

# WOMEN IN LOVE HISTORIES

Linda Feuerstein-Kalogeropoulos

## Classical Great Histories about Twin Souls

feat. Cleopatra, Mark Anthony, Octavius, Abélard, Héloïse, Fulbert, Henry II, Rosamund Clifford, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Guillaume de Palerne, Melior, The Werewolf, Roswall, Lilian, Boccaccio, Maria d'Aquino, Fiammetta

*... and Its Intriguing Dangerous  
Splendour*

**INTEGRAL**

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## The Black Wedding: Cleopatra and Mark Anthony

“Brilliant to look upon and to listen to, with the power to subjugate everyone.” That was the description of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt. She could have had anything or anyone she wanted, but she fell passionately in love with the Roman General Mark Anthony. As Shakespeare depicts it, their relationship was volatile (“Fool! Don’t you see now that I could have poisoned you a hundred times had I been able to live without you”, Cleopatra said) but after they risked all in a war on Rome and lost, they chose to die together in 30 BC. “I will be a bridegroom in my death, and run into it as to a lover’s bed”, said Anthony. And Cleopatra followed, by clasping a poisonous asp to her breast.

It is an ending so epic that Shakespeare himself couldn’t better it, says Hadley Meares. In the golden city of Alexandria, Cleopatra VII (69-30 BC), Queen of Egypt, holes up in her self-made mausoleum, as her arch-nemesis Octavian (later known as Augustus), Emperor of Rome, closes in. But she is not alone. In her arms is her lover, the Roman general and statesman Mark Antony (83 -30 BC), who is dying of a self-inflicted stab wound. As he slowly slips away Cleopatra wails, beating her chest, smearing herself in his blood. Usually, a master of self-possession, she is losing her mind. Antony dies as Cleopatra holds him. She will soon follow him to the grave.

Cleopatra VII Philopator (69—August 10 or 12, 30 BC) was the last active ruler of the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt, nominally survived as pharaoh by her son Caesarion. As a member of the Ptolemaic dynasty, she was a descendant of its founder Ptolemy I Soter, a Macedonian Greek general and companion of Alexander the Great. After the death of Cleopatra, Egypt became a province of the Roman Empire, marking the end of the Hellenistic period that had lasted since the reign of Alexander (336–323 BC). Her native language was Koine Greek and she was the only Ptolemaic ruler to learn the Egyptian language.

In 58 BC, Cleopatra presumably accompanied her father, Ptolemy XII, during his exile to Rome after a revolt in Egypt (a Roman client state) allowed his daughter Berenice IV to claim the throne. Berenice was killed in 55 BC when Ptolemy returned to Egypt with Roman military assistance. When he died in 51 BC, the joint reign of Cleopatra and her brother Ptolemy XIII began, but a falling-out between them led to open civil war. After losing the 48 BC Battle of Pharsalus in Greece against his rival Julius Caesar (a Roman dictator and consul) in Caesar’s Civil War, the Roman statesman Pompey fled to Egypt. Pompey had been a political ally of Ptolemy XII, but Ptolemy XIII, at the urging of his court eunuchs, had Pompey ambushed and killed before Caesar arrived and occupied Alexandria. Caesar then attempted to reconcile the rival Ptolemaic siblings, but Ptolemy’s chief adviser Potheinos viewed Caesar’s terms as favoring Cleopatra, so his forces besieged her and Caesar at the palace. Shortly after the siege was lifted by reinforcements, Ptolemy died in the 47 BC Battle of the Nile. His sister Arsinoe IV was eventually exiled to Ephesus for her role in carrying out the siege. Caesar declared Cleopatra and her brother Ptolemy XIV joint rulers, but maintained a private affair with Cleopatra that produced a son, Caesarion. Cleopatra traveled to Rome as a client Queen in 46 and 44 BC, where she stayed at Caesar’s villa. After the assassinations of Caesar and (on her orders) Ptolemy XIV in 44 BC, she named Caesarion co-ruler.

In the Liberators’ civil war of 43–42 BC, Cleopatra sided with the Roman Second Triumvirate formed by Caesar’s grandnephew and heir Octavian, Mark Antony and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus. After their meeting at Tarsos in 41 BC, the Queen had an affair with Antony. He carried out the execution of Arsinoe at her request, and became increasingly reliant on Cleopatra for both funding and military aid during his invasions of the Parthian Empire and the Kingdom of Armenia. The Donations of Alexandria declared their children Alexander Helios, Cleopatra Selene II and Ptolemy

Philadelphus rulers over various erstwhile territories under Antony's triumviral authority. This event, their marriage, and Antony's divorce of Octavian's sister Octavia Minor, led to the Final War of the Roman Republic. Octavian engaged in a war of propaganda, forced Antony's allies in the Roman Senate to flee Rome in 32 BC and declared war on Cleopatra. After defeating Antony and Cleopatra's naval fleet at the 31 BC Battle of Actium, Octavian's forces invaded Egypt in 30 BC and defeated Antony, leading to Antony's suicide. When Cleopatra learned that Octavian planned to bring her to his Roman triumphal procession, she killed herself by poisoning (contrary to the popular belief that she was bitten by an asp?!).

Boisterous, mirthful, moody and lustful, Antony had been a favorite of Caesar. In the wake of Caesar's assassination, Antony formed an uneasy Triumvirate in 43 BC with Marcus Aemilius Lepidus and Caesar's nephew Octavian to rule the sprawling Roman Republic. Antony was put in charge of the Empire's rowdy Eastern territories.

Marcus Antonius (January 14, 83 BC—August 10, 30 BC), commonly known in English as Mark Antony or Anthony, was a Roman politician and general who played a critical role in the transformation of the Roman Republic from an oligarchy into the autocratic Roman Empire.

Antony was a supporter of Julius Caesar and served as one of his generals during the conquest of Gaul and the Civil War. Antony was appointed administrator of Italy while Caesar eliminated political opponents in Greece, North Africa and Spain. After Caesar's death in 44 BC, Antony joined forces with Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, another of Caesar's generals, and Octavian, Caesar's great-nephew and adopted son, forming a three-man dictatorship known to historians as the Second Triumvirate. The Triumvirs defeated Caesar's murderers, the Liberatores, at the Battle of Philippi in 42 BC, and divided the government of the Republic between themselves. Antony was assigned Rome's eastern provinces, including the client kingdom of Egypt, then ruled by Cleopatra VII Philopator, and was given the command in Rome's war against Parthia.

Relations among the triumvirs were strained as the various members sought greater political power. Civil war between Antony and Octavian was averted in 40 BC, when Antony married Octavian's sister, Octavia. Despite this marriage, Antony carried on a love affair with Cleopatra, who bore him three children, further straining Antony's relations with Octavian. Lepidus was expelled from the association in 36 BC and in 33 BC disagreements between Antony and Octavian caused a split between the remaining Triumvirs. Their ongoing hostility erupted into civil war in 31 BC, as the Roman Senate, at Octavian's direction, declared war on Cleopatra and proclaimed Antony a traitor. Later that year, Antony was defeated by Octavian's forces at the Battle of Actium. Antony and Cleopatra fled to Egypt, where after a minor victory at the Battle of Alexandria they committed suicide.

With Antony dead, Octavian became the undisputed master of the Roman world. In 27 BC, Octavian was granted the title of *Augustus*, marking the final stage in the transformation of the Roman Republic into an empire, with himself as the first Roman Emperor.

In 41 BC, Antony sent for Cleopatra while he was staying in the magnificent city of Tarsus, near the coast of what is now Turkey. He had first met Cleopatra in Rome when she had been the young mistress of his mentor Caesar (the two had a son Caesarion). But Antony was meeting a very evolved Cleopatra. Caesar "had known her when she was still a girl and inexperienced in affairs", the Greek writer and philosopher Plutarch wrote, "but she was going to visit Antony at the very time when women have the most brilliant beauty and are at the acme of intellectual power".

Their love story had started over ten years earlier when both were in their prime. Cleopatra was the divine Ptolemaic ruler of prosperous Egypt—brilliant, silver-tongued, charming, scholarly and the

richest person in the Mediterranean. Politician and soldier Antony, supposedly descended from Hercules, was "broad-shouldered, bull-necked, ridiculously handsome, with a thick head of curls and aquiline features".

Aware of Antony's love of spectacle—and of Rome's interest in her riches—Cleopatra orchestrated an entrance into Tarsus designed to awe Antony and his cohorts. According to Stacy Schiff's *Cleopatra: A Life*, she sailed into the city in an "explosion of color" underneath billowing purple sails: "She reclined beneath a gold-spangled canopy, dressed as Venus in a painting, while beautiful young boys, like painted Cupids, stood at her sides and fanned her. Her fairest maids were likewise dressed as sea nymphs and graces, some steering at the rudder, some working at the ropes. Wondrous odors from countless incense-offerings diffused themselves along the river-banks".

The pageantry worked. "The moment he saw her, Antony lost his head to her like a young man," the Greek historian Appian wrote. Cleopatra was not done—throwing extravagant parties and dinners for the Romans, flaunting her riches by giving away all the furniture, jewels and hangings from the soirees. She drank and sparred with Antony, who "was ambitious to surpass her in splendor and elegance," throwing his own parties that never quite lived up to hers.

Though it appears their attraction was genuine, it was also politically savvy "and...thought to harmonize well with the matters at hand". As Schiff notes, Antony needed Cleopatra to fund his military endeavors in the East and Cleopatra needed him for protection, to expand her power, and assert the rights of her son Caesaron, Caesar's true heir.

Antony soon followed Cleopatra to Alexandria, which was experiencing an artistic, cultural and scholarly renaissance under their Queen. The two powerful rulers often behaved like college students, forming a drinking society they called the Society of the Inimitable Livers. "The members entertained one another daily in turn, with an extravagance of expenditure beyond measure or belief", Plutarch explained.

The new couple also loved to tease each other. One legend has it that at one party, Cleopatra bet Antony she could spend 10 million sesterces on one banquet. According to the Roman chronicler Pliny the Elder: "She ordered the second course to be served. In accordance with previous instructions, the servants placed in front of her only a single vessel containing vinegar. She took one earring off, and dropped the pearl in the vinegar, and when it wasted away, she swallowed it".

Another time, Antony, the masterful athletic soldier, was frustrated as he fumbled with a fishing rod during a riparian entertainment. "Leave the fishing rod, General, to us". Cleopatra joked. "Your prey are cities, kingdoms and continents."

Antony was soon off to Rome to report on his triumphs. In his absence—by 40 BC—Cleopatra gave birth to their twins, Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene. That same year Antony married another intelligent dynamo—Octavian's sister Octavia. Seemingly happy in his new marriage, Antony and Cleopatra did not meet for three and a half years, until the lovers reunited in Antioch, the capital of Syria in 37 BC.

The two picked up right where they left off, even issuing currency engraved with both their faces. In Antioch, Antony met his twins for the first time and bestowed large swaths of land on their mother. "As of 37, Cleopatra ruled over nearly the entire eastern Mediterranean coast, from what is today eastern Libya, in Africa, north through Israel, Lebanon and Syria, to southern Turkey, excepting only slivers of Judaea", Schiff writes.

For the next two years, the couple would often travel together, as Antony's military and administrative exploits took them all over the Mediterranean. It was during this period that Antony's military prowess began to falter, causing him to lose thousands of men. Of course, instead of the blame being placed on Antony's rash, bull-headed decisions, Plutarch would blame the failures on Cleopatra: "So eager was he to spend the winter with her that he began the war before the proper time and managed everything confusedly. He was not master of his own faculties, but, as if he were under the influence of certain drugs or of magic rites, was ever looking eagerly towards her, and thinking more of his speedy return than of conquering the enemy".

However, Antony's fortunes were briefly reversed when he successfully conquered the kingdom of Armenia. In the fall of 34 BC, he triumphantly returned to Alexandria, where the Armenian royal family was paraded in chains. Reunited with Cleopatra, "the two most magnificent people in the world" staged an event that came to be known as "The Donations of Alexandria". According to Schiff: "In the open court of the complex that fall day the Alexandrians discovered another silver platform, on which stood two massive golden thrones. Mark Antony occupied one. Addressing her as the *New Isis*, he invited Cleopatra to join him on the other. She appeared in the full regalia of that goddess, a pleated, lustrously striped chiton, its fringed edge reaching to her ankles. On her head she may have worn a traditional tripartite crown or one of cobras with a vulture cap. By one account Antony dressed as Dionysus, in a gold-embroidered gown and high Greek boots... Cleopatra's children occupied four smaller thrones at the couple's feet. In his husky voice Antony addressed the assembled multitude".

In an intentional provocation to Octavian, Antony distributed lands to his and Cleopatra's children, making it abundantly clear that their family was the dynasty of the East. For Octavian, this was a bridge too far. In 33 BC, the Triumvirate disbanded. The next year, Antony divorced Octavia. All pretenses of partnership and friendship between the two men were over. Shortly after the divorce, Octavian declared war on Antony's true partner—Cleopatra.

For all of Cleopatra's riches, and the couple's combined military prowess, they were no match for the Roman army. As Octavian and his forces closed in on Alexandria, the lovers continued their decadent parties, although they now called their drinking society "Companions to the Death." Longtime advisors deserted, as did much of Antony's army. While Antony was off battling Octavian's forces, Cleopatra busied herself building a new "temple to Isis", which she called her mausoleum. According to Schiff: "Into the mausoleum she heaped gems, jewelry, works of art, coffers of gold, royal robes, stores of cinnamon and frankincense, necessities to her, luxuries to the rest of the world. With those riches went as well a vast quantity of kindling. Were she to disappear, the treasure of Egypt would disappear with her. The thought was a torture to Octavian".

It also appears that Cleopatra was secretly negotiating with Octavian, unbeknownst to Antony. Always the more level-headed and strategic of the two, Cleopatra no doubt saw that Antony was doomed—but their children might not be. She had word sent to Antony that she had killed herself, knowing that he would soon follow. She was right. According to Plutarch, when Antony was told of his partner's death, he uttered the immortal words: "O Cleopatra, I am not distressed to have lost you, for I shall straightaway join you; but I am grieved that a commander as great as I should be found to be inferior to a woman in courage".

After his attempted suicide, a distraught Cleopatra had Antony brought to her. Seeing what she had done, she was heartbroken but resolute. After Antony breathed his last, Cleopatra fought on, attempting to negotiate with Octavian. But all hope was lost and Cleopatra snuck poison (or in some versions an asp) past Octavian's guards. When Octavian realized what had happened, he sent soldiers to bust into the temple. There they found Cleopatra dead, her two attendants, Charmion and Iras, near

death. According to Schiff: "Charmion was clumsily attempting to right the diadem around Cleopatra's forehead. Angrily one of Octavian's men exploded: "A fine deed this, Charmion!". She had just the energy to offer a parting shot. With a tartness that would have made her mistress proud, she managed, "It is indeed most fine, and befitting the descendant of so many kings," before collapsing in a heap, at her queen's side".

With Cleopatra's death, Egypt became part of the Roman Empire. Caesarion was murdered, while Alexander Helios, Cleopatra Selene and Ptolemy Philadelphus were brought to Rome to be raised by Octavia. Her victorious brother erased all traces of the once glorious couple, but he did make one concession. Honoring her last request, he had Cleopatra and Antony buried side by side.

The descendants of Antony were a lot and some of them continued to write the history. He had many mistresses (including Cytheris) and had been married in succession to Fadia, Antonia, Fulvia, Octavia and Cleopatra, leaving behind him a number of children. Through his daughters by Octavia, he would be ancestor to the Roman Emperors Caligula, Claudius and Nero.

Antony first married to Fadia, a daughter of a freedman. According to Cicero, Fadia bore Antony several children. Nothing is known about Fadia or their children. Cicero is the only Roman source that mentions Antony's first wife.

Marriage to first paternal cousin Antonia Hybrida Minor was the next one. According to Plutarch, Antony threw her out of his house in Rome because she slept with his friend, the tribune Publius Cornelius Dolabella. This occurred by 47 BC and Antony divorced her. By Antonia, he had a daughter: Antonia, granddaughter of Gaius Antonius Hybrida, married the wealthy Greek Pythodoros of Tralles.

The third marriage was to Fulvia, by whom he had two sons: Marcus Antonius Antyllus, murdered by Octavian in 30 BC, and Iullus Antonius, married Claudia Marcella Major, daughter of Octavia.

The fourth marriage was to Octavia the Younger, sister of Octavian, later Emperor Augustus; they had two daughters: Antonia Major (also known as Julia Antonia Major), who married Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus (consul 16 BC); maternal grandmother of the Empress Valeria Messalina and paternal grandmother of the Emperor Nero; and Antonia Minor (also known Julia Antonia Minor), married Nero Claudius Drusus, the younger son of the Empress Livia Drusilla and brother of the Emperor Tiberius; mother of the Emperor Claudius, paternal grandmother of the Emperor Caligula and Empress Agrippina the Younger and maternal great-grandmother of the emperor Nero.

Antony had three children with the Queen Cleopatra VII of Egypt, the former lover of Julius Caesar: Alexander Helios (his fate is unknown; Plutarch, Cassius Dio and Suetonius state that Octavian killed Antony's son Marcus Antonius Antyllus and Cleopatra's son with Julius Caesar, Caesarion; the only further mention of Alexander Helios and Ptolemy Philadelphus comes from Cassius Dio, who states that when their sister Cleopatra Selene II married King Juba II, Octavian, then named Augustus, spared the lives of Alexander Helios and Ptolemy Philadelphus as a favor to the couple; after Helios arrived in Rome, he disappears from historical records, implying that he died before reaching maturity); Cleopatra Selene II, married King Juba II of Numidia and later Mauretania; the queen of Syria, Zenobia of Palmyra, was reportedly descended from Selene and Juba II; Ptolemy Philadelphus (if he survived to adulthood, proof of his survival has not been found; some historians speculate that he may have died from illness in the winter of 29 BC).

Through his daughters by Octavia, Antony would become the paternal great grandfather of Roman Emperor Caligula, the maternal grandfather of Emperor Claudius, and both maternal great-great-grandfather and paternal great-great uncle of the Emperor Nero of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the very