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5. The Battle of Actium and the 'slave of passion'^{*}

Carsten Hjort Lange

In *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare dramatically recalls Antonius' (Mark Antony) wish to fight the battle of Actium against Octavian (later Augustus) at sea 'For that he dares us to't'. Domitius Ahenobarbus suggests that this might not be a good idea after all (3.7):¹

Your ships are not well mann'd;
Your mariners are muleters, reapers, people
Ingross'd by swift impress; in Caesar's fleet
Are those that often have 'gainst Pompey fought:
Their ships are yare; yours, heavy: no disgrace
Shall fall you for refusing him at sea,
Being prepared for land.

In the end the battle at sea is lost, less because of the factors mentioned by Domitius Ahenobarbus, than because of the fleeing of Cleopatra (3.10). This is then recalled in Domitius Ahenobarbus' answer to Cleopatra, when she asks him who is to blame for the defeat at Actium (3.13):

Antony only, that would make his will
Lord of his reason. What though you fled
From that great face of war, whose several ranges
Frighted each other? why should he follow?
The itch of his affection should not then
Have nick'd his captainship; at such a point,
When half to half the world opposed, he being
The meered question: 'twas a shame no less
Than was his loss, to course your flying flags,
And leave his navy gazing.

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¹ The text used is that of the Oxford World Classics: Shakespeare (edited by M. Neill), *The Tragedy of Anthony and Cleopatra* (Oxford, 1994).

Shakespeare uses Plutarch superbly, to explain why, when Cleopatra abandoned the scene of battle, Antonius followed her, leaving his navy and army behind to fend for itself (*Ant.* 66, 68). Importantly, even though Cleopatra fled, it was when Antonius followed her that the battle was lost. This Shakespearean view, due to the influence of Plutarch, was also the most common view of the battle of Actium in the eighteenth century, the main focus of this article. The French historian Charles Rollin describes the scene from the point of view of the army of Antonius: 'But seeing themselves abandoned by their generals, they surrendered to Caesar, who received them with open arms'.²

Plutarch and the majority of the ancient sources agree that Cleopatra betrayed Antonius by fleeing and that he followed her, leaving his fleet and army behind. Most eighteenth-century scholars follow Plutarch and the ancient evidence on this issue. Johannes Kromayer, a German military historian rejects this evidence, in a famous article from 1899, arguing instead that this was all in accordance with a prearranged plan, as mentioned by Cassius Dio, a Roman senator and historian writing in the early third century A.D.³ Yet as will be shown this idea, supported almost universally by modern scholars, does not fit the ancient evidence.⁴

This article will focus mainly on what today might be described the alternative eighteenth-century view of the battle of Actium. Its purpose

² C. Rollin, *The Roman History from the Foundation of Rome to the Battle of Actium: By Mr. Rollin*, vol. VI, eighteenth edition (London, 1841), 405. See Plutarch *Ant.* 68.3.

³ J. Kromayer, 'Kleine Forschungen zur Geschichte des Zweiten Triumvirats VII. Der Feldzug von Actium und der sogenannte Verrath der Cleopatra', *Hermes*, 34 (1899).

⁴ For the consensus, see Kromayer, *Hermes* 34, 33; T. Rice Holmes, *The Architect of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1928), 253–8, disagreeing with A. Ferrabino, 'La battaglia d'Azio', *Rivista di Filologia e di Istruzione Classica*, 52 (1924); G.W. Richardson, 'Actium', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 27 (1937), 158–9; J.M. Carter, *The Battle of Actium. The Rise and Triumph of Augustus Caesar* (London, 1970), 213; M. Grant, *Cleopatra* (London, 1972), 208, 211; J.R. Johnson, *Augustan Propaganda: The Battle of Actium, Mark Antony's Will, the Fasti Capitolini Consulares, and Early Imperial Historiography*, Ph.D. diss. (University of California, 1976), 48–9, 55; H. Bengtson, *Marcus Antonius. Triumvir und Herrscher des Orients* (Munich, 1977), esp. 230; C.B.R. Pelling, 'The Triumviral Period', in A.K. Bowman et al. (eds.), *CAH 10², The Augustan Empire, 43 B.C.–A.D. 69* (Cambridge, 1996), 57; D. Kienast, *Augustus. Princesps und Monarch*, second edition (Darmstadt, 1999), 7; K. Bringmann, *Augustus* (Darmstadt, 2007), 100; M. Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate. An Historical Commentary of Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 49–52 (36–29 B.C.)* (Atlanta, 1988), 104–5, with more scholarship.

is twofold: it will demonstrate that Kromayer's ideas are already found in earlier scholars from the long eighteenth century and, importantly, there is an alternative that has wrongly been ignored for a long time. The alternative is the betrayal of Antonius by Cleopatra.⁵ In this article I will not go into great detail on the battle itself, but mainly concentrate on its historiography, although it will be suggested that Plutarch (especially *Ant.* 66, 68) is more credible than Cassius Dio. The battle of Actium was most likely decided by the Cleopatra's treachery and the subsequent flight of Antonius.

Crevier and Actium: a Case Study

Jean Baptiste Louis Crevier, a student of Rollin and for twenty years professor of rhetoric in the college of Beauvais, completed *The Roman History From the Foundation of Rome to the Battle of Actium*, the work of his former teacher. This section will look closely at Crevier's description of the battle of Actium, as an example of the alternative eighteenth-century view of the battle.⁶ The main evidence used by Crevier on the battle of Actium is Plutarch (*Ant.* 61–68).

Crevier rightly stresses that this conflict was of such a magnitude that 'the whole Roman Empire was shaken by this war'.⁷ He continues to give a detailed account of the troops and ships involved in the battle. He concludes: 'By the account which I have given of the forces of the two parties, it appears that both generals had grounds to hope for victory'.⁸

He carries on to give an account of the preliminaries of war and rightly suggests that at this point in time Antonius was already in distress, due to desertions and famine amongst his troops.⁹ But importantly, in the judgement of Crevier Antonius could still hope to win. As a result of the problematic situation, Antonius summoned a grand council. Crevier explains:

⁵ Cleopatra's betrayal has found some support in the twentieth century, but A. Domaszewski, *Geschichte der Römischen Kaiser* (Leipzig, 1909), 154–5; M. Beike, *Kriegsflotten und Seekriege der Antike* (Berlin, 1990), 145 seem to be exceptions.

⁶ J.B.L. Crevier, *The Roman History From the Foundation of Rome to the Battle of Actium: That is, To the End of the Commonwealth* (By Mr. Crevier, Professor of Rhetorick in the College of Beauvais, being the Continuation of Mr. Rollin's Work), vol. XVI, second edition (London, 1754).

⁷ Crevier, *Roman History*, 35.

⁸ Crevier, *Roman History*, 36.

⁹ Crevier, *Roman History*, 42–5.

Dio assures us, that Cleopatra's advice was to march back all the troops into Egypt, leaving only garrisons in the most considerable posts and towns in the countries they were to quit. A shameful and foolish advice, which I cannot believe even Cleopatra herself durst propose to Antony. Mean while this historian adds, that the Roman general consented to it, and that the battle of Actium, which followed soon after, happened in spite of Antony, when he had an intention to retire, and not to fight.¹⁰

Crevier interprets the ancient evidence on the battle of Actium, the same material modern scholars look at today. He continues:

This account, of which I do not find the least hint in any other author, appears to me very improbable, and I rather chuse to follow that of Plutarch, according to whom, the resolution of giving battle having been taken and confirmed, they only deliberated whether they ought to fight by land or sea.¹¹

Crevier rightly stresses that Cassius Dio is the only source that mentions this alleged prearranged plan to flee Actium. As a result he concludes that the scenario mentioned by Plutarch is much more likely. Crevier suggests that Antonius had every reason to have confidence in his 'battle-hardened' legions, even when disease and famine are taken into account.¹² This is fascinating and suggests, even though Crevier does not spell it out, that an oddity at Actium is the missing battle on land. He also mentions the suggestions by Antonius' generals to send Cleopatra back and make for Macedonia.¹³ It should be remembered though that this would hardly have been possible without Antonius losing his fleet. At the same time Crevier is right in stressing that the legions would most likely be lost if this prearranged plan would be carried out. This is deemed very unlikely by the eighteenth-century historian, as it does not fit his understanding of Antonius and interpretation of the ancient evidence. He sums up the situation as follows:

...; and that it would be very strange if Antony, who had such great experience in land-fights, did not take the advantage of the force, number, and courage of his legions, but on the contrary put his whole confidence in his fleet.¹⁴

¹⁰ Crevier, *Roman History*, 45.

¹¹ Crevier, *Roman History*, 45.

¹² Crevier, *Roman History*, 45.

¹³ Crevier, *Roman History*, 45.

¹⁴ Crevier, *Roman History*, 46.

Crevier has departed from the discussion of the prearranged plan; this is about the decision to fight at sea. He turns to his explanation of why Antonius decided to abandon the fight on land (at least at first). Instead he focuses on the sea battle:

Such solid reasons as these would doubtless have made an impression upon Antony, if he had still been capable of judging for himself; but he saw nothing but by Cleopatra's eyes, not determined upon any thing but according to her directions.¹⁵

Crevier does not understand Antonius' decision to fight at sea (Plutarch *Ant.* 63). Antonius' plan was to try to win the battle of Actium, which most likely would involve a battle on land as well. He goes on to sum up the ship numbers and once again dwells on the question of why Antonius decided to fight a sea battle, quoting Plutarch (*Ant.* 64) and the centurion's plea, trying to reason with his general not to fight an un-Roman sea battle.¹⁶

Next Crevier describes the actual battle of Actium on 2nd September 31 B.C., where it was decided who should win supremacy over Rome.¹⁷ Antonius offered battle, but this was refused by Octavian, who ordered his ships further away from shore, to give more room for manoeuvre. When fighting began Agrippa tried to sail around the ends of Antonius' line and in doing so created chaos in the opposing line of ships. Crevier stresses that at this point during battle no side had the clear advantage.¹⁸ It was thus very much to the surprise of the ancient and modern writers/historians that Cleopatra's ships, at this exact point in time, hoist their sails and make off for Egypt.

According to Crevier, fear was the likely reason for Cleopatra's flight: 'without doubt fear had seized the princess'.¹⁹ He concludes in wonder:

There was nothing very surprising in that behaviour of Cleopatra; but Antony's conduct on this occasion is quite inconceivable. It is not possible, says Plutarch, to discover in it either the General, or the man of courage and conduct. He seemed even to have lost the power of following his own

¹⁵ Crevier, *Roman History*, 46.

¹⁶ See D. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History* (Berkeley, 2007), 120–1 on the Roman idealisation of their land-based self-sufficient pre-expansion days. The Romans were in the own view not very interested in the sea.

¹⁷ Crevier, *Roman History*, 48.

¹⁸ Crevier, *Roman History*, 49–51.

¹⁹ Crevier, *Roman History*, 51.

inclinations, and verified what is commonly said of lovers, *viz.* that their soul dwells entirely in the person whom they love.²⁰

Cleopatra thus betrayed Antonius, but he, following her, betrayed his men and himself. The battle is lost and Crevier continues: 'The number of dead did not exceed five thousand; and the whole number of vessels which were taken amount to three hundred'.²¹ Plutarch is thus given the final say, stressing that Octavian captured 300 ships in the battle of Actium (*Ant.* 61.1–2; 68.1) and that the number of dead enemies in the battle was no more than 5,000 dead (*Ant.* 68.2).

For modern scholars Crevier's lack of footnotes and secondary scholarship may seem strange at first, but this should not be confused with unprofessional behaviour or lack of methodology; Crevier and his contemporaries knew the ancient evidence. Knowledge of this evidence thus makes it easy to follow Crevier's line of enquiry. He, having interpreted the evidence on the battle of Actium, concludes that Plutarch is more likely than Cassius Dio, who is therefore rejected. There is nothing in the eighteenth-century practice, as exemplified here by Crevier, their use of evidence and the reading of sources, and the assumptions that underlies these practices, that are notably different from the methods of today. This is analytical historical research. It may thus be that we modern historians are too quick to dismiss certain sources, as this article will indeed suggest. Moreover one might ask if the professionalisation of history has prevented us from seeing the 'emotional' as a serious historical factor. The question is, of course, whether Crevier's view on the battle of Actium is typical for the eighteenth century.

The Standard Eighteenth-Century View on the Battle of Actium

Rollin has Cleopatra suggest, following Plutarch (*Ant.* 63), that it would, if need be, be easier to escape by sea, which Antonius listens to, at the same time ignoring his officers. They advise him not to fight a sea battle and to send Cleopatra home to Egypt.²² Rollin reaches his conclusion after a thorough investigation of the context of the period of the triumvirate. He continues:

The contest was doubtful for some time, and seemed as much in favour of Antony as Caesar [i.e. Octavian], till the retreat of Cleopatra. That queen,

²⁰ Crevier, *Roman History*, 51.

²¹ Crevier, *Roman History*, 52.

²² Rollin, *Roman History*, 403–4.

frightened with the noise of the battle, in which every thing was terrible to a woman, took to flight when she was in no danger, and drew after her the whole Egyptian squadron ... Antony, who saw her fly, forgetting even himself, till then, had had exceedingly well disputed. It, however, cost the victor extremely dear. For Antony's ships fought so well after his departure, that, though the battle began before noon, it was not over when night came on; So that Caesar's troops were obliged to pass it on board their ships.²³

In England the ghost writer of Nathaniel Hooke, perhaps Dr Gilbert Stuart, a noted historian and reviewer, has similar views. Hooke died in 1763 and the fifth edition 1770 of his work *The Roman History. From the Building of Rome, to the Ruin of the Commonwealth. Illustrated with maps and other plates* is the first to comprise all four volumes, thus for the first time including volume IV with comments on Actium.²⁴ Just like Crevier Hooke/Stuart interprets closely the preliminaries before addressing the actual battle of Actium; again, this is analytical historical research.²⁵ Agrippa's raids, and the desertions are mentioned²⁶ and he then carries on describing the grand council:

..., but Cleopatra biased him the other way, and obliged him, against his will, to hazard his empire and life in a sea-fight, and this only that, in case of a defeat, she might escape with greater ease. Dio pretends that she even advised him to march back to Egypt.²⁷

Hooke/Stuart dismisses Cassius Dio as unlikely and instead prefers the account of Plutarch. In a footnote the differences between a defeat on land and on sea are explained: Octavian perhaps had better chances in a sea battle, but the same would have been was the case on land according to Hooke/Stuart. But in case of a defeat on land Antonius would have found it difficult to escape, whereas in a sea fight an escape

²³ Rollin, *Roman History*, 404.

²⁴ I would like to thank Dr Gareth Sampson for his helpful comments on Hooke. See also G. Sampson, I. Macgregor Morris and J. Moore, 'Nathaniel Hooke', in E.J. Jenkins (ed.), *Eighteenth-Century British Historians* (The Dictionary of Literary Biography vol. 336) (New York, 2007), 188–92. The publishers wanted to give the impression that the ghost writer used Hooke's notes, but there is no solid evidence to back this up.

²⁵ N. Hooke, *The Roman History. From the Building of Rome, to the Ruin of the Commonwealth. Illustrated with maps and other plates*, fifth edition (London, 1770), 430. He also stresses that the decision to fight at sea rested on the idea that it would be easier to escape should they fare badly in battle (1770, 426–31 on the period covered in this article).

²⁶ Hooke, *Roman History*, 427.

²⁷ Hooke, *Roman History*, 428.

was possible.²⁸ This may be wrong after all, but the historian is trying to make sense of the material in front of him (see below). Importantly, Antonius' 'limited' chances for victory do not make the historian accept the prearranged plan to flee. Again, the tale of the centurion's plea is mentioned (Plutarch *Ant.*64), followed by the actual fighting.²⁹ Hooke/Stuart concludes:

..., when Cleopatra, wearied with expectations and overcome with fear, unexpectedly tacked about, and fled towards Peleponnesus with her sixty sail: And, what is still more surprising, Antony himself, now regardless of his honour, fled precipitately after, and abandoned his men who generously exposed their lives for his interest. Having reached Cleopatra's galley, he went into it, and sat a long time in a melancholy posture, without desiring to see the Queen, though he had followed her, says Plutarch, without any apparent reason but the thoughts of her absence.³⁰

Montesquieu expresses a similar view:

The battle of Actium was fought, Cleopatra fled, and drew Antony after her. It evidently appeared by the circumstances of her future conduct, that she afterwards betrayed him; perhaps that incomprehensible spirit of coquetry so dominant in her sex, tempted her to practice all her arts to lay a third sovereign of the world at her feet.

A woman, to whom Antony had sacrificed the whole world, betrayed him.³¹

Even Oliver Goldsmith, in a book for schools and colleges and with no original research or interpretation, agrees, showing that in the case of Actium the difference between the scholars and the popular historians was virtually non-existent:

But all of a sudden, Cleopatra determined the fortune of the day. She was seen flying from the engagement, attended by sixty sail; struck, perhaps, with the terrors natural to her sex: but what increased the general amazement, was, to behold Antony himself following soon after, and leaving his fleet at the mercy of the conquerors.³²

²⁸ Hooke, *Roman History*, 428 n. i.

²⁹ Hooke, *Roman History*, 429–31.

³⁰ Hooke, *Roman History*, 430.

³¹ C.-L. de Secondat Baron de Montesquieu, *Reflections On the Causes of The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London, 1759), 183.

³² O. Goldsmith, *The Roman History from the Foundation of the City of Rome, to the Destruction of the Western Empire*, vol. II, sixth edition (London, 1789), 78f.

The comments on the gender of Cleopatra are typical of the period but should not make us dismiss the theory of betrayal in general.³³ All in all these views are very close to one found in Crevier and in fact the theory of Cleopatra's betrayal does seem to have been completely dominant until the end of the long eighteenth century (see below).³⁴ Whether 'proper' historians or epitomising historians, they all seem to agree on this particular issue. Even Romantic poets followed these themes developed by historians. This is an interesting feature, showing that the work of these historians were having a genuine impact in forming popular opinion about the battle, and that the poets were responding to the themes they raise; this is very much in tune with the thought of the time. Waller Rodwell Wright, the consul-general of the Ionian Islands during their period as a British protectorate during the early years of the nineteenth century, tells the story of love, the greatest of stories, in his *Horae Ionicae*.³⁵

But whither strays my thought? This classic shore
 Recalls the strain to themes of ancient lore.
 Behold you ruins, sacred to the brave
 That triumph'd on Ambracia's blood-strain'd wave!
 There spreads the op'ning bay in prospect wide,
 And Arta's gulph receives the rushing tide –
 Arta, whose waves beheld the fated hour
 That tore from Anthony the wreath of pow'r –
 Where Actium proudly rears her trophied head,

³³ Similar T. Blackwell, *Memoirs of the Court of Augustus. Continued, and Completed, from the Original Papers of the Late Thomas Blackwell, ... by John Mills, Esq.*, vol. III (London, 1763), 176; Hooke, *Roman History*, 427–8.

³⁴ It is amongst others found in A. Adams, *Classical Biography: Exhibiting Alphabetically the Proper Names, with a short Account of the Several Deities, Heroes, and other Persons* (Edinburgh, 1800), 284; J. Adams, *The Flowers of Ancient History. Comprehending, on a New Plan, the most Remarkable and Interesting Events, as well as Characters, of Antiquity*, third edition (London, 1796), 245; J. Aikin, *General Biography; or Lives, Critical and Historical, of the most Eminent Persons of all Ages, Conditions, and Professions, Arranged according to Alphabetical Order. Chiefly Composed by John Aikin, M.D. and the late Rev. William Enfield, LL.D.*, vol. I (London, 1799), 315; L.-P. Anquetil, *A Summary of Universal History: in Nine Volumes. Exhibiting the Rise, Decline, and Revolutions of the different Nations of the World, from the Creation to the Present Time*, vol. III (London, 1800), 444; E. Edward Button, *Rudiments of Ancient History, Sacred and Prophane ... By Way of Question and Answer. Designed for the use of Schools*, third edition (London, 1757), 359f; C.J.A. Hereford, *The History of Rome, from the Foundation of the City by Romulus, to the Death of Marcus Antonius. In Three Volumes. By the Author of The History of France ...*, vol. II (London, 1792), 467; R. Millar, *The Whole Works of the Reverend Robert Millar ... In Eight Volumes*, vol. IV (Paisley, 1789), 328f.

³⁵ W.R. Wright, *Horae Ionicae. A Poem, Descriptive of the Ionian Islands, and Part of the Adjacent Coast of Greece* (London, 1809), 27–8.

Octavius triumph'd, and his rival fled.
 He who, unmov'd, the work of death had view'd,
 With eager haste his trembling love pursu'd;
 Resign'd the glorious prize for which he strove;
 For empire fought, and was subdu'd by love.

Now, through the limits of the spacious plain
 That parts her waters from th' Ionian main,
 Nicopolis, majestic in decay,
 Records the triumphs of that fatal day.

Irwin Eyles in his elegy on the occasion of the victory of Admiral Nelson at the Nile writes similarly on this story of passion:³⁶

From Actium thus, the slave of passion fled,
 For Beauty's smile, his life and fame to wave,
 Thus, to his former glories, Pompey dead,
 In Egypt found a dagger and a grave!³⁷

Lord Byron, the famous English poet, also tells this extraordinary story of love and passion in *Stanzas Written in Passing the Ambracian Gulf*:

Through cloudless skies, in silvery sheen,
 Full beams the moon on Actium's coast:
 And on these waves for Egypt's queen
 The ancient world was won and lost.

And now upon the scene I look,
 The azure grave of many a Roman;
 Where stern Ambition once forsook
 His wavering crown to follow *Woman*.

Florence! whom I will love as well
 As ever yet was said or sung,
 (Since Orpheus sang his spouse from Hell)
 Whilst thou art fair and I am young;

Sweet Florence! those were pleasant times,
 When worlds were staked for ladies' eyes:
 Had bards as many realms as rhymes,
 Thy charms might raise new Antonies.

³⁶ This idea in fact has a long history. Dante places Cleopatra in the Second Circle of Hell (Canto 5.63) of *The Divine Comedy*, together with other lustful figures. She is thus placed 'higher' than the Seventh Circle, Second Circle, the place of figures who committed suicide. Her sin was that of lust.

³⁷ I. Eyles, *Nilus; an Elegy. Occasioned by the Victory of Admiral Nelson over the French Fleet on August 1, 1798* (London, 1798), 9.

Though Fate forbids such things to be,
 Yet, by thine eyes and ringlets curl'd!
 I cannot lose a world for thee,
 But would not lose thee for a World.

(November 14, 1809)³⁸

It does not matter if Cleopatra's betrayal or Antonius' flight is stressed by the poets, as this is basically the same story, taken from Plutarch. Importantly, the prearranged plan is not mentioned as an option. Historians and poets alike conclude that Antonius fled the scene of battle, leaving his fleet and army behind, out of love for Cleopatra.³⁹ This is of course also the line famously taken by Shakespeare. Why has this been dismissed? It is because it is seen as too good a story, or perhaps because it is thought that feelings should not be part of the decisions of generals in war? Is it that unlikely that Antonius might have followed Cleopatra because he loved her, as indeed the ancient evidence suggests?

Kromayer and the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

As mentioned there has been a general consensus on the central issue on the battle of Actium since Kromayer, which rejects the account given in the ancient evidence, according to which Cleopatra decided to flee and Antonius, much to the surprise of the ancient evidence, to follow her. Instead the modern consensus is that the withdrawal was in accordance with a prearranged plan.⁴⁰

Even though this theory in its modern form dates back to Kromayer, he was in fact articulating what had already been suggested, most notably in the account of the Battle of Actium by Colonel William Martin Leake, an English topographer, in his *Travels in Northern Greece*.⁴¹ Even though today hardly any scholarship before Kromayer is taken into account, it seems wrong, certainly from a historiographical point of view, to leave out the likes of Leake, especially if the commemorations of Octavian after the battle are also considered. The fieldwork of Leake is surely unsurpassed. He 'discovered' Michalitsi when he visited the

³⁸ The text used is that of Lord Byron (edited by J.J. McGann), *Lord Byron, The Complete Poetic Works*, 7 vols. (Oxford, 1980–1993). See also *Don Juan* 4.25–32; *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* 2.397–402.

³⁹ Plutarch *Ant.* 66; Velleius 2.85.3; Propertius 2.16.39.

⁴⁰ See Kromayer, *Hermes* 34, 33f.; Rice Holmes, *The Architect of the Roman Empire*, 253 on this issue.

⁴¹ W.M. Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, vol. IV (London, 1835), 40.

area in 1805; or to be more precise, he was the first modern scholar who understood that Michalitsi had to be the site of Octavian's tent and thus the site of his Victory Monument. His evidence was Cassius Dio, whom he cites:

The place where his own tent stood he surrounded with squared stones and adorned with captured beaks of ships, and built in it an edifice open to the sky, which he consecrated to Apollo.⁴²

Similarly, in volume I of his *Travels in Northern Greece*, as part of his discourse on Nicopolis, Michalitsi is mentioned as the most likely site of Octavian's tent before the Battle of Actium.⁴³ The conclusion goes back to a thorough reading of ancient texts together with topographical knowledge and understanding. He did not find the Victory Monument and never claimed to have done so.⁴⁴ The monument was first discovered in 1913 by Alexander Philadelphus, but Leake did indeed find the right place:

⁴² Cassius Dio 51.1.3; Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, vol. IV, 40. See also W.M. Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, vol. I (London, 1835), especially 180, 193f. For a detailed discussion of Leake's methodology and as a topographer, see M. Wagstaff, 'Colonel Leake and the Historical Geography of Greece', this volume; V.M. Murray and P.M. Petsas, *Octavian's Campsite Memorial for the Actian War* (Philadelphia, 1989), 12–14; I. Macgregor Morris, 'Shrines of the Mighty. Rediscovering the Battlefields of the Persian Wars', in E. Bridges et al. (eds.), *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars: Antiquity in the Third Millennium* (Oxford, 2007), 249–52; C.L. Witmore and T.V. Buttrey, 'William Martin Leake: a Contemporary of P.O. Brøndsted in Greece and in London', in B. Bundgaard Rasmussen et al. (eds.), *Peter Oluf Brøndsted (1780–1842). A Danish Classicist in his European Context. Acts of the Conference at The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters* (Copenhagen, 2008), esp. 15, 24. Leake also identified the ruins near Preveza as Nicopolis. In the back of volume I of his *Travels in Northern Greece* there is a map of Nicopolis by T.L. Donaldson. Another visitor to Nicopolis was the Dane Peter Oluf Brøndsted, a contemporary of Leake, who against his will, at least at first, was forced by Ali Pacha to conduct a one day excavation at Nicopolis in 1812. The excavations yielded two local coins, one from the time of Commodus and one from Caracalla. Brøndsted was given the Caracalla coin; Ali Pacha pocketed the other as the latest 'augmentation of his treasury'. See J. Isager, *Peter Oluf Brøndsted. Interviews with Ali Pacha of Joanina in the Autumn of 1812; with some Particulars of Epirus, and the Albanians of the Present Day* (Athens, 1999), 63–74, 74 on the excavations; J. Isager, 'Visitors to Nicopolis in the Reigns of Augustus and Ali Pacha', in K. Zachos (ed.), *Nicopolis B. Proceedings of the Second International Nicopolis Symposium (11–15 September 2002)*, 2 vols. (Preveza, 2007), 34–9.

⁴³ Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, vol. IV, 187 with map of the area.

⁴⁴ See Murray and Petsas, *Octavian's Campsite Memorial for the Actian War*, 14 n. 14.

Such a view as Dio here describes, Augustus could not have obtained from the isthmus of Nicopolis, or from any spot in the immediate vicinity, except Mikhalitzi, from whence all the objects stated may be seen.⁴⁵

The theory of the prearranged plan can thus be traced back at least to the end of the long eighteenth century. The unacknowledged source of the theory it seems is the historian John Gillies in 1807, supported by Leake in 1835.⁴⁶ In the judgement of Gillies Antonius could not win the Battle of Actium. He writes: From these difficulties a battle only could extricate him.⁴⁷ He continues:

His best officers exhorted him to avoid fighting by sea; but Cleopatra, on the contrary, recommended this measure. She was impatient, it seems, to return to Alexandria; and Antony knew no pleasure equal to that of compliance with her will. He determined to accompany Cleopatra by the readiest way into Egypt, and to fight the enemy if his passage was obstructed. In this design, his fleet was equipped either for a battle or a voyage⁴⁸

The 'emotional' is certainly seen as a serious historical factor, but Gillies prefers Cassius Dio and the prearranged plan to flee to the account of Plutarch. He continues:

In this manner the combat raged for two hours, when Cleopatra, who had viewed it from behind the line, darted through the midst of the combatants, and with crowded sail made all haste to escape from the bay into the open seas ... Antony, also, followed her, and though his

⁴⁵ Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, vol. I, 193–4. On the Victory Monument, becoming more and more central to and understanding of the early ideology of the regime of Octavian, see Murray and Petsas, *Octavian's Campsite Memorial for the Actian War*. Since 1995 new excavations have been carried out by Zachos, with remarkable success. See K. Zachos, 'Excavations at the Actian Tropaeum at Nikopolis. A preliminary report', in J. Isager (ed.), *Foundation and Destruction. Nikopolis and Northwest Greece. The Archaeological Evidence for the City Destructions, the Foundation of Nikopolis and the Synoecism* (Aarhus, 2001), 29–39; K. Zachos, 'The Tropaeum of the Sea-Battle of Actium at Nikopolis: Interim Report', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 16 (2003), 65–92; Zachos, *Nicopolis B*.

⁴⁶ I would like to thank Dr Andrew Bayliss for bringing my attention to John Gillies' comments on Actium. See J. Gillies, *History of the World, From the Reign of Alexander to that of Augustus, Comprehending the Latter Ages of European Greece, and the History of the Greek Kingdoms in Asia and Africa, from their Foundation to their Destruction*, vol. III (Philadelphia, 1809), 466–8; Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, vol. IV, 36.

⁴⁷ Gillies, *History of the World*, 466.

⁴⁸ Gillies, *History of the World*, 466.

departure was known from both sides, the battle still continued with emulation⁴⁹

Given the prevailing eighteenth-century view, this suggests a high level of debate on the subject of Actium in the long eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century. The prearranged plan theory was only accepted after Kromayer and is now deemed the most likely scenario. Thus the prevailing modern view of Actium actually originated in the long eighteenth century.

Kromayer, in a brilliant piece of persuasive scholarship, argues that the position of Antonius had become hopeless and therefore he decided to make a breakout. In what might be described as a typically thorough German academic style, Kromayer dismisses the standard eighteenth-century view on the battle and effectively ends the nineteenth-century discussion on the matter (see below). With Kromayer Cleopatra's betrayal became an unlikely and even unacceptable conclusion and the debate on the battle changed towards the consensus of today.⁵⁰ Even though this is a fascinating theory, it must be remembered that this is only a theory. Surely a very good reason is needed if ancient evidence is dismissed and a modern theory, disagreeing with most of the ancient evidence, is accepted instead. As already mentioned Gillies and Leake advocated this theory in the long eighteenth century and Kromayer's theory is in most details similar. Leake writes:

By the advice of Cleopatra, it was resolved, that after having garrisoned strongly the most important places, she and Antony should return with remaining forces to Egypt: but that avoiding any appearance of a retreat, in order not to discourage their allies, the fleet in moving should advance as if intent on battle.⁵¹

Their focus is on the statement by Cassius Dio 50.15.1, stressing that Cleopatra was implementing this prearranged plan, rather than betraying Antonius. According to this theory Antonius had in reality lost the battle before it was ever fought, but the account of Cassius Dio is largely rhetorical, and must be contrasted to the much fuller narrative

⁴⁹ Gillies, *History of the World*, 467.

⁵⁰ For a case against Kromayer, supporting Cleopatra's betrayal, see C.H. Lange, *Res Publica Constituta: Actium, Apollo and the Accomplishment of the Triumviral Assignment*, Ph.D. thesis (University of Nottingham, 2008), chapter 4. A revised version of my thesis will be published by Brill in 2009.

⁵¹ Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, vol. IV, 36.

of Plutarch, which includes much more factual detail.⁵² Importantly, aside from Cassius Dio's narrative, arguing for a decision to withdraw at the council before battle, this prearranged plan is not mentioned in any other ancient evidence.

The twentieth-century alternative view to the prearranged plan is found in William W. Tarn, using Horace *Epode* 9, suggesting that Antonius wanted to fight, but treachery of the fleet forced him in the end to flee.⁵³ The poem cannot be taken to support the theory of Tarn that the fleet of Antonius deserted him; *Epode* 9 cannot be taken to resolve the matter and lines 19–20 can never be decoded for certain. Ronald Syme, building on Tarn's 1931 article, reaches the conclusion that there was little fighting and few casualties at Actium. He famously called the Battle of Actium a 'Shabby affair'.⁵⁴ The idea in fact goes at least back to George Rawlinson, Syme's predecessor as Camden Professor at Oxford:

These repeated defections reduced the triumvir to a state of despondency, and led him most unhappily to accept Cleopatra's fatal counsels. Under pretence of giving battle to his adversary's fleet, Antony, on the morning of September 2, B.C. 31, put to sea with deliberate intention of deserting his land force and flying with Cleopatra to Egypt. Actium was not a battle in any proper sense of the term.⁵⁵

⁵² Kromayer, *Hermes* 34, 44 and 48; Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, vol. IV, 36. According to W.W. Tarn, 'The Battle of Actium', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 21 (1931), 182; W.W. Tarn, 'Actium: A Note', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 28 (1938), 168 Horace is a primary source, whereas Livy, Velleius, Florus, Plutarch, Cassius Dio and Orosius are secondary. He concludes that it is better to rely on Horace because of Cassius Dio's use of rhetoric (rightly criticising Kromayer and the prearranged plan). This seems to be a misconception of history, judging ancient evidence by modern historical standards and furthermore, all writers used rhetoric or literary techniques. See S.A. Oakley, *A Commentary of Livy Books VI–X*. vol. I: *Introduction and Book VI* (Oxford, 1997), 7–10. Tarn's idea is refuted by J. Kromayer, 'Actium. Ein Epilog', *Hermes* 68 (1933), 363–4, suggesting that Plutarch's source can be traced back to the battle and that Cassius Dio used Livy and the autobiography of Augustus. On Cassius Dio, see J.W. Rich, *Cassius Dio. The Augustan Settlement (Roman History 53–55.9)* (Warminster, 1990).

⁵³ Tarn, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 21, 173; W.W. Tarn, 'The Actium Campaign', in S.A. Cook et al. (eds.), *Cambridge Ancient History, 10: The Augustan Empire, 44 B.C.–A.D. 70* (Cambridge, 1934), 104–5; R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford, 1939 (1952)), 297. Ferrabino, *Rivista de Filologia e di Istruzione Classica*, 52 (1924), 470–1 was the first to use *Epode* 9 and argue that one of Antonius' generals refused to fight and returned to port. The treachery of Sosius decided the battle.

⁵⁴ Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, 297. See also Pelling, *The Triumviral Period*, 59, accepting Kromayer's take on the battle, but describing the battle of Actium as a 'lame affair'.

⁵⁵ G.A. Rawlinson, *Manual of Ancient History. From the Earliest Times to the Fall of the Sassanian Empire* (Oxford, 1880), 452.

Most scholars since Syme have accepted Kromayer's conclusions over Tarn's.⁵⁶ The one important issue where the two combatants Kromayer and Tarn agree, is that the old theory that the battle was lost because of Cleopatra's treachery can safely be dismissed, a point that has been accepted all too willingly by subsequent scholars.⁵⁷

The Situation Before the Battle

All the evidence suggests that Antonius did not choose Actium as the site for battle. At Rome it was claimed that Antonius and Cleopatra were planning to make war on the Roman state and to invade Italy and Rome.⁵⁸ However, in reality there is hardly much truth in that, even though they were surely planning for war. In the end Octavian did not wait until spring, as Antonius probably thought he would. Antonius set up his winter quarters at Patrae, leaving his fleet at Actium about 200 km away.⁵⁹ Octavian arrived at Actium first, taking Antonius completely by surprise, as Crevier stressed correctly.⁶⁰

As part of the manoeuvres before battle Antonius made sure the sails were on board, something quite unusual in ancient times.⁶¹ Ancient sea battles were fought close to land and thus sails would not be needed, and while this could be interpreted as showing an intention to flee, it seems more likely that this was a simple matter of Antonius keeping his options open

⁵⁶ See Murray and Petsas, *Octavian's Campsite Memorial for the Actian War*, 132, n. 6.

⁵⁷ See Kromayer, *Hermes* 34, esp. 1, 33f; Kromayer, *Hermes* 68, 377–80; Tarn, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 21, 173 and esp. 196; Murray and Petsas, *Octavian's Campsite Memorial for the Actian War*, 133 summing up the modern view that Cleopatra did not betray Antonius.

⁵⁸ Livy *Per.* 132; Velleius 2.82.4; Tacitus *Ann.* 3.18; Plutarch *Ant.* 56.1–2; 58.1–2; 60.2; 62; Pausanias 4.31; Cassius Dio 50.3.2; 50.9.2; 50.12–13; Florus 2.21.1–3. See Kromayer, *Hermes* 34, 9; V. Fadinger, *Die Begründung des Prinzipats. Quellenkritische und staatsrechtliche Untersuchungen zu Cassius Dio und der Parallelüberlieferung* (Berlin, 1969), 189–194; A.J. Woodman, *Velleius Paterculus. The Caesarian and Augustan Narrative (2.41–93)* (Cambridge, 1983), 212. Pelling, *The Triumviral Period*, 48 rightly stresses that the decision of Antonius to bring Cleopatra so close to Italy was a mistake from a political point of view.

⁵⁹ Cassius Dio 50.11–13. Kromayer, *Hermes* 34, 9.

⁶⁰ Crevier, *Roman History*, 39. See also E. Kraggerud, *Horaz und Actium: Studien zu den politischen Epoden* (Oslo, 1984), 70; Carter, *The Battle of Actium. The Rise and Triumph of Augustus Caesar*, 208 stresses that the plan of Octavian was to avoid battle until at full strength and then drive the enemy back and the fleet, deprived of land support would have to flee. But why make a surprise attack and then wait?

⁶¹ Plutarch *Ant.* 64 and Cassius Dio 50.31.2. See Kromayer, *Hermes* 34, 35; Pelling, *The Triumviral Period*, 58.

in case the battle did not go according to plan.⁶² Crevier rightly stresses this as an assurance.⁶³ The riches of Antonius and Cleopatra were also on board (Cassius Dio 50.15.4) and Antonius even decided to burn part of his fleet.⁶⁴ According to Kromayer all these factors are enough for us to accept Cassius Dio 50.15.1 and the intention of Antonius and Cleopatra to flee.

Kromayer thus asks, as mentioned above, why Antonius accepted a sea battle; he answers that the blockade of Agrippa made his choices limited. Again, he draws the same conclusion reached by Leake.⁶⁵ According to Kromayer's theory the raids and capture of Greek cities by Agrippa meant Antonius was effectively blockaded: the fleet of Octavian was superior before Actium, with Agrippa capturing Methone, Patrae, Leucas and perhaps Corinth, which led to a blockade of the Ambracian Gulf and the fleet of Antonius. According to Kromayer the capture of Leucas effectively completed the blockade.⁶⁶ This also meant that Antonius' supply routes were cut off.⁶⁷ Prior to Kromayer, Crevier and Hooke/Stuart also advocated the idea that Antonius lost Leucas, Patrae and Corinth, both suggesting that Antonius' choices were limited.⁶⁸

The ancient accounts all point to desertion, disease and hunger amongst Antonius' troops.⁶⁹ Ultimately, the attack on Methone gave Octavian

⁶² Tarn, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 21, 189; Johnson, *Augustan Propaganda*, 49.

⁶³ Crevier, *Roman History*, 47. This equals the 'Plan B' of Tarn, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 21, 188.

⁶⁴ Cassius Dio 50.15.4; Plutarch *Ant.* 64.1. See C.B.R. Pelling, *Plutarch. Life of Antony* (Cambridge, 1988), 276. See also Horace *Odes* 1.37. See Tarn, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 21, 183–184 and Tarn, *The Actian Campaign*, 105, implying that Octavian burned the ships after the victory, not Antonius. Tarn, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 21, 192 he calls the idea that Antonius burned ships 'The silly perversion'. But this is contrary to all the evidence (Cassius Dio 50.15.4 and Plutarch *Ant.* 64.1). See also Richardson, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 27, 155–156; Pelling, *Plutarch. Life of Antony*, 276.

⁶⁵ Kromayer, *Hermes* 34, 9; Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, vol. IV, 34.

⁶⁶ Kromayer, *Hermes* 34, 9–28. See also Richardson, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 27, 159; Johnson, *Augustan Propaganda*, 48; Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate*, 103. On Corinth, see Cassius Dio 50.13.5, who puts the capture of Corinth before Actium, Plutarch *Ant.* 67.7 after. The best account on the build up to the battle is still Kromayer's article from 1899. According to Grant, *Cleopatra*, 205–207 losing Methone meant losing the war, as there would be a blockade of Actium. Against this theory of a blockade, see Lange, *Res Publica Constituta*, chapter 4.

⁶⁷ Velleius 2.84.1, Cassius Dio 50.13.5–6, 14.4; Florus 2.21.4. See Woodman, *Velleius Pateculus*, 221–222. See also Kromayer, *Hermes* 34, 19–20, 25–26; Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate*, 103. Oros. 6.19.6 on Agrippa's interception of supply ships.

⁶⁸ Crevier, *Roman History*, 38–42; Hooke, *Roman History*, 427.

⁶⁹ Orosius 6.19.5ff, Velleius 2.84.1, Cassius Dio 50.11–15, 50.27.8 and Plutarch *Ant.* 63, 68.4. On the desertions, see Woodman, *Velleius Pateculus*, 222 with a list. Rawlinson, *A Manual of Ancient History*, 452 observes that this decided the engagement.

the possibility to cross to Corcyra (Corfu) and then Actium.⁷⁰ But did this mean that Antonius did not have a chance of winning? And, more importantly, did he accept that this was the case? And why did he not use his land army? According to Crevier they were spectators, but surely they were there for a reason.⁷¹ Theodor Mommsen, a leading ancient historian of the nineteenth century, is certainly right in stressing that it is most likely that Antonius' legions were present at Actium to be used in a land battle.⁷² Of course some of them were fighting at sea, but they could easily have been deployed on land after an unsuccessful sea battle. Surely both generals had grounds to hope for victory.⁷³ Vitaly, while the eighteenth-century scholars accepted that Antonius' choices were limited, they were still surprised that a Roman general did not stand and fight.

The Battle of Actium: Cassius Dio versus Plutarch

According to Cassius Dio the council before the battle saw Cleopatra suggest that they should flee and fight another day, as the battle was lost before it had been fought. This is, as mentioned, supported by the likes of Leake and Kromayer, but perhaps the most extreme example of supporting this idea is found in Josiah Osgood, who very recently concluded that in some ways Antonius had the better of the day, outwitting Octavian by escaping from Actium.⁷⁴ This is a very odd approach, as it does not take the consequences of Antonius' actions into account. The battle cannot be isolated from the war, which ended on 1 August 30 B.C. at Alexandria. By escaping Antonius only postponed what his flight made inevitable.

Furthermore, Cassius Dio contradicts himself at 50.33.1–2, apart from being isolated amongst the ancient evidence. Cassius Dio 50.33.1–2 is very close to the information in the rest of the ancient evidence, as it

⁷⁰ Richardson, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 27, 156 n. 15; J. Osgood, *Caesar's Legacy. Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2006), 372.

⁷¹ Crevier, *Roman History*, 48.

⁷² T. Mommsen, *Römisches Kaisergeschichte. Nach den Vorlesungs-Mitschriften von Sebastian und Paul Hensel 1882/86, Herausgegeben von Alexander Demandt* (Munich, 1992), 85.

⁷³ Crevier, *Roman History*, 36.

⁷⁴ Osgood, *Caesar's Legacy*, 374. See also Kromayer, *Hermes* 34, 44 and 48; Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, vol. IV, 36; F. Cairns, 'Horace Epode 9: Some New Interpretations', *Illinois Classical Studies*, 8.1 (1983), 91, stressing that Antonius was not technically defeated. Pelling, *The Triumviral Period*, 59 stresses that 'Cleopatra arguably won it', because they achieved all they could have hoped, thus supporting Cassius Dio and Kromayer.

focuses on Antonius and his disbelief when he learned that Cleopatra was fleeing. According to Plutarch Cleopatra ran away at a time when the battle was yet to be decided; it is at this crucial point that Antonius chose Cleopatra above his men (Plutarch *Ant.* 66). There simply is no reliable method by which we can conclude that Cassius Dio 50.15.1 is the truth, i.e. what actually happened, whereas 50.33.1–2 is the 'propaganda' of Octavian, as some modern scholars do.⁷⁵ It may indeed be that both stories are the 'propaganda' of the regime.

The main problem when addressing the notion of Cleopatra's betrayal is, as mentioned, that both sides of the modern twentieth-century debate, Kromayer and Tarn, agreed this never happened.⁷⁶ The main evidence for Cleopatra's betrayal is a Late Latin translation of Josephus (Against Apion) *C. Apion.* 2.59, a Jewish historian from the first century A.D.:

Sed quid oportet amplius dici, cum illum ipsum in nauali certamine relinquens, id est maritum et parentem communium filiorum, tradere eum exercitum et principatum et se sequi coegit?

But what more need be said, when she, deserting even him – her husband and the father of their children – in the naval battle, compelled him to surrender his army and imperial title to follow her?⁷⁷

Relinquens is perhaps better translated as 'leaving' not 'deserting', but there surely is no prearranged plan in Josephus. Similarly, Virgil (*Aen.* 8.704ff), the Augustan poet, mentions that Actian Apollo fires the first shot of the battle and as a result Cleopatra flees (*Aen.* 707–8):

*ipsa videbatur ventis regina vocatis
vela dare et laxos iam iamque immittere funis.*

The queen herself was seen to woo the winds,
spread sail, and now, even now, fling loose the slackened sheets.⁷⁸

Velleius, an early first-century Roman historian, agrees and stresses that Cleopatra took the initiative in the flight and that Antonius chose her above his soldiers (2.85.3). In fact this is also found in Plutarch (*Ant.*

⁷⁵ See Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate*, 114.

⁷⁶ See especially Kromayer, *Hermes* 34; Tarn, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 21, 196; Grant, *Cleopatra*, 213; Murray and Petsas, *Octavian's Campsite Memorial for the Actian War*, 133 ignores the evidence, as there is agreement on this matter in the modern debate.

⁷⁷ Translation by H.St.J. Thackeray, *Josephus, The Life Against Apion* (Cambridge Mass. and London, 1926). Pelling, *Plutarch. Life of Antony*, 284 suggests that Cleopatra's betrayal is mentioned first by Josephus. This is hardly true.

⁷⁸ Translated by H.R. Fairclough, *Virgil Aeneid 7–12, The Minor Poems* (Cambridge Mass. and London, 1934).

66.3), Florus (2.21.8–9), a Roman historian writing during the reign of Hadrian and Cassius Dio (50.33.2). The sources except Cassius Dio are all in agreement: Cleopatra ran away and Antonius followed her.

As mentioned all the ancient evidence on the battle could be dismissed as propaganda of the regime, including Cassius Dio 50.15.1. But the only possibility we have is to work with historical probability and use the evidence at hand. All the evidence suggests that Cleopatra betrayed Antonius, with the exception of Cassius Dio, who contradicts himself. Nothing in the historical context dictates that Cleopatra's betrayal is unlikely or indeed impossible. One possible explanation may be the attitude towards Plutarch in the eighteenth century versus the attitude in nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship. In the eighteenth century his reputation was high, but already during the early nineteenth century we witness Plutarch's fall from grace. The problem with that theory is that Cassius Dio is normally not considered a good source either.

Conclusion: Cleopatra's Betrayal

Even in the nineteenth century the idea of Cleopatra's betrayal was not dismissed by all scholars; Leopold von Ranke, a very influential German historian of the nineteenth century, suggests that Antonius was betrayed by Cleopatra and made after her when she fled:

Als Cleopatra Gefahr sah, warf sie sich mit ihrem Geschwader in die Flucht, mitten durch die kämpfer. Antonius, schwächer als seine Leidenschaft, eilte ihr nach und liess seine flotte in der hand der Feinde.

When Cleopatra saw danger, she fled together with her fleet throwing herself through the middle of the combatants. Antonius, weaker than his passions, hurried after her and left his fleet in the hand of the enemies.⁷⁹

On the issue of the battle of Actium Ranke, one of the founding fathers of modern historical research in Germany of the nineteenth century, was a binding link between the eighteenth-century and the nineteenth-century approach to the battle. It seems that the critical method of the nineteenth century did not necessarily create a difference in approach to the battle of Actium.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ L. von Ranke, *Weltgeschichte*, 2.2: *Die Römische Republik und Ihre Weltherrschaft* (Leipzig, 1882), 387–8. Translation by Carsten Hjort Lange.

⁸⁰ M. Gelzer, 'Caesar als Historiker', in D. Rasmussen (ed.) *Caesar* (Darmstadt, 1967), 438f. sums up a standard nineteenth- and twentieth-century definition of a historian, as a person with a university degree in history, but at the same time he rightly concludes that the critical method, although it goes back to Niebuhr and Ranke, at least in Germany, was also found during the Renaissance and especially during the Enlightenment.

Mommsen rightly observes that the sources are not positive towards Cleopatra. The prearranged plan is mentioned and then dismissed. He neither believes in treachery nor 'petulant' treachery; Cleopatra fled because she thought it best for her and her fleet. He suggests that she wanted to win the naval battle, something the Ptolemies traditionally mastered. In the end it was understandable for Cleopatra to flee, thus saving her fleet, when things went wrong, but completely incomprehensible that Antonius followed her.⁸¹ Mommsen's description of the battle, using mainly Plutarch's conclusion (*Ant.* 66, 68), is closer to Crevier's eighteenth-century views than Kromayer's theory.

Furthermore, it needs to be remembered that Cleopatra was ruler of Egypt, not just the lover of Antonius; this is Mommsen's vital contribution to this discussion. According to Mommsen Cleopatra did not betray Antonius, but she did flee the battle without telling him first. Perhaps she did not flee out of fear after all, but because she tried to save what was hers, at least for the time being. She was after all only a client ruler. Importantly, even Leake, accepting Cassius Dio and the prearranged plan, suggests that Antonius' men were surprised and dismayed 'On beholding this shameful flight of their commander'.⁸² To accept the prearranged plan does not necessarily mean to dismiss the idea of betrayal altogether; in this case Antonius' betrayal of his men.

Why should historical probability dictate that Antonius thought it unlikely to win? Most likely he thought he could win, but being the good general he was, he had a 'Plan B'. William Ledyard Rodgers, a Vice Admiral in the US Navy during the early twentieth century believes that Antonius did not merely try to escape, but instead: 'Like every good commander, Antony was ready for the worst while hoping for the best'.⁸³

This certainly fits a Roman general better. However, Rodgers also suggests that Antonius' plan was to escape with as many soldiers as possible, if he did not win.⁸⁴ The problem is that he did not do so, but simply left his fleet and army behind. It seems that Cleopatra and Antonius left the battle before it was decided, as stressed by Plutarch, the most thorough source on the battle, and thus the answer may lie somewhere else. It

⁸¹ Mommsen, *Römisches Kaisergeschichte*, 85–6. Similarly, V.E. Gardthausen, *Augustus und seine Zeit* (Leipzig, 1891/1896), 377–83, who accepts Cleopatra's betrayal.

⁸² Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, 38.

⁸³ W.L. Rodgers, *Greek and Roman Naval Warfare. A Study of Strategy, Tactics, and Ship Design from Salamis (480 B.C.) to Actium (31 B.C.)* (Annapolis, 1937), 535.

⁸⁴ Rodgers, *Greek and Roman Naval Warfare*, 535. Similarly, Grant, *Cleopatra*, 211, suggesting that that was the plan, but in the end they were not able to achieve this. This is in principle possible, but not what the sources suggest.

is hardly an unlikely scenario that during battle, before it was decided, Cleopatra lost her nerve and fled to Egypt, or alternatively, decided that the battle was lost and fled. She did save her fleet, at least for the time being, but this meant the battle of Actium was lost and Antonius was closer to losing the war altogether.

In conclusion, the debate on the battle of Actium raged all through the nineteenth century, with both sides (the prearranged plan and Cleopatra's betrayal) represented. If we consider the long eighteenth century, Gillies and Leake supported the prearranged plan of Cassius Dio, which seems to have been deemed unlikely by scholars writing before Gillies. This changed with Kromayer and the later modern consensus.

Since Kromayer the theory of Cleopatra's betrayal has been deemed unacceptable, but it is time to take a critical stance towards the theory of the prearranged plan. It is time to dismiss Cassius Dio and accept the prevailing picture presented in the ancient evidence. It is time to re-evaluate the battle of Actium and take into account the standard perception of the battle held in the eighteenth century, which rightly prefers Plutarch over Cassius Dio. Cleopatra wanted to fight at sea, which Antonius accepted. The battle itself was most likely decided because Cleopatra lost her nerve and fled, leaving Antonius behind to decide what to do. This equals Cleopatra's betrayal, even though she might have thought it best for Egypt to save her fleet. Looking at the ancient evidence, first and foremost Plutarch, this seems much more likely than the prearranged plan of Cassius Dio. Importantly, Cleopatra's betrayal caused Antonius to betray his fleet and army at Actium, thus in reality losing him the war against Octavian. It would thus seem that for Antonius at least nothing went according to plan at Actium.

We can choose to stress the differences between the eighteenth-century and modern historical writing, but we should not dismiss secondary material on the grounds that it is old. A careful reading of the likes of Crevier clearly demonstrates that the methodology and knowledge of ancient evidence has not changed significantly over time, although the ways historical scholarship is presented have. It is not difficult to follow Crevier's line of enquiry, as he is very close to Plutarch's description of the battle. Having interpreted the ancient evidence before him, Crevier concludes that Plutarch is more likely than Cassius Dio; that it is most likely that Cleopatra fled the scene of battle, leaving Antonius behind. This was not according to a prearranged plan; this was betrayal of Antonius by Cleopatra. He then, out of love for her, betrayed his men, following Cleopatra and leaving them behind. The ancient evidence should not easily be dismissed and neither should the 'emotional' as a serious historical factor.