Invoking Cleopatra to Read the Shifting Grid of Leadership

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Cleopatra is increasingly positioned within a frame of leadership. Readings of Cleopatra, however, invariably tend to tell us more about the culture that produces them rather than the subject of their analysis. In this seminar, I discuss how her representations pose insight into current paradoxes of leadership. I argue that we currently read leadership into Cleopatra not due to new historical material, but because of the shifts in the contemporary ground and grid of the knowledge that constitutes ‘leadership’. The analysis of engagements with Cleopatra examines a range of binaries, organized into man/woman (reading gendered power) and West/East (reading imperial power). The former examines the paradoxes of queen/mistress, public/domestic, sage/child, beautiful/ugly and warrior/mother. The latter considers the paradoxes of Rome/Egypt, discipline/decadence, white/black, and winner/loser. These paradoxes provide points of entry into a reading of leadership that critically examines a lattice of difference and its shifting grid.

About the presenter
Sally Riad is a senior lecturer in Victoria Management School. She has a background in science and the arts, building on both in her work. Her research interests have increasingly focused on analysing the social facets of organization and difference. Her published work is based on critical approaches to organizational topics such as mergers and acquisitions, culture and ethnography as well as analyses of the variety in engagements with the ancient world within the domains of organization and leadership.

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