

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Robert Green. *Cleopatra*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1996. 63 pp. \$6.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-531-15800-5; \$23.00 (library), ISBN 978-0-531-20231-9.

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Cleopatra is one of the most fascinating, and misunderstood, figures of the ancient world. She was reviled by the Roman writers who followed her as a temptress and an affront to Roman ways. Her luxurious manner of living and her sexual liaisons with Caesar and Marc Antony were emphasized by these writers, upon whom we depend for the historicity of her reign. What was left unsaid were her many accomplishments: her prosperous reign in the face of Roman encroachment, and her domestic achievements when faced with civil war, famines caused by low Niles, and dynastic squabbles. Thus, the modern view of Cleopatra, reinforced by popular books and movies, has been of the beautiful but wily seductress.

It was thus refreshing to read Robert Green's even-handed biography intended for middle schoolers, with its captivating text and lavish illustrations. The reader is drawn into the story immediately, with a recounting of perhaps the most famous of the events told about her life, namely her arrival before Caesar wrapped in a carpet. From there, Green moves from a description of the ancient setting at the time of Cleopatra's birth through

the events of her life and death as they intertwined with the world of Alexandria and Rome.

The accompanying illustrations include both ancient and modern interpretations of Cleopatra and her contemporaries, in the forms of statues, temple reliefs, and paintings. My only disappointment in the book was the lack of adequate identification of the sources of these illustrations. It also would have been instructive to include an image from the coinage of the period, which depicts Cleopatra as anything but the beautiful *femme fatale*. Further discussion of the ancient textual sources would have also been in order; this is only briefly addressed in a paragraph at the end of the book.

Supplementing the book are a timeline, map, and suggestions for further reading, including many helpful Internet sites.

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