For the last few decades, people have been constantly going back and forth about Cleopatra’s race. Some argue that she is Macedonian/Greek, while others argue that she is Egyptian. These debates were recently sparked again during the announcement of a new Cleopatra film starring Gal Gadot.

My blog series Cleopatra and the Public aims to investigate the public debates about Cleopatra’s race as they occur on social media and among academic scholars. Not only are people discussing Cleopatra’s race, but they are also very passionate about the historical evidence. Reddit users seem to overall agree that Cleopatra is Macedonian/Greek.

However, classical scholars have inserted themselves to say that identifying Cleopatra’s race is a tricky subject from a modern perspective. Film adaptations of Cleopatra are based on people’s desires and fantasies.

Cleopatra is a popular media figure for both Egyptians and Arabs. She serves as a symbolic figure for African Americans based on a shared culture and history of oppression and exploitation rooted in Pan-Africanism. Finally, she is a popular ancient historical figure in Western society.

What are the nature of these debates? How do classical scholars insert themselves within them?

There is something enchanting about Cleopatra as a figure that leaves hundreds of people discussing her race and identity.