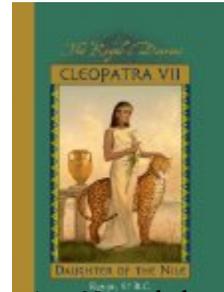


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Kristiana Gregory. *Cleopatra VII: Daughter of the Nile. The Royal Diaries*. New York: Scholastic, 1999. 221 pp. \$10.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-590-81975-6.

Reviewed by Alexandra O'Brien (University of Chicago)
Published on H-AfrTeach (February, 2001)



Cleopatra VII was the last Ptolemy and the last queen of Egypt; upon her defeat with Marc Antony at the battle of Actium in 31 BC, Egypt became part of the Roman Empire, never to experience independence again until the twentieth century.

Cleopatra is a potent historical character, immortalized in the work of Shakespeare as well as numerous painters, who portray her as a clever and manipulative woman. While little can be known about the actual woman herself, we do have Plutarch's biography in addition to numerous monumental renderings of the queen and her son, Caesarion. It is Plutarch who tells us not only of her literacy and polyglossy, but also of how it was her personal charisma, rather than any great physical beauty, which made her so irresistible to men.

Gregory's diary is a departure from the more usual depictions of Cleopatra as we are introduced to her aged twelve, while still a princess. Her diary takes us through a brief slice of her life during which she has to deal with the absence of her father (who has fled fearing death at the hands of the Alexandrian mob) and the threat of death from her jealous older sister. Cleopatra herself soon had to leave Alexandria and head for sanctuary in Rome, out of reach of her sister's assassins.

The personal diary is an interesting vehicle for introducing Egyptian history to younger readers. I found the narrative engaging and entertaining. While some may be disappointed with the portrayal of ethnicity in this book, I would point out that the book seeks to give an impression of life for a royal in the Alexandria of the first century BC. The term "politically correct" was certainly many centuries from invention at this time, and in fact, that this was not even an issue in the ancient world

might be a departure for a class discussion. Nevertheless, it would have been a good idea for the author to have addressed such issues.

Despite that, the end matter is full of useful further information, which is why I think this book is a good starting point for school children's study of Egyptian history. An Epilogue (pp. 177-180) tells us what happened to Cleopatra later in life, and the Historical Note (pp. 181-187) provides further background on Cleopatra and Egypt. The queen's family tree is included (pp. 188-189), along with lists of the children of Ptolemy XII (p. 190-191), Cleopatra's loves (p. 191), Cleopatra's children (p. 192) as well as lists of other royals, important figures and places. Following this information are twenty pages of illustrations and maps, which include images of Caesar, Cleopatra, Marc Antony as well as the Sphinx, Pharos lighthouse and the Alexandrian library. Unfortunately there is no list of suggested further reading, which is somewhat surprising given the wealth of writing on Cleopatra.[1]

This Royal Diary of Cleopatra is one of the "Royal Diaries" series, which are all very attractively produced and would be enjoyed by readers of between ten and thirteen years of age (most nine year olds would find this book a little challenging). At \$10.95 they are also very attractively priced. I would recommend this book.

Notes:

[1]. For a list of links to Web sites and bibliography see The House of Ptolemy at <http://www.houseofptolemy.org/housecle.htm> and Diotima at <http://www.stoa.org/dio-bin/diobib?~cleopatra>.

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Citation: Alexandra O'Brien. Review of Gregory, Kristiana, *Cleopatra VII: Daughter of the Nile. The Royal Diaries*. H-AfrTeach, H-Net Reviews. February, 2001.

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