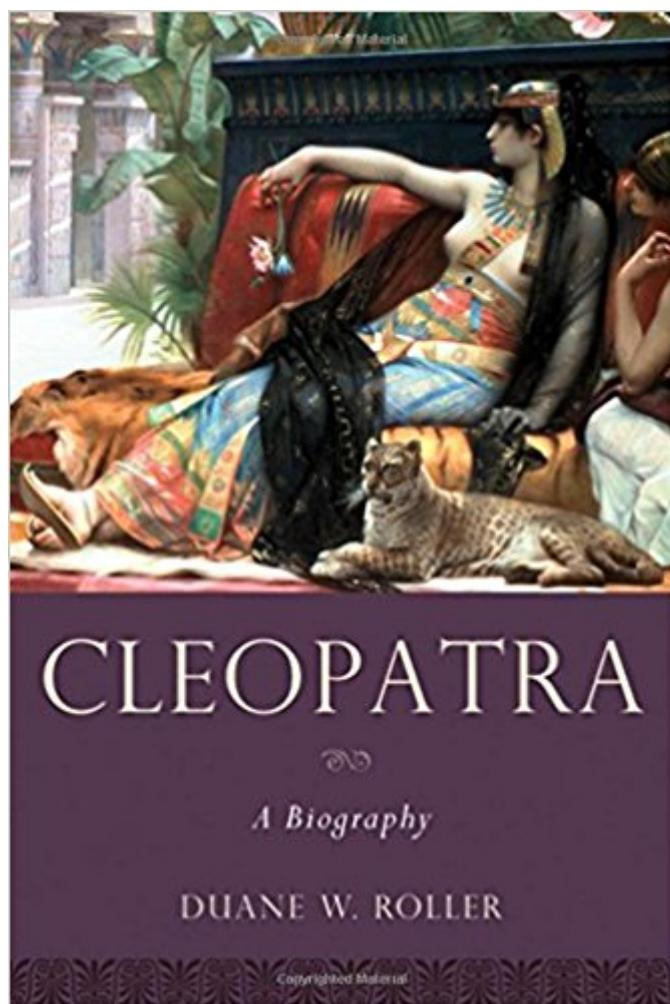


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Cleopatra: A Biography (Women In Antiquity)



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

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Customer Reviews

Since Cleopatra remains one of the most fascinating females in the annals of history, one more full-length biography couldn't hurt. Roller begins with the premise that Cleopatra has been generally misunderstood by centuries of biographers and historians. This misinterpretation has led to the emergence of Cleopatra as a popular-culture icon rather than a politically savvy and calculating leader. Basing this chronicle exclusively on primary sources culled from classical antiquity, the author painstakingly separates myth from reality, discounting her undeserved reputation as a seductress and concentrating on her impressive—but often overlooked or minimized—political, military, and administrative achievements. This revisionist portrait of one of the most powerful women in the ancient world adds substance and heft to her exotic legacy.

--Margaret Flanagan --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"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 "A rich, comprehensive portrait of Cleopatra in her many dimensions--skilled orator, medical writer, linguist, naval commander, administrator, accomplished diplomat. Using only data from the ancient world itself, Duane Roller deftly disentangles the historical queen of Egypt from her later legendary selves. The real Cleopatra emerges in all her many-sided splendor, with some surprises for us all." --Margaret George, author of The Memoirs of Cleopatra and Helen of Troy "Duane Roller has written a superb biography of Cleopatra VII. Accessible to the general reader and yet free of sensationalism, this book provides a clear account of what can be historically known about the famous queen and the cultural context in which she lived." --Kathryn Gutzwiller, University of Cincinnati "Meticulously researched, compellingly written, and with judicious use of the sources, Roller's often breezy prose style makes for enjoyable reading, and his no nonsense historical approach, leaving all of the speculative myths, propaganda and legends to others, breathes some fresh air into a subject who is after all one of the greatest and most enigmatic figures of the ancient world, and who lived during perhaps the most momentous couple of decades in Mediterranean history. Roller restores to us both a sensible

picture of the queen and a well-rounded sense of her life, her surroundings, and the culture and institutions that made Egypt in the last century BC so fascinating to Rome, and such a threat." --Joseph Manning, Yale University "Did we really need another scholarly life of Cleopatra after Joyce Tyldesley's Cleopatra: Last Queen of Egypt (2008)? Surprisingly, the answer is yes...Cleopatra reclaims her stature as a significant monarch of her era in this unsentimental corrective to the romantic legend. Recommended for all who study her era." --Library Journal "A straightforward, reader-friendly biography of this intriguing and powerful ruler...a definitive account of a queen of remarkable strength" --Publishers Weekly "A treasure trove of facts that show [Cleopatra] in a new light." --Austin American-Statesman "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 "Thought-provoking...adds a dose of historical accuracy to the romance of her life." --The Weekly Standard "Compulsively readable." --Bookslut "The 'Women in Antiquity' series aims to provide 'compact and accessible introductions' to the figures it treats, and Roller succeeds admirably on this front. Short, well-written chapters trace the main events of Cleopatra's life, with stops along the way for the Egyptian backdrop; endnotes provide essential documentation; and a series of appendices provide useful reference material such as a Ptolemaic genealogy and discussion of controversial points." --Bryn Mawr Classical Review "Besides providing a compelling story and breathing fresh air into a heretofore two-dimensional caricature from history, Duane W. Roller's "Cleopatra" provides an interesting commentary on the attitudes still prevalent towards women who rule. It tells us that we still have a ways to go before there is true gender equity in the political realm." --Christian Science Monitor "A rich account of late Ptolemaic culture." --The New Yorker "Demonstrate[s] why feminist history is necessary." --The New Republic

A great book and one that will help introduce students to this woman, mother, ruler, and seducer. I would recommend this as a great place to begin research and possible paths for further investigation. I did not agree with everything and the author is too dismissive at times of real issues and potential realities but such is the nature of our work and profession.

I recommend this book to history buffs or to anyone who is Cleopatra's biggest fan. It gives good insight as well historical blood lines leading up to Cleopatra's rise to the throne. It's a good read if you want to learn more about Cleopatra.

Cleopatra is the most interesting!

You will experience the drama of that fascinating, ancient age in this fresh look at Cleopatra. This book should be picked up not only by courses in classical history, but by Women's Studies classes everywhere. This carefully researched and scholarly history makes clear that the Hollywood version is only partially accurate - Cleopatra chose to see to it she was educated as well as any man, and evidently had the charisma to hold her own with anybody in negotiations on behalf of her beloved Egypt. It's even a great beach house read, for the right kind of people.....! Hooray for strong women everywhere, in all times!

Nothing new here and in fact, much is incorrect. Discoveries in the past decade which gave new information, this author chose to ignore. Even the map of Alexandria is incorrect.

This book has a very long introduction discussing Cleopatra's lineage, taking many detours through the politics of the time. There's finally some discussion of Cleopatra starting in chapter 3 (Cleopatra's Youth and Education) but again the narrative is mostly about politics. Out of the 8 chapters i'd say 7 are about everything else, the epilogue, appendices, notes, bibliography and index of passages cites take up the rest of the book. I understand that this is an academic paper but I really think that the title is misleading because there's very little biography and plenty of everything else. If you are looking to learn about Cleopatra's life, this is not the book.

It was good but a little too much detail with a lot of extraneous names which didn't add to the story. I did find it interesting.

This is a serviceable biography of Cleopatra. The scholarly digressions are consigned to helpful appendixes that Roller uses as small seminars for airing points of dispute, as a good many remain. What, for example, were the origins of Cleopatra's mother? Was Cleopatra -- the quintessentially vile foreigner according to Octavian's propaganda -- a Roman citizen? (Roller believes she was.) And Roller offers a digest of classical literary descriptions of the queen and a discussion of her iconography (including coin portraits, which are the only certain likenesses) to pinpoint those elements of her modern identity that only evidence from the period can prove or support.

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