



Bio4Kids: Cleopatra
(69 B.C.- 30 B.C.)

Brief Outline

As queen of ancient Egypt, Cleopatra is one of the most famous female rulers in history. Officially, she is known as Cleopatra VII—she was the seventh woman in her family to have the name. But she is the one that made the name famous. Her family had ruled Egypt for more than 100 years before she was born around 69 bc. One of her ancestors was Ptolemy, a Greek general who helped Alexander the Great conquer Egypt in 332 bc. Ptolemy became king of Egypt after Alexander's death in 323 bc.

The daughter of a king, Cleopatra learned how to govern by watching her father. She also learned many different languages so that she could communicate with the people of Egypt and those in other lands. After her father's death, Cleopatra rose to power around 51 bc.

At first, Cleopatra shared the throne with her younger brother-husband, Ptolemy XIII. As strange as that sounds to us now, brothers and sisters marrying was not uncommon for the royalty of ancient Egypt (sometimes it was the only way for a woman to rule). But they didn't share power for long. With help from his advisors, Ptolemy was able to take control of the government and to force Cleopatra flee Egypt in 48 bc.

Cleopatra, however, would not give up the throne without a fight. To help win back her throne, she made friends with Julius Caesar, the Roman ruler. Cleopatra was charming and smart, which made Caesar want to help her. Caesar helped Cleopatra regain power, which she again shared with another

brother-husband, Ptolemy XIV. But Cleopatra wanted to be with Julius Caesar. She was pregnant with their son, Caesarion. After Caesarion was born, Cleopatra and her son left Egypt for Rome in 46 bc to be with Caesar. Unfortunately, the relationship ended in tragedy when Caesar was assassinated by some of his former friends in 44 bc.

After Caesar's death, Cleopatra and her son returned to Egypt. She found a way to make her son her co-ruler. (it is believed that she had her brother-husband killed.) A few years later, she met another Roman leader, Mark Antony, and soon started a relationship with him. Shortly after, she became pregnant and gave birth to twins: a son was named Alexander Helios and a daughter Cleopatra Selene. Antony returned to Rome and later married Octavia, the sister of another Roman leader, Octavian.

Antony left his wife around 37 bc and met up with Cleopatra again. He hoped she would help him gain more power and lands. The two joined forces politically and personally. They married and had a third child together Ptolemy Philadelphus. With their children, they ruled many lands besides Egypt, including Cyprus, Crete, and Syria.

Antony's actions angered Octavian and he convinced the Roman senate to go to war against Egypt in 32 bc. The next year Antony and Cleopatra suffered a devastating defeat at the Battle of Actium. Following the war, Antony killed himself. By some accounts, he did this after hearing a false report that Cleopatra was dead. Cleopatra did not want to be captured by Octavian so she committed suicide in 30 bc. (Some reports say she poisoned herself and another popular story goes that Cleopatra died after letting a poisonous asp, a type of snake, bite her.)

The stories and myths surrounding Cleopatra's tragic life inspired a number of books, movies, and plays. One of the most famous one is the play Antony and Cleopatra by William Shakespeare. Cleopatra has become one of the most well-known ancient Egyptians.

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