Cleopatra Essay, Research Paper

Cleopatra

Cleopatra was queen of Egypt, last ruler of the dynasty founded by Ptolemy, a

Macedonian general of Alexander the Great, who took Egypt as his share in dividing

Alexander?s empire. Her capital, Alexander, founded by Alexander the Great, was

the center of Hellenistic Greek culture of the world at that time, as well as a great

commercial center. Although she imagined as a ?beautiful and glamorous woman

today, she was not very attractively depicted on ancient coins, having a long hook

nose, and masculine features? (Flamarion 181). She deemed to be a strong-willed

Macedonian queen who was brilliant and dreamed of a greater world empire. Highly

intelligent, this shrewd politician almost achieved this goal. Her contributions as the

last of the Ptolemaic Greek rulers of independent Egypt, were the endless expansion

of the Roman Empire throughout the Mediterranean, and at her death left behind ?a

rich, imperial province which continued to flourish as the center of commerce,

science, and learning under Roman rule? (Newman 554). This natural born leader

was the oldest living daughter of Ptolemy XII Auletes and of his sister and wife

Cleopatra Tryphaena. Such brother-sister marriages were common among members

of the Egyptian ruling house. Her father, who died in 51 BC, requested the

Cleopatra and his oldest son, Ptolemy XIII, become joint rulers, and made Rome the

guardian of the Egyptian state. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the life of a

prominent Egyptian figure, who through her determination and strong will,

established herself as a pharaoh and queen of Egypt.

Problems arose when the young Ptolemy began to serve as a puppet for

power-hungry advisers, who much have found him far more easy to command and

dictate than Cleopatra who was older and more intelligent. Cleopatra and her

brother started a civil war between themselves, which resulted in her being forced

into exile to Syria. In Syria, she raised an army and started back to Egypt to regain

her throne. In 48 BC, this ambitious monarch was in Pelusium, on the eastern

frontier of Egypt, with her newly acquired army preparing to attack her brother and

his associates. This battle was never fought, however, because Julius Caesar, who

had arrived at Alexandria in pursuit of Pompey, ?claimed the right to arbitrate the

quarrel? as the representative of Rome (Hoobler 28). Both Ptolemy and Cleopatra

were to dismiss their armies and meet with Caesar, who would settle their dispute.

Meanwhile, there was also a civil war going on between Caesar and Pompey.

Pothinus, knowing that Caesar would win, convinced Ptolemy XIII that it would be

best to have Pompey beheaded and have his head presented to Caesar, as a way to

convince him to join their side in the their civil dispute. Caesar had not been

?enchanted, and being friends with Pompey, did not desire to have him treated so

disrespectfully? (Foreman 61). Determined to present her case, Cleopatra sailed to

Alexandria in a small boat with only a few assistants. There she had herself rolled up

in to a carpet and carried to Caesar?s palace by one of her attendants who told the

guards it was a present for Caesar. She did this because it would have been

impossible to gain access to the palace without Ptolemy XIII discovering and killing

her. Cleopatra realized that in order to gain power she would have to remain on

good terms with Rome and its leaders so she successfully set out to captivate him.

Both Caesar and Cleopatra used each other to gain something, because he wanted to

obtain money, and her main concern was gaining power.

What had begun as a war between Cleopatra and Ptolemy XIII evolved into a

war between Ptolemy XIII allied with Arsine, his sister, against Caesar, and became

known as the Alexandrian War. Caesar read Aulete?s will to Ptolemy and forced

him to restore her to the throne. When Ptolemy XIII drowned in the Nile, Caesar

declared that ?Cleopatra should marry her younger brother, then eleven years old,

and rule as queen? (Newman 556) in order to please the Alexanderians and the

Egyptian priests. He remained in Egypt, ignoring his affairs in Rome and in the East,

?out of arrogance and his desire to get his hands on Egypt?s vast resources?

(Foreman 99). On his return to Rome, Caesar asks the tribune of the people, Helvius

Cinna, to introduce into the Roman Senate a law permitting Caesar to marry

Cleopatra and make their son, Caesarion, his heir. Many were upset that he was

planning to marry Cleopatra regardless of the laws against bigamy and marriage to

foreigners. It took Caesar two years to defeat Pompeian opposition, and as soon as

he returned to Rome, they celebrated a four-day triumph, or a ceremonial parade

held to honor victorious generals. This quick-witted woman arrived in Rome with

Ptolemy XIII and Caesarion, and they lived in Caesar?s villa, where he visited her

constantly. Cleopatra had started calling herself the New Isis and was the subject of

much gossip. A golden statue of her had been put in the Temple of Venus Genetrix,

the anchantress of the Julian family to which Caesar belonged. On the Ides of March

in 44B.C., Caesar was assassinated outside the Senate building in Rome, ?due to the

threat that he posed to the well-being of the republic, because they believed that he

was going to declare himself king? (Foreman 83). Shortly after Caesar was stabbed,

Cleopatra left Rome, and one year later Ptolemy XIII died, just before he would have

reached the legal age at which he could be expected to participate in the government,

and some say she may have poisoned him. On Ptolemy?s death, Cleopatra had her

son, Caesarion, or ?Little Caesar,? made co-ruler at the age of four.

Caesar?s assassination caused anarchy and civil war in Rome. Eventually the

empire was divided among three men: Caesar?s great-nephew, Octavian, Marcus

Lepidus, and Marc Antony. Antony, as one of the new rulers of the Eastern empire,

summoned Cleopatra to Tarsus to answer charges that she had helped republican

forces. Antony was in need of money to launch a campaign against the Parthians,

and hoped Cleopatra would give him the funds he desperately needed. She set out

for Tarsus in Asia Minor with lots of gifts, and entered the city on a magnificently

decorated boat. She sailed with silver oars, purple sails, and dressed as Aphrodite,

the Goddess of Love. She already new enough about his ?limited strategic and

tactical abilities, his blue blood, the drinking, his womanizing, his vulgarity and his

ambition,? (MacUrdy 79) to know how to get to him. After much feasting and

entertaining for days, Egypt remained an independent country instead of becoming a

Roman province, as Antony intended. This very seductive woman agreed to provide

him with money on the condition that her sister, Arsinoe IV, be executed. Forgetting

his responsibilities and duty to the Roman empire, he accompanied this charismatic

individual to Alexandria and spent the winter with her there. In the spring of 40 BC,

Mark Antony left Cleopatra and returned home, after giving her much land,

including Cyprus, the Cilcian coast, Phoenicia, Coele-Syria, Judea, and Arabia,

which was very essential to Egypt.

After the formation of the Second Triumvirate between Antony, Octavian, and

Lepidus, Antony married Octavia, Octavian?s sister, in 40 BC to seal a deal with

Octavian. It stated that ?after the Triumvirate ended the two would both rule the

Roman world, though they allowed Lepidus to remain in northern Africa and govern

the area? (Foreman 95). Octavian held all of western Europe and Antony held the

eastern end of the Roman world. Upon forming this pact, he then went east to meet

with Cleopatra again, because he needed money for his campaign, and later made a

huge mistake by marring her, ?which was not morally wrong, but by Roman law was

invalid? (Hoobler 32). In 37 BC, however, Antony?s march eastward led to renewed

friendship and an understanding between both Antony and Cleopatra. From then

on, Cleopatra?s influence over Marc Antony grew, and she wore Egyptian clothing

that represented the goddess Isis and is reported to have adopted the following oath:

?As surely as I shall one day dispense judgment in the Roman Capital? (Newman

556). When Antony arranged for Caesarion, and his own three children by

Cleopatra, to share ruling both Egypt and Roman provinces in Asia Minor and

formally divorced Octavia, the Romans were furious. Octavian declared war not

against Antony, but against Cleopatra, and announced Antony into the Senate.

Romans felt it was much better to declare war on the foreign queen that they believed

was influencing him, than on Antony himself. Cleopatra prevented Antony from

leaving her to fight Octavian, who was winning much of his eastern territory from

him. At the battle of Actium in 31 BC, Cleopatra?s Egyptian forces, together with

Antony?s Roman forces, faced Octavian?s fleet, commanded by Marcus Vipsanius

Agrippa. During this naval battle, when Cleopatra retreated and Antony, infatuated

as he was with her, quickly followed, and Octavian won a great victory. Antony

joined his legions in Cyrene, and Cleopatra turned to Alexandria to recruit more

troops and to raise new fleet. Octavian offered Cleopatra favorable treatment if she

would kill Antony, but she refused. She believed, however, that if he thought she

were dead that he would commit suicide, and she was right, his last words being,

?Now, Antony, why delay longer? Fate has snatched away your only reason for

living? (Flamarion 219). With that, he plunged a dagger into his stomach, however

did not die instantly.

She was a mysterious and intriging woman who seemed that she would do

anything to keep Alexandria under Egyptian rule no matter what the consequences.

Rather than have to face the humility of attending her enemy?s triumph, she

committed suicide by being intentional bitten by an asp, which was an Egyptian

cobra, and was buried at Antony?s side as she had requested. She died on August 12,

30 BC, at the age of 39. The Egyptian religion declared that ?death by snakebite

secured immortality, allowing her to achieve her dying wish, not to be forgotten?

(MacUrdy 129). Her death was the mark of the end of Egyptian Monarchs, as well

as the last Egyptian Pharaoh, because after her death, Egypt became a Roman

province, however her legacy still lives on.

nces.

Works Cited

Foreman, Laura. Cleopatra?s Palace: The Search for the Real Queen of the Nile.

New York: Cambridge UP, 1973.

Flamarion, Edith. Cleopatra: The Life and Death of a Pharaoh. New Jersey:

Macmillan, 1981.

Hoobler, Thomas. Cleopatra. London: Random, 1989.

MacUrdy, Grace Harriet. Hellenistic Queens: A Study of Woman Power in

Macedonia, Seleucid, Syria, and Ptolemaic Egypt. New York: Little, 1984.

Newman, Robert. The Warrior Queens. Toronto: McGraw, 1977.

Foreman, Laura. Cleopatra?s Palace: The Search for the Real Queen of the Nile.

New York: Cambridge UP, 1973.

Flamarion, Edith. Cleopatra: The Life and Death of a Pharaoh. New Jersey:

Macmillan, 1981.

Hoobler, Thomas. Cleopatra. London: Random, 1989.

MacUrdy, Grace Harriet. Hellenistic Queens: A Study of Woman Power in

Macedonia, Seleucid, Syria, and Ptolemaic Egypt. New York: Little, 1984.

Newman, Robert. The Warrior Queens. Toronto: McGraw, 1977.