

Historical investigation – cleopatra essay sample



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Amid the splendor of mighty pyramids and mystic sphinxes a baby girl was born. She would be remembered throughout history as Cleopatra, the last queen of Egypt. Cleopatra came to the throne at ripe age of 17 years of age, this would not only have an impact on her homeland of Egypt, but a far wider and dramatic effect on the Roman Empire as well.

Historical Context

Cleopatra was a member of the Ptolemaic dynasty, a family of Greek origin that ruled Egypt after Alexander the Great's death during the Hellenistic period. Cleopatra was regent during the time of the Roman Civil between the Caesarian party led by Mark Antony and Octavian and their opponents the assassins of Caesar took place. During this time period the Roman Empire conquered large areas and established military bases. Cassius also wanted to invade Egypt to seize the reassures of that country and to punish Cleopatra. At this time Egypt was also considered an easy target, as it did not have strong land forces, there was famine and an epidemic disease with symptoms similar to the plague. Egypt was economically crumbling.

Cleopatra gained the throne in a time when Rome was conquering city after city. Rome was slowly approaching their invasion on Egypt and its hierarchy was falling to pieces, politically Egypt was loosing its influence on the world. Towards the end of Cleopatra's Reign around 30BC during the Roman Civil war, there was pressure on the economy from the war and due to this the economy was rapidly dissipating, resulting in Egypt being in strife.

Background

Cleopatra (born Cleopatra VII Philopator) was born 69 B. C. E in Alexandria, Egypt (Figure 1) and was the last ruler of Egypt from the house of the Ptolemy, a family that had ruled Egypt for over 100 years. Cleopatra was the third daughter of Ptolemy XII Auletes, a family that could be traced back to the Macedonian House of Lagid Ptolemeis, who took the throne after the death of Alexander the Great. Her mother was Cleopatra VI.

Figure 1.

Nicolaus of Damascus, a Syrian historian reported that Cleopatra had three sisters and two younger brothers. Both of her brothers ruled Egypt with Cleopatra before their early deaths, Ptolemy XIII drowning during a fight with Caesar and Cleopatra killing Ptolemy XIV herself. Cleopatra learned her political lessons from her father and much like those that ruled before Ptolemy XII, their court was plagued with violence and corruption.

Growing up in this environment, part of the Ptolemaic Dynasty, she grew up to be ruthless, cunning and was able to govern at a very early age. She was also the only one of her line to speak the native Egyptian language along with nine others including Greek fluently, which ensured her popularity among Alexandrians. When Ptolemy XII Auletes died, he willed the throne to two of his children, Cleopatra and her brother, Ptolemy XIII. Cleopatra VII and Ptolemy XIII Philopator co-ruled together for a while. The minister of Cleopatra's 10-year-old brother found him much easier to control than her, and as a result, Cleopatra was exiled from Egypt in 48 B. C. E.

Significance

Cleopatra is of great historical significance for a variety of reasons. She was one of the few female pharaohs to rule in ancient Egyptian history, she achieved this through utilizing her charm and shrewdness to lure important men into forming political alliances with her, which resulted in marriages and children with two of the most significant men of that time period, Caesar and Antony.

When Caesar arrived in Alexandria after the Battle of Pharsalus, she seized the opportunity to use him to help her regain the throne through Julius' anger towards Ptolemy. Once she had fumbled across this idea she had herself smuggled into his palace to meet with him in a rug. Cleopatra and Caesar's relationship grew due to their mutual longing for power and money, Caesar wanted the riches found in Cleopatra's court, while she longed for power in Rome. During this period she became Caesar's mistress, nine months after their first meeting, in 47 BC, Cleopatra gave birth to their son, Ptolemy Caesar, nicknamed Caesarion, although Caesar never formally recognized him. At this point, Caesar abandoned his plans to annex Egypt, and instead helped Cleopatra claim back the throne. As a supporter of Cleopatra, Caesar engaged in war with Ptolemy XIII, and defeated Ptolemy's army at the Battle of the Nile where Ptolemy XIII drowned in the Nile.

Following Ptolemy XIII's death, Caesar appointed Cleopatra to her throne with her younger brother Ptolemy XIV as her new co-ruler. During the summer of 46BC Cleopatra, Ptolemy XIV and Caesarion visited Rome and stayed in Caesar's country houses. Their romance was a great scandal as Caesar was already married. After Caesar was assassinated during the Ides of March 44BC Cleopatra returned to Alexandria in April, shortly after

Ptolemy XIV was poisoned by Cleopatra. After Ptolemy XIV's death, she made her son her co-ruler on the throne while they awaited the outcome of the political struggle in Rome.

During the Roman civil war Cleopatra supported the Caesarian party who consisted of Mark Antony and Octavian against the party of assassins of Caesar. When Cleopatra was summoned and questioned about her loyalty, and charges of helping Brutus and Cassius in the conspiracy to assassinate Caesar she captivated Antony with her charm and bent him to her will. He then chose to spend the winter of 41-40BC in Alexandria with Cleopatra. On 25 December 40BC, Cleopatra gave birth to twins, Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene, fathered by Mark Antony. Four years later Antony made Alexandria his home, and renewed his relationship with Cleopatra and in 34BC their third child was born, Ptolemy Philadelphus. He then married Cleopatra according to the Egyptian rite, although he was at the time married to Octavia Minor, sister of his fellow triumvir Octavian. All of Cleopatra's children were murdered, except Selene who ended up getting married and becoming queen before dying in 6CE.

When Octavian and Mark Antony's relationship began to fall apart due to conflict involving Cleopatra he declared war against Antony, resulting in the battle of Actium. It was the decisive confrontation of the Final War of the Roman Republic. After being defeated Antony committed suicide by stabbing himself. Octavian was now able to consolidate his power over Rome and its dominions. Octavian then invaded Egypt and wanted Cleopatra to be his trophy, however, before this could happen Cleopatra committed suicide by a bite of an asp. (Venomous snake) on August 12 30BC. She did this purely to

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maintain her honour for herself and Egypt, unfortunately, her death ended the Ptolemaic dynasty, as her son, Caesarion was murdered on August 23 30BC. This resulted in Egypt becoming an exploited, though mostly prosperous Roman province.

Evaluation

Cleopatra's death had a great impact on Egypt as it ceased to be an independent power and became a province of the Roman Empire. The Egyptian culture, language and religion slowly vanished. Egypt did not regain independence as a nation again until the middle of the 20th century AD. For Rome, Cleopatra's death led to a sense of relief. They were grateful to be rid of the woman, whom they thought wanted to rule Rome and destroy their way of life. On a higher level the Romans were jubilant not only because of their victory over Cleopatra, but of the loot brought back to the city by Octavian. Each man and his sons received 400 sesterii. Due to this the cost of goods rose and merchants were able to make a profit, there was so much money in Rome that interest rates dropped from 12% to 4%.

Cleopatra will always be remembered, as a woman in history who seized any opportunity she could get her hands on. There are many components as to why Cleopatra is historically significant including her romances, involvement in wars and political behaviour. However, many know her as being a manipulative figure in history. She has become a romantic legend in modern times, as she was both a lover of the Roman emperor Julius Caesar and his general Mark. Cleopatra is known for her legacy of determination, beauty, and the legends surrounding her death. As Plutarch once quoted " Her

beauty, as we are told, was in itself not altogether incomparable, nor such as to strike those who saw her; but converse with her had an irresistible charm, and her presence, combined with the persuasiveness of her discourse and the character which was somehow diffused about her behaviour towards others, had something stimulating about it. There was sweetness also in the tones of her voice; and her tongue, like an instrument of many strings, she could readily turn to whatever language she pleased..." demonstrating just how memorable her beauty was.

She is also known as Cleopatra VII Philopator and is often represented as Isis, the Greek goddess of love, by the Romans. This is due to Caesar bringing her image back to Rome and constructing statues of her around his home, with reference to Isis. Her ambition for the throne made her name popular.

Although her moments of power were short lived, her determination to rule made history. Cleopatra was a very important Queen, and is now a very strong symbol associated with Egypt and its history. The stories and myths surrounding Cleopatra's tragic life inspired a number of books, movies and plays, including Antony and Cleopatra by Shakespeare.

Conclusion

Cleopatra is one the most renowned Pharaohs who reigned over ancient Egypt. She is mainly remembered for her love affairs with Caesar and Antony, as well as her desire to rule over Egypt. She heavily influenced the Roman Empire, as well as her homeland. Cleopatra is a historical figure whose name will be heavily noted for generations to come. Her beauty, determination and charm will always be remembered.

Resource List

WEBSITES:

Unkown, " Cleopatra VII Biography", 2012,

[http://www. notablebiographies. com/Ch-Co/Cleopatra-VII. html#b\(22 Jul 2012\)](http://www.notablebiographies.com/Ch-Co/Cleopatra-VII.html#b(22 Jul 2012))

This website for me the most useful website out all the ones I accessed. It gave me a great understanding behind Cleopatra's Significance and background. As it was divided into sub sections it was easy to subtract information. It gave a very detailed response about her life, especially information relating to her romances with Caesar and Antony. It was a very reliable source, and allowed us to access further information as it provided a resource list from where it subtracted its information. It was very precise and easy to understand. However, it lacked information in other areas relating to my historical such as context and detail involving her family, which resulted in further research. It was very helpful with my investigation and took a non-biased approach towards Cleopatra.

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Moran, M. July 10 2007, Nefertiti: A Novel (3 Aug 2012)

Graves, R & Grant, M. 1957, Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, Penguin Classics, London, England. (7 Aug 2012)