Ptolemaic Dynasty

The Ptolemaic dynasty flourished in Egypt from 323 until 31 BC. Ptolemy I Sōtēr began with the satrapy of Egypt, but at times the kingdom also included Kyrene, Koile-Syria, Cyprus, various islands in the Aegean Sea, Crete, and parts of Syria and Asia Minor. The Ptolemaic kingdom survived until Ptolemy’s great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandson Ptolemaios XV Caesar was executed by Octavian in 31 BC.
Ptolemy I Soter “the Saviour” (ca.360-282 BC).

Ptolemy I Soter (Ptolemaios in Greek), was one of the most successful of the diadochoi. An astute and capable strategist, Ptolemy exploited his position as satrap of Egypt (a secure, stable and virtually impregnable satrapy) to establish a dynasty that lasted until the death of Cleopatra VII in 31 BC. Ptolemy was perhaps the only one of the first generation of diadochoi to die peacefully.

Ptolemy was probably the son of Macedonian noble named Lagos, and a Macedonian woman named Arsinoë, although it was rumoured that he was a bastard son of Philip II. Ptolemy was brought up at Philip’s court in Pella, and was one of the boyhood companions (syntrophoi) of Alexander the Great. Like Alexander the Great, Hephaistion and Kassandros he was educated by the famous philosopher Aristotle. In 336 Ptolemy was banished from Macedon along with Harpalos, Nearchos and Erygios for their part in the so-called “Pixodaros affair”. He was recalled shortly afterwards when Alexander succeeded to the throne after the assassination of Philip II.

Ptolemy accompanied Alexander on his invasion of Asia, and became one of his seven elite bodyguards (somatophylakes) in 330. By the time Alexander died Ptolemy was one of the most important men at the king’s court. Ptolemy was married to Artakama the daughter of Artabazos, a very prominent Persian noble who had once been satrap of Bactria. The sources indicate that after Alexander’s death only Perdikkas and Leonnatos who were both related to the Macedonian royal house were considered more senior than Ptolemy.

Ptolemy quickly realised the potential that Egypt offered as a base of operations and asked for it as his satrapy. His wish was granted by Perdikkas after he had been made epimeletes or “manager” of the kings of Macedon, and Green has noted that Ptolemy “had no cause to regret his choice”. Indeed, during more than forty years in power in Egypt Ptolemy’s position was only seriously threatened on two occasion, and neither invasion force managed to cross the Nile delta and enter Egypt.

Ptolemy maintained good relations with Antipatros in Macedon, and like Krateros and Perdikkas married one of Antipatros’s daughters. Soon after taking control of Egypt he began to act independently from the Perdikkas in Babylon. He invaded the neighbouring region of Kyrene and added it to his satrapy. In 321 he openly acted against Perdikkas, and hijacked the funeral carriage that was carrying Alexander’s body back to Macedon. Ptolemy ensured that Alexander received the funeral of a pharaoh at Memphis and later built a magnificent tomb at Alexandria. Ptolemy then made alliances with several Cypriot kings – Nikokreon of Salamis, Pasikrates of Soloi, Nikokles of Paphos and Androkles of Amathous – and stirred up trouble in Cyprus. After making these alliances, Ptolemy’s forces then besieged the city of Marion with almost two hundred warships.

1 Arrian, *Anabasis*. 2.11.8; 3.6.5.
2 Pausanias. 1.6.2; Quintus Curtius. 9.8.22; Suda s.v. “Lagos”.
3 Plutarch, *Alexander*. 10.4; Arrian. 3.6.5.
4 Arrian, *Anabasis*. 3.27.5.
5 Arrian, *Anabasis*. 7.3.
Ptolemy’s actions were a serious blow to the prestige of Perdikkas who had his eye on the throne of Macedon. At around this time Antipatros and Krateros invaded Asia Minor to remove Perdikkas from power. Perdikkas responded to these threats by sending a force to Cyprus, and then decided to deal with Ptolemy in person. Perdikkas brought the Royal Army and the two kings down to Egypt, but was unable to effect a crossing of the Nile delta. More than 2,000 of his troops drowned in the Nile, and more still were taken by crocodiles. A group of his frustrated officers including Seleukos, Peithon and Antigenes the commander of the Silver Shields murdered him in his tent while Ptolemy was cautiously waiting on the other side of the river. Ptolemy crossed the Nile after learning of Perdikkas’s demise and provided food for the enemy troops who offered him the position of epimeletes or “manager” of the kings. Ptolemy declined the offer, and nominated Peithon and his own ally Arrhidaios (the same man who had taken Alexander’s body to Egypt) and joint-managers instead. They led the Royal Army back to Triparadeios in Phoenicia where they were met by Antipatros and Antigonos the One-Eyed and their armies. Antipatros was hailed as epimeletes, and he confirmed Ptolemy in his satrapy of Egypt. Diodoros states that Ptolemy was allowed to keep his satrapy because “it was impossible to displace him, since he seemed to be holding Egypt by virtue of his own prowess as if it were a prize of war”.6

Ptolemy does not seem to have played a leading role in the wars between the diadochoi in the next few years. He did join with Antigonos and Kassandros in opposing the choice of Polyperchon as the successor of Antipatros as epimeletes, but he did not offer any real military support, largely because his satrapy was so remote from the fighting.

In 316 Ptolemy joined with Kassandros, Lysimachos and Seleukos in resisting Antigonos the One-Eyed. After Antigonos eliminated Eumenes of Kardia he gained effective control of all the satrapies of Asia from the Indus River to the Aegean Sea. Only Seleukos in Babylonia, Lysimachos in Thrace, Kassandros in Macedon, and Ptolemy in Egypt remained outside his direct control. Soon after eliminating Eumenes Antigonos provoked a quarrel with Seleukos who fled from his satrapy in fear of his life. Seleukos fled to Ptolemy, and encouraged him to stand against Antigonos. Antigonos’s obvious ambition forced the remaining independent satraps to act, and in 315 Ptolemy formed a coalition with Seleukos, Lysimachos and Kassandros against him.

For the next few years Ptolemy played the leading role in the fighting against Antigonos. Both Ptolemy and Antigonos built up large navies and they vied for control of Rhodes, Cyprus and Koile-Syria. In 312 Ptolemy and Seleukos inflicted a crushing defeat on Antigonos’s son Demetrios at Gaza in Koile-Syria. Some 500 of Demetrios’s men were slain in the fighting and more than 8,000 deserted to Ptolemy. The defeat was a serious setback for Antigonos, and Ptolemy gained much prestige from the victory.

The victory also allowed Seleukos to return to Babylon to reclaim his satrapy. Ptolemy gave Seleukos a small force (either 1,000 infantry and 300 cavalry, or 800 infantry and 200 cavalry) for this purpose.

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6 Diodoros. 18.39.5.
During the next few years Ptolemy was trying to expand his empire, and in 308 he gained a foothold in Greece, capturing the cities of Korinth, Sikyon and Megara. Things were thus going very well for Ptolemy. He was secure in Egypt, he possessed Kyrene, Cyprus, Korinth, Sikyon and Megara, and he possessed a powerful fleet. But in 306 Ptolemy was soundly thrashed by Demetrios in a sea battle near Salamis in Cyprus. This loss was a crushing blow to the prestige of Ptolemy who lost possession of the vital island for the next ten years. After this victory Antigonos proclaimed himself a “king” (basileus) and formally donned a diadem. He also granted Demetrios the title of king and presented him with a diadem. Demetrios also began minting coins in Cyprus to commemorate his victory which showed sea-god Poseidon on one side and the goddess Nike (Victory) on the other.

Antigonos tried to follow up this success by invading Egypt. He mustered a force of 80,000 infantry, 8,000 cavalry, 83 elephants and 150 warships and set out for Egypt. Antigonos safely reached the Nile with this force that may have been four times the size of the army that Ptolemy was able to muster, but the invasion failed because Demetrios was unable to effect a landing on the western side of the Nile delta. Each time Demetrios tried to land he was repelled by missile-fire from Ptolemy’s men, and after Demetrios lost some of his ships in a violent storm Antigonos decided to retreat rather than risk suffering the same fate as Perdikkas.

After Antigonos and Demetrios had retreated Ptolemy formally adopted the title “king” (basileus) and started wearing a diadem. After he had done so Lysimachos, Seleukos and Kassandros also began to call themselves “king” and started wearing diadems.

After he repelled this invasion Ptolemy lent assistance to the people of Rhodes during the long siege (305-4) by Demetrios. During this unsuccessful siege which earned Demetrios the ironic epithet Poliorketes or “the Besieger”, Ptolemy sent 300,000 bushels of grain to help them hold out and some reinforcements. The grateful Rhodians hailed him as their “Saviour” (Greek = Soter) and set up a statue of him to show their gratitude. This was origin of Ptolemy’s royal title “Soter.”

In 301 Ptolemy again joined with Seleukos, Kassandros and Lysimachos against Antigonos when he decided to risk everything in a pitched battle against all his enemies. Antigonos brought together an army of 70,000 heavy infantrymen, 10,000 cavalry and 75 elephants and marched into Asia Minor. Seleukos and Lysimachos met him at Ipsos with 64,000 foot-soldiers, 10,500 horsemen, 120 war-chariots, and 400 elephants and defeated him. Antigonos was left dead on the battlefield and Demetrios fled with a small number of survivors. The victors were left to squabble over dividing up his kingdom.7

Ptolemy was meant to invade Asia Minor from the south, but rumours that Seleukos and Lysimachos had been defeated reached him so he contented himself with capturing Koile-Syria. Once the battle was over and Ptolemy had learned that Seleukos and Lysimachos had prevailed over Antigonos he refused to hand Koile-Syria over the Seleukos to whom it should have belonged. With Lysimachos taking most of Asia Minor, and Ptolemy stealing Koile-Syria it meant that Seleukos received

7 Plutarch, Demetrios. 28-9.
comparatively little benefits from the victory over Antigonos despite having played the leading role in the battle. This sowed the seeds of trouble between Seleukos and Ptolemy for years to come. In the next two centuries there were six separate so-called “Syrian Wars” between the Seleucid kings and the Ptolemies over ownership of Koise-Syria.

After Ipsos he gave his daughter Arsinoë to Lysimachos in marriage, and another daughter Lysandra to Alexandros V, the youngest son of Kassandros, and his stepdaughter Antigone to Pyrrhos of Epeiros. This diplomatic manoeuvring by Ptolemy may have been intended to isolate Seleukos who soon made a short-lived alliance with Demetrios Poliorketes and married his daughter Stratonike (I).

In 295 Ptolemy captured Cyprus and took over the League of Islanders, but he was unable to prevent Demetrios Poliorketes from capturing Athens. Demetrios attacked Athens with a large army and blockaded the city with his fleet. Ptolemy sent some 150 warships to try to break the blockade, but his fleet was no match for the 300 warships of Demetrios.

In 288/7 Ptolemy brokered a peace deal between Athens and Demetrios Poliorketes. Later that year he repudiated his first wife Eurydike, and his eldest sons Ptolemaios Keraunos “the Thunderbolt”, a violent and ill-mannered man who later briefly ruled Macedon from 281-279, and Meleagros who also briefly ruled Macedon in 279.

In 285 he made his son Ptolemaios Philadelphos joint-king. Philadelphos was his son by mistress Berenike. Also in that year the lighthouse at Pharos was built by Sostratos of Knidos. This structure was the first important lighthouse in the world and guided ships into the harbour at Alexandria for more than 1,000 years before it was destroyed in an earthquake. The Lighthouse was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world along with the Colossus of Rhodes, the Pyramids, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Statue of Zeus at Olympia, the Temple of Artemis as Ephesos and the Mausoleum at Halikarnassos.

Ptolemy died in his bed in 282 BC and was succeeded by Philadelphos. He was the only one of the successors of Alexander (aside from Antipatros) who died peacefully.

After his death Philadelphos instituted a festival called the Ptolemaieia in honour of his parents, Ptolemy Soter and Berenike. These festivities included games and a procession in honour of Ptolemy and Berenike, and sacrifices to both Ptolemy and Berenike as deities.

During his reign Ptolemy paid considerable attention to the arts, no doubt a result of his education by Aristotle. He wrote a history of Alexander’s campaigns which was one of the two main sources for Arrian’s Anabasis, and founded a Library and Museum in his capital at Alexandria. The Library was founded at Alexandria supposedly on the advice of the philosopher Demetrios of Phaleron from Athens, who had been a student of Aristotle and Theophrastos. During its heyday the Library is said to have housed almost half a million volumes. The Museum (in Greek “Mouseion” or “House of the Muses”) was separate from the Library, and housed a

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8 Plutarch, Moralia. 1095D; Strabo. 17.1.8.
group of scholars funded by the Ptolemaic kings and later by the Caesars. They were headed by a priest (Greek = *hiereus*) and a lay director (Greek = *epistates*). The Museum facility compromised an arcade with seats for lectures, a covered walkway lined with trees, and a separate communal dining hall. The Museum was visited by many important scholars from antiquity including Galen and Plutarch.

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9 Strabo. 17.1.8.
Ptolemaios II Philadelphos “Sister-Loving” (308-246 BC).

Ptolemaios II Philadelphos was the son of Ptolemy I and his mistress Berenike. Although he was not the eldest son of Ptolemy I, he was clearly the favourite, perhaps because he was the son of his favoured mistress, perhaps because he shared many of his father’s qualities. Green has described Philadelphos as “like his father, a defensive counter-puncher rather than an aggressor”.

Philadelphos was born on the island of Kos in 308 BC. Little is known about his life and career until he was made joint-king with his father in 285, the same year in which he married Arsinoë I, the daughter of Lysimachos. His elevation came at the expense of Ptolemy’s eldest sons by Eurydice, the aptly named Ptolemaios “Thunderbolt”, a violent, tempestuous individual, and Meleagros, both of whom went on to briefly rule Macedon. Philadelphos succeeded his father when he died in 282.

Philadelphos was very careful to stress his links to his family in order to consolidate his position as king in Egypt. In 279 he instituted a festival called the Ptolemaieia in honour of his parents, Ptolemy Soter and Berenike. These festivities included games and a procession, and sacrifices to Ptolemy and Berenike as a god and goddess. Not long after his sister Arsinoë II returned to Egypt in 279 Philadelphos married her. Arsinoë adopted the title Philadelphos “Brother-Loving” to symbolise their union. Philadelphos also made himself and his sister/wife partners in cult worshipping Alexander the Great as a god with the titles “Sibling Gods” (Theoi Adelphoi).

Philadelphos spent much of his reign involved in warfare with the Seleucid kings and Antigonos Gonatas in Macedon. In 276 he was defeated by Antiochos I in Syria. Between 274 and 271 he campaigned more successfully against Antiochos in the so-called First Syrian War. During these years he also put down a revolt in Kyrene by his half-brother Magas.

Between 267 and 261 Philadelphos was allied to Athens and Sparta against Antigonos Gonatas in the Chremonidean War. The war was disastrous for Athens and Sparta (Athens was forced to change from a democracy to an oligarchy, and the Spartan king Areus was killed), and the failure can largely be blamed on the lethargic performance of Philadelphos. Intriguingly, an Athenian decree announcing the alliance between Athens, Sparta and Philadelphos states that war was the result of “the policy of Arsinoë”. The fact that Arsinoë died not long before the war broke out may account for Philadelphos’s poor showing in the war.

Between 260 ad 253 Philadelphos was engaged in the Second Syrian War, this time against Antiochos II, the son of Antiochos I. This time Philadelphos was not as successful, and he lost the island of Samos to Antiochos. After the war Antiochos married Philadelphos’s daughter Berenike (II).

In 250 Philadelphos re-established Ptolemaic rule in Cyprus and founded trading posts in the Red Sea.

11 P.Hib. 199.
Overall Philadelphos seems to have been a successful military leader, largely due to the strength of his fleet. His territorial gains are reflected in a poem by Theokritos, who wrote that:

“He [Philadelphos] cuts off for himself parts of Phoenicia, Arabia, Syria, Libya and [the lands of] the black-skinned Ethiopians. He gives orders to all the Pamphylians, the Kilikian spearmen, to the Lykians and to the warlike Karians, and to the islands of the Cyclades, since his are the finest ships that sail the seas.”

Philadelphos continued the patronage of the library and museum at Alexandria commenced by his father, and sent an expedition into eastern Africa in search of elephants for his army. He died in 246 and passed on his kingdom to his son Ptolemaios III Euergetes.

\[12\] Austin #217.
Arsinoë II Philadelphos “Brother-Loving” (ca.316-ca.268 BC).

Arsinoë was the daughter of Ptolemy I Soter and Berenike. She was thus the full sister of Ptolemaios II Philadelphos. Arsinoë was one of the most significant and influential women in the Hellenistic period. After she married her brother Philadelphos she exerted considerable influence over him and seems to have ruled Egypt almost as an equal to her brother/husband. The ancient writers uniformly saw Arsinoë as an ambitious and threatening figure. Modern opinions on Arsinoë have varied. Sir William Tarn saw Arsinoë as a “remote and spiritual beauty”, whereas Peter Green has described her as being “as remote and spiritual as a rattlesnake disturbed”.

Arsinoë first appears in the sources when she married Lysimachos in 299/8. She bore three children by Lysimachos – Ptolemaios of Telmessos, Philippos and Lysimachos. Arsinoë clearly hoped that her sons would succeed to the Macedonian throne, which meant that only her stepson Agathokles stood in the way. In 283 she encouraged Lysimachos to execute Agathokles. Pausanias believed that Arsinoë fell for Agathokles and then plotted against him when he rejected her sexual advances, “playing Potiphar’s wife to Agathocles’ Joseph” as Green has described it, but it more likely that Arsinoë conspired against Agathokles because she wanted her sons Ptolemaios to succeed to the throne, or she feared her children might suffer at his hands once Lysimachos was dead. The execution of Agathokles proved disastrous for Lysimachos and Arsinoë, for his widow Lysandra fled to Seleukos in Babylon and encouraged him to invade Asia Minor to avenge her husband. Seleukos slew Lysimachos in a pitched battle at Kouroupedeion in Asia Minor, and prepared to make Macedon his own. His ambitions were forestalled by Ptolemaios Keraunos the half-brother of Arsinoe who assassinated Seleukos at Lysimacheia in 281 and had himself hailed as king of Macedon in his stead.

After Lysimachos was slain Arsinoë fled to the city of Kassandreia. But after her Keraunos had slain Seleukos and seized control of Macedon in 281 he wrote to Arsinoë offering to marry her and make her his queen, and to adopt her sons by Lysimachos and entail the Macedonian throne to the eldest – Ptolemaios of Telmessos. Ptolemaios of Telmessos urged her not to marry Keraunos who was infamous for his brutality, but Arsinoë went ahead with the marriage. Ptolemaios fled to Illyria, which proved to be a wise decision, for Keraunos murdered his two younger brothers – Philippos and Lysimachos – and Arsinoë was forced to flee in fear of her life.

Arsinoë made her way back to Egypt in 279/8 where she married her full brother Ptolemaios II, and took the title “Philadelphos” (Brother-Loving). Arsinoë adopted her stepchildren and effectively became the co-ruler of Egypt. Arsinoë soon appeared with her brother/husband on gold and silver coinage. She also played a prominent role in the cult performed in honour of their father Ptolemy who was worshipped as a god after his death. Green has speculated that Philadelphos was probably hoping to use the marriage to secure his position as the legitimate ruler of Egypt and to stress his links

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15 Pausanias. 1.10.3.
17 Justin. 17.2.4-8, 24.2-3.
to his divine father by “playing Osiris to Arsinoë’s Isis for the benefit of his Egyptian subjects, and Zeus to Hera for any Greeks who...were unwise enough to query the propriety of the marriage”\textsuperscript{18}. There is evidence to suggest that Arsinoë was worshipped as a divine being during her lifetime, and Philadelphos ensured that she was deified after her death ca.269 with the introduction of a festival known as the Arsinoeia.

Arsinoë seems to have had considerable influence over her brother/husband, so much so that an Athenian decree announcing the alliance between Athens, Sparta and Philadelphos that sparked off the Chremonidean War states that alliance was the result of “the policy of Arsinoë”.

The date of her death has been disputed. Until recently it has been fixed ca.270 BC, but recent research suggests that she may not have died until just before the Chremonidean War broke out in 268/7.

\textsuperscript{18} Green, pp145-6.

Cleopatra VII was one of the most striking figures in antiquity. Cleopatra was intelligent and quick-witted, charismatic and charming, and her love affairs with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony (Marcus Antonius) have inspired poetry, a Shakespearean tragedy, and Hollywood films. Cleopatra was the last of the Hellenistic monarchs, and her death in 31 BC marked the end of the Hellenistic period and the final triumph of Rome over the Graeco-Macedonian world.

Despite her famous love affairs with Caesar and Antony and the romantic image of Cleopatra that one finds in Hollywood movies, it does not appear that she was particularly beautiful. Plutarch writes “her beauty, as we are told, was in itself not altogether incomparable, nor such as to strike those who saw her”. Green described her coin portraits as “far from flattering”, and argued that a marble bust at the Vatican Museum which has been identified as Cleopatra does not suggest that she was “a raving beauty”. In fact, the portraits of this famous queen indicate that she had a rather large nose, which she may have inherited from her father Ptolemaios XII Auletes whose coin portraits indicate had a particular large nose.

The evidence does make it clear that Cleopatra was particularly charming and intelligent. Plutarch writes that “converse with her had an irresistible charm”. Plutarch also notes that she was fluent in many languages (Macedonian, Greek, Egyptian [she was the first and only one of all the Ptolemaic rulers to learn it], Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Ethiopian, Median, Parthian and Troglydote), and was capable of speaking others. Curiously she was not fluent in Latin, so she must have conversed with Caesar and Antony in Greek. Cleopatra was also a capable mathematician and businesswoman. Her textile business was so successful that she is actually said to have hired a Roman Senator – Q. Ovinius – to run it for her.

Cleopatra became queen at the age of 18 when her father Ptolemaios XII Auletes died in 51 BC. Convention dictated that Cleopatra always had to have a nominal or titular male co-ruler, so she ruled jointly with her younger brother Ptolemaios XIII who was then about twelve years old, and later with another younger brother Ptolemaios XIV, and later still with her son Ptolemaios XV Caesar. By August of 51 (the year in which she became queen) the name of Ptolemaios XIII had been removed from official documents, and Cleopatra had begun to mint coins with only her name, which suggests that Cleopatra had begun trying govern Egypt in her own right. This would have alarmed powerful figures in Alexandria who would have preferred to rule Egypt themselves through the young king.

The early years of Cleopatra’s reign were dominated by drought and famine. A royal decree bearing only the name of Ptolemaios XIII banned the shipping of grain to anywhere in Egypt except the city of Alexandria, which indicates how bad the food shortages were in the Ptolemaic capital.

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19 Plutarch, Antony. 27.2.
21 Plutarch, Antony. 27.3.
22 Orosios. 6.19.20. Octavian (later Augustus) had this man executed because he considered inappropriate for a Roman Senator to take up such employment.
At some point in time Cleopatra was driven out of Alexandria by a groups of Alexandrian officials led by Theodotos, the eunuch Pothinos and the general Achillas. They set themselves up as council to act as regent for the young king Ptolemaios XIII. Cleopatra and her sister Arsinoë were forced to flee into Upper Egypt, and later to the west where she raised an army among the Arab tribes and moved into Syria.\(^{23}\)

In the meantime, the Roman civil war imposed itself on Egypt in 48. After Cn. Pompeius Magnus (Pompey) was defeated by C. Julius Caesar at Pharsalos in Greece he fled to Egypt hoping to find support there. Instead Ptolemaios’s advisers executed Pompey on the spot and presented his head in a jar to Caesar when he arrived in Alexandria soon afterwards.

Caesar’s arrival in Egypt led to a change in the fortunes of Cleopatra. According to Plutarch she had herself delivered to Caesar at night, by a Sicilian merchant, hidden in a rolled up carpet. Caesar was captivated by her charms and Cleopatra soon became his lover. The sources indicate that theirs was a match between intellectual equals. It was probably not the grand passion that Shakespeare portrayed, but there must have been a genuine emotional connection between them.

Once Caesar made it clear that he intended to favour Cleopatra’s cause rather than her younger brother Ptolemaios XIII war within Egypt became inevitable. The followers of Ptolemaios XIII and his advisers soon attacked the small force that Caesar had brought with him sparking off the so-called “Alexandrian War” for control of the Egyptian capital. The ensuing warfare embarrassed Caesar, and according to Green “came as close to destroying Caesar himself, let alone his reputation, as any campaign, military or political, that he ever fought”.\(^{24}\) On one occasion Caesar was almost captured by the enemy and had to leap into the water and swim to safety, having left his purple general’s cloak behind. Arsinoë escaped from Caesar’s custody and was proclaimed as queen by the Macedonian soldiers and the Alexandrian mob.

But ultimately Caesar triumphed over his enemies. Achillas was murdered by Arsinoë’s eunuch and Caesar captured and executed Pothinos. In 47 Mithridates of Pergamon arrived in Egypt with a force to relieve Caesar. Ptolemaios XIII escaped, but later drowned in the Nile. Cleopatra was hailed as queen again, and she married her younger brother Ptolemaios XIV who was then around eleven years old. Arsinoë was charged with high treason and was imprisoned by Cleopatra and Caesar. She was later led through Rome in chains in one of Caesar’s triumphs in 46.

By now Cleopatra had fallen pregnant. It certainly suited her plans to strengthen her connection with Caesar, and Caesar would not be dissatisfied with being the father of the heir to the Egyptian throne. A son, Ptolemaios Caesar (known as Caesarion) was born in June 47. Octavian later cast doubts over the boy’s paternity, but Antony informed the Senate that Caesar had acknowledged the boy as his son.\(^{25}\)

In July 46 Caesar returned to Rome where he was awarded four triumphs and a ten-year dictatorship. Caesar brought Cleopatra across to Rome at the time he was celebrating his triumphs. Cleopatra and her entourage were set up in Caesar’s Roman

\(^{23}\) Strabo. 17.1.11.
\(^{25}\) Suetonius. *Divine Julius*. 52.1
town house, and all the notable Romans felt the need to call upon her no matter what they thought of her in private.26 Even Cicero who disliked Cleopatra because of her arrogance visited Caesar’s home to pay his respects to her. Cleopatra duly snubbed Cicero, an insult that was sufficient for Cicero to write about it himself.27

The sources allege that Caesar intended to marry Cleopatra despite the Roman laws forbidding unions with foreigners. They also allege that Caesar was beginning to believe in his own divinity and intended to make Alexandria a second capital and Cleopatra a kind of goddess-queen, for Cleopatra began to be described as the New Isis. Caesar even set up a golden statue of Cleopatra in the temple of Venus Genetrix, thus closely linking his lover and the mother of his only son with the Goddess of Love, a goddess from whom his family claimed descent.28 But whatever Caesar’s plans were, they were cut short when he was assassinated on the Ides of March in 44. When Caesar’s will was read and his grandnephew Octavian (later Augustus) was named as his heir rather than Caesarion, Cleopatra fled to Alexandria.

Cleopatra found that drought and famine were again afflicting Egypt. She decided to secure her position by having her brother Ptolemaios XIV assassinated, and then made Caesarion her co-ruler with the regnal name Ptolemaios XV. After this she involved herself in the Roman civil war between the supporters of Caesar (the triumvirate of Antony, Octavian and Lepidus) and the supporters of Brutus and Cassius. In 43 Cleopatra sent the four Roman legions that Caesar had left behind in Egypt to his former lieutenant Dolabella, who desperately needed these troops for the war against Cassius. In gratitude for Cleopatra’s assistance Dolabella endorsed Caesarion as co-ruler of Egypt. Thus Cleopatra was able to safeguard her own position as queen and ensure that Caesarion had Roman recognition for his position as king. After Antony, Octavian and Lepidus defeated Brutus and Cassius at Philippi in 42, the triumvirs formally recognised Caesarion as king in Egypt in gratitude for the assistance she had rendered to Dolabella.

Antony headed to the east after the victory over Brutus and Cassius. He was, as Green had argued, “the man to watch”.29 Octavian had returned to Rome after the battle at Philippi because of an illness that was so bad he was thought likely to die, and Lepidus was quite ineffectual. In 41 Antony summoned Cleopatra to Tarsos in Kilikia. Green has argued that Cleopatra by now “knew more than enough about him: his limited tactical and strategic abilities, his great popularity with his troops; his blue blood, which was so embarrassingly offset by financial impoverishment; the drinking, the philoprogenitive womanizing, the superficial philhellenism, the Herculean vulgarity, the physical exuberance and brutal ambition, the Dioynsiac pretensions to godhead”.30 In short, she knew his limitations and faults, and the sources indicate that it was clear to Cleopatra and those around her that she would be able to charm Antony and manipulate him to her own ends.

26 Suetonius. Divine Julius. 52; Dio Cassius. 43.27.3.
27 Cicero. Atticus. 15.15.
Cleopatra responded to the summons to Tarsos and put on a display that was guaranteed to catch Antony’s attention. She sailed up to meet Antony on a barge with a gilded poop, purple sails and silver oars. Cleopatra herself was dressed like Venus, the Goddess of Love, and she surrounded herself with boys dressed as Eros (the Greek version of Cupid) and girls dressed as the sea nymphs known as Nereids. Green described the show as “vulgar bait to catch a vulgar man”. It worked, and soon Antony and Cleopatra became lovers. They spent the winter of 41 in Alexandria.

Antony left Cleopatra in the spring of 40. He would not return to her for a further four years, which makes one question the extent to which Cleopatra was able to manipulate him. After Antony left Cleopatra his wife Fulvia died, and he married Octavia, the half sister of Octavian in an attempt to patch up his relationship with Octavian. In the meantime, Cleopatra gave birth to twins, a boy named Alexandros and girl named Kleopatra. In 38 Octavia bore Antony another daughter, but unlike Cleopatra, she never produced a son. This may have affected Antony’s later choices.

After increasing tension between Antony and Octavian returned to the east with a commission from the Senate to reallocate the client kingdoms there. Relations between Antony and Octavian had been troubled for some time, and things were not helped by the fact that Octavian failed to deliver four legions to Antony in exchange for 120 warships. Octavia did her best to act as an intermediary between her husband and her brother, but she was unable to reconcile them. In 37 Antony returned to the east and told Octavia to return to Italy. As soon as he arrived in Antioch in Syria, Antony summoned Cleopatra to meet him. He gave her the lands of Cyprus, Kilikia and Koile-Syria and acknowledged the young Alexandros and Kleopatra as his children. Alexandros was given the title Helios (the god of the sun) and Kleopatra the title Selene (the goddess of the moon), a move which speaks of the ambitions of Antony and Cleopatra.

In 36 Antony waged a disastrous campaign in Parthia, where he lost two fifths of his army. While he was absent another son, Ptolemaios Philadelphos was born. When he returned Cleopatra met the remnants of his army with food, clothing and cash subsidies and introduced him to his new son.

Antony spent the winter of 35 in Egypt. If the snubbing of Octavia and the birth of Ptolemaios Philadelphos had not already ruined his relationship with Octavian, this was perhaps the last straw (even it Octavia herself continued to stand by her husband). In 34 Antony campaigned successfully in Armenia and returned to Egypt with a large and sumptuous parade. Antony portrayed himself in the guise of the god Dionysos, and Cleopatra presided over the ceremony in the costume of the goddess Isis. Once again Cleopatra was addressed as the New Isis.

A few days later in the great Gymnasium at Alexandria a similarly clad Antony and Cleopatra sat on golden thrones on a silver platform before Cleopatra’s subjects. Antony then proclaimed the so-called Donations of Alexandria. Cleopatra was given the title Queen of Kings and declared queen of Egypt, Cyprus, Libya and Koile-Syria, and Caesarion was to share the kingdom with her. Antony also awarded kingdoms to

31 Plutarch, Antony, 26.
32 P. Green, Alexander to Actium, (London, 1990), p663.
33 Octavia cared for all of Antony’s surviving children after his death.
his children by Cleopatra: Alexandros Helios was dressed in the manner of the Achaemenid kings of Persia (in Median garb with a tiara and upright headdress) and hailed as king of Armenia, Media and Parthia; Kleopatra Selene was named as queen of Kyrene and Crete; and Ptolemaios Philadelphos was dressed in Macedonian royal attire (boots, a short cloak and the broad-brimmed Macedonian hat surmounted by a diadem) and hailed as king of Syria and Kilikia.\textsuperscript{34}

These so-called “Donations at Alexandria” laid improper claims to territories outside Roman control or territories already under Roman control. Alexandros Helios was awarded the independent Parthian kingdom, and Kleopatra Selene was awarded Crete and Kyrene which were already under Roman control. Needless to say this did not help Antony’s reputation in Rome and made Cleopatra even more unpopular at Rome.

Antony and Cleopatra then spent the winter of 33 BC in Ephesos. Antony began to include Cleopatra’s image on his official coins, and in 32 BC he formally divorced Octavia in a move to force the Romans to acknowledge his illegal relationship with Cleopatra. By now it was clear that Antony desired (like Caesar before him) to rule a world empire with Cleopatra, the “New Isis” as his queen. The situation was now so critical that Octavian declared war on Cleopatra.\textsuperscript{35} He did not declare war on Antony, but he was certainly targeted for having misused Roman troops, acted without Senatorial approval, and having given away territories that belonged to Rome.\textsuperscript{36}

In 32 BC Antony and Cleopatra invaded Greece. Octavian sent his general M. Vipsanius Agrippa to opposed them. The fate of the entire Mediterranean world rested on the result of one great sea battle off the coast of Actium (in Greek Aktion) on September 2, 31 BC. Agrippa achieved a crushing over the naval forces of Antony and Cleopatra, which ended their plans of world leadership.

Antony and Cleopatra fled to Alexandria where Antony committed suicide after a brief attempt to defend the city. Cleopatra allegedly made a desperate attempt to seduce Octavian, but if this was the case he rebuffed her advances. Bereft of all hope Cleopatra had an Egyptian cobra or uraeus – not an asp (an easy mistake to make because the Greeks called the cobra an “aspis”) smuggled into her quarters in a basket of figs and allowed it to bite her. Her death spelled the end of the Ptolemaic dynasty. Her children by Antony were allowed to live, and Kleopatra Selene was married to king Juba II of Mauretania. But Caesarion was not so fortunate. Octavian had him butchered to death because of the threat he represented as the acknowledged son of Caesar.\textsuperscript{37} His death marked the final triumph of Rome over the Graeco-Macedonian world.

Green aptly summed up Cleopatra’s career as follows: “She was, in short, a charismatic personality of the first order, a born leader and vaultingly ambitious monarch, who deserved a better fate than suicide with that louche lump of a self-indulgent Roman, with his bull neck, Herculean vulgarities, and fits of mindless introspection”.\textsuperscript{38} To a certain extent Cleopatra did fare better than that. Like

\textsuperscript{34} Plutarch, \textit{Antony}, 54; Dio Cassius 41.1-3.
\textsuperscript{35} Dio Cassius, 50.6.4; Plutarch, \textit{Antony}, 60.
\textsuperscript{36} Dio Cassius, 50.1.3-5.
\textsuperscript{37} Plutarch, \textit{Antony}, 82.
\textsuperscript{38} P. Green, \textit{Alexander to Actium}, (London, 1990), p664.
Alexander the Great, whose death ushered in the Hellenistic period, Cleopatra, whose death ended the Hellenistic period, is just as famous today as she was when she was alive. Her fame and reputation for her beauty has lasted thousands of years, and her legacy will be with us for longer still. The ancient Egyptians believed that death by the bite of the sacred cobra which symbolised the land of Egypt would confer immortality on the victim,\textsuperscript{39} and in the sense that name Cleopatra is still synonymous with beauty today, it clearly did.

\textsuperscript{39} P. Green, \textit{Alexander to Actium}, (London, 1990), p682.