RACE, GENDER, AND QUEENSHIP IN BOOK 2 OF VITRUVIUS’S DE ARCHITECTURA

PATRICIA EUNJI KIM

I. INTRODUCTION

In Book 2 of *De Architectura*, Vitruvius includes a story about Artemisia II, the fourth-century queen who ruled the kingdom of Caria in Asia Minor after the death of her brother-husband King Mausolus.1 Enraged that a woman reigned over them, the Greek men of Rhodes planned an attack on Halicarnassus, which led to a naval battle between them and the Hecatomnid queen. Artemisia was victorious and commemorated her triumph by commissioning a bronze trophy at Rhodes. Vitruvius tells us that although religious scruples forbade these Greek Rhodians from removing the trophy, they still found a way to enact symbolic violence against the queen’s monument by building a wall around it.

Vitruvius’s story about Artemisia illuminates the critical role of race, gender, and queenship in the cultural, aesthetic, and political production of Roman imperial identities in the first century BCE.2 The public, monumental, and visible status of queenship was precisely what made it a rich terrain for imagining and demonstrating which racialized and gendered identities could embody Roman imperial power and which could not.

1 I am grateful to Megan Boomer, Iggy Cortez, Hallie Franks, Tiffany Fryer, Ann Kuttner, Suzanne Lye, Grace D. Player, Jillian Stinchcomb, Chris Waldo and the 2019 Race Work in the Classics symposium at UIUC for their engagement with my work. I thank the anonymous reviewers for their generous feedback. Translations are my own.


Arethusa 55 (2022) 19–45 © 2022 by Johns Hopkins University Press
Indeed, Vitruvius wrote his treatise just after the defeat of another queen, Cleopatra VII of Egypt, who was negatively characterized in many Roman political and cultural works. Though three centuries separate Artemisia and Cleopatra, an intersectional analysis can explore the hostility toward them both. This type of scholarship, produced since the 1970s, interrogates how different categories of identity, like race, gender, class, and sexuality, overlap to produce specific positions in relation to power. Although the broader structural terms under which the intersections of race and gender operated in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods are obscure, our extant historical and literary records describe how individual queens were punished in ways that cannot be explained solely by their gendered identities. In other words, I am interested in how racial formations were inextricably tied to notions of womanhood in the first century BCE. As such, this article goes beyond the study of the biographies of historical queens to consider formations of race and gender in antiquity, while demonstrating intersectionality’s epistemological value for understanding ancient physical, imperial, and symbolic violence.

I begin by highlighting the role of Artemisia as a royal woman who was politically powerful. My analysis of Vitruvius’s story about her in *de Architectura* focuses on how the narrative reflects broader political and cultural attitudes in the first century BCE. Next I situate my analysis within an intersectional framework by defining the terms “race” and “gender” more explicitly. My discussion then threads together other historical sources into that intersectional framework in order to interrogate and understand Roman political and social constructions of imperial power. I argue that these Roman accounts of queenship configure Artemisia and then Cleopatra as racialized and gendered embodiments of both vulnerability and opposition to an idealized Roman imperial masculinity. I also demonstrate how intersectionality is a generative mode of historical analysis that can aid in understanding the functions of race and gender in the conceptualization of imperial power in contemporary society.

II. WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT ARTEMISIA II AND CLEOPATRA VII

The extant evidence for Artemisia II and Cleopatra VII highlights their political influence and military power when compared to other dynastic women from the long Hellenistic period. Both women worked within political structures shaped by imperial masculinities and desires—although the scale of those political enterprises differed.
Artemisia married her brother Mausolus, who was not only the dynast of Caria, but also the satrap or ruler of the Carian province of the Achaemenid Persian empire (which stretched from the shores of the Mediterranean to central Asia), though the Hecatomnids enjoyed relative autonomy (Hornblower 1982 and Ruzicka 1992). In 370, Mausolus moved his kingdom’s capital from Mylasa to Halicarnassus, adding a number of non-Greek villages to enlarge the city’s area. He annexed the islands of Rhodes, Chios, and Cos in the 350s, while also exerting influence over other cities in Pisidia, Pamphylia, Ionia, and Cnossus. Though Mausolus and Artemisia did not control an empire on the scale of, say, those of the Achaemenids or the Macedonians, the desire to extract tribute and expand were clearly important components of Hecatomnid rule.

Notably, the epigraphic evidence for this rule across the eastern Mediterranean often includes both Mausolus and Artemisia (and later their sibling successors Idreus and Ada). Although the archaeological and textual evidence overwhelmingly suggests that Mausolus wielded more political influence than did Artemisia, it still demonstrates that the royal couple as a unit became an important political symbol. Compared to other dynastic women, Artemisia was undoubtedly powerful; she ruled by herself from 353/52–351/50 after the death of her brother-husband (as did her younger sister Ada) and even oversaw part or most of the construction of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus.

The volume of historical evidence for Cleopatra VII exceeds that of Artemisia II and demonstrates how Cleopatra allied herself with Roman politicians and military generals to foster her own imperial visions. Her father arranged her first marriage to her brother Ptolemy XIII, with whom she briefly co-ruled Egypt starting around 51 BCE, but that relationship soured, leading to the Alexandrine Civil War (48–47). Julius Caesar allied with Cleopatra to help defeat Ptolemy XIII, making way for the joint rule of Cleopatra and her other brother, Ptolemy XIV. The alliance between Cleopatra and Julius Caesar became intimate, resulting in the birth of their son, Ptolemy XV Philopater Philometer Caesar, or Ptolemy Caesarion, and

---

3 Labraunda 40 = GHI 55 preserves Mausolus and Artemisia’s grant of proxenia to the Cnossians. I Erythrai 8 = SIG 168 = GHI 2:155: the inscription honors both Mausolus and Artemisia, but nevertheless clearly gives Mausolus more importance by offering him more honors. See I Kaunos 46, 47, 48 for Kaunian dedications to Mausolus, Artemisia, and Hecatomnus.

their move to Rome. When Caesar was assassinated in 44, Cleopatra moved back to Alexandria as Ptolemy Caesarion’s co-regent where her brother died by poison (Macurdy 1932.193 and Huss 2001.726–31). Meanwhile, the Roman republic was controlled by a triumvirate: Octavian, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, and Mark Antony; their political conflicts would eventually lead to a civil war. It is noteworthy that a diplomatic marriage between Octavia (Octavian’s sister) and Antony was arranged in 40 to temporarily manage the adversarial relationships among the triumvirs.

Antony was a military leader who managed Rome’s eastern provinces, including Egypt. Antony and Cleopatra met for the first time in 41 at Tarsus, where their political and romantic relationship began. In the year 40, Cleopatra gave birth to twins, Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene, and would later have a third son named Ptolemy Philadelphus. Both Cleopatra and Antony were invested in organizing public spectacles and expanding their imperial power. For instance, Antony gifted Cleopatra with the lands of Chalcis, Judaea, and Nabataea as additions to her kingdom in 37 or 36. And when Antony won Armenia in 34, he celebrated his victory with a parade through Alexandria that included a procession of troops, the spoils of war, and Anthony dressed as Dionysus, while the public addressed the queen, dressed in the sacred robe of Isis, as the living New Isis. It was at this festival that Antony and Cleopatra, who were seated on golden thrones atop a silver tribune, distributed their new empire among their children (Plut. Ant. 54.3–5). In 31, Cleopatra and Antony lost the decisive battle of Actium to Octavian, who became the first Roman emperor. Their deaths by suicide followed quickly at Alexandria.

From these brief biographical sketches of Artemisia and Cleopatra, important historical similarities between the two women emerge. In
addition to their consanguineous marriages, they both wielded exceptional political and military power (albeit to different degrees). Significantly for both, the desire for the expansion of, and control over, territory shaped their political relationships with men and informed their public images. For my purposes, however, what most matters is Artemisia’s first-century representation in Vitruvius’s text, where she appears as a mytho-historical example that echoes a Roman cultural discourse of imperial hostility toward foreign queens. I argue that both race and gender intersected to produce a model of queenship that was a necessary counterexample to the Roman imperial masculinity of the first century BCE.

III. VITRUVIUS’S BARBARIAN QUEEN

Vitruvius tells us that the Rhodians were outraged that a woman should rule over them and launched a naval attack to overthrow her (2.8.14). When Artemisia learned of their plans, she organized a counterattack: she lured the Rhodians away from their ships and inside the city walls of Halicarnassus. The queen then captured their emptied fleet, leaving the Rhodians stranded in the city where they were killed. Artemisia sailed the commandeered Rhodian fleet back to Rhodes. Seeing their ships return, the Rhodians initially thought that they had been successful:

Tum Artemisia Rhodo capta principibus occisis tropaeum
in urbem Rhodo sae Victoriae constituere aeneasque duae
statuas fecit, unam Rhodiorum civitatis, alteram sae
imaginis, et ita figuravit Rhodiorum civitatis stigmata impo-
inentem. Id autem postea Rhodii religione impediti, quod
efas est tropaea dedicata removeri, circa eum locum
eaedificium struxerunt et id erecta Graia statione texerunt,
ne qui posset aspicere, et id abatun vocitari iuserunt.

After Rhodes had been seized and its leaders killed, Artemisia then set up a trophy of her victory in the city of Rhodes and made two bronze statues: one of the citizenry of the Rhodians and the other in her own likeness, and she created the latter as putting brand marks onto the citizenry of the Rhodians. The Rhodians, however, restrained by a religious law forbidding the removal of dedicated trophies, later constructed a building around that site and
Patricia Eunji Kim

covered it with a Greek outpost so that no one would be able to see it and commanded that it be called an *abaton* (“an inaccessible place”).

The queen’s victory trophy symbolized her power over the Rhodians. By depicting the queen branding the Rhodian body with the *stigmata* that commonly marked enslaved people (Jones 1987), the sculptural group would have been a constant reminder of Artemisia’s subversion of political and gendered hierarchies. Indeed, public victory monuments are often divisive: they symbolize both victory and loss, depending on the viewer’s political and social identity. In an act of iconoclasm, the Rhodians built a wall around the trophy, removing Artemisia’s statue from public view with the intention of erasing their defeat from the collective memory and rendering her invisible (Kim 2020 and Varner 2004). Thus the Rhodians enacted a form of ideological erasure and violence by covering the Carian queen’s trophy. “Disappearing” a monument in this way was an attempt to maintain a particular image of civic power wherein Rhodian Greek men were politically dominant.

Although Vitruvius discusses the statues and *abaton*, archaeologists have not confirmed their existence. As a result, many historians debate the authenticity of the events or the accuracy of the text—neither of which I will address here (Penrose 2016.166–71, Sebillotte Cuchet 2015.231–33, Berthold 1978.134 n. 2, and Hornblower 1982.129). Rather, I examine what this narrative about Rhodian political, military, and symbolic violence directed against Artemisia II might illuminate about first-century BCE attitudes toward power (Wallace-Hadrill 2008, Gros 2006, Courrént 2011.32, and Formisano 2016).

Vitruvius states that Artemisia’s gender drove the Rhodians to attack, but he does so without placing undue emphasis on that fact (Williams 2016.240–41). Although the “rhetoricity of gender” may be at a relatively “low decibel” level here, the topic of gendered and racialized power dynamics in monumental spaces is nevertheless present throughout the rest of *de Architectura*. Take, for instance, Vitruvius’s aetiological account of the caryatid, a column/statue of a woman in a stola, in Book 1 (1.1.5–6):

---

10 This was not a new premise in the ancient world. According to Diodorus Siculus (13.24.5), in 415 BCE, Nicolaus of Syracuse had warned his ethnically Greek audience about the dangers of victory trophies that memorialized intra-ethnic conflict, urging them to support each other against foreign enemies.
when the Peloponnesian city of Caryae allied with the Persians against Greece, the Greeks, after defeating them, constructed the caryatid as a durable and public mode of punishing Caryaean women, while displaying effigies of Persians outfitted in their own native dress (*barbarico vestis ornatu*). About this passage, Kristina Milnor argues that “the display of ‘other’ bodies—women or barbarians—as architectural elements is meant to remind the viewer of the power which both caused their subjugation and created the monument of which they are a part; both femininity and foreignness here identify the subject status of the figures used in place of columns” (2005.114–15; op. cit. Williams 2016.233).

Vitruvius uses ancient monuments in order to comment on power and identity, all while formulating a particular historical memory of conquest that would be useful for the construction of a triumphant Rome and its empire (Oksanish 2019.82, Milnor 2005.139, and Nichols 2017.30–31). As Indra Kagis McEwan argues (2003), Vitruvius’s treatise illuminates the ways in which built environments and monuments helped to symbolize the “angelic, Herculean, beautiful, and kingly bodies” of Roman imperial authority and architecture. Similarly, I suggest that this message was enhanced by the story of the Rhodians concealing a monument to the Carian queen in a public space. The *abaton* obscured the bronze portrait of Artemisia, thus making a new monument out of her body’s visible absence.

Earlier classical- and Hellenistic-era texts on historical barbarian queens unmistakably inform some of Vitruvius’s narrative of Artemisia. It is clear that, in part, he adapted the Greek conception of barbarity that emphasized polar oppositions between Greek democracy and non-Greek tyranny, and between the manly Greek warrior and the effeminate non-Greek Other (E. Hall 1989.207–09 and Sebillotte Cuchet 2015.234). As Edith Hall establishes in her foundational study of fifth-century Greek thought, the inversion of the gendered power structure wherein despotic, bellicose women

---

11 Oksanish 2019.78 suggests that Vitruvius confuses Caria and Caryae, the latter the city in the Peloponnesian that he discusses at 1.1.5 for its alliance with Persia against Greece. A study of the flexible etymological and aetiological ties among Caria, Caryae, and caryatids in Vitruvius leads Oksanish to suggest that the author purposely created an ambivalent slippage between the two cities and used an etymology in his description of Persian porticos to symbolize foreign enemies (for more on this flexibility within the text, see Romano 2011). In sum, Oksanish argues that Vitruvius evokes both Caryae and Caria in his historical description of a past conflict to inform the “present” of Augustan Rome. See also Milnor 2005 for a reading that focuses on the ways that feminine space is carved out with this passage.
replace weak men, is typical of barbarians. For example, the Athenian orator Demosthenes, in his speech *For the Liberty of the Rhodians*, wonders whether the Athenians should fear Artemisia II, who was “at once a barbarian and a woman” who threatened the sovereignty of Rhodes (15.23; Sebillotte Cuchet 2015.231). By the time Vitruvius wrote his treatise, several other works about similar non-Greek queens had already appeared. A case in point is the Hellenistic-period compilation known as the *Tractatus de Mulieribus Claris in Bello* (“Women Distinguished and Courageous in Warfare”), which Deborah Gera dates to the late second or early first centuries. This work discusses fourteen queens who are understood as historical women mostly from regions in Asia and Africa (Gera 1996.28–30). The majority of the *Tractatus*’s queens are characterized as skillful in the art of war and savvy at dynastic politics—much like Vitruvius’s description of Artemisia II, who defeated the Rhodian navy, killed its Greek leaders, and humiliated their city with the construction of her bronze trophy.

But Vitruvius does not employ conceptions of barbarity to define the Roman self in all the same ways that fifth- and fourth-century Greek authors and artists used them to construct a Greek identity (J. Hall 2010), nor does he lambast the tyrannical despotism that was generally associated with eastern queens (E. Hall 1989.207–08 and Wallace-Hadrill 2008.144–45). Moreover, just as Vitruvius barely mentions gender as such in his treatise (Williams 2016), he does not comment on Artemisia’s Carian identity in this specific narrative either, though just before discussing her monument, Vitruvius does make a general statement about the Carians and the Leleges (groups indigenous to Asia Minor) as barbarians who were driven out of the region (“barbaros Caras et Lelegas eiecerunt,” 2.8.12) by settlers from Troizen. As Naomi Carless Unwin (2017.39) notes, these earlier tales about Greek settlements in Caria were meant to “emphasise the gulf between them and their ‘barbarian’ neighbours” in order to convey a sense of unity among Greek settlers.

---

12 For discussions of Greeks and Amazons as opponents in visual culture, see Cohen 2010 and Castriota 2005. For depictions in literature and text, Blok 2002 and Penrose 2016.

13 Notably, one of the fourteen women is the fifth-century half-Carian and half-Cretan queen Artemisia I, and the earliest sources for the *Tractatus*, Herodotus and Hellanicus, date to the fifth century BCE.

14 This even though “the notion of a frontier between the Hellenes and non-Hellenes in western Anatolia was an artificial construct” (Unwin 2017.41) and not reflective of the interconnectedness across the Aegean and the discursive process of on-the-ground identity formation.
Also complicating any Greek binary model of barbarianism is Vitruvius’s historical narrative of assimilating Carions, who became “Hellenized” by adopting Greek cultural modes of artistic and cultural expression, especially under the reigns of Mausolus and Artemisia. In other words, “being barbarian” was about the absence of humanitas and social status as much as it was about perceived “ethnic” differences (McEwen 2003.149–150, Van der Vliet 2003.261–63, Dench 2005, and Nichols 2017).

Another way of conceptualizing the barbarianism of the Carions is found in Strabo, who describes them as barbarophonoi because they spoke “bad” Greek despite having lived alongside Greeks (14.2.28). Based on this particular passage, Eran Almagor argues for the Carions as inhabiting an “ethnological middle ground” (2000 and 2005.47), a conceptual space in which they were neither purely Greek nor completely barbarian. However, Emma Dench (2005.261) points to Strabo’s “impatience with . . . the category of migades, ‘mixed people’” (14.5.23–26): despite interethnic mixing, someone was either “more Greek” or “more barbarian.” Such discussions reveal that by the early Roman imperial period, the notion of barbarianism, especially as it related to perceptions of Carian identity, was much more complex than a simple binary. In a first-century context, and particularly in Vitruvius’s story about Artemisia and Rhodes, the barbarian was a situational and contingent figure: although she had the potential to be civilized, barbarianism was the default.

Emma Dench’s work (2005) on identity in the Roman world illuminates the diversity of thought among ancient authors regarding Roman attitudes toward difference. On the one hand, praise for Rome’s ethnically mixed populations co-existed with the growth of new distinctions being drawn between barbarians, Greeks, and mixed peoples. Nevertheless, by the end of the second century BCE, a monolithic Roman identity began to develop in opposition to “foreignness” (235–55). For Dench, there is a growing anxiety in Augustan society around the notion of purity: the idea that Roman stock must be protected from foreignness. Yet being a “pure

---

15 Unwin 2017 illuminates the complexity of Carian identities and brings nuance to the cultural processes and interactions on the ground, despite the many ancient sources that simply cast Carions as barbarians in opposition to Greeks. For more on hybrid ethnic identities in colonized contexts, see Malkin 1998.

16 This reading runs parallel with Kuttner’s visual analysis (1995.109–16) of barbarians in Augustan royal art. In particular (pp. 109–10), Kuttner discusses the representations of the “good” and “bad” Celt alongside each other in Augustan contexts as ways to show the incorporation of “good” barbarian hostages into the king’s domus.
Roman” had as much to do with being upper class as it did with ethnicity (Dench 2005 and Nichols 2017). That is, being a pure Roman was not just a matter of ethnicity, it also depended on other perceived identities and behaviors. Dench’s arguments suggest that being Roman, barbarian, or any other racial formation for that matter was a process that intersected with other social factors.

With these conceptual complexities in mind, the Vitruvian story of the public punishment of the Carian queen and her monument begs for a careful and nuanced consideration of the role of barbarian queenship in the imagining of Roman imperial power. As I will argue, intersectional feminist frameworks are useful for investigating the specific ways that foreign and barbaric queens were politically and rhetorically operative in the first century. But in order to do so, a theoretical excursus that explains intersectional feminist thinking—and the role of race as a critical framework more broadly—is necessary.

IV. TOWARDS AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO THE ANCIENT WORLD

Critical race theory allows researchers to analyze race as a tool of power that divides and creates hierarchies among people based on natural, environmental, and/or biological distinctions. As a concept, race naturalizes socially constructed differences and has been used to justify violence, the extraction of resources and labor, and unequal political and legal experiences. One important concept that has emerged from critical race theory is intersectionality: a race-oriented feminist framework for investigating how different vectors of identity (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, to name a few) intersect to produce geographically and historically specific positions related to power.17 Here I provide a necessarily brief genealogy of intersectional feminist inquiries. By reviewing the core theoretical and political conversations being addressed by intersectional feminism, I hope

17 A recent edited volume by Fabre-Serris et al. (2021) aims to show “how the intersection of ethnicity and gender can illuminate the way the Ancients spoke of identity.” I build on that volume’s discussion by considering specifically the epistemological value of such intersections to a study of power in the ancient world. Milnor’s (2005) work on gender and domestic spaces likewise provides an important foundation for considering the production of identity-based power dynamics within imperial spaces in de Architectura.
to demonstrate the epistemological leverage of a race-oriented feminist inquiry—that is, how the premise of interlocking vectors of identity is relevant to classical and historical studies more broadly.

The term intersectionality was coined in the late 1980s by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who used the metaphor of the intersection to argue that race and gender are not mutually exclusive categories of analysis and experience but co-constitutive (Crenshaw 1989 and 1991, Carastathis 2016.55). Crenshaw’s work and the term intersectionality are rooted in the ideas and activisms of Black and Women of Color (WOC) feminists in the nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Specifically, the study of simultaneous, multiple, and interlocking oppressions originated with political coalitions that sought to resist the structures of violence wrought by imperial and colonial systems of governance (Combahee Collective 1977, Lorde 1984, Nash 2018, and Alexander and Mohanty 1977). This theoretical framework created an epistemic shift in various academic discourses and brought its methods of inquiry into historical and cultural contexts other than the late twentieth-century United States (Cho et al. 2013 and Patil 2013.850).

Though most feminist scholars agree about the critical importance of interlocking systems, not all intersectional frameworks are homogenous: major tensions have emerged. Rather than draw a veil over these debates, I call attention to one of the major critiques that also proves useful for the analyses of Roman masculinity and non-Roman femininity (Nash 2018). Jasbir Puar, whose work focuses on interlocking systems, points out how intersectional subject-positioning often results in an “ironic othering of WOC,” such that “WOC” is completely devoid of any viable political meaning. Puar thus reveals the limits of a representational and subject-oriented politics: it flattens marginalized groups into an essentialized category of the Other that exists only in polar opposition to a white heteronormative

---

18 The concept of interlocking systems of oppression traces back to nineteenth-century African-American women (some scholars call this earlier form “proto-intersectional”) and other coalitions that resisted and challenged oppressive white patriarchal capitalism. For a historical genealogy of intersectional feminism as both political movement and critical methodology, see Carastathis 2016 and Moraga 2015a.

19 For instance, the phrase “interlocking oppressions” comes directly from the 1977 Combahee River Collective, a Black feminist lesbian socialist organization that addresses their exclusion from both leftist and white feminist groups.

20 Puar 2012.52: “WOC is simultaneously emptied of specific meaning in its ubiquitous application and yet overdetermined in its deployment. In this usage, intersectionality always produces an Other, and that Other is always a Woman of Color . . . who must invariably be shown to be resistant, subversive, or articulating a grievance.”
patriarchy. Puar’s critique is both political and epistemological: she demonstrates how intersectional thinking risks reproducing “modernist colonial agendas and regimes of epistemic violence” (2012.54, 57) and advocates for approaching intersections as relational, affective encounters in the process of “subject-becoming” rather than as immutable, legible attributes of an ontologically monistic Other as a way to “reintroduce politics into the political” (2012.63). Puar’s work emphasizes that an intersectional approach does not represent the political experiences of women of color. Rather, “the intersection of these categories reveals the failure of representation. Intersectionality reveals the absence of concepts adequate to the lived experience of simultaneous oppression(s)” (Carastathis 2016.118). In other words, an investigation of the erasures of, and violence toward, specific bodies (like Artemisia’s) actually exposes the workings of race and gender in empire making. And as feminist scholar Maria Lugones instructs us, such raced-gendered identities emerge intersubjectively—that is, race and gender form at the sites of encounter, confrontation, meeting, resistance, and adaptation among different groups of people (2010.747–48). Intersectional frameworks have major implications for how we might think about racial formations in antiquity as well as in the present, ultimately enriching our understanding of how concepts of xenophobia and barbarity formed and dissolved over time.

This brief genealogy of intersectional feminism indicates its methodological relevance to 1) classics’ interest in race and 2) a historical and cultural analysis of political power in the first-century BCE ancient Mediterranean—especially as scholarly interest in thinking about race has burgeoned in the past couple of decades. Benjamin Isaac’s *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (2004) discusses the formulation of “proto-racism” as foundational to Greek and Roman thinking by presenting ancient scenarios of race-making and the role of environmental determinism: the naturalization of human difference based on geography and climate.21 Indeed, as the authors of the anthology *Race and Ethnicity in the Classical World* write, multiple conceptualizations of human difference

---

21 These environmental theories are not monolithic, as has been noted by Dench 2005.267–79 and McCoskey 2012.36–58 about Herodotus’s fifth-century *Histories* and Hippocrates’ *Airs, Waters, and Places*. For Vitruvius, Romano 2016.350–51 likewise discusses an “ethnography of domination” and the center of power in Rome’s supremacy in terms of geography, climate, and ethnicity. Spencer 2015 investigates Vitruvius’s grappling with the relationship between people and their urban and social environments, particularly during periods of imperial expansion and migration.
Race, Gender, and Queenship in Book 2 of de Architectura

co-existed in antiquity (Kennedy et al. 2013.xv). However, despite their transhistorical impact, ancient theories and representations of race do not correlate directly with contemporary understandings. Modern notions of race, primarily rooted in eighteenth-century Linnaean taxonomic systems, are often associated with visible markers of corporeal and somatic difference (e.g., hair, skin color, physiognomy) that are imbued with political and social meanings (Omi and Winant 2015.109–11 and Dench 1995.46).

But as historian Denise McCoskey asks: “If skin colour was not the basis of racial difference in antiquity, what forms or versions of racial formation might the Greeks and Romans have actually used?” (2012.10; cf. Dee 2003). Of course, material evidence from Greco-Roman contexts offers insight into what kinds of perceptible corporeal differences existed, though the meanings assigned to such differences may be obscure, and we are not able to articulate which physiognomic characteristics were racialized (Dench 2005.226, Martin 2017, Derbew 2018, and Snowden 1970). Likewise, as Chicana feminist scholar Cherrie Moraga points out, aspects of racial subject-positioning and self-identification in our contemporary society are not always epidermal, spectral, or visible (Moraga 2015b and Heng 2018.3). Categories of racial identity are complex discursive formations that, while politically operative, are sometimes not recognized because they do not correspond with normativized political subjects.

Despite these divergences between ancient and modern conceptions of human difference, critical race theory as an analytic lens is epistemologically useful for unpacking how political hierarchies map onto historical constructs of human difference. Race does specific political and ideological work as an analytic framework that the idea of “ethnicity” does not and cannot do (Omi and Winant 2015.109). Scholars of the ancient world, particularly those interested in issues of identity formations, have typically mobilized ethnicity to conceptualize how people formed a sense of belonging through the construction of a shared past, cultural traditions, and/or kinship (Martin 2017.145, McInerney 2014.2, 6–8, and McInerney 2001.51–52).22 Though such shared political identities or cultural expressions

---

22 According to Omi and Winant, ethnicity was a critical framework that transformed modern accounts of race into a social construct that did not depend on corporeal differences (2015.21–22). Instead, ethnicity became synonymous with cultural identity, thus making ethnic identity malleable enough for mid- and late-twentieth century nationalist, neo-conservative discourses of diversity to thrive in the United States (Omi and Winant 2015.21, 39–40). Until recently, race and racism were seen as anachronistic, while the question of
are surely important, race allows for discussions of the discourses, representations, and administration of power. Geraldine Heng’s understanding of race in the European Middle Ages is instructive (2018.4; emphasis original):

The term race continues to bear witness to important strategic, epistemological, and political commitments not adequately served by the innovation of categories of greater generality (such as otherness or difference) or greater benignity in our understanding of human culture and society. Not to use the term race would be to sustain the reproduction of a certain kind of past, while keeping the door shut to tools, analyses, and resources that can name the past differently . . . The unavailability of race thus often colludes in relegating such manifestations to an epiphenomenal status, enabling omissions that have, among other things, facilitated the entrenchment and reproduction of a certain kind of foundational historiography in the academy and beyond.

Critical race theory provides the tools with which we might better describe the distribution of power among, and use of violence toward, specific groups of people. Moreover, a study of racialized bodies—not just distinct ethnic groups—provides a space to analyze political, physical, and symbolic violence with more specificity (Alexander and Mohanty 1997.xv). With these theoretical approaches in mind, I consider how and why race and gender were intertwined in first-century BCE representations of Artemisia II and Cleopatra VII. Race and gender—as well as the conceptual inseparability of these categories of identity—offer the possibility of a new analysis of the imagining and representation of imperium (“might” or “power”), and it is this particular theoretical framework that I use to unpack the political and symbolic violence found in Vitruvius’s narrative about Artemesia II in Book 2 of de Architectura: a text, famed for its contradictions and inconsistencies, that nevertheless provides valuable insights into first-century understandings of imperial identity (Romano 2016, Nichols 2017, McEwen 2003, and Oksanish 2019).

multiple, co-existing ethnic identities came to permeate academic conversations throughout the 1960s and 70s (J. Hall 2010 and McInerney 2014.1–2).
The version of Vitruvius’s treatise that we have probably circulated between 27–20 BCE, that is, after the decades-long series of Roman civil wars that had culminated in the defeat of Cleopatra VII and Mark Antony in 31 and Cleopatra’s death by suicide in 30 (Gros 1994.xxvii–xxxii, Rowland and Howe 1999, and Baldwin 1990). The historical context of Vitruvius’s story about Artemisia is the recent defeat and death of Cleopatra VII. These events warrant an examination of barbarian queenship as a trope in the late first century, as well as an examination of the connections among other “barbarian queens.”

Various scholars have explored the parallels between the Greek past and the Roman historical present within Vitruvius’s treatise, especially in regard to Book 2’s preface and the correspondences between the fourth-century Alexander the Great and his architect Dinocrates with the first-century Roman emperor Augustus and the architect Vitruvius. McEwen finds multiple literary pairings and fictive kinship links among the four men, with special attention given to Vitruvius’s conceptualization of the “Herculean” imperial, masculine body that created a vision of empire through architecture (McEwen 2003.7, Oksanish 2019, Fögen 2009, Courrént 2011, and Formisano 2016). Vitruvius weaves together Greek exempla, like the story of the caryatids, with his descriptions of Augustan monuments, thus developing literary and historical strategies that contribute to a contemporary discourse on Roman imperial identity (Nichols 2017, Oksanish 2019, Wallace-Hadrill 2008, McEwen 2003, and Romano 1987, 2016). Marden Nichols makes an instructive point about Vitruvius’s careful descriptions of objects and monuments as “attempts to preserve the memoria of the Greek East and to promote Rome as heir to the achievements of the Mediterranean World” (2017.25). Therefore, Vitruvius’s story about Greek men constructing a Greek wall around a Carian queen’s victory monument raises questions about the rhetorical role of this particular event in crafting a Roman identity and begs for an intertextual reading.

Artemisia’s barbaric ways and the Rhodians’ violence against her trophy affirm a moralizing message that would have resonated with many Romans in the first century because of the recent defeat of Cleopatra VII. Of course, Vitruvius never explicitly mentions Cleopatra. Furthermore, in Vitruvius’s retelling of the Artemisia story, the Rhodians were defeated by a foreign queen—a historical detail that surely breaks the alignment.
between the Greek east and victorious Rome. Nonetheless, and despite these important differences, the point of the narrative is that a Greek wall could ultimately ensure the permanent disappearance of the barbarian queen’s trophy. Comparing Vitruvius’s story with other first-century BCE Roman descriptions of foreign queens reveals how such representations were useful in the construction of a Roman identity: these racialized and gendered representations flattened these royal women into embodiments of the feminine barbarian Other, thus affirming the Roman man as the raced-gendered expression of political power.

VI. RACE, GENDER, AND MAKING THE ROMAN EMPIRE

In the preface of his book, Vitruvius dedicates *de Architectura* to the new Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus—a book that, scholars agree, memorializes the emperor’s “possession of the world.” Vitruvius explicitly addresses Caesar and other readers, who were most probably members of the Roman imperial elite, including other architects and engineers (1.1.1–2). Moreover, as I mentioned above, Book 2 explores earlier imperial settings, beginning with Dinocrates, the architectural advisor of Alexander the Great. Dinocrates surveyed the city of Alexandria off the coast of Egypt and proposed shaping Mount Athos in northern Greece into a colossal version of the body of Alexander. Vitruvius therefore seems to have aligned himself with Dinocrates (despite his old body contrasting with Dinocrates’ athletic one), while Caesar’s imperial greatness echoes that of the fourth-century BCE Greco-Macedonian Alexander, who conquered large swathes of land and water from the Mediterranean to the Indus Valley (McEwen 2003.129). It is within this particular thematic framework of combined Greek and Roman imperial aesthetics and politics that Vitruvius’s description of Artemisia should be understood.

Other first-century evidence from the time of Vitruvius illustrates the intense political and cultural hostilities aimed against Cleopatra by

23 Formisano 2016 examines explicit contrasts, ruptures, and breaks as evidence for the macrotextuality of *de Architectura*, that is, its dismembered composition, such that a section might “[diverge] considerably from the original authorial intentions and/or concrete situations in which the individual texts were produced” (p. 150).
Octavian and the Roman senate. Dio (50.4, 50.26.3) tells us that the senate formally declared war against Cleopatra at the end of October in 32 BCE, suggesting that they labeled her a *hostis* or “public enemy” (Varner 2001.42, Reinhold 1982.98; see also Plut. Ant. 60.1). By the late republican period, the legal term *hostis*, used during periods of civil war, meant that an individual had been stripped of his Roman citizenship. The first recorded instance of the word being used in this way appears in 88 BCE, when Sulla declared his personal rivals and opponents to be *hostes*, thereby marking once Roman citizens as non-Roman adversaries (Cornwell 2014.48–49 nn. 23–24 and Allély 2012.21–28). As Hannah Cornwell argues, the term fits squarely within a “political culture of denigrating one’s opponents as if they were enemies of the state” in the early half of the first century (2014.50).

Indeed, the suggestion that Cleopatra was an enemy against whom to wage war is striking (Dio 50.26). If Cleopatra was labeled a *hostis*, the legal force of the term would have had no effect on her, since she was evidently not a Roman citizen. Instead, as an Egyptian woman, she was *born* an enemy of Rome. However, the declaration of war against Cleopatra was symbolically important for Roman politicians because it made her racial difference, and thus her political inferiority, clear. On the other hand, while the sources are conflicting, most scholars agree that the senate never formally declared Antony a *hostis* and instead stripped him of his consulship. Declaring war against Cleopatra rather than Antony was politically savvy because it allowed both Octavian and the senate to avoid responsibility for starting a war against a fellow Roman. The senate could draw an essential contrast not only between the Egyptian Cleopatra and Octavian (and itself), but also between Cleopatra and the father of some of her children, the Roman Antony. In other words, the senate emphasized Cleopatra’s racial difference with its formal process.

Although members of the Ptolemaic dynasty often expressed their kinship ties with the original fourth-century Greco-Macedonian conquerors of Egypt, the historical evidence leaves little doubt that the Romans

---

26 In pre-classical Latin, *hostis* meant “foreigner,” a meaning later indicated by *peregrinus* according to Varro *Ling*. 5.3; see also Lange 2016.104.
27 Suetonius *Aug.* 17.2 and Appian *BC* 4.38, 4.45 both tell us that Antony was declared a *hostis*; contra Dio Cass. 50.4.3–5; see also Plut. *Ant.* 60.1. For Antony not a *hostis*, see Lange 2009.68–69 and 2016.123, Eder 1990.100, Cornwell 2014.56, and Reinhold 1982.97 n. 3.
28 Cornwell 2014.54; for a similar example related to Sextus Pompeius, see Allély 2012.109.
saw Cleopatra as “Egyptian.” Denise McCoskey describes this process of racial formation as political: “Egypt became the perfect expression of her debauched essence”—in other words, a racial category (2012.17). This characterization of Cleopatra as an Egyptian Other obscured the complex entanglements between the Macedonian, Greek, and Egyptian populations within Ptolemaic Egypt. According to the theoretical work of Omi and Winant (2015.44): “racial formation always involves ‘lumping,’” and the flattening of Cleopatra’s complex heritage into that of an Egyptian was a useful strategy for political actors at Rome. Furthermore, Cleopatra’s racialized difference informed her gender identity as well: the two were considered inseparable. Later in the second century CE, Dio writes concerning Cleopatra, that she was always “true to her nature as a woman and an Egyptian,” thus attributing her deviousness and manipulative sexual charms to her racialized and gendered identity (50.26, 50.33). Moreover, the public representation of her identity was also critical to Roman imperial aesthetics.

Cleopatra’s royal femininity contrasted with public representations of two other Roman dynastic women: Livia, Octavian’s wife, and Octavia, Octavian’s sister and Mark Antony’s wife. In 35, the senate honored Octavia and Livia with public portraits, also granting them tribunician sacro-sanctity and emancipation from tutela (“financial wardship”; Dio 49.38.1 and Flory 1993.293–94). As Maureen Flory (1993) and Barbara Scardigli (1982) argue, such honors differentiated Cleopatra from the ideal Roman women related to Octavian. Flory even suggests that the senate did not remove a gilded statue of Cleopatra that was on display in the Temple of Venus Genetrix (both the statue and shrine had been commissioned by Julius Caesar) in order to contrast her gilt image with the “decent” marble statues of Livia and Octavia in traditional Roman dress. Extant examples of Livia’s portrait produced by and for Roman contexts include her matronly stola, tunic, and veil, as well as iconography that associates her with goddesses like Magna Mater (Kampen 2009). Whatever the senate’s actual intentions, Octavia and Livia would have presented an image of ideal Roman femininity that Cleopatra certainly did not: Cleopatra was imagined as a decadent and insolent Egyptian woman (Pliny NH 9.119–21).

29 Flory 1993.295–99, following Appian BC 2.102 and Dio Cass. 49.42.1 and 51.22.3. For the remarkable lack of iconoclasm toward Cleopatra’s image after her death, see Varner 2001.
Horace’s ode on Cleopatra (Carm. 1.37) likewise describes how the Egyptian queen’s behavior exceeded the boundaries of proper femininity. Cleopatra was “non-womanly” (nec multiebriter, 1.37.22) in how she died, and also “not a humble woman” (non humilis mulier, 1.37.30). Horace’s construction of Cleopatra’s femininity is in opposition to that of Livia and Octavia, clearly demonstrating that gender and race were inextricably bound. Moreover, as Andrew Feldherr argues, Horace “transforms the story of civil war to one of foreign war, a war ending not in the killing of citizens, but in a foreigner’s suicide” (2010.224). One might similarly conclude that Vitruvius transforms the once Hellenized Carian Artemisia into a barbarian queen whose monument was “disappeared” through an act of iconoclasm. Horace, a literary and intellectual contemporary of Vitruvius (Nichols 2017), casts Cleopatra as a fatale monstrum (Carm. 1.37.21), a phrase that scholars have translated as a “deadly marvel/monster” or a “fated or monstrous portent of discord” (Simone 2019, Clark 2010, and Feldherr 2010). He turns Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen, into a public monument of civil discord like Vitruvius’s Artemisia: both public symbols of foreign barbarian queens whose racialized-gendered identities threaten the empire.

This particular construction of queenship and Roman imperial ideology shaped other first-century literary texts that depended on the representation and punishment of foreign queens. Only a couple of decades after Cleopatra’s death, Vergil’s Aeneas, the legendary Trojan ancestor of the Romans, falls dangerously in love with Dido, the queen of Carthage (in modern-day Libya) who was originally from Tyre (in modern-day Lebanon). Throughout the first six books of the Aeneid, Dido is described as a passionate, opulent queen who distracts Aeneas, endangering the future of Rome. Unsurprisingly, many scholars have drawn comparisons between Dido and Cleopatra: they both form political alliances and sexual relationships with Roman men and die by suicide. Notably, Vergil uses similar language in his descriptions of Dido’s and Cleopatra’s deaths, drawing strong parallels between the two queens (Dido is described as pallida morte futura, “pale at the imminence of death,” 4.644, whereas Cleopatra is pallentem morte

30 Lowrie 1997.141 n. 3 suggests that non refers to both “woman” and “humble.”
31 Drew 1927.82 writes: “Dido is, on the one side, Cleopatra—the foreign woman doomed to a tragic end by suicide, ruler of a nation, at once strong and weak in her femininity. The hero is seduced from his piety: he turns eastern sultan (as if he were already a Roman) under her influence.” See also Bertman 2000, Knox and McKeown 2013.186–87, Hardie 2014, Galinsky 2003, and Benario 1970. Contra Pöschl 1962.189 n. 39.
Patricia Eunji Kim

future, “pale at the coming of death,” 8.709). Dido and Cleopatra become metaphors for each other (Feldherr 2021.142), while the construction of queenship, conceived as the inseparable intersection of racialized and gendered difference, functions in service of a triumphalist masculinity.  

Although Vitruvius does not explicitly link Artemisia II with Cleopatra VII in the way that Vergil casts Dido as Cleopatra, he participates in a cultural discourse that positioned the trope of foreign queens in opposition to Roman imperial masculinity (Giusti 2018).  

Vitruvius’s description of Artemisia’s bronze trophy exemplifies how the visible erasure of the monuments and bodies of barbarian queens could prefigure the intersectional power dynamics of the Roman empire. Though these queens may have been ethnically “mixed,” and therefore there was for them the possibility of being Hellenized, they illustrate barbaric behavior in ways that emphasize their racialized and gendered differences. In a sense, Book 2 provides a warning: a speculative narrative of what could have been if not for Augustus’s triumphant victory over Cleopatra and Antony. Vitruvius’s narrative paints a portrait of which raced-gendered bodies could and should wield imperial power.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Because Vitruvius’s story of Artemisia II fits into a broader first-century Roman context, the discursive strategies that early imperial actors and artists constructed require us to use the tools of intersectional analysis in order to understand the ways that power was represented through the co-constitution of gender and race. It is only when we approach the subject of power through the lens of intersectionality that we can fully grasp how empire was conceptualized in the first century BCE. The examples that

32 Roman authors other than Vergil produced such narratives. Fabre-Serris’ 2021 study of Livy’s passage on the third-century Carthaginian princess Sophonisba demonstrates that she was important for illustrating first-century Augustan ideas about which mores were “typically Roman,” while acting as a metaphor for Cleopatra. Writing in the same volume, Klein’s discussion of Propertius’s Cleopatra poetry argues for the “gendered intertextuality” with earlier Hellenistic poetry about the Ptolemaic court in Propertius’s articulation of the power dynamics between Romans and foreigners.

33 The social, cultural, literary, and compositional similarities between Vitruvius and Vergil, Horace, Propertius, and Livy are discussed by Nichols 2017 and Romano 2016. For the role of architectural expertise in the construction of Augustan imperial authority, see Corso and Romano 1997 and Nichols 2017 chap. 1.
I discuss highlight the symbolic usefulness of queenship, thanks to its visibility and monumentality, in demonstrating the raced coordinates of Roman imperial identity; the Artemisia narrative in Book 2 is an example of how Vitruvius uses history and monuments to craft an idealized image of Roman citizenry (Oksanish 2019).

Postcolonial feminist scholar Ania Loomba describes European imperial encounters with Asia after the mid-eighteenth century (2005.154–55, emphasis added):

If America and Africa, then, are usually represented as savage women, images of “the Orient” cluster around riches, splendor and plenty. As we might expect, women attached to royalty—either queens or harem girls—become symbols of this world. The veiled Asian woman becomes a recurrent colonial fantasy, as does the recurrent figure of the Eastern Queen, whose wealth testifies to the riches of “the Orient” and whose gender renders those riches vulnerable to the European self.

Loomba’s analysis hints at the effects of early Roman imperial discourse on much later colonial ventures. European and western imperial powers relied on representations of racialized and gendered bodies while enacting violence toward and through these representations, since violence was a tool of political control. Histories of empire must begin with analyses of race and gender as categories of identity that are inextricably tied together: gender and race intersect to constitute highly visible expressions of who does and does not embody imperial power. In this way, the Roman empire relied on representations of royal women’s political punishment and/or death to perform crucial political work. Thinking intersectionally allows us to capture the full complexities of imperial representations in the first century BCE.

New York University

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Cuomo, Serafina, and Marco Formisano (eds.) 2016. *Arethusa* Special Issue 49.2: *Vitruvius: Text, Architecture, Reception*.


Nichols, Marden. 2017. Author and Audience in Vitruvius’s de Architectura.


_AFLS_ 3.61–64.


