

# Egypt's greatest ruler Cleopatra the misunderstood English literature essay

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## Egypt's Greatest Ruler: Cleopatra the Misunderstood Mistress

Jocelyn C. Royer

In the time of ancient civilizations, Egypt was one to take note of in particular. A magnificent empire situated in Africa that was centred along the coast of the Nile River, the source of all life for ancient Egyptians at the time. As exaggerated as it may seem the Nile was life for them just as their ruler was supreme. This country was ruled by a Pharaoh rather than a King. The Pharaoh was more than a King for the Egyptians, he was a leader and ideally a God in the eyes of his people. But who was considered Egypt's greatest ruler? A genius among the many that there were. Egypt's last and final ruler was not one to be reckoned with, but as well not the commonly thought male figure that usually ruled over an entire civilization such as this one. This leader was a woman and one whose actions went down in history for all to see. Contrary to popular opinion Cleopatra's accession to the throne and her reign as one of Egypt's greatest rulers was not because she was a promiscuous beautiful maiden but rather the fact that she was an individual of high intellect, a persuasive speaker and a political prodigy. Although many factors prominently played their part in Cleopatra's life and why she was considered the great ruler many individuals saw her to be, the one ingredient to this recipe that was of the utmost importance was her intelligence and knowledge. It clearly states in the following: "She had an Egyptian belief in the absolute power of the Pharaoh, and a Greek reverence for knowledge and learning." (Hunt, 2008). What this demonstrates about her is that Cleopatra saw the importance of intelligence and that the means to attain power was evidently through the intake of knowledge by research and study. Her heritage and background allowed her to see the importance of

knowledge and learning all together relating back to the Greek interpretation of schooling and education. She would then combine it with the Egyptian understanding of complete and utter control to attain power. Most significantly relating back to the thesis, this is a relevant and critical point because it gave her the possibility to be able to gain the ability to learn and use other perspectives that she would use later on in her life as methods of persuasion and seduction. She was raised in an environment where there was a complete fusion between Greek and Egyptian cultures. This allowed her to not only understand one perspective but many in terms of history and culture. This brought diversity into her life and it gave her the understanding to know the difference between things whether they be simple or complex. Looking further into culture Cleopatra was brought up in a city that was considered one of the most cultured in the world during the era of classical civilizations, the city of Alexandria. It was named after Alexander the Great, the founding father of the Ptolemaic dynasty and an individual who appreciated education and learning. Ironically the city was also known as the capitol of learning, a place that would raise many teachers and philosophers of their time. In fact many scholars and philosophers even began to move to Alexandria because it became a place for teaching and learning. In the quote: "The ancient library of Alexandria. The library was the centre of Cleopatra's world, said to have held 700,000 scrolls collected by her ancestors." (Hunt, 2008). It explains that the library of Alexandria was the source that fed all of her hunger for learning. In doing so she was offered the opportunity to attain vast knowledge in all aspects of life at the time, helping expand her thoughts and ideas on a whole new scale. Quite relevant to the thesis because she

could use this to her advantage as a ruler, the library not only provided her with the knowledge and perception of many teachers and scholars but as well gave her the chance to learn from previous historical periods' mistakes and try to change what they did wrong or add to whatever they were missing at the time. Hence she gained insight on different ideas and stories that were written on scrolls. In the end this would only further her understanding of the world and all of its mechanics. As far as knowledge and understanding goes, it leads to more specific elements of Cleopatra's personality that made her one of Egypt's greatest rulers. This factor being her ability and skill as a speaker. Known internationally throughout the classical era for her persuasive and compelling monologues with some of the most powerful rulers in history that she undoubtedly lured in with her words of compulsion. Proof of her proficiency in speaking, "She was taught to speak 9 or 10 languages." (Elston, 2009). Being the only Ptolemaic ruler of Egypt to actually learn how to speak and even write in the native Egyptian language. It takes an individual with a passion for learning and speaking to actually take the time to learn multiple languages and understand them. Cleopatra was not only multilingual in the way that she could speak all of the languages she learned but she could also read and write in those languages. A crucial element relating back to the thesis, this point has huge importance because Cleopatra wanted to get her point across any way that she could even if that meant learning new languages. Being the only Ptolemaic ruler to learn Egyptian possibly showed her people that she cared enough about them to learn it, while it was more likely to be one of her many methods of manipulation and persuasive speaking when thought about more clearly.

Regarding her ability as a manipulative and ambitious speaker, Cleopatra often had many particular moments in her life where she could display her ability to try and get her way. She often used this ability to form alliances with the different empires when she felt Egypt was unsafe or her position was in danger of being taken from her altogether. This is evident in the quote: "Antony summoned her to Tarsus in Cilicia, she responded eagerly. Matching her preparations to the man whose weaknesses she knew, she dazzled Antony and bent him to her will." (Houghton, 2002). Cleopatra knew that her relationship with Caesar was going to perish and soon enough his position would be taken over or he would be killed. She saw the opportunity in this situation to seduce Mark Antony with her eloquent words and ideas. An essential factor that is hugely significant to the thesis, what people don't understand about Cleopatra was that she wasn't just getting what she wanted because she was beautiful but rather she understood that advantage and used it in a flirtatious manner to persuade and manipulate whoever she wanted into doing her chores. She was smart enough to comprehend that she had an advantage so why not use it. Cleopatra went to extraordinary lengths to try and save her empire that she even enveloped herself in a carpet to get into Caesar's palace to try and dazzle him. Last but surely not least, even though vast knowledge and great speaking skills were great assets to Cleopatra's reign as Pharaoh they would've only been semi-effective if not for her understanding of politics at an immeasurable level. Being the daughter of the previous ruler of Egypt and so forth even back to the beginning of the Ptolemaic dynasty, she was able to witness the evolution of politics and government through learning about the

history of her forefathers' reigns. In the quote: " She learned her political lessons by watching the humiliating efforts of her father to maintain himself on the throne of Egypt by buying the support of powerful Romans." (Gale, 1998). This explains that Cleopatra was taught lessons based on politics at a very young age, and later on used them as an advantage but also motivation to succeed and not make the same mistakes her father did. This relates to the thesis completely because Cleopatra was a political inspiration and had a captivating way of speaking that attracted almost every individual she met. Even later on in her life she used this skill to her benefit. Her meeting with Caesar was usually portrayed as a seduction on her behalf but it had vast political significance. Although it seems she became his mistress it is clear that they also became partners, instead of surrendering she formed an alliance and it's rumoured that she seduced him not sexually but persuasively with her words. Regarding her political prowess, Cleopatra had created her own form of propaganda that would inescapably entice her people once again to admire and see her as godly altogether. In the following statement: " In the Edfu temple, during its build Cleopatra depicted herself in statues and portraits as the Egyptian god Isis, but it was also hugely implied that Caesar was depicted as Horus." (Hunt, 2008). Cleopatra was stating to her people that she was not only their Pharaoh and ruler but one of their God's as well. She depicted herself as the Goddess Isis, the Goddess of fertility who also watched over the Nile. This was an excellent move on her behalf because regardless of the fact that she was being looked up to and idolized before, now she was being worshipped as a higher deity and this had compelled them completely to look at her only positively and with worshipping

intentions. This is significant to the thesis because it was a very cunning move on her behalf, she used Egypt's religion and beliefs as a way to display and enforce political propaganda thus making people conform to her in some way or another. It's as if she almost did it as a way to get their trust and to make them feel like she truly felt she was Egyptian. She even displayed huge interest in their culture, portraits of her were found dressed in complete historical and traditional Egyptian garments. She even made the effort to adapt her entire lifestyle to coexist with their own. In conclusion, though it may seem Cleopatra was only a pretty face with an alluring attitude she truly displayed the qualities of a great and memorable ruler and leader. Although there were multiple factors in her life that threatened her position on the throne such as her relationship with her brothers and the potential conquering of Egypt by both Rome and Greece. This only motivated and determined her to manipulate and persuade her way to the top, she was Egypt's greatest ruler by far. Even in her death she displayed how she was the one to have the last word, paying attention to Cleopatra's life and history as a whole she truly was an individual of high intellect, a persuasive speaker and a political prodigy.