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Cleopatra

The life and loves of the world's most powerful woman

Elizabeth Benchley

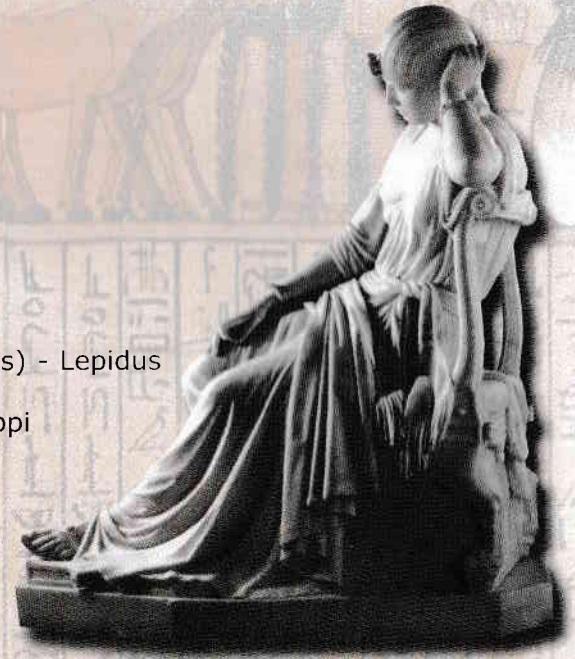


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Page 1	Cleopatra VII ,bronze coin, Mint of Alexandria, 40 B.C.
Page 2	The Death of Cleopatra, J.A. Rixens, 1874.
Pages 16, 120	David Roberts, Egypt, 1839.
Page 19	Basalt statue of Cleopatra VII.
Pages 21-22	The Lighthouse of Pharos.
Page 24	Marble statue of Cleopatra, W. W. Story, 1858.
Page 38	Cleopatra and Caesar, J. L. Gerome, 1853.
Page 42	Life on the Nile, 50 A.D., Pygmies Hunting, Pompeii.
Page 45	A copy from a mosaic (Palestrina mosaic): Royal Party.
Page 47	A statue of Caesarion.
Page 48	Cleopatra and a Peasant, E. Delacroix, 1850.
Page 56	Cleopatra, Michelangelo Buonarroti, 1535.
Page 61	Cleopatra and Antony, a Tapestry, Le Clere, 1680.
Page 63	Cleopatra, William Kent, 1730.
Page 65	The Meeting (Antony and Cleopatra), Tommaso Costa, 1760.
Page 67	The Banquet of Cleopatra, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, 1740.
Page 69	The Feast of Cleopatra, Tommaso Costa, 1760.
Page 74	Antony taking leave of Cleopatra, F. P. Stephanoff, 1840.
Page 88	Cleopatra, earthenware figure, Naples, 1795.
Page 92	Cleopatra, bronze statue, Hubert Le Sueur, 1636.
Pages 94-95	Vatican Cleopatra (copy): The Death of Cleopatra and Antony, England 1815.
Page 96	Cleopatra and Antony, 19 th century.
Page 102	The Suicide of Cleopatra, Milan, 1580.
Page 111	Cleopatra, A. Cabanel, 1887.
Page 125	Antony and Cleopatra, John Moyr-Smith, 1875.
Page 133	The Death of Antony, 1420.
Page 134	The Suicides (of Cleopatra and Antony), 1480.
Page 135	Cleopatra by the tomb of Antony, A Kauffmann, 1770.
Page 136	The Death of Cleopatra, in Giovanni Boccaccio book, 1400.
Page 137	A cobra, 80 B.C..
Page 139	The Death of Cleopatra, John Parker, 1749.
Page 142	The Death of Cleopatra, Bartolomeo Neroni, 1560.
Page 143	The Funeral of Cleopatra, Charles M. Challe, 1765.



- 69 B.C.** Birth of Cleopatra
- 48 B.C.** Caesar restores Cleopatra on the Egyptian throne
- 46-44 B.C.** Cleopatra resides in Rome
- 44-40 B.C.** Elimination of Caesar's assassins
- 44 B.C.** Assassination of Caesar
- 43 B.C.** Formation of the triumvirate: Antony - Octavian (Augustus) - Lepidus
- 43-42 B.C.** Victory of the triumvirate over Caesar's assassins at Philippi
Antony in charge of reorganizing the Orient
- 42 B.C.** Dionysiac entry of Antony at Ephesus
- 41 B.C.** Meeting between Antony and Cleopatra at Tarsus
- 40-34 B.C.** Formation of the two blocks
- 40 B.C.** Treaty between Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus
- 36 B.C.** Elimination of Lepidus
Octavian controls Africa and becomes the effective ruler of Rome
Parthian campaign of Marc Antony
- 34 B.C.** Organization of the "Antonian Orient"
- 32 B.C.** Western provinces pledge allegiance to Octavian
Declaration of war on Cleopatra Antony and his allies gather on the Island of Samos
- 31 B.C.** Battle of Actium and victory of Octavian
Antony and Cleopatra seek refuge at Alexandria
- 30 B.C.** Victory of Octavian at Alexandria
Suicide of Antony and Cleopatra
Egypt becomes a Roman province



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On August 10, in the year 30 B.C., the body of Cleopatra VII, The last Egyptian Pharaoh, was found in a mausoleum she had built for herself in Alexandria. Cleopatra had taken her own life at thirty-nine years of age. We shall probably never be certain with exactly what means she accomplished this, her last dramatic feat. However, much is known about the tumultuous, passionate, remarkable life that preceded it, and which, perhaps, made it inevitable. Cleopatra the Great left questions that have occupied the minds of generations since antiquity. Who was this enigmatic woman? By what talents and designs did she manage to influence the most powerful men the world had ever known, and to alter the course of history? To begin to understand we must delve deep into ancient times, and examine the roots and fertile ground from which the amazing Queen arose.



● Made in Greece ●

When the Macedonian conqueror Alexander the Great died in 331 B.C., he left behind no natural legitimate heir. Military administration of his far-reaching empire was divided among his generals. Ptolemy, son of Lagus, a Macedonian Greek, was a companion and advisor to Alexander who had recently been promoted to rank of general and entrusted with various military responsibilities. Ptolemy was not interested in controlling an empire and had never subscribed to Alexander's expansionist vision. He shrewdly opted out of the intense power struggle among the generals and undertook administrative control of Egypt, a wealthy and independent, although fairly isolated land, along with Libya and Arabia.

The man who would become the first Ptolemy Pharaoh was a man of contemplation and careful thought as well as of ambition and decisive action. His political astuteness and his personal ambition combined to make him a successful ruler. Ptolemy I contrived to have the body of Alexander laid to rest in Egypt, rather than in Macedonia, lending himself an air of identification with the great man.

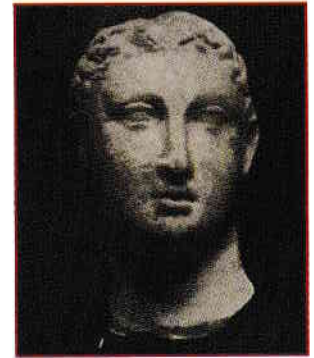
When Ptolemy I declared himself King of Egypt in 304 B.C., the 300-year rule of the Ptolemaic Pharaohs began. The city of Alexandria was the seat of the monarchy, and thrived and grew during his rule. The great Library of Alexandria was conceived and built during the reign of the first Pharaoh as were many other state buildings and structures. Ptolemy I oversaw and encouraged the immense intellectual and cultural growth of the city.

King Ptolemy I had several wives and many children. His third wife, Berenice, became original mother of the dynasty, as Ptolemy appointed his son by her his heir, even though he had older children by a previous wife. Historical conjecture holds that Berenice was in fact Ptolemy's full sister. If so, this began an almost ironclad family tradition by which most of the marriages in subsequent generations of Ptolemies were clearly incestuous in the first degree. Berenice was herself a forceful figure and a powerful woman who probably influenced the rule of Egypt as much as her brother/husband. Their son, Ptolemy II Philadelphus stepped up to the throne when at last at age 82, Ptolemy I stepped down.

Ptolemy II, a lover of art and poetry, and possessed of many positive personal characteristics, was by all accounts well respected and liked. A man of contradictions, however, he did on occasion demonstrate the fiery Ptolemy will and he certainly had a love of power. The second Ptolemy established a thriving court life in Alexandria, and continued his father's patronage of the arts and sciences. The great library doubled its holdings and was cataloged under his direction. Ptolemy II, like his father before him, placed great importance on the capital, and continued to expand and maintain the great city of Alexandria. Militarily, Egypt held its own in



Ptolemy I



Ptolemy II

the region and was secure as a powerful force to be reckoned with. Ptolemy II married his half-sister, Arsinoe, and she bore him a son, Ptolemy III. He later married a second Arsinoe, his full natural sister, and remained in that marriage until the latter passed away. It is said that this sibling marriage was also a true love relationship and that Ptolemy II mourned long for his sister-wife after her death. Numerous temples and statues in Alexandria were constructed in her memory, and she was worshipped along with the Egyptian gods.

The second Arsinoe had adopted her nephew/stepson Ptolemy III, and he was named heir to the throne. Ptolemy III married his sister Berenice, and ruled Egypt until 221 B.C., overseeing a great era in Egypt's history. This Ptolemy was perhaps less intelligent and astute than his predecessors, but he succeeded militarily and expanded Egypt's influence, especially to the east. Alexandria continued to flourish, and the country was wealthy and militarily secure.

Under the reign of the first three Ptolemaic rulers, Alexandria and Egypt experienced a golden age of growth and achievement. Alexandria was probably the largest city in the world, and definitely an intellectual and scientific center of great importance. The construction of the great palace of the Pharaohs took place during this time, and important agricultural and educational strides were made. The Alexandrian School was established and populated by numerous Hellenist Greek scholars. The library and museum attracted notable scholars as well, although no particular new discoveries or philosophies are traced to this period.

Things winds of change began to blow strongly after Ptolemy III.

While the tradition of incestuous marriage began right at the outset of the Ptolemaic dynasty, the first three demonstrated at least a modicum of personal



Ptolemy III

integrity. After that, the descent of the family into depravity, cruelty and greed became more pronounced with each succeeding Ptolemaic ruler. Murder of siblings, parents and children became as common as marriage among the same. When Ptolemy IV, son of Ptolemy III and Berenice came of age, a Ptolemy “bad seed” seemed to have emerged. Some believe that the inbreeding practiced by the clan had begun to cause the decline of its better attributes and the passing down of the more vicious and unsavory of human tendencies.

It is believed that Ptolemy III was murdered by his young son who was impatient to achieve the throne. Ptolemy IV then began his reign over Egypt with a sickening string of further murders that wiped out most of his remaining family, including his brother and mother. He married his sister, another Arsinoe, but was known to consort with both men and women of the court. This Ptolemy completely disregarded the Greek tradition of respect for family ties and regard for one’s elders, and simply ran rampant over anyone and everyone whom he perceived as any kind of threat. His life style was one of low pursuits, and he often entertained young boy prostitutes and a circle of various mistresses. Many of his closest advisors were known criminals. When he died, his wife, Arsinoe III was to become Queen, but her dead husband’s ministers had her put to death, and her son, Ptolemy V, then still a child, was put on the throne.

The Ptolemy dynasty continued its decline into vice and decrepitude. One after the other, the leaders repeated the pattern of incest and murder. The Ptolemies were energetic, intelligent, power-hungry and ruthless. Ptolemy V continued his father’s brand of cruelty and indiscriminate use of violence. Having no sister, he was the first of the line who was forced to marry outside the clan. His wife, Cleopatra I, ushered in a new era in the Ptolemy dynasty – that of dynamic and influential women. The women lusted after



power and demonstrated their ability to seize and use it as well. This pair reigned until the death of Ptolemy V at the age of 28 whereupon rule was passed to his son, Ptolemy VI. Ptolemy VI later married his sister, Cleopatra II, and they ruled for a time jointly with their brother, Ptolemy VIII until Ptolemy VI was driven out of Egypt and became king of Cyrene. The source of this falling out was undoubtedly the sexual triad the siblings engaged in, which could not be sustained long without an outbreak of jealousies and quarrels.

When Ptolemy VI died in 145 B.C., the monarchy passed to his 16-year-old son by Cleopatra II, Ptolemy VII. Ptolemy VIII did not stand by long and allow his nephew power, however. He married his widowed sister Cleopatra II, and immediately (some say at the wedding itself, in full view of his wife-sister) murdered Ptolemy VII. History has handed down the story that Cleopatra II accepted her brother-husband Ptolemy VIII into her bed that very evening, even though he had so recently killed her son that his hands were still stained with blood! If Cleopatra II had not begun yet to despise Ptolemy VIII, he gave her further reason when he seduced her daughter, Cleopatra III. This pair left Egypt for some time, likely haven been driven out by Cleopatra II, who then ruled alone in their absence. When they returned the three ruled Egypt together for a time, but this could hardly have been a happy alliance. Ptolemy VIII demonstrated a particularly despicable and cruel character. When he perceived his son by Cleopatra II to be a threat at one point, he ordered him killed and dismembered, and delivered the remains to the boy's mother as a "gift". Cleopatra II died, probably having been murdered by her daughter who wished to get her out of the way. Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra III were married, perhaps even before her mother's death.

Ptolemy VIII died in 116 B.C., leaving Cleopatra III as Queen of Egypt. The most powerful woman yet to come upon the Egyptian scene, Cleopatra III had two sons with her uncle-husband. His will mandated that she rule together with one of them, according to her choice. Cleopatra was partial to her younger son, Ptolemy X, who in his youth was pliable and suggestible and whom



Ptolemy III

she felt she could control. She despised the elder; Ptolemy IX whom she feared was plotting to take over her power and who seemed to have the ability to do so given a chance. Her hatred of her son was quite vehement and she persecuted him with all the fury of her character, which was considerable. Cleopatra's choice was Ptolemy X, although the council of Alexandria strongly apposed her. Ptolemy IX meanwhile took over the government of Cyprus, while his younger brother ruled jointly with their mother. The Alexandrians chafed miserably under Ptolemy X's rule, and wanted his brother to come back. Cleopatra was forced to allow him to return, replacing him in Cyprus with Ptolemy X. IX then ruled with his mother for a time, but she soon hatched a plot to have him exiled by pretending he had been caught plotting her murder. The younger brother then returned from Cyprus and again shared the throne with Cleopatra III. He had gained some maturity during this time however and apparently had grown into some of the Ptolemy greed and lust for power after all. Mother and son had a falling out, and Ptolemy X arranged to have Cleopatra murdered. He took over solo rule, until his death in a naval battle. Ptolemy IX was once more brought back from Cyprus and ruled Egypt until he died at age 62, leaving no