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Ernle Bradford

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Cleopatra, the last Ptolemaic Queen, passed into legend, and history traduced and maligned her as an infamous woman, given to sexual excess and capable of every perfidy.

The truth was quite different.

She was a woman of infinite courage and political resource. From the age of eighteen until her death she had fought to free her country from the iron dominance of Rome and to secure its inheritance for the son of her first lover Julius Caesar. It was right that she should be buried in Alexandria, for in her spirit and in her ambition she was worthy of Alexander himself.

The subject of biography and tragedy, Queen Cleopatra remains a subject to which historians are attracted two thousand years after her glorious but doomed life.

Had Julius Caesar not been murdered, Cleopatra might well have become the empress of Rome and all the Mediterranean world, living to see it ruled by a Julian-Ptolemaic dynasty.

The ‘Queen of the Nile’ was seventeen when she took to the throne of Egypt in 51BC. This ambitious young woman, initially married to her younger brother and co-ruler Ptolemy XIII, watched the savage struggle between Caesar and Pompey, hoping that Rome would destroy itself in the process.

A politician as well a monarch, Cleopatra was determined to save Egypt from being overcome by Rome in its most Golden Age. Her political intentions were clear in her amorous conquests of both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. The latter was defeated at the Battle of Actium in 31BC.

Ernle Bradford uses ancient sources to piece together the life of the Queen, and reflects on portraits of her throughout history.

‘Cleopatra’ is a thorough biography of one of the most fascinating figures in history.

Ernle Bradford (1922-1986) was a British historian noted for his specialisation in the Mediterranean World and naval subjects. His works include numerous biographies of military figures and books about the ancient and medieval worlds.

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