non-interference. All of this shows that the queen decided and went through with her suicide

on her own terms and under her own power. Her attendants acknowledge her expression of agency even as they display appropriate sorrow.

Cagnacci's last Cleopatra also projects a peaceful air that evokes a release from the burdens of life rather than the surrender of a woman lost to passion and despair. This Cleopatra is somewhat more idealized than his single-figure version, particularly in the face. She is thinner overall, with a slightly more concave stomach, an elegant neck and more delicate facial features. Her hair is also neatly coiffed, instead of spilling about her shoulders. The queen slumps naturalistically, with convincing weight and accurate folding through the torso area. The artist is again pushing back against the overt eroticization of antique heroines. Cagnacci acknowledges that the scene should draw the gaze of viewers by inserting the attendants as observers directly within the painting, but he makes them all female and shifts their focus. The artist forces the viewer to interact with Cleopatra as her attendants do – to express any of the variety of emotions visually portrayed by the women, but not to seek pleasure or to delight in lust inspired by the nude female form. In death, Cleopatra looks neither to the heavens nor others for support, but turns inward to find true freedom in herself.

#### GUIDO CAGNACCI AND THE VIENNESE COURT

The context of Vienna is of paramount importance for explaining the shift in Cagnacci's approach to Cleopatra. The cultural and political landscape was significantly different from that of Venice, where Cagnacci had resided for the previous decade. His artistic priorities changed as he shifted from being an independent artist to being an artist tied to a powerful court. The intertwined relationships of the royal European houses meant that aesthetic trends often crossed geographic boundaries. For instance, fashions

from the Spanish court of Philip IV were quite popular in Vienna, an effect that deepened after Leopold I married the Infanta Margarita Teresa in 1666.<sup>68</sup> Some artists used the linked courts to support their activities, spreading trends and acquiring influences throughout their itinerant careers. Cagnacci wandered the Italian peninsula to some extent, but he had not absorbed a broad sense of European styles before traveling to Vienna. The artist's late exposure to Flemish painting had a noticeable effect on his Viennese works. He also acquired a new focus on the visual language of power, which carried over from his state portraits to works like the two late Cleopatra paintings. Cagnacci's late style is a combination of adaptation and invention, prompted by the demands he encountered as a painter at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor.

Since the division of the Hapsburg line in 1521, Vienna had been the seat of the family's junior branch. The senior branch held the Spanish throne, but disputes over the precise division of Hapsburg territories were not settled until the secret Oñate treaty was signed in 1617. Leopold I had been elected Holy Roman Emperor only in July of 1658, so when Cagnacci arrived sometime the next year, he would have encountered a young man still settling into his role. During this period, almost all of Europe was still feeling the effects of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), particularly in terms of economic strain and population loss. The most important geopolitical aspect was the fragmentation of Central Europe, which had decentralized the power of the Holy Roman Empire. The staunchly Roman Catholic Leopold must also have been dismayed by the failure to achieve religious unification across Europe. Leopold, however, fortuitously came to power as the Austrian branch of the Hapsburgs was on the ascendance. With the death of

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<sup>68</sup> Polly Cone, ed., *The Imperial Style: Fashions of the Hapsburg Era* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980), 87.

his uncle Philip IV of Spain in 1665, Leopold became the clear head of the family, and Vienna solidified its position as the new pinnacle of Habsburg power.<sup>69</sup> His two closest advisors were his uncle, the Archduke Leopold Wilhelm, and his grand chamberlain, Count Johann Ferdinand Portia. The archduke will be discussed in greater detail below, but Portia deserves consideration here given his ties to Venice, where Cagnacci resided prior to his court appointment.

Portia came from a family that had spent generations in the service of the Hapsburg dynasty. He was born and raised in Venice, where his father represented Austrian interests in the Venetian senate. Portia's first foray into politics was a thirteen-year stint on the government council in Graz, following which he returned to Venice to serve as Imperial orator to the Signoria. He was then appointed to be Leopold's governor in Vienna, which fostered a trust between the two and led to his later role as the first minister.<sup>70</sup> The pertinent issue for this paper is whether or not Portia might have been the link between Cagnacci and Vienna. It seems probable that someone close to the court knew Cagnacci or his works firsthand. His reputation was simply never high enough to elicit a summons from such a powerful and discerning patron on its own. Given that Portia remained in Venice until 1652, he might well have seen the work of Cagnacci, who arrived in that city around 1650. Even if Portia's path did not cross Cagnacci's, perhaps because the artist might not yet have been well-established, he would at least have maintained contacts in Venice that might have provided a recommendation. Without further evidence it is difficult to form any conclusions, but the possibility of Portia's involvement is intriguing.

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<sup>69</sup> Spielman, *Leopold I*, 17.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37.

As stated in the earlier discussion of chairs as related to the late Cleopatra paintings, it seems that Cagnacci was working to appropriate contemporary symbols of authority. There is some sense within these paintings that the artist came to a greater awareness of female power once he arrived in Vienna. A number of women in authoritative positions were intimately connected with the Hapsburg dynasty, a history Cagnacci would likely have become more familiar with once he took on his court role. The nearest example would have been Eleonora Gonzaga (1630-1686), Leopold I's godmother and eventual stepmother. Leopold evidently held her in great affection and allowed the dowager empress wide latitude at his court until her death in 1686.<sup>71</sup> Eleonora continued the legacy of support for Italian artists at the Viennese court, which had thrived since the time of her namesake great-aunt. The elder Eleonora(1598-1655) had married the emperor Ferdinand II in 1622, and soon established herself as a patron of the first order. She hired theatre troupes and musicians and commissioned new compositions, contributing to the establishment of links between the musical trends of Mantua and Vienna.<sup>72</sup> She was also involved in bringing ballet to Austria. Although Cagnacci could not have encountered the elder Eleonora since she died in 1655, her younger counterpart was a major player in the artistic life of the Viennese court during his time there.

The Gonzaga family had an established legacy as great art patrons. Although their priorities varied, the dukes of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were committed to maintaining the court at Mantua as a flourishing center for the arts.

Vincenzo Gonzaga (1562-1612) was a voracious collector who modeled his approach on

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>72</sup> Don Harrán, "From Mantua to Vienna: A New Look at the Early Seventeenth-Century Dance Suite," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 129 (2004), 183-84.

that of the Hapsburg dynasty, while his son Ferdinando Gonzaga (1587-1626) was highly discerning and organized.<sup>73</sup> The Gonzaga collection was inventoried between December 1626 and April 1627 in preparation for the largest art deal of the seventeenth century, in which many of the best pieces of their collection were sold to Charles I, King of England. The sale was brokered by Daniel Nijs, a merchant with Flemish roots who lived most of his life in Venice.<sup>74</sup> Although there is no evidence that Eleonora knew of Cagnacci, there were certainly links between the artistic circles of Venice and Mantua. Perhaps someone in the retinue that accompanied her to Vienna at the time of her marriage was aware of Cagnacci's work. In any case, Eleonora swiftly established herself as a cultural force at the Imperial court.

Eleonora was well-educated in a wide range of subjects and actively involved in the arts throughout her life. Reputedly a talented painter, her main passion was literature and poetry. In her role as empress she organized a lively circuit of court performances, particularly as her husband shared her interest in the arts.<sup>75</sup> After the death of Ferdinand III, she continued to dominate the Viennese court. When Leopold I decided to expand the Hofburg Palace provisions were made for Eleonora's accommodation. In 1665, she engaged the Italian-trained painter Carpofo Tencalla to fresco her apartments in the new Leopoldine Wing, although these rooms were destroyed in a fire three years later. Her role as a patron of the visual arts is understudied, but it is known that she commissioned works and even supported female artists. According to the Seicento

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<sup>73</sup> Raffaella Morselli, ed., *Gonzaga: La Celeste Galeria* (Milan: Skira, 2002), 43.

<sup>74</sup> Christina M. Anderson, "The Art of Friendship: Daniel Nijs, Isaac Wake and the Sale of the Gonzaga Collection," *Renaissance Studies* 27, 5 (Nov. 2013), 724.

<sup>75</sup> Barbara Furlotti and Guido Rebecchini, *The Art of Mantua: Power and Patronage in the Renaissance* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008), 253.

biographer Malvasia, the empress owned two of Elisabetta Sirani's paintings.<sup>76</sup> Eleonora was also depicted a few times in the early 1650s by Ferdinand's Flemish court painter, Frans Luycx.<sup>77</sup> One portrait is traditional and the other is allegorical, but neither representation is particularly innovative or powerful. Eleonora is richly dressed, but there are no symbols of personal authority like the tiara and throne in Cagnacci's late images of Cleopatra. As a dowager empress at the court of a non-blood relative, Eleonora would have needed to be careful about how she projected her status. The secret to her longevity at the Viennese court may well have been the subtle touch of her influence. Seeing a woman like Eleonora enact a powerful role might have inspired Cagnacci to view Cleopatra's story through a different lens.

A number of other strong female figures lived and ruled across Europe during Cagnacci's lifetime. Women such as Maria de' Medici (1575-1642, France), Claudia de' Medici (1604-1648, Austrian County of Tyrol), and Anne of Austria (1601-1666, France) wielded vast power as regents for their minor sons. Isabella Clara Eugenia (1566-1633) continued as governor of the Spanish Netherlands for a further twelve years after the death of her husband. As a patron, Maria de' Medici was typical of this group of women. Highly educated and raised in a rich cultural environment, her first significant involvement with artistic commissions occurred following her marriage. Portraits of her from this period generally focused on her dual role as supportive wife and mother of the heir to the throne.<sup>78</sup> Her patronage was mainly limited to works that established the

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<sup>76</sup> Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice: Vite de' Pittori Bolognesi* (Bologna, 1678); rpt. Giampietro Zanotti, ed. (Bologna, Tipografia Guidi all'Ancora, 1841), II:399.

<sup>77</sup> See the *Portrait of Eleonora Gonzaga* by Luycx in the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm and *Eleonora Gonzaga as Diana* by Luycx in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

<sup>78</sup> Géraldine Johnson, "Imagining Images of Powerful Women: Maria de' Medici's Patronage of Art and Architecture," in *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and connoisseurs*, ed. Cynthia Lawrence (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 129.

public image of the royal family. Although Maria did pursue a few projects on her own initiative during her husband's lifetime, such as an equestrian monument of the king, she truly came into her own as a patron after his death.<sup>79</sup> This was a general trend among women who held power as regents, rather than as hereditary monarchs.

As Maria established her authority, her image and ambitions shifted as well. She became involved in building projects, and portraits of her took on a very different tone. During his time at the French court in the early 1620s, Peter Paul Rubens painted Maria a number of times. One representation, *Maria de' Medici as the Queen Triumphant* (Musée du Louvre, Paris), is arguably the most forceful depiction of female authority from the period. The artist has crammed so many symbols of power into the piece that it almost feels cluttered. From the expression of territorial possession as represented by the cannon and discarded arms and armor, to the allusion of divine right established with the crown delivered by *putti*, everything in this portrait is designed to project Maria's position. In a world that often tried to limit what women could achieve, Maria de' Medici and other contemporary female figures in power understood that holding onto their authority required determined effort and the support of a strong visual program.

Queen Christina of Sweden (1626-1689), on the other hand, was in many ways an exception to the typical trajectory of powerful women. She ruled on her own as queen for over two decades before abdicating the throne in 1654, converting to Catholicism, and spending much of the rest of her life at the center of cultural life in Rome. Christina had encountered the Archduke Leopold Wilhelm in 1654 when she resided for a time in Antwerp and Brussels immediately following her abdication. A woman of remarkable intelligence and curiosity, she communicated with a number of the preeminent scholars

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 134.

of the day. She was renowned for her patronage of both the performing and visual arts, owning works by sought-after Seicento artists such as Gian Lorenzo Bernini.<sup>80</sup> Christina visited Innsbruck in 1662, when a production of the opera *La Magnamità d'Alessandro* by the Venetian composer Antonio Cesti was staged in her honor.<sup>81</sup> Exemplars of female power and patronage such as these colored the environment of the Hapsburg court and may have prompted Cagnacci's reassessment of Cleopatra.

Seventeenth-century Vienna was a rich cultural center. Due to the turmoil and difficult economic recovery following the Thirty Years' War, the city's artistic development was rather slow. The Imperial art collection in Prague had been looted by Swedish troops during the fighting, and when Leopold I came to the throne, the majority of artistic efforts were still focused on rebuilding after that loss. His accession marked the Hapsburg return to patronage on a grand scale, with a visual program designed to solidify his authority and divine right to rule.<sup>82</sup> Courts and religious institutions drove artistic production, eclipsing small towns.<sup>83</sup> Many artists had left Central Europe because of the military and political conflict, and a number of others chose to spend a good portion of their careers abroad.<sup>84</sup> The mid-seventeenth century saw a wave of these artists returning to Austria and Germany, heralding the area's recovery and bringing back a variety of aesthetic influences that may have played a role in Cagnacci's shifting style.

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<sup>80</sup> Lilian H. Zirpolo, "Christina of Sweden's Patronage of Bernini: The Mirror of Truth Revealed by Time," *Woman's Art Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2005), 38.

<sup>81</sup> Agnes Kory, "Leopold Wilhelm and His Patronage of Music with Special Reference to Opera," *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, T. 36, Fasc. 1/2 (1995), 24.

<sup>82</sup> DaCosta Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister, and City*, 270.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>84</sup> Julius Held and Donald Posner, *17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Baroque Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture* (New York: Abrams, 1971), 403.

Flemish and Dutch art had a significant impact in Vienna during the post-war years, due to strong trade links and political connections between the courts.<sup>85</sup> The influence of Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony Van Dyck, both of whom died in the early 1640s, lingered in the aesthetic trends of European court art at mid-century. Artists throughout central Europe and beyond continued to emulate Rubens' naturalistic, yet idealized figures and fondness for robust colors.<sup>86</sup> Flemish art continued to evolve, turning to artists like Jacob Jordaens, who was represented in Leopold Wilhelm's collection. Jordaens created works that are teeming with humanity.<sup>87</sup> Many of his scenes display a complex, overlapping arrangement of figures and a circular composition that draws the viewer into the action, much like Cagnacci's late multi-figure Cleopatra (Fig. 15). Although Jordaens usually used this type of composition for his genre paintings, with the people clustered around a table rather than a throne, the principle is similar. A classicizing current appeared in court art that also had a great deal to do with the influence of Netherlandish art.<sup>88</sup> This trend spread through the work of Italian artists as well, who were popular at the Viennese court throughout the seventeenth century.

The Imperial court wanted to reassert its position through art, so symbols of state and power were very important. Allegorical and *trompe l'oeil* painting surged in popularity during the post-war period in Vienna.<sup>89</sup> As Italian artists had long been known for such styles, many were summoned to the Austrian court. Female nudes were extremely popular with German collectors, and Italian painters increasingly sent their

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<sup>85</sup> Eberhard Hempel, *Baroque Art and Architecture in Central Europe* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), 61.

<sup>86</sup> Held and Posner, *17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century Art*, 198.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>88</sup> DaCosta Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister, and City*, 281.

<sup>89</sup> Ehrenfried Kluckert, "Art and Architecture in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, Baroque and Rococo," in *Vienna: Art and Architecture*, ed. Rolf Toman (Cologne: Könemann, 1999), 107.

work abroad to meet this demand.<sup>90</sup> Vienna established itself as a center of court ceremony and celebration where entertainment of all sorts flourished, although theatre and music were typically the preeminent arts. The court of the Holy Roman Emperor was heavily influenced by Italian trends. The growing tradition of employing artists from Italy, or at least those who had studied there, affected the aesthetic of Vienna in a number of ways. Italian music, opera, theatre, and architecture were all dominant.<sup>91</sup> The link between the Austrian Hapsburgs and the Gonzaga family of Mantua, solidified through decades of intermarriage, probably increased this preference. Italian was also extensively spoken at the court until the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>92</sup> Italy and the Netherlands, as well as France by the time of Louis XIV, all influenced the Viennese court. Cagnacci's late works reflect this mixed cultural context with elements that recall a variety of styles.

Leopold I as an art patron and the mid-century period as a whole have received relatively little attention in English-language sources.<sup>93</sup> In contrast to the situation for his uncle the archduke, almost nothing is known about the painters Leopold patronized or what types of works he commissioned. He was far more focused on music and theatre than the visual arts. Leopold's main contribution as a patron was his expansion of the Hofburg Palace, the city's first major project to express elements of what came to be known as the "Baroque" style. The initial design for the Leopoldine Wing came from Filiberto Lucchese, who drew his inspiration largely from Roman and Venetian churches.<sup>94</sup> The nature of Vienna's creative culture, which was strongly affected by the

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<sup>90</sup> Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters; A Study in the Relations between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 195, 199.

<sup>91</sup> DaCosta Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister, and City*, 270.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Historians tend to focus on the earlier period of the Thirty Years' War or on Leopold I's military campaigns, while art historians often ignore Leopold entirely.

<sup>94</sup> Kluckert, "Art and Architecture," 44, 50-51.

surrounding countries and the dissemination of ideas through closely-linked European courts, makes it difficult to define a characteristically “Viennese” style. As Spanish power weakened between the end of the Thirty Years’ War (1648) and the death of Philip IV (1665), courts across Europe increasingly began to follow French trends. The seat of the Holy Roman Empire was no exception, although the contentious relationship between Leopold I and Louis XIV made the situation more complicated. Versailles was a particularly strong influence beginning in the late the seventeenth century, and created a sense of cultural competition in Vienna.<sup>95</sup> The two courts often utilized the same imagery. Leopold was frequently represented as Apollo, as was Louis XIV, known as the Sun King. Both men understood the power of a cohesive visual program at court, and executed projects to solidify their status.

The function of art and architecture in mid-seventeenth-century Austria remained principally “to reflect and provide a theatre for the increasingly elaborate court ceremonials that expressed hierarchies and orders of ranks.”<sup>96</sup> Leopold was so fond of the theatre that he even had himself represented in costume, elaborately dressed as Acis from the play “La Galatea,” in a court portrait by the Flemish painter Jan Thomas from 1667 (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna). In the political landscape that rose from the ashes of the Thirty Years’ War, with all of the major players jostling for renewed status and influence, a visual language that emphasized the well-ordered lineage of authority had strong appeal. Leaders had long understood and capitalized on the power of imagery. Court portraits of Leopold typically depicted him wearing royal robes and elaborate

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<sup>95</sup> Joachim Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire, Volume 2: From the Peace of Westphalia to the Dissolution of the Reich, 1648-1806* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 529.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

armor while holding or pointing to other visual symbols of political power.<sup>97</sup> Leopold developed his public persona as a mediator, choosing to stand on tradition rather than forge a new path.<sup>98</sup> The attention and sensitivity to political power in Vienna under Leopold lends itself to a potential reading of Cagnacci's late Cleopatra paintings as ruminations on the nature of power. The two works fit within seventeenth-century Austrian style both in their finely-tuned sense of drama and their emphasis on position and decisive authority.

For Cagnacci, patronage in Vienna was concentrated around the Emperor's court. In his official capacity, he produced the state portrait of *Emperor Leopold I in Coronation Armor* (Fig. 10, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna). A fairly standard court portrait, it depicts Leopold wearing an elaborate suit of armor and holding a scepter in an architectural setting. The emperor's crown is also included, and he gazes directly at the viewer. Leopold's posture suggests that he is about to stride confidently forward out of the painting. Cagnacci uses his talent for rich color and fine detail to emphasize the symbols of Imperial wealth and power. Cagnacci's religious commissions also came from the court, represented by pieces such as the *St. Jerome* from the same collection. Like the two late Cleopatra paintings, this work was part of the supplement to the 1659 inventory of Leopold Wilhelm's collection, indicating that its acquisition likely post-dates the creation of the list. The close familial and economic ties between the major art patrons at the court in Vienna make it difficult to determine the precise derivation of Cagnacci's last commissions. Although his summons was to the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, the

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<sup>97</sup> See, for example, the *Portrait of Leopold I, Holy Roman Emperor* by an anonymous seventeenth-century Austrian artist now in the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum, Vienna.

<sup>98</sup> Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire*, 105.

appearance of the artist's works in the inventory of the Archduke Leopold Wilhelm suggests a more complicated arrangement of service.

Because the Viennese court absorbed such a broad range of influences, it was often the personal taste of the patron that gave works of art a particular signature. Leopold Wilhelm, the Emperor's uncle, was a key figure in the city's artistic life. The Archduke was a military commander during the Thirty Years' War who later ruled the Spanish Netherlands from 1647-1656. While residing in Brussels during his tenure as governor, Leopold Wilhelm began to form his celebrated collection of paintings, which would eventually become the core of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. He had a particular affinity for Flemish and Italian works from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>99</sup> Fortuitously, a number of superior art collections came up for sale during this period, including those of the Duke of Hamilton in 1649 and the Duke of Buckingham in 1648. Part of the archduke's strength as a collector was his willingness to build upon the work of these earlier connoisseurs by adding more contemporary pieces.<sup>100</sup>

Leopold Wilhelm's tastes as a collector were largely focused on Italian and Flemish art. An investigation of his preferences will provide a sense of the artistic styles Cagnacci would have been exposed to and perhaps drawn on in his late works. When he arrived in Brussels to take up his post as governor, the archduke was accompanied by his court painter Jan van den Hoecke.<sup>101</sup> A native of Antwerp, van den Hoecke had studied with Peter Paul Rubens, and he had worked in Vienna for about a decade at the court of Emperor Ferdinand III (1608-1657). Jan van den Hoecke's career points to an established

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<sup>99</sup> Wolfgang Prohaska, *Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna: The Paintings* (London: Scala Books, 1997), 9.

<sup>100</sup> Ernst Vegelin van Claerbergen, ed., *David Teniers and the Theatre of Painting* (London: Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery, 2006), 130.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

taste for Flemish seventeenth-century painting among Austrian patrons. This preference is also evident from the 1659 inventory of Leopold Wilhelm's collection, which lists 517 works by Italian masters, 880 works by Dutch, Flemish and German masters, 343 works on paper, and 542 assorted statues, figurines, and antiquities.<sup>102</sup> The Italian works included artists such as Palma Giovane, Tintoretto, Titian, Giorgione, Veronese, Raphael, Correggio, and Guido Reni. In addition to Jan van den Hoecke, the inventory lists works by Dutch and Flemish painters such as Anthony van Dyck, Paul Brill, Peter Paul Rubens, Jacob Jordaens, Justus van Egmont, and Pieter Bruegel the Younger. Many of the entries list the artist as unknown, however, indicating that the archduke did not solely acquire pieces by major names. The records demonstrate the breadth of Leopold Wilhelm's taste, ranging from landscapes to portraits to history and genre paintings. In assessing Cagnacci's work in Vienna, one particularly intriguing piece in the inventory is described as "Ein Kopfstuckh der Cleopatra in Profilo von Marmel. Antico, Original."<sup>103</sup> Although this work cannot be connected to a known sculpture today, it suggests the possibility that Cagnacci was influenced by an antique sculptural representation of the queen.

The Dutch painter David Teniers the Younger was an instrumental part of Leopold Wilhelm's efforts as a collector who responded to the collection's diversity. He was named court painter to the archduke by 1651, a position that included caring for all the works at the palace in Brussels. Additionally, there is evidence that he was sent as the archduke's agent to acquire paintings in England that same year from the sale of the late

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<sup>102</sup> Adolf Berger, "Inventar und Kunstsammlung des Erzherzogs Leopold Wilhelm von Österreich," in *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* (Vienna: Halm & Goldmann, 1883), LXXXVI-CLXXVII.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, CLXVIII.

king Charles I.<sup>104</sup> Clearly there was a high level of trust between the artist and his employer. Also in 1651, Teniers began to paint a number of gallery views, paintings that replicated various pieces from the archduke's collection in miniature and showed how they were displayed in a room. These gallery views were sent to Philip IV of Spain and the archduke's brother Ferdinand III, among others, spreading awareness and increasing the prestige of Leopold Wilhelm's collection by accurately representing the paintings in miniature.<sup>105</sup> Gallery views were first executed by Frans Francken the Younger in Antwerp during the early seventeenth century, but Teniers was the primary developer of the type. The high level of detail and inclusion of attributions along the painted frames allow for the identification of many pieces. Teniers' talent for precise reproduction would also prove useful in his other major undertaking for the archduke, the *Theatrum Pictorium*.

The *Theatrum Pictorium* was a compilation of prints that catalogued and celebrated the archduke's collection of paintings. Although the project was likely started around the mid-1650s, it was not printed for the first time until 1660, after Leopold Wilhelm and his collection had already returned to Vienna.<sup>106</sup> The *Theatrum Pictorium* was an innovative tribute to Teniers' great patron. Its focus on Italian painting reflected the archduke's priorities as a collector and showcased his most prized acquisitions. In discussing the impact of Cagnacci's exposure to Leopold Wilhelm's collection on the artist's late style, a few of the paintings recorded in Teniers' gallery views seem particularly relevant. Two official portraits that include low-back red leather chairs with carved wooden arms and finials are visible in the upper right-hand corner of one of the

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<sup>104</sup> Claerbergen, *David Teniers*, 13.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

gallery views (Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Schleissheim). One portrait depicts a Venetian doge, the other an unidentified noblewoman. The *Theatrum Pictorium* contained two portraits of doges, sometimes identified as Nicolò da Ponte and Francesco Donato, both of which were attributed to Tintoretto and represented in Teniers' gallery views interchangeably.<sup>107</sup> Both doges wear elaborate state robes, clearly indicating power and position. In contrast to the portrait of the unknown noblewoman, whose hands are clasped demurely in her lap, both doges rest their hands firmly on the arms of the chair. Like Cleopatra, neither doge is physically imposing, although for the men it is due to their age rather than the vulnerability of nudity and death. It is apparent from these key pictorial records that within the archduke's collection there were examples of a traditional, symbolic language of authority and status that may have influenced Cagnacci's late interpretations of Cleopatra.

Leopold Wilhelm's personal taste was probably the primary factor that led to Cagnacci's summons to Vienna. As demonstrated by his acquisition of a large number of Venetian paintings from the Hamilton collection, the archduke was fond of that school of painting. He had a keen eye for quality, and picked up works spanning the full spectrum of types, including portraits, history paintings, and still lifes. By the time Cagnacci encountered Leopold Wilhelm and his collection in Vienna around 1659, the group of works included large holdings of both Italian and Flemish art. In certain aspects of his late paintings Cagnacci appears to have incorporated, whether consciously or not, some of the qualities of Flemish style. The complicated interplay between figures and focus on expressive facial reactions recall artists like Jacob Jordaens, while the clarity of light and detailed naturalism of the attendants' faces are reminiscent of works by painters such as

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 104.

Anthony van Dyck. The way the women huddle around Cleopatra's throne while also leaving space for the viewer to interact recalls a number of Dutch genre paintings, including those by David Teniers the Younger. Given his importance to European court art, Rubens was also probably an influence. Having been prone his entire career to imitate the characteristics of other artists, Cagnacci perhaps found a new vein of innovation after being exposed to so many works from a different school. His multi-figure *Death of Cleopatra* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum seems to draw on a different set of considerations, as do other works from his Viennese period, such as *Martha Rebuking Mary for Her Vanity* (Fig. 11, Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena).

The attendants in the multi-figure Cleopatra have faces that are reminiscent of Flemish genre paintings. In contrast to the queen's royal image, the surrounding women radiate a certain wholesomeness with their simple hairstyles and milky, pink-tinged complexions. The furrowed brow and grieving expression on the face of the woman immediately behind Cleopatra's throne expresses such a sense of humanity and suffering that it would not seem out of place in a peasant scene. The crispness and clarity that marks Cagnacci's handling of light also seem to reflect a growing awareness of Dutch and Flemish style. The artist's figures are cleanly elucidated, emphasizing his naturalism and defining the attendant women in a way that makes them ordinary and plain. Cagnacci's ability to juxtapose stylistic elements and use inventive iconography created a compelling narrative, making his late Cleopatra paintings some of his most affecting works.

## CONCLUSION

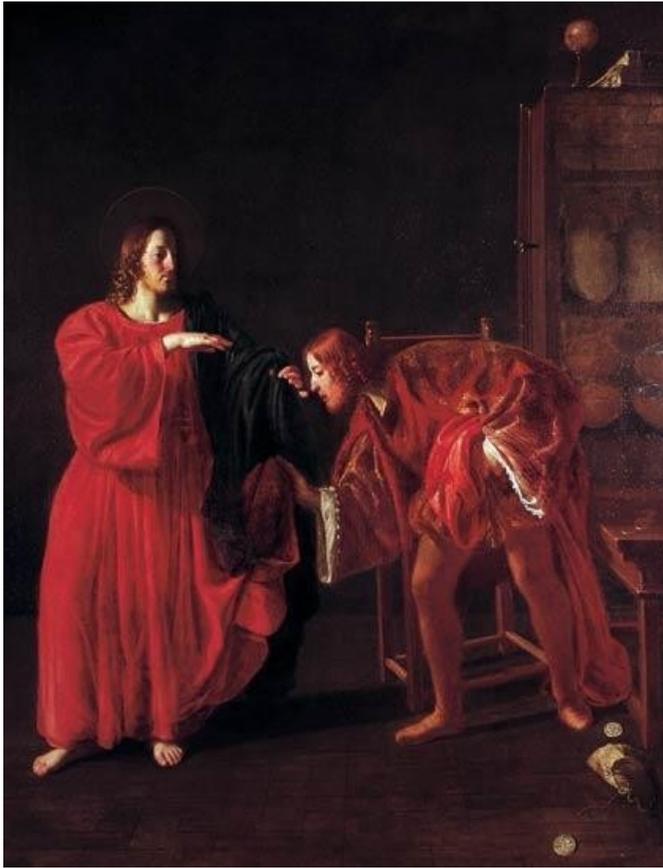
In the late paintings that Cagnacci seems to have produced for Leopold Wilhelm, the artist found a compelling approach that played to his artistic strengths. Perhaps in an effort to increase his appeal to the archduke, Cagnacci learned to combine his exceptional naturalism with a balance between Venetian *colore* and Dutch detail. Whatever his motives, Cagnacci's style underwent a noticeable shift following his arrival in Vienna that reflected aspects of the art collection he was surrounded by and the personal preferences of his primary late patron. Fortunately his context seems in this case to have inspired, rather than superseded, his personal capacity for creative invention.

Guido Cagnacci's late paintings of Cleopatra stand out from the rest of his oeuvre, and from other seventeenth-century Italian depictions of antique heroines. His work reflects an awareness of classical and Renaissance texts and of the standard types of female figures promoted by artists like Guido Reni. Subjects such as the death of Cleopatra were easy to eroticize and very popular with patrons. For most of his career, Cagnacci was one of many Italian artists working to meet the demands of the market. He seems to have felt a greater degree of artistic freedom only after he gained the stability of his job as a court painter in Vienna. Cagnacci's late burst of creativity produced several paintings that are a marked departure from his earlier attempts at similar subjects. The shift in his approach to antique heroines resulted in far more dynamic works that project calm authority rather than aggressive sexuality.

The cultural environment at the Viennese court exposed Cagnacci to a wide range of influences. He mixed familiar Italian trends with the Flemish and Dutch tastes of his patrons to craft a more engaging and original style. Cagnacci's approach to iconography

changed as well. Surrounded by a powerful family with links to many exceptional female leaders, he focused on depicting authority and self-reliance in his late Cleopatra paintings. Cagnacci empowered the queen in compelling and subtle ways. Placed on a throne, peaceful in death, Cleopatra curves in toward herself. She does not cry out, or turn to anyone for help. Cagnacci lends the queen quiet courage and determined dignity in the face of distasteful choices, a reflection and a model of virtue. His last vision of Cleopatra is fearless. Cagnacci subverted the artistic conventions of the seventeenth century by giving greater weight to Cleopatra's heroism, as opposed to her desperation, and delivered an astounding portrayal of a woman who remained undimmed by circumstance.

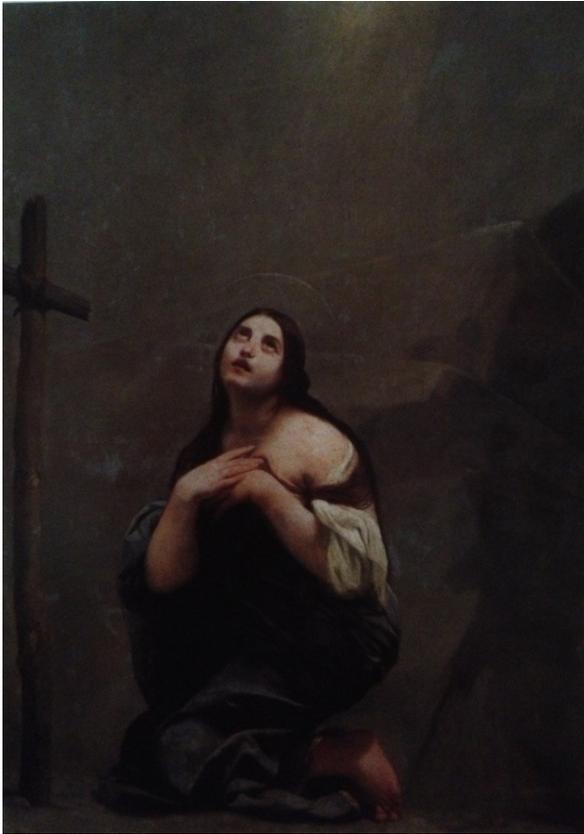
## ILLUSTRATIONS



1. Guido Cagnacci, *Calling of St. Matthew*, Museo della Città, Rimini; oil on canvas, 183 x 145 cm



2. Guido Cagnacci, *St. Anthony between Two Saints*, Museo della Città, Rimini; oil on canvas, 190 x 160 cm



3. Guido Cagnacci, *Penitent Magdalen*, Santa Maria Maddalena delle Benedettine, Urbania; oil on canvas. 218 x 157 cm

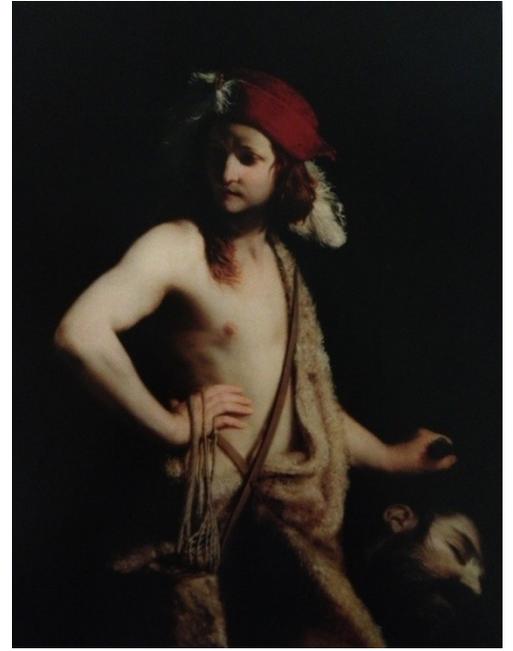


4 (left). Guido Cagnacci, *Glory of St. Mercurialis*, Pinacoteca Civica, Forlì; oil on canvas, 410 x 231 cm

5 (right). Guido Cagnacci, *Glory of St. Valerian*, Pinacoteca Civica, Forlì; oil on canvas, 410 x 231 cm



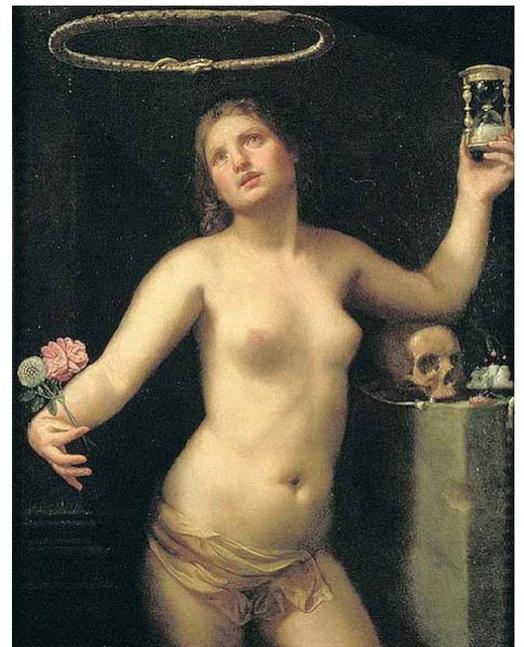
6. Guido Cagnacci, *David with the Head of Goliath*, private collection; oil on canvas, 112.5 x 95 cm



7. Guido Cagnacci, *David with the Head of Goliath*, Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, S.C.; oil on canvas, 129.5 x 99 cm



8. Guido Cagnacci, *Human Life*, Nelson Shanks Collection, Andalusia, PA; oil on canvas, 61 x 56 cm



9. Guido Cagnacci, *Human Life*, Fondazione Cavallini Sgarbi, Ferrara; oil on canvas, 108.5 x 84 cm



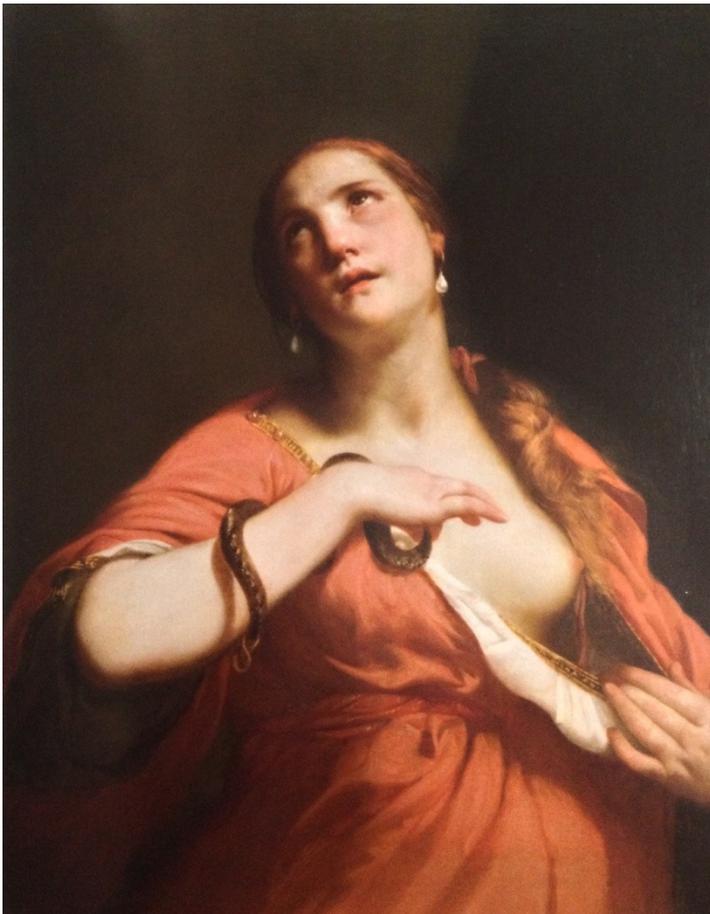
10. Guido Cagnacci, *Emperor Leopold I in Coronation Armor*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; oil on canvas, 190 x 120 cm



11. Guido Cagnacci, *Martha Rebuking Mary for Her Vanity*, Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA; oil on canvas, 229.2 x 266.1 cm



12. Guido Cagnacci, *Cleopatra*, formerly in the Salamon collection, Milan; oil on canvas, 174 x 116 cm



13. Guido Cagnacci, *Cleopatra*, private collection; oil on canvas, 95 x 75 cm



14. Guido Cagnacci,  
*Cleopatra*, Pinacoteca di  
Brera, Milan; oil on canvas,  
120 x 158 cm



15. Guido Cagnacci, *Death of  
Cleopatra*, Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Vienna; oil on  
canvas, 153 x 168.5 cm

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