



# **Costumes for the “Entrance into Rome” scene of the film *Cleopatra* (1963)**

**Costume-Con 33 Historical Masquerade**

**Charleston, South Carolina, 2015**

**Kathe and Philip Gust**

**Open Division**

## Costumes for the “Entrance into Rome” scene of the film *Cleopatra* (1963)

“The picture was conceived in a state of emergency, shot in confusion and wound up in blind panic.” - Mankiewicz

The Entrance to Rome sequence in the film represents the quadruple triumph celebration of Gaius Julius Caesar’s four splendid victories over the Gauls, King Pharnaces of Pontus, King Juba of Numidia and the Egyptians. The actual event took place on July 25, 46 BCE. The film costumes are a combination of 1960’s glamor, theatrical convention and historical research.

### About Cleopatra’s Ceremonial Costume

The golden Ceremonial costume worn by Elizabeth Taylor as the title character in the 1963 film *Cleopatra* is arguably one of the most famous, or possibly notorious, costumes in film history. The costume consists of a cape, overdress, skirt, headdress and shoes, some of which have been sold at auction since the completion of the film. It is also the only costume Ms. Taylor wears in the film that is not essentially an “orientalized” 1960’s fashion, though it does have historical anomalies.

The historical Cleopatra is known to have been a devotee of the goddess Isis, and definitely did dress as the goddess on occasion, such as during the famous “Donations of Alexandria”. The decision to use a classic Egyptian style for this particular costume was made by designer Irene Sharaff, who wanted the design of that particular costume firmly tied to Egyptian religion and tradition. The use of a winged design for the cape reflects Cleopatra’s affinity with the goddess Isis as stated in the film script.



Sharaff’s book also makes it clear that this particular costume was made in Hollywood, very probably at Western Costume where she had connections and knew what the staff could accomplish. Several of the parts that have come up for auction still have Western Costume labels in the pieces.

Sharaff knew this costume would be an important one in the film and wanted to ensure it would be ready on time – it was due to be filmed early in the shooting – and that it should be as spectacular as possible.



Partly based on the relief carving of the queen at the Dendara Temple complex, it is doubtful that the real Cleopatra wore anything like this outside public ceremonial events. For the Greek-descended Ptolemy kings and queens, Egyptian dress was nothing more than a masquerade costume that might hold a political resonance with the people.

Producer Walter Wanger mentions in his published diary of the filming, that he, “Went to Western Costume to see Irene Sharaff’s costumes for Liz. They are marvelous...”  
- My Life with Cleopatra

The Ceremonial costume is at the center of a number of film myths. Irene Sharaff never once says it was made of “cloth of gold”, though she does mention some bullion embroidery on one item in the ensemble. She also sets the price tag of the completed costume well below the oft-reported \$6500.00 (1963 dollars) price tag.

She recounts this story about the “24-karat gold” costume in her book: “During the filming and in the promotion of the picture much was made of the gold ceremonial costume that Cleopatra wore at her entrance into Rome. The cost of making the complete costume – about two thousand dollars— was blown up by publicity to triple and quadruple that sum.”

“Walter (Wanger), as the producer, gallantly entertained socialites and celebrities and visiting movie stars in the Cinecittà commissary. One day, lunching the Baroness de Rothschild, he was in full steam about the gold costume. At the neighboring table I heard him announce ‘seven thousand dollars!’ She, hardly turning her head, remarked that for that sum she could not even get a raincoat at Balenciaga.”

## About the Julius Caesar Costume

September 12, 1962

...“We are all unhappy about his (Harrison’s) wardrobe. We have asked Irene Sharaff to re-do his entire wardrobe. Another delay but well worth it.” - My Life with Cleopatra

When the first rushes returned from scenes with Rex Harrison, the production team knew there was a problem. Rex didn’t look right. His original costumes for *Cleopatra* were made while he was starring in a play and his focus was on that performance and not the upcoming film. He said the costumes made him “look like an old Charlie (fool)”. In his modern clothing he was tall, trim and dashing. The carefully authentic Roman costumes exposed all the weak points in his figure. This is not something you want to happen when you are the leading man in a big film.



Early attempt. *Not very sexy.*

Irene Sharaff was asked to immediately re-design the wardrobe for Julius Caesar. She did so, and by sticking to a few basic designs enriched by color changes, different jewelry and trims, she replaced the costumes with only a minor delay in the filming.

## Construction Summary

The items in this set of costumes were constructed either through the use of patterns made/re-created by the costumers, or by draping on the persons involved. Fabrics were selected in accordance with those available in the early 1960s. Most were sewn by hand, though major seams in Caesar's costume and Cleopatra's overdress were stabilized by later machine sewing over the hand sewing.

Our guiding principle for the build was to seek out any information about the original costumes and props used in the scene, and to re-create them in accordance with known facts. Where no descriptions were found, we were guided by the available photographic evidence.

Notable points in the construction of individual items are further discussed in the narrative following this section. Construction photos follow each individual section in the narrative.

**Cleopatra Cape** – re-creation of the life size pattern, completely hand beaded and hand sewn in accordance with known facts about the original using information from auction description, high resolution photos, and research. Fun fact – for about three months most of the silver lined gold beads in stock in North America were either already on the cape or at our house waiting to go on the cape.

**Cleopatra Overdress** – pattern was drafted, bodice was hand trapunto quilted, and gown was fully lined with silk.

**Cleopatra Shoes** – hand painted in multiple gold shades to simulate those worn in the scene.

**Cleopatra Headdress** – recreated in mixed media in accordance with known facts about the original, using information from auction descriptions and high resolution photos.

**Caesar Tunic** – fabric was commercially pleated to our specifications and constructed by draping and cutting on the costumer who wears it. The belt for the tunic was assembled using parts from a 1960's chain belt.

**Caesar Toga** – the matching theatrical toga has a trim consisting of 30 feet of purchased trim altered to more closely match the film trim, with hand embroidery and beading used to enhance the resemblance.

**Props and Accessories** – recreated by the costumers from high resolution photos using various common materials as explained in the following narrative text.

## About Cleopatra's Cape

The cape worn in the film is frequently referred to as the Ceremonial, Isis or even the Phoenix Cape since the design was crafted to “resemble the wings of a Phoenix” according to one auctioneer. It has been described in auction records as: “an ornately designed piece made of thin panels of gold-painted leather adorned with hand-stitched gold bugle beads, seed beads and bead-anchored sequins”.

It was described by its designer as “the wings of Isis” and she has this to say about it. “For the wings of Isis ... I drew the pattern in exact size. Their foundation was a coarse net, on which were applied pieces of thin gold kid cut in the form of stylized feathers. “

Ms. Taylor wore the cape in two key scenes in the film: Cleopatra's Entrance into Rome and Cleopatra's Death. The actual cape worn in the film was sold at auction in 2012 for \$59,375.

Irene Sharaff states that she actually drew the pattern for the cape herself at 100% scale. What became of the original pattern is anyone's guess, but if making the original was anything like the process we used during our recreation, chances are good that the pattern was cut into individual feathers, used and probably discarded afterward.

We began our re-creation of the cape with two full scale pattern prints made by enlarging high resolution photographs taken when the cape was auctioned. One pattern was first used to cut the base of coarse net for the cape. That pattern was then cut into further sections. Each feather in a section was numbered and then cut out of gilded fashion leather. The numbers allowed the feathers to be assembled on nylon net for beading in the correct order to match the original. The beading patterns can also be seen on some of the high resolution photos.

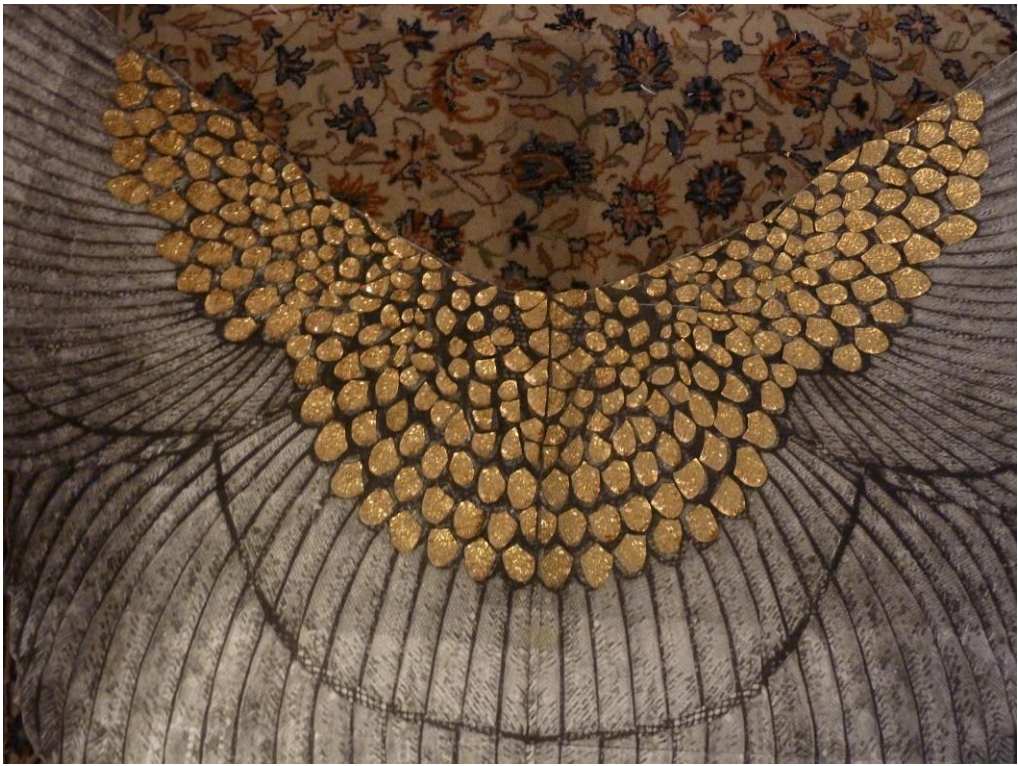
Beading on the cape was done entirely by hand using two sizes of seed beads, three sizes of sequins and four sizes of bugle beads. The beads used are Japanese silver-lined glass in shades of gold and light gold.

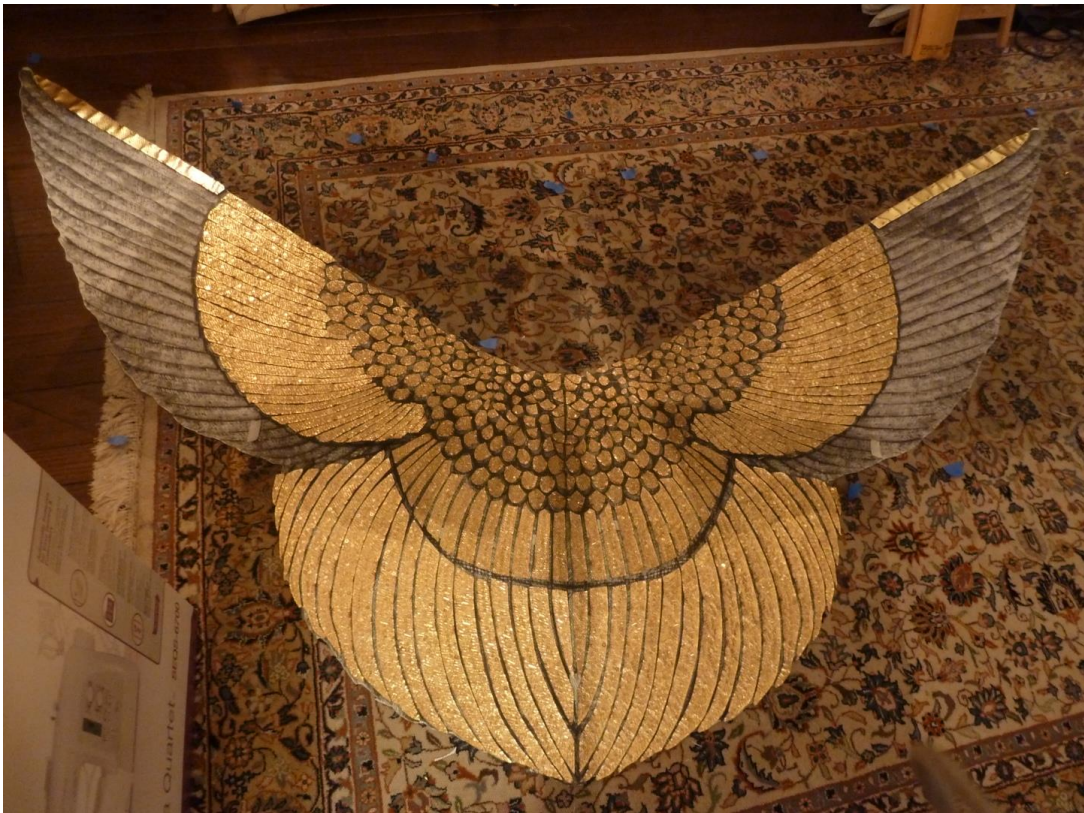
After completion of the beading, all the sections were re-assembled on the coarse cargo net base while it was lying over the top of the second full-sized printout to insure proper alignment. The sections were then hand sewn to the heavier net.



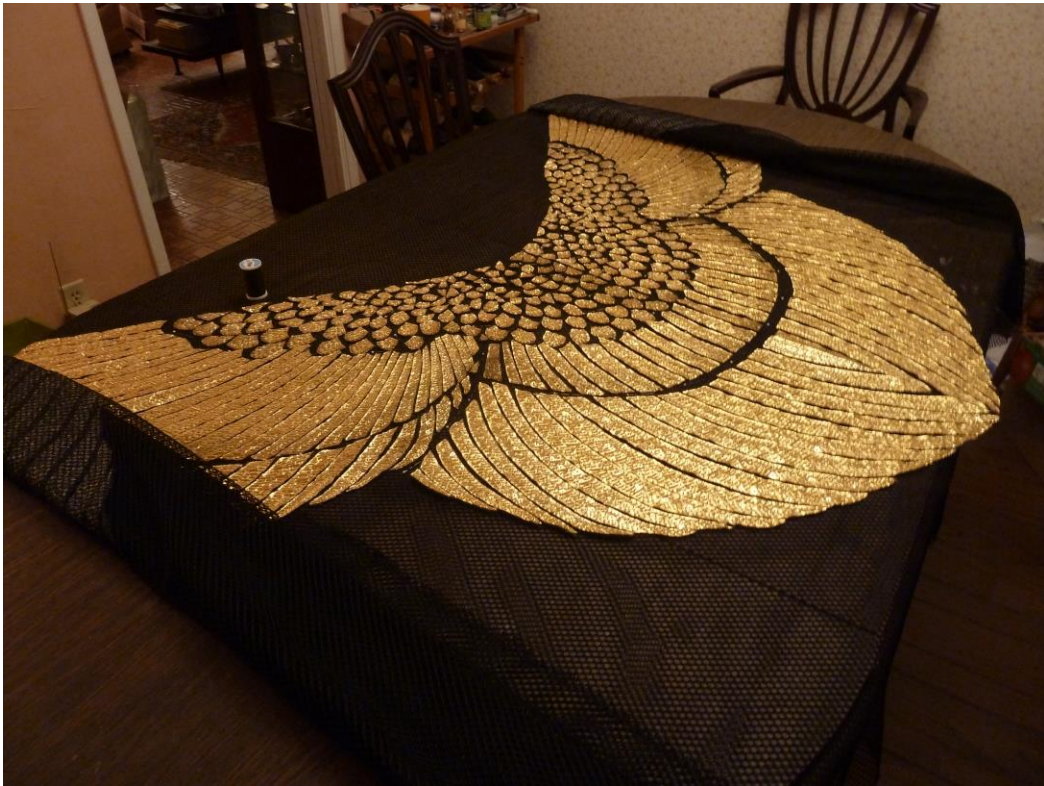
Original Auction Photo of the Cape











## About Cleopatra's Overdress

"I was lucky enough to find a photograph of a small headless statue in the Cairo Museum, whose dress gave me a clue to designing Cleopatra's costumes. The tight-fitting bodice showed fine lines of trapunto or, as it is more commonly called, quilting, one of the oldest forms of decoration" - Sharaff

The overdress worn as part of the Ceremonial Costume has a much more complicated history. It is the single most jarring part of the costume to historical purists due to the tight waistline, darts and the obvious separating zipper down the center front of the dress.

Irene Sharaff states that the overdress was made of gold lamé over silk and embroidered with gold bullion.

Our version of the overdress is created of heavy woven lame. The bodice and hip areas were flatlined with muslin that had a "feather" pattern traced on it. The pattern was hand embroidered through both fabrics using an "antique gold" floss since metallic threads of any gold color simply disappeared into the fabric. After the embroidery, the darts were sewn and each feather segment of the muslin backing was opened to permit the design to be trapunto quilted. The final lining of old gold silk was applied as was the requisite obvious front zipper.

A piece purporting to be the actual costume was put up for auction in 2011. The interesting result of that auction posting was a withdrawal of the item and a lawsuit. According to an anonymous collector of film memorabilia, this item was a "fake" since he owned the actual overdress used in the film!

The sequined gown had been privately purchased in 1999 with some other items and had been warranted to be authentic. Described by the auction house as: "constructed entirely of heavy gold lamé on silk, with some sequin loss, especially at shoulders and containing a Western Costume label inscribed Elizabeth Taylor 1606-3".

Close examination of the existing photos of Ms. Taylor wearing the overdress without the cape, do not show any sequins on the overdress she is wearing on the set, and the pattern apparent on the garment is not the geometric one on the sequined version, but a more organic leaf or feather pattern that appears to be embroidered and trapunto quilted as Sharaff states in her book.

The controversial sequined version of this design has shown up again recently. It was placed on stage at a cocktail party for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the film at the Cannes Film Festival, but considering that the mannequin was also wearing a very simple lamé version of the cape and an obviously re-created headdress, it is still possible to doubt the authenticity of this sequined version of the overdress design.



It is my personal belief that the sequined version was not the one used for filming. It may have been a test version that was never used. It may be a replica made for promotional purposes since we know from a few newspaper reports of the time that actual costume wardrobe items or replicas were loaned to local groups for “fashion shows” to publicize the film.

I believe this is not the right gown for the following reasons: The fabric of the auction version does not appear to actually be lamé, despite the labelling, but only some yellow textile, possibly silk. More importantly, our own experience with the costume demonstrates that any sequins on the overdress are bound to catch in, and be ripped off by, the coarse net base supporting the cape. This might account for the stated sequin loss on the shoulder areas of this version, and could have led to it being shelved and replaced with a lamé version using an embroidered design, which would not snag in the net, instead.

The cut appears to be similar, but the details seem incorrect. The resolution of the lawsuit over this version of the gown has not been reported, but obviously this gown is still out there.



Ensemble borrowed for a fashion show

## About Cleopatra's Skirt

“These gowns are too gorgeous to be left behind...They’ll make the most wonderful ball gowns and party dresses... All of them are precious. But what is more important, they’re as modern as tomorrow. I think I’ll set a new trend. Not only with the dresses but the hairdos and such—the Cleopatra look.”  
- Elizabeth Taylor (*Photoplay*, April 1962, p. 30.)

The original skirt worn as part of the ceremonial costume is one of the undocumented pieces. It has never come up for auction and is usually very well hidden beneath the overdress and cape in photos. From the glimpses we can catch through the center front opening of the overdress it is evidently pleated, and reaches to the instep of the wearer.

We were fortunate to come across a complete vintage evening ensemble from the time of the film that included a permanently sunburst pleated gold polyester knit skirt. We have chosen to use this vintage garment in homage to the many ways the film influenced fashion at the time of its original release in the early 1960's. Miss Taylor *did* set her trend!





## About Cleopatra's Headdress

"The headdress was topped by a crown, based on the one on the bas-relief at Denderah, formed by a circle of cobras and the sun disk and the two feathers associated with the goddess Isis. Wah Chang executed the elaborate crown out of papier-mache."

- Broadway & Hollywood: costumes designed by Irene Sharaff



The headdress is another mystery, not because nothing is known about it, but simply because what is known is second hand at best. The actual maker did not seem to talk about this particular creation. It was sold at auction in 2011 for \$123,000.

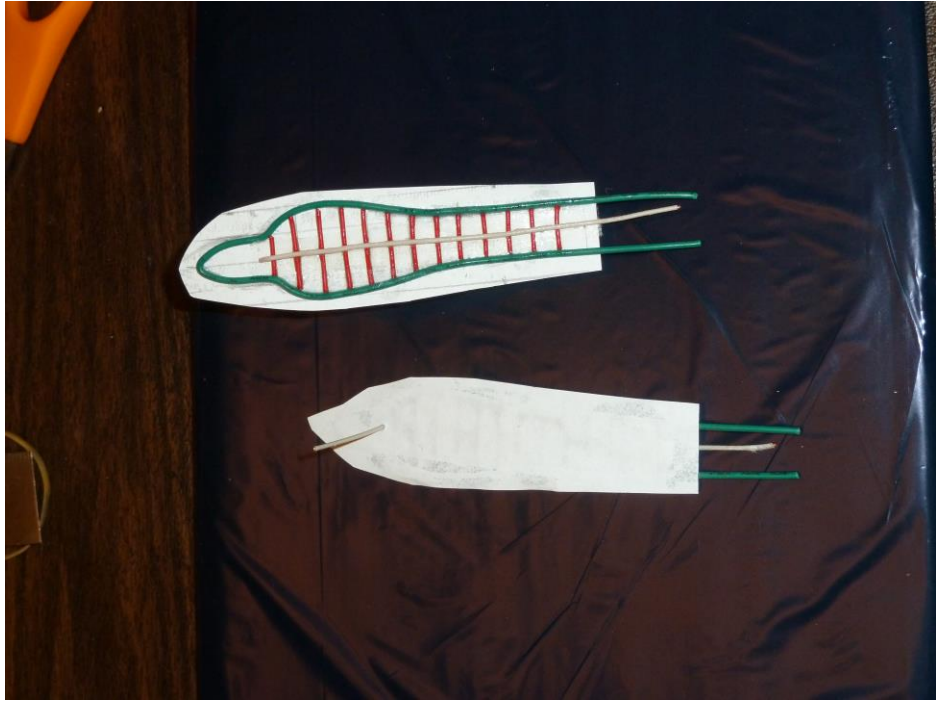
Taking Ms. Sharaff at her word, and using the high resolution photos of the headdress from the auction as a guide we attempted some experiments to see whether any parts of the headdress could be made in papier-mache, and found that it could.

The ring of cobras and the uraeus (the cobra image of the goddess Wadjet with the vulture image of the goddess Nekhbet representing of the unification of Lower and Upper

Egypt) are made of a combination of wire frames, muslin, beads and sculpted papier-mache. The tall plume representing the goddess Maat is constructed of a combination of balsa wood and rolled and stamped papier-mache.

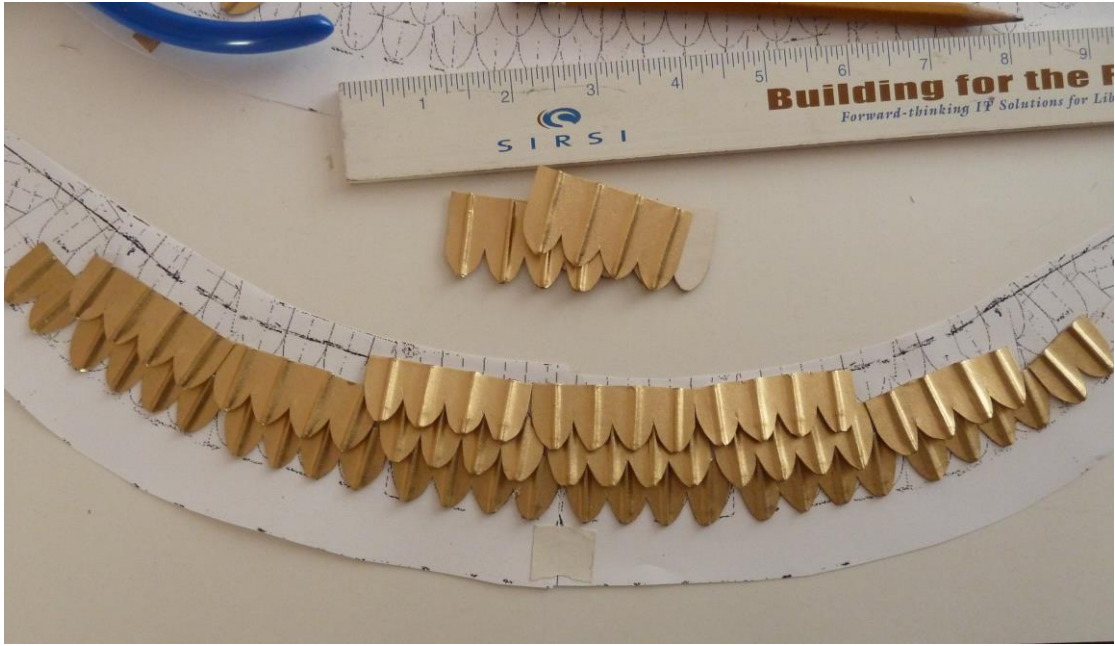
The pearl decorations on the back of the headdress were assembled of painted pearls, toothed washers and poster board disks with tiny eye screws for attachment to the painted cargo net layer draped over a black twill coif.

The tinsel chenille rope used in the original fringe has not yet been sourced in a correct diameter for the work and mylar rope mini-tinsel has been substituted. Both have the characteristic corkscrew pattern seen in the high resolution photos of the headdress.













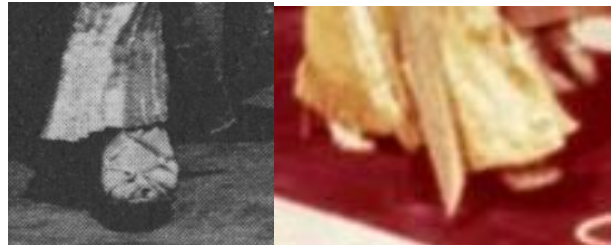
## About Cleopatra's Shoes



Although at least one pair of Ms. Taylor's shoes from the role is known to exist, they are not a pair worn with this costume. The ones worn with this costume seem to vary considerably. On her funeral bier Cleopatra is clearly wearing sandals decorated with gilt metal studs. But none of the Entrance into Rome scene photos display such footwear. Outdoors, the historical Cleopatra would not wear sandals, but shoes. Sandals were for indoor wear only.

### Surviving "Cleopatra" shoe

Elizabeth Taylor was a short actress (5' 2" – 5' 4") and was working with the much taller (6' 1") Rex Harrison. Surviving photos do allow the viewer to see that she is wearing heels in the scene, but the shape and style of shoe seems to vary from photo to photo when they can be seen. She does an excellent job of concealing her feet while wearing this costume!



We know from research on the shooting schedule that this particular sequence began rehearsing at the start of the Italian shoot and began filming on April 13<sup>th</sup>. It was put on hold due to bad weather, and then resumed May 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. The sections were edited together to create the completed scene for the film. I have included here two of the better close ups of the actress's feet showing various shoe styles.

We elected to purchase a shoe similar to what can be seen in the black and white photo since the shoes in the color photo appear to be standard issue pointed-toe spike heels.

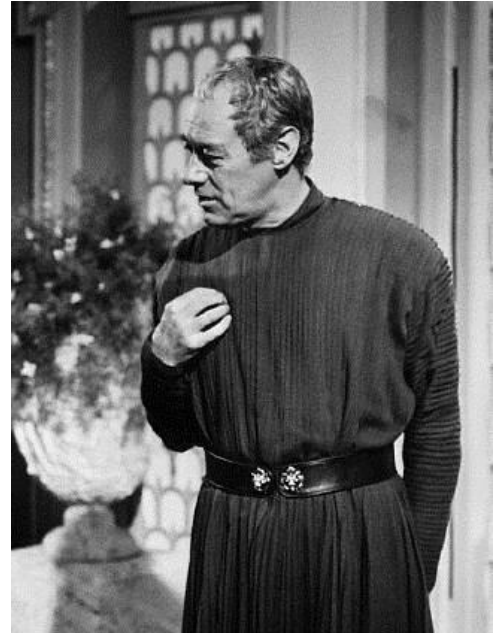
Unable to locate an exact match, we selected a platform soled shoe that had decorative toe weavings similar to the one in the photo and gilded it ourselves with several "gold" colors of Lumiere metallic paint.

## About the Julius Caesar Tunic

In the course of her research into the appropriate costumes for the Roman part of the film, Ms. Sharaff had discovered that Caesar had a reputation for dandyism. According to Suetonius, Caesar introduced long fringed sleeves to the normally sleeveless or cap sleeved senatorial tunic. He also adopted a much looser method of belting than was normally worn, for which he was criticized. The designer adapted these personal traits of Julius Caesar into the new designs she created for Harrison's character.

Long sleeves were added to all his costumes, which were now floor length whenever possible. Pleats were added to both the sleeves and the tunic body to increase bulk and although he is belted, it is never tightly. The short collar that shows above the tunic is a separate under-garment, frequently in a finer fabric but always matching the tunic color. The tunic itself pulls on over the head and has a narrowly finished jewel neckline which fastens in the back.

Although the historical Caesar did not ever wear the color purple publically until February 15, 44 BCE, after he had been named *dictator perpetuus* and shortly before he was killed, the designer chose to show him in a purple ensemble at this earlier event. It is not, however, the historical Roman or Tyrian purple (*see Appendix B*). The genuine historical color is worn by Marc Anthony and Octavian in this scene. The Caesar character is garbed in modern purple.



Our speculation is that this may have been done to provide a color contrast to the large red hanging behind the actor's chair and the red carpets all around him, or possibly to demonstrate a contrast between Caesar in Egypt, whose main color was the true Roman purple (dark crimson), and the triumphant Caesar in Rome, who is arguably different in portrayal than the man viewers saw in Alexandria.

No one has documented what fabrics any of the Caesar tunics in the film are made from and none of them appear to have ever reached the auction houses. The fabric in the photographs seems too heavy to be silk, even if the technology existed in 1963 to permanently pleat it.

Since we know the pleats are an important part of the design, we chose a woven polyester fabric that would allow permanent pleats to remain even when the tunic is cleaned, as it must have been after the actor spent all day under the Italian sun filming in it.

The fabric was commercially pleated to our specifications and then the tunic was constructed from the pleated fabric by draping and cutting on the costumer. The belt with lion head plaques was built by hand using hardware from a vintage chain belt that was disassembled for parts.



## About the Julius Caesar Toga

The various togas Caesar wears over his tunics in the film add some additional bulk to the actor and are designed, either by the use of contrasting color or dramatic trim, to break the tall narrow silhouette of Harrison's figure. In the Entrance into Rome sequence the toga matches the color of the tunic, but has a rich gold trim that provides a diagonal line for the viewer, creating a more symmetrical shape for the actor. Based on Harrison's movements, it also appears to be a "stage" toga, rather than the actual confining garment worn by the Romans.

A true toga (*see appendix B*) was much more about designating the wearer's status, than allowing for any comfort or freedom of movement. It can also make the wearer appear laughable if he is unaccustomed to wearing one. The "stage" toga gives the correct historical impression without the historical discomfort, and is designed to drape the actor in a way that will look both graceful and impressive while allowing him to move about the stage and gesture normally.

The film toga also uses a large brooch to hold it in place, another historical anomaly.

We made our toga from un-pleated fabric matching the tunic. The trim was executed by bias cutting strips of matching fabric. We used a purchased modern trim of vine leaves, and removed every other set of leaves. The "missing" leaves have been replaced with short hand embroidered stems and metal bead caps hand sewn on to the 30 feet of bias trim.





## About the Jewelry used in *Cleopatra*

The design for most of the jewelry used in the filming of *Cleopatra* was based on originals in museums around the world. There is an existing jewelry design sketch for the film on illustration board, with marking on bottom of sketch which reads, "Royal Jewellery" (sic), but it is not attributed to a particular designer and it cannot be determined whether it is an artifact of the British or Italian designs. It is also impossible to reconcile any of the designs with the items worn by Ms. Taylor or Mr. Harrison in the *Entrance to Rome* scene.

A high percentage of the jewelry, particularly pieces worn by Ms. Taylor, was made by costume jewelry designer Joan Castle Joseff, of Joseff of Hollywood. Some of the items made for the film are still in the possession of the company. A few were also produced in small editions after the film for the consumer market and are highly collectible. The bracelets worn by Ms. Taylor with this costume are not among those so produced.



Even the highest resolution photo we have does not provide a very good look at the bracelets. We can tell that they are a pair, that they are wide and golden. They appear to be simple woven or beaded cuffs, but there does seem to be some type of clasp or vertical bar of trim at one point on them. We have purchased wide gold beaded cuffs for these bracelets since that is a technique known to be consistent with bracelets of the period in both historical eras.

Julius Caesar's personal jewelry consists of a large brooch in the shape of an Eagle (symbol of the legions of Rome) inside what appears to be a wreath of oak leaves (symbol of triumph). He also wears a medallion on a chain, which has a profile head on it, and a simple red signet ring on his left hand.

Caesar also wears a coronet of golden oak leaves. This *corona civica* had been presented to him in 79 BCE for saving the life of a Roman citizen in battle. As the possession of this crown was so high an honor, its attainment was restricted by very severe regulations. When once obtained, it must always be worn at public gatherings. Historically it was made of common oak leaves and acorns, and not gilded.



He carries an ivory scepter topped with an eagle (*sceptrum augusti*) in his role of victorious general. The direction of the head of the eagle is important since facing left, it enjoins war (on the scepter) and facing right peace and honor (on the brooch). This myth may not date back to Roman times, but has been held true in the mythology of the United States since the Truman era. And the jewelry and prop makers would have been aware of the significance of it to members of the audience.



The medallion and chain were the first items we tackled here. A suitable silver colored medallion was found on Etsy, but a similar chain in any metal was not commercially available. The chain was constructed by us of wire wrapped figure-eight links crafted from 18-gauge brass wire, 15mm hammered pewter discs and connector rings. The finished necklace was first sprayed gold and patina was added by hand. The signet ring was purchased.

Our recreation of the brooch is constructed of a canning jar lid, ribbon and artificial "greenery" stems sprayed gold. It was completed by the addition of a purchased eagle brooch.

The *corona civica* is assembled on a metal hoop base using gilded polyester "silk" oak leaves and gilded real acorns on wired stems. The purchased gold ribbon was finished with handmade gold tassels.

Caesar's scepter was made by joining two flat backed pieces of architectural trim to create the staff which was sanded to shape, painted and had a patina of pearl glaze applied to make it more closely resemble ivory. The top and base of the scepter are parts of a dollhouse Corinthian column that have been gilded. The eagle is a flagpole topper with the head removed and reset in the correct direction. The wreath on the scepter is composed of the same material used for the wreath on the brooch.









## Appendix A: About Historic Egyptian Garments

The Egyptian climate caused inhabitants to favor garments made of natural fibers, such as linen, and in Roman times occasionally cotton, imported from India. Traces of silks have also been found in Egyptian tombs of the Roman era, but linen in varying qualities was the main textile for the country. The climate was also responsible for the decision on the part of Egyptians in general to wear as few garments as necessary.

Surviving garments indicate that little sewing was done in the construction and fastening of Egyptian fashion. It was more common to use a correctly sized cloth and then wrap, belt or tie it into place. In the case of royalty, garments were more varied and may have had symbolic meaning attached to some of them. As well as underwear, Tutankhamen's tomb yielded many other pieces of clothing: tunics, shirts, kilts, aprons and sashes, socks, headdresses, caps, scarves, gauntlets and gloves.

Pharaohs and Queens are always depicted as wearing crowns or headdresses, but whether this is just artistic convention, or they actually did so in daily life, is not known.

### At the time of Cleopatra

Cleopatra VII was the last pharaoh of the Ptolemaic Dynasty. The Ptolemies were of Macedonian-Greek extraction. They began ruling Egypt after the country had been conquered by Alexander the Great. Other than Cleopatra herself, none of them so much as spoke the language of the country they ruled.

For daily wear it is likely that she dressed much the same as any other Greek or Roman woman of the time in a long tunic of linen or silk with a stola of similar fabrics and palla over-cloak when needed for warmth. She would have worn sandals (solae) indoors and shoes (calcei) outdoors. Since she was much interested in Egyptian culture, she may also have worn the feminine equivalent of a galabeyah.



Relief of Cleopatra VII at Dendarah

The Ptolemies, as a family, seemed genuinely intrigued by Egyptian religious belief. Out of that emerged a hybrid Greco- Egyptian religion that found its ultimate expression in the cult of Serapis—a Greek superimposition on the Egyptian legend of Osiris and Isis.

The word Isis means “throne” in old Egyptian and the goddess was an important personification of the pharaoh’s power. She was a popular goddess throughout the Middle East since her attributes allowed her to readily merge with similar goddesses from other areas, such as Hathor, Astarte, Venus, Demeter, and Aphrodite. Herodotus wrote that Isis was the only goddess worshiped by all Egyptians alike. She even had temples in Rome. Her worship was finally ended during the time of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian, but there has been a modern revival.

By the time of Cleopatra VII a cult around the goddess Isis had been spreading across the Mediterranean for hundreds of years. According to Plutarch, Cleopatra VII actually embraced Egypt's traditions, and sought to link her identity with Isis and to be venerated as in incarnation of the goddess as “the New Isis”.



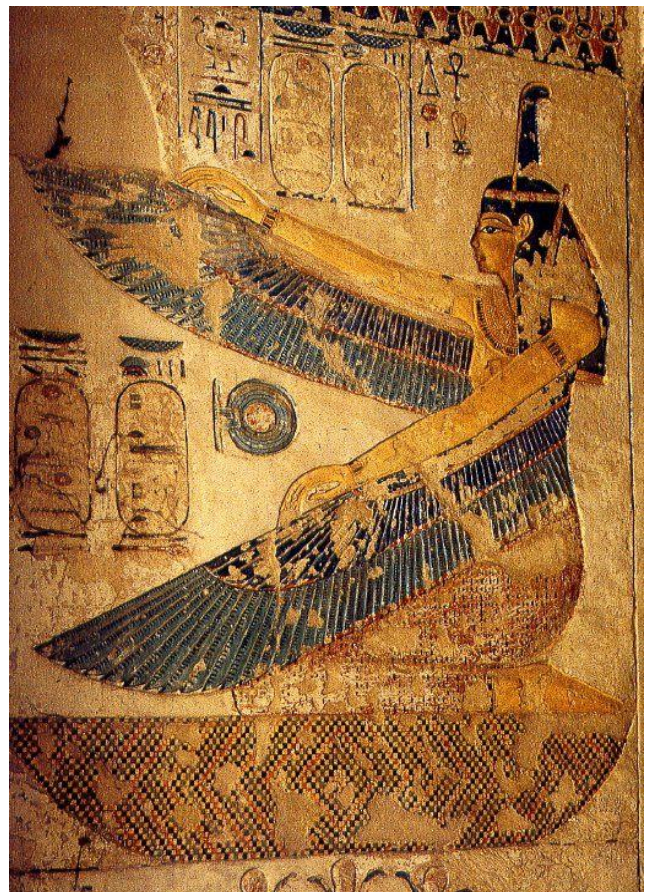
She had herself depicted in portraits and statues as the universal mother divinity and is known to have appeared in the holy dress of Isis at a festival staged in Alexandria to celebrate Antony's victory over Armenia in 34 B.C.

If Cleopatra wished to appear as in the ancient paintings of Isis, she would want to wear some version of the Egyptian sheathe dress in rainbow colors, but if she wished to resemble contemporary depictions, she would be more likely to wear a tunica belted high above the waist as in the gilded marble or cast bronze Isis statues found at Pompeii. No matter which dress style Cleopatra chose for her version of Isis, the formal costume would have also included a necklace, wig, and headdress.



While Isis is usually depicted as a human figure, as far back as the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty Isis has also been depicted with wings. In this form, her wings spread a heavenly scent across the land and bring fresh air into the underworld ruled by her spouse Osiris.

Isis Maat, the Winged Egyptian Goddess  
19th Dynasty. Tomb of Siptah.  
Valley of the Kings.



## Appendix B: About Historic Roman Garments

“Dress for a Roman often, if not primarily, signified rank, status, office, or authority. . . . The dress worn by the participants in an official scene had legal connotations. . . . The hierarchic, symbolic use of dress as a uniform or costume is part of Rome's legacy to Western civilization.”

- *The World of Roman Costume*

Roman clothing was designed to indicate the social status, and frequently, the profession of its wearer. Julius Caesar's successor Augustus emphasized the interaction of dress, social status, and public display by requiring official dress at public performances. He regulated public seating in the theaters and amphitheaters of Rome by reserving seats for specific classes. The first rows were reserved for senators, the next for male equestrians, the next for male citizens (with women of all classes relegated to the top rows of this section), and the top "standing room only" spaces for the lowest classes. Those attending events would see a visual display of the different status groups as blocks of color created by the different types of garments. The film *Gladiator* recreates this effect in their simulation of the Coliseum.

At the time of Julius Caesar, the standard woolen garb of Rome was beginning to give way to other options for the upper classes. The extent of the empire permitted well-to-do Romans the possibility of using cloth made of linen, cotton, or silk which could be purchased commercially, rather than spun wool woven by household slaves.

The basic male dress consisted of the *tunica*, made of two pieces of fabric sewn together at the sides and shoulders and belted in such a way that it just covered the knees. Openings for the arms were left at the top of the garment, creating an effect of cap sleeves when the tunic was belted. Tunics were not usually cut in a T-shape, but Julius Caesar was a noted exception to this rule. Sleeves on a tunic were considered rather “sissy”, but he changed that opinion over the course of his career. Colored stripes in differing widths are indicators of class on a tunic when they appear there.



The toga is the main garment that was typically Roman, and it was worn with decorum only by males. The average toga at the time of Julius Caesar was about 5 feet in width and three to four times the height of the wearer (12-16 feet) in length. For a man 5'7" tall, the measurements would be 49 inches wide and 14 feet 8 inches long. Over time the toga became longer and its draping even more elaborate.

The toga cloth was first folded almost in half lengthwise. It is then draped over the left side of the body, over the left shoulder, under the right arm, and back up over the left arm and shoulder. It is held in place partly by the weight of the material and partly by the wearer's left arm pressed against his body. The large overwrap in the front of the body was called a *sinus*, and part of the material underneath this fold was pulled up and draped over it to form the *umbo*.

Getting into a toga and draping it properly is a matter of no little difficulty. No pins or brooches were used. Keeping the toga on the wearer was a matter of careful draping and careful wear. If the pleats at the shoulder slipped, the rest would inevitably follow, leaving the wearer in a state of undress.



Decorum was precarious, and skill and care in draping essential since incorrect wear could actually damage a career. It needed to be draped to the correct length, show the colored stripe to advantage, and required the wearer to be “dress conscious” and exercise restraint in movement. Wearing the toga well was considered an accomplishment, demonstrating the wearer’s moral and social worth.

Members of the upper classes had specially trained slaves to get them into the garment. Citizens were supposed to wear them on all public occasions, but this was not stringently enforced until after the time of Julius Caesar.

There were at least five documented types of togas. Each had its own special meaning, marking differences in age and status. The toga worn by Rex Harrison in the film *Cleopatra* during the Entrance to Rome scene is the *toga picta*. This is a purple toga embroidered with gold thread worn by a victorious general during a triumphal parade. It was later adopted by emperors for state occasions. A variant of this costume was the *toga purpura*, an all-purple toga (no embroidery) worn by the early kings and possibly also adopted by some emperors.

A note on Roman or Tyrian purple: The color the Romans called purple was more like a deep crimson rather than the color we associate with the name today. The dye came from a snail and was greatly prized because the color did not fade, but instead became brighter with weathering and sunlight. It came in various shades and was extremely expensive and thus a symbol of status. The emperor Aurelian refused to allow his wife to buy a shawl of purple silk because it literally cost its weight in gold.



This fresco from Pompeii clearly shows the true Roman “purple”.

Sandals were the appropriate footwear for indoor use, but *calcei* (shoes), which encased the foot and covered the toes, were considered appropriate for outdoors and were always worn with the toga. Upper class males wore distinctively colored shoes to indicate their status, such as the red ones worn by patrician men.

## Appendix C: About the Film

April 29, 1961

"I first approached Miss Sharaff, who is one of the top Broadway designers, to do costumes for *Cleopatra* in 1958. Irene...brushed it off with, "It wouldn't be possible to do *Cleopatra* without making it look like a production of *Aida*." Now, however, she admitted that some of the excitement of our concept of the picture had reached her and agreed to design Elizabeth's (Taylor) costumes."

-My Life with Cleopatra

The filming of *Cleopatra* is the stuff of Hollywood legend. The "most expensive film ever made" up to that time, *Cleopatra* set a record only surpassed by James Cameron thirty years later. It was the subject of constant speculation and gossip for five years during its making, and has received much attention from authors interested in documenting the history of film as both a triumph and a fiasco. Artifacts from the film, particularly those associated in some way with the main stars, go for record amounts at auction.

The film was greenlighted by Fox for independent producer Walter Wanger in 1958. Originally set for filming in England during 1960. Three months after they began, they closed the production. A combination of inappropriate climate, production issues and illness of the actors involved resulted in no usable footage and costs of over \$5 million that were passed on to the 1963 production. This included a record setting \$1 million for the ailing Elizabeth Taylor.

The re-tooled version of the film was moved to Italy in September 1961. Both of the leading men, the script, the producer, the costume designer(s) and the cinematographer had been replaced. By the time of actual shooting any costumes worn by Taylor or Rex Harrison as Caesar, had been replaced by new versions designed by Irene Sharaff. The 65 outfits she wore in the film earned Elizabeth Taylor a *Guinness World Record* title, "Most costume changes in a film". This record was also not beaten until over 30 years later. The \$194,800 budget for Taylor's costumes was the highest ever spent for a single actor at the time

The impact of the film, combined with the events of the main stars' personal lives, had a tremendous impact on popular culture for years. Before and during the making and release of the film marketing expectations were high. The Fox Studio nearly bankrupted itself and experienced a dramatic and devastating change of top management as a result of the picture. The lives of the director, producer, and many of the stars associated with the Italian production also took major detours as a result of their involvement with the film.

Among those who did not take a hit for participating in *Cleopatra* was Irene Sharaff. She wound up with her fourth Oscar for design and went on to design costumes for several more films with Taylor and Burton, as well as the musical extravaganzas *Funny Girl* and *Hello, Dolly*. After *Cleopatra* she received four more nominations and won a fifth Oscar.

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