

## **Caesar and Cleopatra - clash for the real power: an analysis of the characters of Caesar and Cleopatra through the comic series “Asterix”**

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### **Introduction**

A combination of images and ideas with oodles of humour is a comic. People get to know about politics and other current issues through comic strips that appear in editorials, gag cartoons and so on. The fun loving people are fond of comics because not only it delights them but also it carries ample of information about current issues. The versatility of comics is well known to everybody as it carries the news about the world today and it can also trace back the history of the world. A comic strip in newspaper is the best example of the former whereas the popular comic series and books are the examples of the latter.

Historical perspectives in the most celebrated comic series ‘ASTERIX’ is the main focus of this paper. The history of the valiant Gauls and the intervention of Roman kings are also part and parcel of this paper.

### **History of Gauls**

Gauls refers to a particular group of people lived probably during the Iron Age in Western Europe (France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Switzerland). It is a general belief that the people of France are the direct descendants of Gauls. The Gauls lived happily in their own way till the invasion of many dominant emperors especially the Romans. The Gaulish people violently fought against all the invasions and they were dangerous enemies of Rome for centuries. During 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC, Gaul fell under Roman rule. The ambitious king Julius Caesar won over the kingdom within a short span of time through his campaigns. The Gauls were invincible and he could not impose his rules over them though he won the war. At the time of Caesar’s invasion, Gaul was a region made up of warlike feudal states. There was trade, but each village kept to itself, running its own affairs with its own government. So Caesar could not impose his authority over them.

The invincibility of Gauls is the base for the comic series. The series follows the adventures of one particular village which was still restricting the Roman occupation. The hero, Asterix and his inseparable friend Obelix undergoes many adventures in this series. The valiant characters appear in this series are portrayed as models showcasing the true valour of Gaul people. Asterix is the hero of the comic and he is unconquerable. This series depicts the bravery of the real Gauls through the imaginary character Asterix.

### **Asterix and his adventures-the beginning**

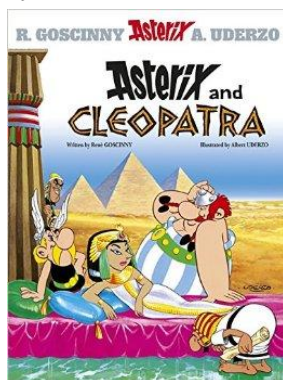
This popular French comic was first appeared in the Franco-Belgian comics' magazine PILOTE on 29 Oct. 1959. It was so popular that the series has been translated into over 100 languages and has been adapted into 12 films (eight animated films, four live action films). Rene Goscinny and Albert Uderzo gained popularity even before creating the Asterix series by another series named Onumpah-Pah, which was published in Tintin magazine. The success of Asterix series in Pilote magazine led to the publication of the book named *Asterix the Gaul* in 1961. It earned great name and fame, and then on Asterix books were released on a yearly basis till the death of Rene Goscinny. Uderzo felt a great blow after the death of his friend but he continued the series alone on the demand of the readers but on a less frequent basis.

### **Historical References**

History was not only touched upon in this series but also traced effectively as one can easily recognise it by their names itself. The major characters like Asterix, Obelix, bear the suffix *-ix* behind their names. This suffix *-ix* alludes to the suffix *-rix* present in the names of many real Gaulish heroes like Vercingetorix, Orgetorix. Asterix, the protagonist was modelled upon the greatest national hero Vercingetorix. Vercingetorix was a real time hero who bravely opposed the invasion of Romans into their land but frustrated by his clansmen's acceptance of Roman occupation. He fought against them with fearless heart and there were a few supporters who also opposed the invasion. The Romans under the leadership of Caesar lost against Vercingetorix and nearly 746 Romans were killed in that battle. On the contrary, he had a high regard for Caesar though he won over him. This comic not only centres the valour of Gaulish people but also adds flavour to the love affair of Caesar and Cleopatra.

### **Asterix-The Comic**

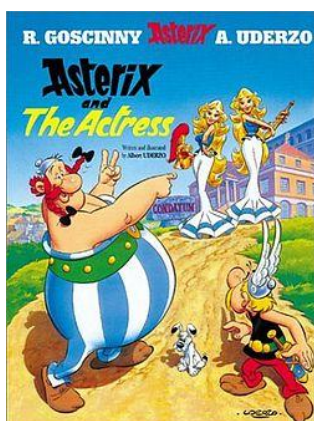
Asterix and Cleopatra, Asterix and the actress are the two comic series taken into consideration for this paper. The heroism of Asterix and the stereotypic mentality of Julius Caesar are the subject matter.



*Asterix and Cleopatra* is the sixth book in this series. This series describes the ego issue that prevailed between Julius Caesar and Cleopatra. They quarrel over the trivial issues and the quarrel ends up in a challenge. Cleopatra wins at the end with the help of Asterix and Obelix.

### **Story in a nutshell**

Julius Caesar looks down upon the Egyptians and Cleopatra feels bad about it. Cleopatra, being the Queen of Egypt, makes a wager with Caesar promising to build a new palace in Alexandria within three months. She appoints Edifis to carry over this great job and Edifis in turn seeks the help of Gauls and their magic potion. Getafix prepares special potion and the people are working harder and faster that the work goes forward on schedule. Caesar because of his jealousy makes troubles to the workers by sending his legion. This legion interrupts the work and infuriated Asterix delivers the news to Cleopatra. She rushes to the construction site and rebuke Caesar. He feels sorry for his mistake and orders his legion to fix the damage and the palace was completed successfully within the stipulated time. Edifis gets a great fortune and Asterix, Getafix and other Gauls are also rewarded.

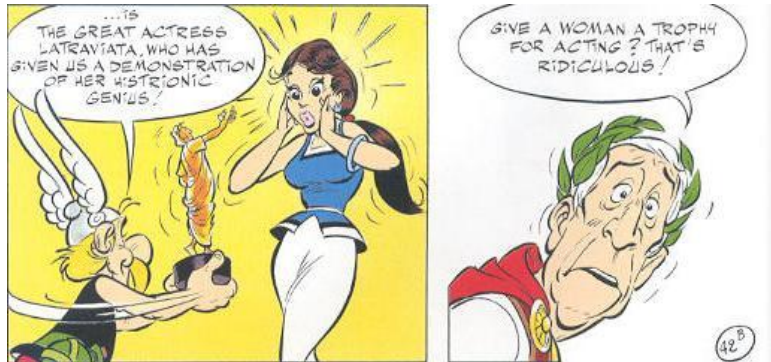


*Asterix and the Actress* is the first volume of this series to get released on 21<sup>st</sup> century. This story is based on the mistaken identity.

### **Story in a nutshell**

Asterix and Obelix celebrate their birthday on the same day and they receive stylish Roman sword and helmet as gifts from their parents. These two precious gifts belonged to Pompey, the life time enemy of Julius Caesar. Pompey tries to retrieve his possession by sending an actress named Latraviata. She disguises as Panacea, the lady who was envied by Asterix as well as Obelix and she tries to seduce them both to recover the possession. Meanwhile the real Panacea who was living with her husband appears in the scene to warn Asterix and Obelix about the imprisonment of their fathers. The problem starts when Latraviata and

Panacea meets each other. At the end, Caesar appears in the scene and the actress was awarded for her outstanding performance and Pompey regains his possession.



### Perspectives

“Absolute power corrupts absolutely”, is a popular saying and it is proved by these two comics. The power and ambition corrupts Caesar’s mind and it let to the downfall of his victorious life. The stories also portray the power of Gauls; the notable aspect is that they were not interested in dominating others whereas Caesar was interested. His stereotypical view is also caricatured in these two series and the above given picture is a perfect example for his mentality. He always views women as second sex. He even feels jealous of his own lover, Cleopatra. On the contrary people of Gaul respect both the gender.

The druids are the elderly people who advice about political issues to the kings or to the leader of the clan. Druid Getafix acts as an adviser and also a magician in this series. Vitalstatix is the leader of the village and his leadership is not very effective and it is clearly shown. Roman occupation was deferred for a certain period because of the magic potion and fearlessness of Asterix, not because of Vitalstatix’s leadership. In real time it was not so, the leader Vercingoterix was very brave and lion hearted.



## **Conclusion**

The historical characters like Cleopatra, Caesar are all caricatured as humorous characters in the series and it provokes laughter instantly. Throughout the ages, Caesar and Cleopatra were shown as elegant and romantic couple but Goscinny mocks at their ego and he ironically comments over their ideologies. Uderzo through his illustrations gave life to these characters. People are familiar with the heroes like Napoleon Bonaparte and Alexander the Great but are unfamiliar with the heroes who struggled hard to save their own country like Vercingetorix. The history of this unknown hero is made known by the Asterix comic series. Although, there are some minor inaccuracies like the depiction of Asterix as a smaller one and his winged helmet, the Gaulish people are undoubtedly brave and the hero Asterix is the representation of his clan. This comic series is considered to be a significant and the most successful one which gives a lot of moral values and showcases the value of friendship.

## **Reference**

1. Uderzo, Albert. *Asterix Omnibus*. Great Britain: Orion Publishing Group, 2007. Print.
  2. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asterix>
  3. <http://www.theguardian.com>
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