Name:
Date:

CLEOPATRA

Cleopatra was the last queen of ancient Egypt and one of the most famous rulers of the ancient world. Her story is one of power, ambition, and romance. Cleopatra was born in 69 BCE, long after the era of the pharaohs had passed, yet she was worshipped by many Egyptians. Cleopatra was born in Egypt, but her ancestry was Greek. She was part of a ruling family that had controlled Egypt for hundreds of years.

The Ptolemys

Alexander the Great was a military genius from Macedonia, a mountainous land north of Greece. He led his army into Egypt and freed the Egyptians from Persian rule. After his death in 323 BCE, Alexander's empire was divided among his top generals. Ptolemy became the ruler of Egypt and the first ruler of the Ptolemaic dynasty.

Ptolemy XII was Cleopatra's father. When Ptolemy XII died in 51 BCE, his will decreed that seventeen-year-old Cleopatra and her twelve-year-old brother, Ptolemy XIII, were to marry and rule Egypt. The marriage was a political arrangement, and while no personal records survive, the evidence suggests it was not a traditional marriage.

Cleopatra Breaks with Tradition

Cleopatra soon broke with the traditions followed by her father and her brother. While the other Ptolemies spoke only Greek, Cleopatra mastered the Egyptian language and openly practiced Egyptian religious customs. Many Egyptians worshipped her as a pharaoh. By 48 BCE, Cleopatra's generals found they could not control the assertive young queen, so they ousted Cleopatra and made her brother the sole monarch of Egypt.

Alliance with Julius Caesar

A few months later, Julius Caesar led a Roman army to Egypt in pursuit of a rival Roman general. His army was much larger than the Egyptian forces, so Cleopatra devised a plan to use Caesar to regain power. According to a well-known story, Cleopatra arranged to have a carpet delivered to the 54-year-old Caesar. When he unrolled the carpet, he found the 21-year-old former queen wrapped inside. Caesar and Cleopatra became allies, and he restored her to power. Ptolemy XIII drowned in the Nile while trying to flee Caesar's army.

Egyptian custom did not allow a queen to rule without a king, so Cleopatra married another brother, Ptolemy XIV, but her relationship with Julius Caesar went far beyond politics. The two spent the next several months traveling along the Nile, where Caesar saw how the Egyptian people worshipped Cleopatra as a pharaoh. Cleopatra later gave birth to Caesar's son, Caesarion. Caesar was a powerful general who had conquered many lands. In Egypt, he saw that Cleopatra had a kind of power he desperately wanted but could never claim.

Caesar returned to Rome in 46 BCE with Cleopatra and their newborn son, Caesarion. Caesar was so popular with the Roman people that he was named dictator and given complete power. Cleopatra was less popular with the Romans. The people were uneasy about Caesar's close relationship with a foreign queen, especially since he was already married. Cleopatra had also angered the Roman people by calling herself the "new Isis." When a group of senators murdered Caesar in 44 BCE, Cleopatra returned to Egypt, where she apparently poisoned Ptolemy XIV and named the four-year-old Caesarion as the new Egyptian king.

A Power Struggle in Come

Rome was in turmoil after Caesar's murder as several armies competed for control. The two greatest were led by Marc Antony and Octavian. Octavian was the adopted son of Julius Caesar, but Antony commanded a powerful army. When Antony asked Cleopatra to meet with him, she saw another opportunity to return to power in both Egypt and Rome. A legend says that when Cleopatra met Antony, she adorned her ship with so many rose petals that the Romans knew of her fragrance before they could see her. She stepped off the ship dressed as Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Antony was immediately love-struck. He was already married to Octavian's sister, but he had three children with Cleopatra.

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*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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Name:

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The Death of Cleopatra

Octavian defeated Antony's forces and led an invasion of Egypt in 30 BCE. Antony took his own life by falling on his sword. Fearing that she would be paraded through Rome as a captive, Cleopatra decided it would be better to end her life. A legend says the former queen asked for an asp, an Egyptian cobra, to be delivered to her in a basket of figs. The asp was a symbol of royalty to the Egyptians, so by allowing the asp to bite her, Cleopatra avoided humiliation by ending her life on her own terms.

Fill in the Blanks

Cleopatra was the last Egyptian q__e__n. She was born long after the era of the p__a__a__hs had ended, but she was very *p__p__l__r with many Egyptian people and was w__r__h__p__ed as a pharaoh in some parts of her *n__t__on. Cleopatra was born in Egypt to a Greek family named P__o__e__y that came to power after the death of A__e__a__d__r the G__e__t. Cleopatra's father's will decreed that Cleopatra share power with her y__u__g__r brother, but when Cleopatra was ousted as queen, she turned to a powerful Roman g__n__r__l named J__l__us C__e__ar to return her to power. Cleopatra and her son, C__e__a__i__n, moved to R_____, but she returned to Egypt when Caesar was m__r__e__ed.

After the death of Caesar, Cleopatra fell in love with a R__m__n general named M_____ A_____. Antony and Cleopatra hoped to rule Rome and Egypt together, but when their forces were d__f__a__ed in war, Antony k__l__ed himself. When Cleopatra realized that she would be forced to live as a s__a__e in a land she once ruled, the former queen allowed herself to be b__t__en by a p__i__o__o__s snake that was a s__m__ol of r__y__l__y in Egypt.

Answer in complete sentences

*1. Why was it surprising that Cleopatra was worshipped as a pharaoh in many parts of Egypt?

*2. Explain how Cleopatra could be described as being both Egyptian and Greek.

*3. Why do you think Cleopatra was initially interested in meeting Julius Caesar?

*4. Why did Cleopatra end her life?

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