

*Formae confisa suae: Ancient Traditions on the Beauty of Cleopatra*  
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By the time Lucan wrote the words in the title of this paper, Cleopatra's beauty had become an accepted image in the reception of her story which was destined to be followed by other Latin and Greek authors especially Velleius, Florus, Appian and Dio Cassius. Since Boccaccio and other medieval writers followed this tradition, the western reception of Cleopatra has represented her for the most part as a great beauty. That the historical Ptolemaic queen actually fit this image is by no means certain. Plutarch notably strays from this tradition in *Antony* 27.3ff, although he contradicts himself elsewhere and has been frequently misinterpreted and even mistranslated. The British Museum exhibition added to an already extensive set of treatments of ancient monuments, sculpture and coinage which have sought to present a definitive contemporary likeness. This still eludes us, but it has produced a collection of alternative Cleopatras, some of which represent her as quite unattractively plain, or in the case of Colleen McCollough's novels "depressingly ugly."

This paper aims to examine extant Greek and Latin literary and historical sources which make specific statements about or allusions to Cleopatra's physical attractions, to trace any connections and influences which seem evident and to attempt to account for the discrepancies between the descriptions of our two most extensive sources, Plutarch and Dio. Special attention will be paid to bridging the gap between the Augustan writers, especially Propertius, and Lucan, and the probable role of lost sections of Livy in that process. Aside from examining the evolution of this iconic aspect of Cleopatra's reception in antiquity, this exercise will also focus our attention on the transmission of her narrative, on Plutarch's use of source material and on his possible reasons for electing to follow alternative traditions.