



CLEOPATRA'S DAUGHTER



and Other Royal Women of the Augustan Era

DUANE W. ROLLER

WOMEN IN ANTIQUITY



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THE AUGUSTAN ERA

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Preface

By the last third of the first century BC, the Roman Empire had come to rule much of the Mediterranean world. Yet various regions, especially in the East, were still under the control of indigenous royalty, which existed in a symbiotic relationship with the Roman government. Even though royalty might have seemed an anachronism in the new Roman world, the kings and queens ruled large territories and wielded great power. Inevitably, studies of this period have focused on the kings—personalities such as Herod the Great and Juba II of Mauretania—and have paid little attention to the queens, whether as companions to their husbands or as independent monarchs in their own right. But they were also an essential part of the contemporary political environment.

This volume examines in detail several royal women of the era of Augustus (ruled 27 BC–AD 14), all of whom were powerful leaders. Emphasis is on Cleopatra Selene of Mauretania (40–5 BC), Glaphyra of Cappadocia (ca. 35 BC–AD 7), Salome of Judaea (ca. 57 BC–AD 10), Dynamis of Bosphoros (ca. 63 BC–AD 7), and Pythodoris of Pontos (ca. 35 BC–AD 33). They were contemporaries, were related through marriage to one another, and were closely allied with the imperial family in Rome and its own women, such as Livia and the younger Antonia, who themselves took on many of the characteristics of Hellenistic queens. The most famous was Cleopatra Selene, the daughter of Cleopatra VII and the triumvir Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony), but the others were also of great importance in their own territories. Some ruled alone, and others were important partners of their husbands. They wielded power within their environments and beyond. In modern diction they are called “queens” (with the exception of Salome), an inadequate translation of the Greek words *basileia* and *basilissa*. Their role models

went back to the heroic age as well as various prototypes from the late Classical and Hellenistic periods, and the concept of “queen” had developed as an important royal dynamic in the generations before the accession of Augustus, in 27 BC.

In the evolving world of the Augustan period, these women were major players in the relationships between the diverse populations of the new Roman Empire and its central government. One (and perhaps another) was a descendant of Antonius, who was also personally involved in the destiny of the others or their families: thus the queens represent an element of the survival of his ambitions in the Augustan world, even though he was a member of the discredited older Roman regime. The women could offer greater political stability and status than their husbands, who might be subject to sudden death while on campaign, and their closeness to the imperial family provided precedents for the role of Roman aristocratic women. Cleopatra Selene was a cousin of members of the ruling Julio-Claudian family and was thus related to three Roman emperors. Others had personal contact with the imperial elite in Rome. Cleopatra Selene and Pythodoris were patronesses of intellectual culture and implemented the work of major scholars. And the descendants of the queens held royal power on the borders of the Roman Empire for generations thereafter.

This contribution to the *Women in Antiquity* series relies on the author’s long acquaintance with the world of the queens, the transitional years from the Hellenistic kingdoms to the Roman Empire. An essential part of this era was the concept of the friendly and allied monarch, the indigenous ruler at the margins of Roman territory who functioned in close alliance with the Roman state, balancing the needs of his or her people with the global requirements of Roman policy. Previous treatments of Cleopatra Selene’s mother and husband, Cleopatra VII and Juba II (who was also a husband of Glaphyra), as well as Salome’s brother Herod the Great, all in their own way friendly and allied monarchs, have set the stage for this study of the queens. Needless to say, there have also been visits by the author, insofar as possible, to their territories and capitals.

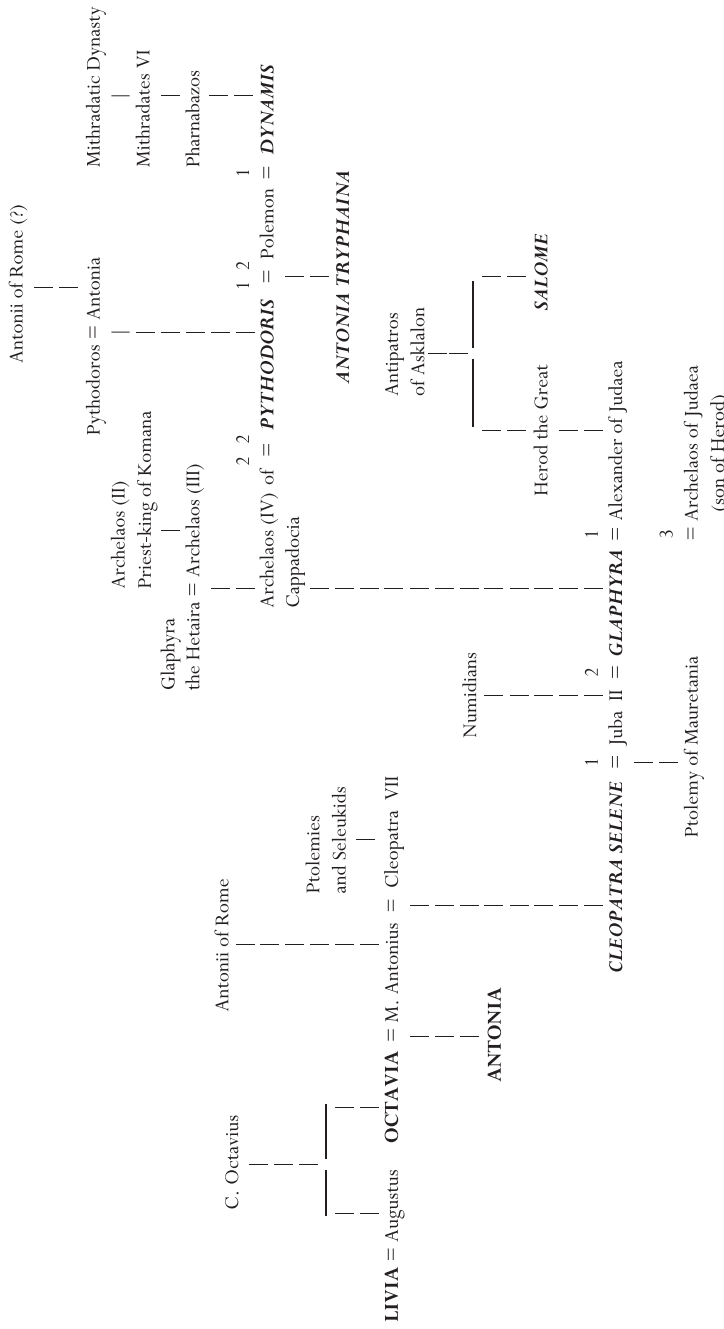
Most of all, the author would like to thank Sarah Pomeroy and Ronnie Ancona not only for their editorial advice but for their faith in entrusting to him another volume of the *Women in Antiquity* series. As before, the author wrote the book in his study in Santa Fe, having conducted research at the Harvard College Library and the library of

the University of California at Berkeley, and utilized the excellent interlibrary loan services of the Ohio State University library. Financial support was provided by the Emeritus Academy of the Ohio State University. Among the many who assisted in the completion of this work, the author would especially like to thank Sally-Ann Ashton, Stanley M. Burstein, Bridget Buxton, Carolin Hahnemann, Molly Ayn Jones-Lewis, Diana E. E. Kleiner, Kyra Nourse, Josiah W. Osgood, John Pollini, Letitia K. Roller, Eugenia Equini Schneider, Stefan Vranka and many others at Oxford University Press, and Wendy Watkins and the Center for Epigraphical and Paleographical Studies of the Ohio State University.



MAP 1. The allied states with prominent royal women during the Augustan period.

Genealogical Chart



Although greatly simplified, this genealogical chart is designed to show the relationships between the royal women of the East and the leading women of Rome, as well as each other. For full stemmata of the personalities involved, see the various works by Richard D. Sullivan listed in the bibliography, and for the Herodians, see Duane W. Roller, *The Building Program of Herod the Great* (Berkeley, CA, 1998), 280–90. It should be noted that the two instances of the name “Antonia” on the chart do not designate the same woman. Names in bold italics designate royal women discussed in this volume; names merely in roman designate Roman women who had relationships with the royal women.

Introduction

On 10 August 30 BC, Cleopatra VII, queen of kings, queen of Egypt, Cyprus, and Libya, committed suicide, probably by ingesting poison. Her companion, until recently the triumvir of the Roman Republic, Marcus Antonius, had died ten days earlier, also by his own hand. Although Cleopatra's son Kaisarion maintained a brief theoretical rule of Egypt for a few days, he was soon eliminated, and the last of the kingdoms established by the successors of Alexander the Great came to an end after nearly three hundred years. Virtually all their territories were now under Roman control. Yet as Rome evolved from its ancient Republic to a new imperial system under Augustus, independent pockets of royal government survived, despite the Romans' antipathy to royalty; they had not been ruled by kings for hundreds of years.

The death of Cleopatra terminated nearly a century of civil violence within the Roman world, which had effectively begun when the tribune Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus was killed by a mob on the Capitol in 133 BC. The chaos and instability that continued for several generations brought about the rise and fall (usually by assassination) of powerful leaders such as Gnaeus Pompeius (Pompey the Great), Julius Caesar, and Antonius, and ended only in 30 BC.

In many ways the turning point of the final stage of the civil war was the death of Julius Caesar in 44 BC. Afterward, the surviving consul Antonius and Caesar's grand-nephew Gaius Octavianus (Octavian, later Augustus) emerged as the most powerful Romans, constituting themselves, along with Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, as triumvirs with a commission to restore the Republic and to eliminate the assassins of Caesar. The latter was effectively accomplished by the autumn of 42 BC at Philippi in Macedonia, with the death of the leaders against Caesar,

Marcus Brutus and Gaius Cassius. Antonius then remained in the East in order to stabilize matters. Octavian returned to Italy and the West.¹

At this time the eastern Mediterranean was a patchwork of Roman territory, independent cities and districts, temple states, and allied monarchies. The concept of allied—often erroneously called “client”—monarchy had originated in the second century BC, when arrangements were made between dynasts on the perimeter of the Roman world and the Roman central government. The idea was that the monarchs, who were local and had a close relationship with their subjects, would rule their territories under Roman supervision, thereby providing local control and frontier security in return for political support and the introduction of Roman culture into their territories. Allied monarchies might evolve into Roman provinces, but this was a long and complex process that was never fully implemented until well after the time of Augustus.²

In the late 40s BC, when Antonius began to settle the affairs of the eastern Mediterranean, the local Roman presence was due to the fragmentation of the kingdoms that had come into existence after the death of Alexander the Great. Greece proper and Macedonia had become Roman territory in the second century BC. The Seleukid kingdom, which had ruled much of Asia Minor and the Levant, had been terminated by Pompey in the 60s BC, and its remnants were under either direct Roman control or that of various local entities. The Ptolemaic kingdom in Egypt still survived under reduced circumstances, yet its struggling young queen, Cleopatra VII, faced many difficulties.

As Antonius journeyed east from Philippi in late 42 BC and into the following year, he would have encountered various forms of rule. Western and southern Asia Minor were largely organized as Roman provinces, but most of the interior was under allied rulers, whose borders fluctuated depending on the status of the dynasties. Even Roman boundaries were not permanent: parts of Cilicia (on the Mediterranean at its northeastern extremity) would revert to the Ptolemies in the 30s BC and then to Archelaos of Cappadocia, who controlled a vast area of south central Asia Minor. The territories along the Black Sea coast were also in flux, with portions of the Roman province of Bithynia and Pontus, which had existed since the 60s BC, eventually transferred back to the local kingdom of Pontus, which also held the southeastern coasts of the sea. Farther around to the east and centered on the northern coast—in the area of the modern Sea of Azov—was the kingdom of Bosphoros, a

region that had been a Greek outpost since the fifth century BC and was still an independent kingdom in the Augustan era.

The Roman province of Syria, established in the 60s BC, was created out of the Seleukid heartland and radiated from Antioch, the old Seleukid capital. To the south was a complex area of local cities, dynasts, and chieftains that had evolved from the dying Seleukid Empire. On the coast were the ancient Phoenician cities such as Tyre and Sidon, which could at times be either independent or under Roman or Ptolemaic control. In the interior was the Hasmonean kingdom of Judaea, established about 100 BC; by the 30s BC it would be under the control of a vigorous young ruler, Herod the Great, placed on the throne by Antonius and Octavian. His difficult rule needed constant Roman support. Yet Cleopatra also coveted much of his territory and received parts of it as far north as Damascus, especially after 36 BC; these largely reverted to Herod after her death.

Farther south was a small area around the ancient city of Gaza that was controlled by the Nabataean Arabs (famous for their remote city of Petra), which served as a contact point between the traders of the Mediterranean and those of Arabia and interior southern Asia. Then there was Egypt, the historic center of the Ptolemaic Empire, which became Roman after the death of Cleopatra; at the same time, her external territories in the Levant, Asia Minor, and Cyprus came under Herodian, Cappadocian, or Roman control. The territory west of Egypt was Roman—although there was some dispute between Rome and Cleopatra about the status of the Cyrenaica (modern Libya)—and then far beyond, at the northwestern corner of Africa, were the twin kingdoms of eastern and western Mauretania, whose future was not to be settled until the 20s BC but whose current rulers were also very much involved in the affairs of the eastern Mediterranean.

This was the situation in 42 BC, yet twelve years after he had headed east from Philippi, Antonius was dead and Octavian had emerged as the sole ruler of the Roman Republic, taking the title Augustus in 27 BC. The civil war had come to an end, and the need for centralized rule under a single powerful yet benign personality had been generally realized. Augustus remained in control until his death in AD 14, transformed the Republic into an empire (although he would have objected to such terminology), and brought peace to a world so disrupted that no one alive had known anything but war. Part of his policy was to support the allied monarchs, and the rule by kings and queens along the Roman

frontier increased during the Augustan years, following the groundwork laid by Antonius after 42 BC. Cleopatra was gone, but the Herodian, Cappadocian, Pontic, and Bosporan monarchies had survived, and soon a new allied kingdom would be established in Mauretania. Royal women would play an important role in this evolving Augustan world, and their interchange with the women of the Augustan family would become an important characteristic of the era.

Even in the Augustan period, the eastern Mediterranean remained fertile ground for dynastic rivalries and conspiracies, yet it was in this environment that the royal women who would be prominent in the Augustan world flourished: Cleopatra Selene, who went from Ptolemaic Egypt to Mauretania; Glaphyra of Cappadocia, who lived for a time in Judaea; Salome of Judaea; Dynamis of Bosporos on the Black Sea; and Pythodoris of Pontos, whose territory at its peak extended throughout much of central and northern Asia Minor.

The Sources

As is inevitable with women from antiquity, the sources for the queens of the Augustan period are scattered and limited. In ancient historical writing, women were often presented only in connection with the men in their lives, which becomes an especially pernicious problem when the women are independent. This can also be a failing of modern scholarship. This bias not only compounds the difficulty of any scholarly analysis, but diminishes the importance of women in Hellenistic and Roman society, where they were more prominent than they had been at any time since the Bronze Age. Even though the literature on the queens is the usual available for the Augustan period, their traces can be faint. The most important Greek writers are Strabo of Amaseia, who had a close yet undefined relationship with Pythodoris and provided a contemporary account of her, and Josephus, whose history of the Herodian family preserves most of what is known about Salome and Glaphyra. The early life of Cleopatra Selene was documented by Plutarch in his biography of her father, Antonius; evidence of her later years is more scattered. Dynamis is best represented by inscriptions, coins, and the late Roman historian Dio. Material culture plays an important role, especially in the case of Cleopatra Selene, with extensive art and coinage preserved from her royal seat, Kaisareia in Mauretania. Pythodoris's Sebaste in Pontos

and Salome's Askalon have visible remains; the former and perhaps the latter also struck their own coinage. Portrait sculpture seems to exist only for Cleopatra Selene, yet inscriptions are an important category of evidence for her, as well as for Dynamis, Glaphyra, and Pythodoris.

Personal and Geographical Names

The handling of proper names from antiquity remains a complex and often insoluble process. The Roman Empire was truly multilingual, with Latin and Greek the primary languages, and Roman officials were expected to be fluent in both and would also write in both, using different forms of their own names depending on the language. Toponyms were also subject to variants in several languages—often the indigenous name used by the locals is not even known—and the modern spelling depends on the survival of sources and what language they were written in, and sometimes even forms developed in post-antique literature. Common vernacular forms in use today for both place and personal names have also passed through the Latinization of medieval and modern times, and thus what is now most familiar may have been unrecognizable to the bearer of the name or the inhabitants of a locality. The orthography is most difficult in the Roman East, where indigenous languages, Greek, and Latin all competed.

With that in mind, Greek place and personal names generally have been directly transliterated, except in some cases (such as Athens, Alexander, and Cleopatra) where common English forms exist. Latin names are generally in the style best known in English (such as Pompey, Octavian, and Rome), except that Marcus Antonius is retained rather than the Mark Antony of Renaissance drama. Names that originated in a third language (e.g., Hebrew or Egyptian) are presented in the most familiar English form (often the Greek or Latin version).

Queens and Royal Women

In Greek antiquity, women were always an essential part of any monarchical system, but their status and roles in society varied with the era. The use of “queen” (Greek *basileia* or *basilissa*) to designate a title or office was not consistent, and both ancient and modern authors have employed the word casually without being cautious about its legal specifications. In fact, the word “queen” is more appropriate to medieval or early modern contexts, and far fewer women in the Greek world were queens than one might imagine. The modern word does not reflect all the nuances of Greek terminology, but if one is going to translate *basileia* and *basilissa*, it is perhaps the best equivalent.¹

The Origins of the Basileia

The first woman to be called a *basileia* in Greek literature was Penelope, the wife of Odysseus. To Homer, the word had a limited meaning, and it is astonishing to realize that most of the famous women of the Trojan War era were not addressed by this title, despite their royal lineage. Homer did not use *basileia* to speak of Clytaemnestra, Helen, or Hecuba. To be sure, they were generically called “queens” in later literature, especially in drama,² but this is anachronistic, and the word does not appear in the *Iliad*, suggesting that it may not even have existed in earliest times. In fact, in the first Greek documents, the Linear B tablets of the Late Bronze Age, the masculine form *basileus* (*pa-si-re-u*) referred to a feudal lord, but there is no evidence of any feminine form.³ Yet by the time of Homer, the term *basileus* had evolved to indicate somewhat greater status. Nevertheless, *basileia* is not documented until Homer

used it to refer to Penelope. The word occurs seventeen times in the *Odyssey*, almost always in reference to her. The only other women so addressed were Tyro, due to her relationship with Poseidon, and Arete and her daughter Nausikaa, perhaps because within the context of the story their status was uncertain and Odysseus was being respectful and cautious.⁴

This suggests that from earliest times the term *basileia*, translated today as “queen,” was a limiting one, used primarily to describe a unique and special woman—Penelope—who was different from the other royal women in the epic tradition. Granted, Penelope, like so many others, was the wife of a king (*basileus*), but it seems that this would not have been enough to gain her the title of queen, for surely Clytaemnestra would also have been so addressed. Yet Penelope was unique in that she managed the palace at Ithaka and the state that it represented (not only Ithaka but several nearby islands) effectively for twenty years while her husband was absent, not seeking any companion for her labors.⁵ Other royal wives left behind during the Trojan War, such as Clytaemnestra and Aigialeia, the wife of Diomedes, found relationships that would normalize their status and aid them in meeting the economic and political requirements of their administration, probably a greater need than any personal satisfaction. Clytaemnestra’s liaison with her husband’s closest male relative, Aigisthos, hints at the proper course of action for a royal woman when the husband is gone for a lengthy period and in all probability will not return. Yet Penelope was different: she sought no male relative or associate of her husband for assistance in managing Ithaka. Among her many suitors there certainly would have been reasonable candidates, presumably including members of her husband’s family; their moral failings were probably irrelevant. Yet despite serious difficulty, Penelope remained free of them and was considered heroic for doing so, and thus earned the office of *basileia*, in addition to any title bestowed by her marriage.

Homer treated Penelope eulogistically, giving further force to the concept of “queen.” Her first appearance in the *Odyssey*, when she comes down from her suite to the main room of the palace on Ithaka, attended by two maids and with her face veiled, is an impressive entrance that sets the tone for her character.⁶ Although in some ways she is unresponsive to the surrounding chaos, this provides her with a dignity rare in the Homeric poems. Yet her passivity was not to be dismissed and in fact was a source of strength, as she was immune to the pressures not only