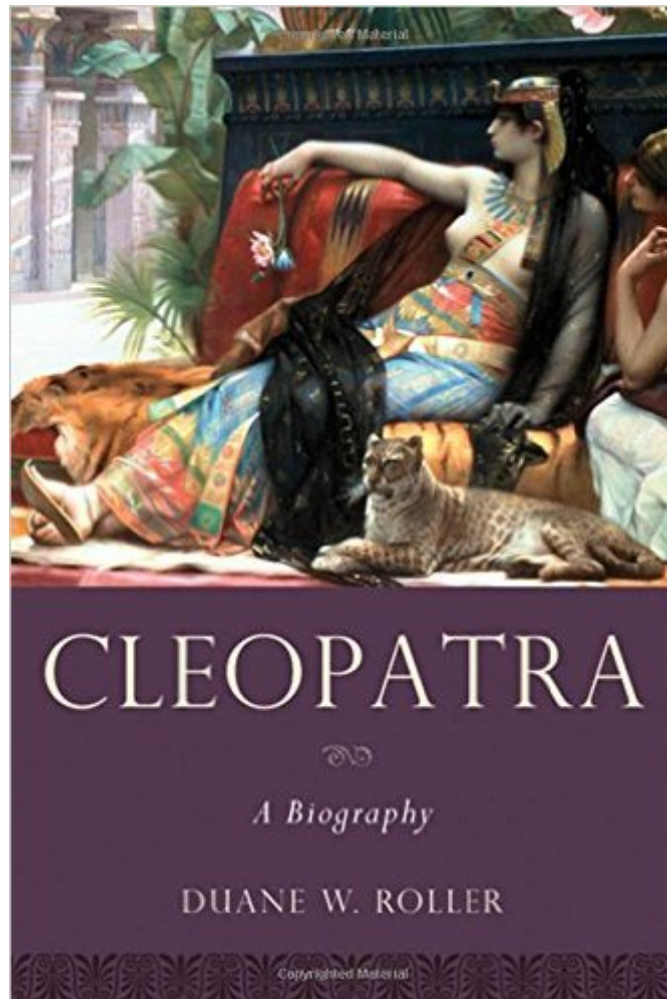


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Cleopatra: A Biography (Women In Antiquity)



Synopsis

Few personalities from classical antiquity are more famous--yet more poorly understood--than Cleopatra VII, queen of Egypt. In this major biography, Duane Roller reveals that Cleopatra was in fact a learned and visionary leader whose overarching goal was always the preservation of her dynasty and kingdom. Roller's authoritative account is the first to be based solely on primary materials from the Greco-Roman period: literary sources, Egyptian documents (Cleopatra's own writings), and representations in art and coinage produced while she was alive. His compelling portrait of the queen illuminates her prowess as a royal administrator who managed a large and diverse kingdom extending from Asia Minor to the interior of Egypt, as a naval commander who led her own fleet in battle, and as a scholar and supporter of the arts. Even her love affairs with Julius Caesar and Marcus Antonius--the source of her reputation as a supreme seductress who drove men to their doom--were carefully crafted state policies: she chose these partners to insure the procreation of successors who would be worthy of her distinguished dynasty. That Cleopatra ultimately lost to her Roman opponents, Roller contends, in no way diminishes her abilities. "Roller tells his tale smoothly and accessibly.... The resulting portrait is that of a complex, many-sided figure, a potent Hellenistic ruler who could move the tillers of power as skillfully as any man, and one far and nobly removed from the 'constructed icon' of popular imagination."--The New York Times Book Review "A rich account of late Ptolemaic culture." --The New Yorker "Offers a superb panorama of the society and culture of late Ptolemaic Egypt, with vivid sketches of the (remarkably vigorous) intellectual life of Cleopatra's Alexandria and the structural instabilities of the late Ptolemaic state."--Times Literary Supplement "Besides providing a compelling story and breathing fresh air into a heretofore two-dimensional caricature from history, Roller's 'Cleopatra' provides an interesting commentary on the attitudes still prevalent towards women who rule."--Christian Science Monitor

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Cleopatra is so well known, some 2,000 years after her death, that it makes for good reading to discover that many tales about her life are untrue. For instance, Cleopatra did not commit suicide by letting an asp bite her. (More likely, through needles to inject poison.) The story that Julius Caesar destroyed the Alexandria manuscript-library, the most important institution of its kind in those days, is probably an exaggeration. That Cleopatra was a Roman citizen and was involved in that City's politics. Probably most important, that fore and foremost, Cleopatra was a shrewd politician, not just a beautiful woman who seduced Caesar and Antonius. Everything she did was to protect Egypt and her throne. The role of Rome as an emerging sole superpower is reminiscent of today's political affairs: Changing sides, scandals, political corruption, bribery, proxy wars, budget crises, and the list goes on and on. One difference should be noted: Solving problems of prominent leaders who would not tow the line or presented future difficulties, was expeditiously handled by murdering them. In Egypt itself, under the Ptolomies as under the pharaohs before them, there were endless dynastic barbarities. This was mostly due to the customary incestuous marriages between royal brothers and sisters, the pretenders to the throne. Unfortunately, the author fails to explain how Cleopatra found the time to be the queen of Egypt, raise her children, and be an expert in medicine, master many foreign languages, and even be a competent navy commander. Readers would wish for some explanation how she managed to perform all these tasks. Puzzling are the number of references that, when everything was lost, Cleopatra contemplated escaping to India with her fortune to retire there.

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