

DRAYCOTT, Jane, *Cleopatra's Daughter. From Roman Prisoner to African Queen*, New York, Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2023, 328 pp. ISBN: 978-1-324-09259-9.

The book *Cleopatra's Daughter* by Jane Draycott, historian, archeologist, and Ancient History professor at the University of Glasgow, is a clear example of how is in fact very possible to correctly build a narration, or a quasi-biography, on a character from which we do not have abundant evidence and information about. The author utilizes her vast knowledge on archeology, epigraphy, and art history, to reconstruct and to paint a magnificent and plausible panorama about the life of Cleopatra Selene, the daughter of Cleopatra VII Thea Philopator.

As a skillful deductive researcher, Draycott completes several gaps in Cleopatra Selene's life. The author completes the biography through multiple inferences that form not realities but possibilities. Such possibilities provide narratives about facts and contexts that very probably happened but that do not have surviving contemporary descriptions to corroborate. Draycott achieves the creation of a detailed painting about the plausible life of a Mauretanian queen with Macedonian-Egyptian-Roman background and with considerable power in the Ancient Mediterranean during the period of the beginning of the Roman hegemony. In doing this, she also achieved the useful creation of diverse and smaller paintings about different topics as: Roman, Egyptian and Mauritanian daily life, the daily life of women, the Roman patriarchy, ancient history of childhood, racial dialectics between Egyptians and Romans, and others.

The book is divided in 12 brief chapters, most of them talk about the circumstances around Cleopatra Selene, i.e. they do not talk directly about this character. I suggest dividing those 12 chapters in two parts. The first part, from chapter 1 to 6, concentrates more in political contexts. In the beautifully articulated chapter 1 we have a historic description of the city of birth of Cleopatra Selene, Alexandria, but we receive more than a brief local history, we receive a story on how the bibliophile rulers of such

famous coastal city, ascendants of the queen, put their efforts in acquiring books from all over the world (p. 41) and how all this culture influenced in the political prestige of the city.

In chapter 2 we have a recount of Mark Anthony and Cleopatra vicissitudes in the Roman politics but, of course, such recount is made in relation to the social life of Cleopatra Selene, therefore, we are in front of a narration that is relatively different from others. In the end that chapter also outlines the negative aspects of Mark Anthony as his alcoholism or his enthusiasm for women (pp. 50-51) or the negative aspects of Cleopatra VII. In chapter 3 we receive an interesting narration about the daily life of the ancient women, where is emphasized the process of giving birth; it concentrates on how could have been all the pregnancies of Cleopatra VII and the political implications of such pregnancies.

In chapter 4 we have an assessment on a more traditional theme for (ancient) historians, the political and military history of Egypt and the fall of Cleopatra VII and her Ptolemaic dynasty (in this respect, I rescue the innovative idea about Octavia, Mark Anthony's wife and Octavius Augustus' sister, in which she is considered an eminent "peacekeeper" (pp. 102-103)). Chapter 5 narrates the consequences of Cleopatra VII's defeat and, magistrally, concentrates on the fate of her sons and daughter, ergo, it provides a story about the upper-class Roman and Egyptian infancy during the first century BCE. Chapter 6 is the first that tackles directly with Cleopatra Selene, it narrates her captivity or "house arrest" in Rome, that is, how was raised by Augustus' family.

I consider that the second part of the book, chapters 7 to 12, concentrates more in social and cultural history. The second part deepens on Roman and North African daily life during the period of life of Cleopatra Selene, from 40 to 5 BCE. Chapter 7, "Egyptomania!", recounts the Roman fanaticism (sometimes a snobbery) on Egyptian religion and art, more concretely, it briefly tells us about Mark Anthony's eccentricities on this (p. 155). Chapter 8 narrates how the Roman patricians raised a child Cleopatra Selene, how they could have chosen her husband (the prince Juba) and the reasons of such a chose. About this arranged couple, it is interestingly assured that "They offered each other not only love and affection but, more importantly considering their respective positions, political, military and financial support" (p. 176). Draycott also speculates about a possible *real* love between Selene and Juba.

Chapter 9 describes the geopolitical and social circumstances about the Mauretanian Kingdom in its last days as an independent political

entity, just before it was absorbed by Rome. This chapter narrates great details about the palace life: it tells how the royal court of Iol Cesarea, the capital of Mauritania, where Cleopatra Selene was the Consort Queen, imitated the Roman court of Octavius Augustus: “Cleopatra Selene may have been in a position to offer her father’s dwarf companion Sisypheus a home at the Mauretanian royal court. [...] the royal family do also seem to have imitated Augustus, who founded the Praetorian Guards in 27 BCE, in their use of bodyguards. They founded their own version of the organization, the *corporis custodes*” (pp. 201-202). Chapter 10, among other topics, describes the difficulties and achievements of the marriage between Cleopatra Selene and Juba, concretely, it tells how she could have juggled her Greco-Macedonian, Roman, and Egyptian (cultural) heritages, in order to rule a North African Kingdom with a Berber population and with a North African husband. Chapter 11, again, utilizes more the deductive method; the author bravely dares to reconstruct what could happen with the descendants of Cleopatra Selene and Juba up until the times of Emperor Alexander Severus (235 BCE); “[...]we cannot trace Cleopatra Selene’s descendents around the ancient Mediterranean over the ensuing decades and centuries with any degree of certainty” (p. 237). And relates a possible divorce between Cleopatra Selene and Juba (due to a possible middle age crisis on the part of the king).

Lastly, chapter 12 delves into the polemic business of Cleopatra Selene’s and Cleopatra VII’s ethnicities. Draycott concludes, debunking audiovisual representations such as that made in the *Queen Cleopatra* series by Netflix, that nor Cleopatra VII and, therefore, neither Cleopatra Selene, were what today is categorized as “Black African” (pp. 239-248). In opposition, the author sustains that Juba could be considered as “Black African” (p. 249), implying then that the grandsons of the famous Queen Cleopatra VII had Black African blood.

Apart from the 12 chapters, the book is benefited by a brief map-genealogies section. Even more, at the end we have a very useful section with several translated (historiographical or literary) fragments that allude directly or indirectly to Cleopatra Selene. After this, we have another section with fragments about daily life in Rome during the time of Cleopatra Selene. The book also has a suggestive introduction where it is explained the significance of Cleopatra Selene to understand more recent debates as women inequality (in power) or (the unjust) daily life of minorities in a particular society. In the end Draycott’s book is erudite and simultaneously

very readable and enjoyable. It can be a paradigmatic case of how to research, write, and divulge the life of a character with scarce information about her. But it could also be an example of how to research the “women history” and the “minorities history” in places extremely different from the current globalized world and of how to build a narrative not only understandable to any reader from the 21st century but also that connects with, and matters to, such any reader.

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