

CLEOPATRA

Queen
51 to 30 B.C.

Cleopatra was the last ruler of Egypt. She was also the only one of the Ptolemys to learn the Egyptian language—all the others had just used Greek. She started her reign when she was just 19 years old. She ruled with her father, Ptolemy XII, for the last year of his life. Then she ruled with her brother, Ptolemy XIII, who was five years younger than she. In 48 B.C. she found he was plotting her death and fled to Syria, returning with an army to fight against him for the throne.

The Roman general, Julius Caesar, helped Cleopatra back to power, making her co-ruler with her younger brother. Cleopatra had a love affair with Caesar, and in 47 B.C. she had his son. In 46 B.C. she and her husband went to Rome to visit Caesar. They stayed until Caesar was assassinated two years later. They then returned to Egypt, where Cleopatra assassinated her brother and ruled with her young son, Caesarion.

► Cleopatra in the early years of her reign. Unlike Hatshepsut, Cleopatra never tried to rule as a pharaoh, so she dressed as a queen.

FAMOUS BEAUTY

"Her beauty was not of that incomparable kind ... but the charm of her presence was irresistible, and there was an attraction in her person and her talk ... that laid all who associated with her under its spell."

from Plutarch's description of Cleopatra, in his work *Mark Antony*





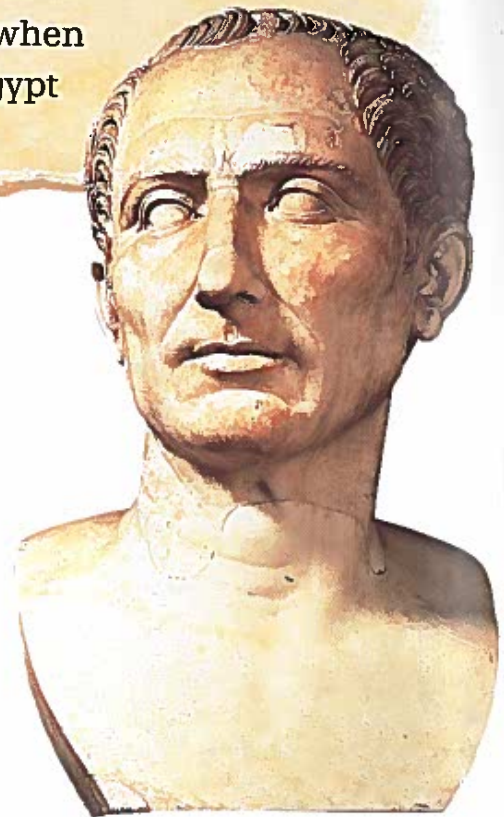
SPOTLIGHT ON CLEOPATRA

Name:	Cleopatra
Job:	Queen
Ruled:	51 to 30 B.C.
Family:	Father was pharaoh Ptolemy XII
Married:	Both her brothers (Ptolemy XIII and Ptolemy XIV) and Mark Antony
Children:	A son, Caesarion, who she said was the son of Julius Caesar and three children by Mark Antony
Personality:	Bossy, intelligent, ruthless
Most famous act:	Committing suicide when Octavian took over Egypt

Caesar was dead, but Cleopatra still needed Roman support. She met the Roman leader Mark Antony and persuaded him to visit Alexandria. By 37 B.C. they were married. This gave Cleopatra Roman support for her rule. Antony could use Egyptian money and supplies to keep his army going. However, Antony also married the sister of the man with whom he ruled the Roman Empire, Octavian. If Mark Antony had returned to Rome, treating his marriage to Cleopatra as a political alliance, he might have survived. He stayed in Egypt and handed over land that was part of the Roman Empire to Cleopatra.



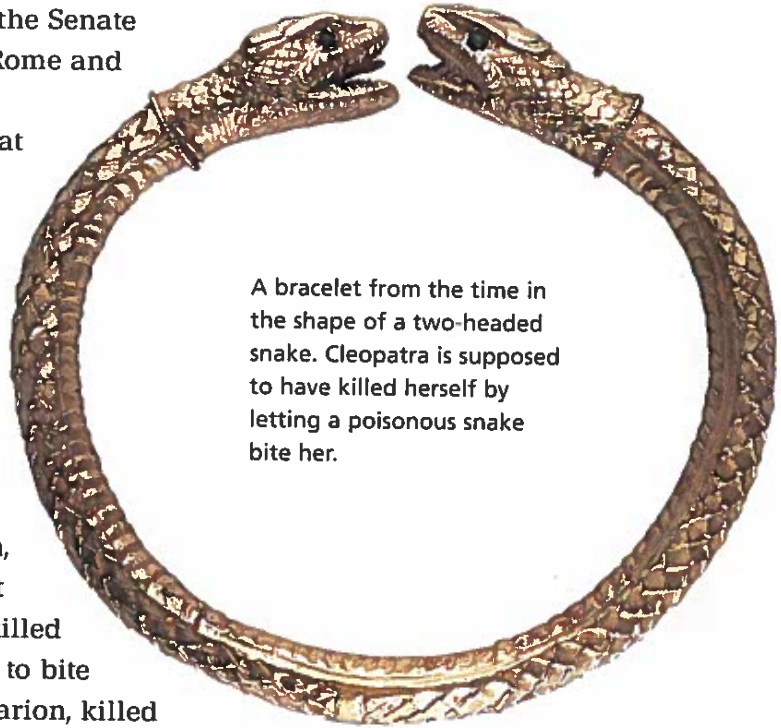
◀ These coins show the head of Cleopatra. The ancient Egyptians only began to use coins during the rule of the Ptolemys. Before that most trading was done by barter.



▲ Julius Caesar, who helped Cleopatra become queen of Egypt and who was assassinated in 44 B.C.

Octavian convinced the Roman Senate that Mark Antony was under Cleopatra's control and no longer had the interests of Rome at heart. In 32 B.C. the Senate denounced Antony as an enemy of Rome and declared war on Cleopatra. In 31 B.C. Antony was defeated in a sea battle at Actium, partly because Cleopatra's fleet fled when they saw they were losing. When he saw Cleopatra's ships sail away, Antony deserted his men and followed.

By 30 B.C. Octavian had gathered a large army and was closing in on Alexandria. Antony committed suicide. Cleopatra met with Octavian, and tried to persuade him to support her. He refused. In desperation, she killed herself by getting a poisonous snake to bite her. Octavian then had her son, Caesarion, killed and made Egypt part of the Roman Empire.



A bracelet from the time in the shape of a two-headed snake. Cleopatra is supposed to have killed herself by letting a poisonous snake bite her.



◀ A portrait of Cleopatra wearing the vulture headdress of Upper Egypt

THE TRUTH ABOUT CLEOPATRA?

It was said that when Antony heard a report of Cleopatra's suicide he killed himself by falling on his sword. Cleopatra did commit suicide, but it was after Antony had killed himself. Some people suggest that she sent this message herself, knowing that he would kill himself when he heard it.