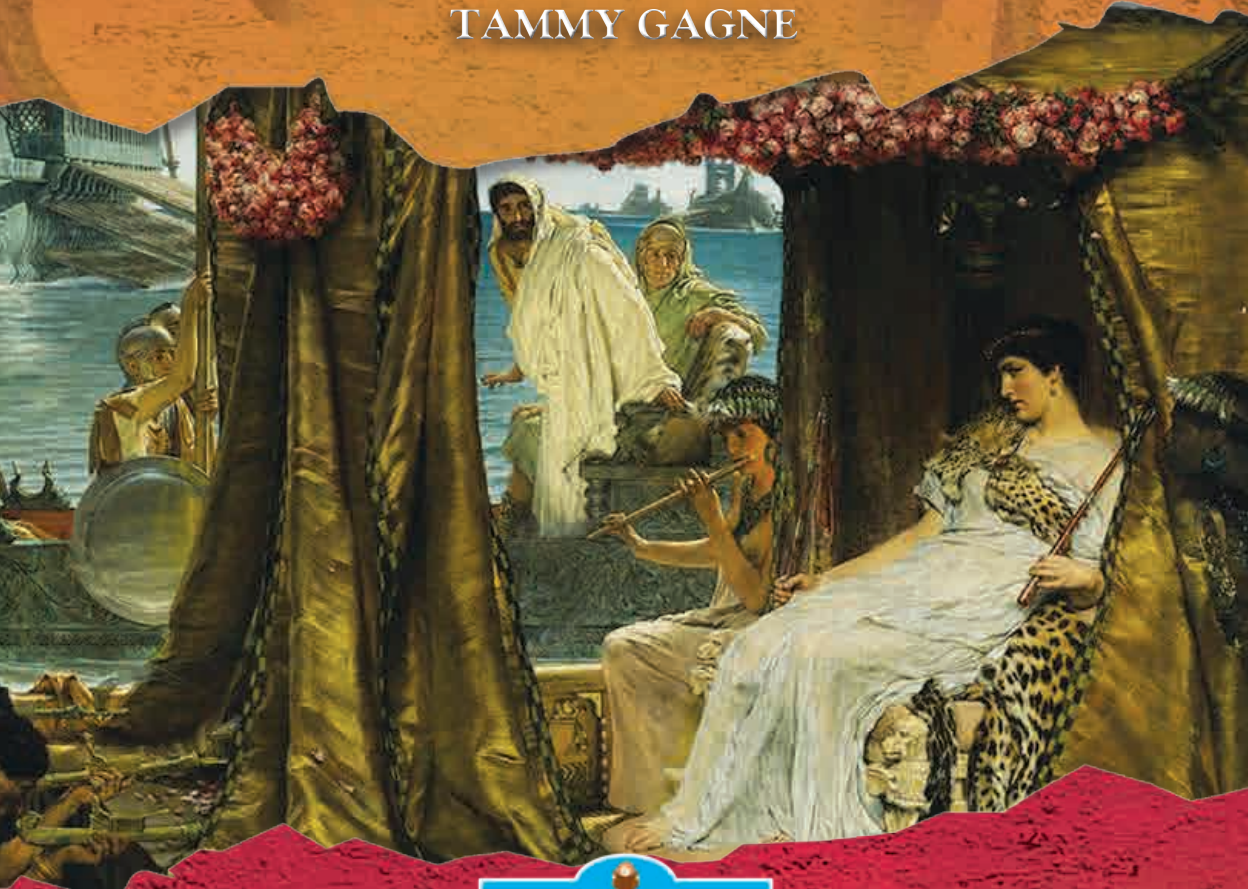


JUNIOR  
BIOGRAPHY  
FROM  
**ANCIENT  
CIVILIZATIONS**

# CLEOPATRA

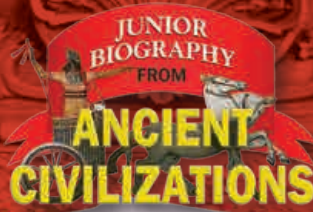
TAMMY GAGNE



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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Tammy Gagne is the author of numerous books for adults and children, including *Buddha* and *King Arthur* for Mitchell Lane Publishers. She resides in northern New England with her husband and son. One of her favorite pastimes is visiting schools to speak to kids about the writing process.

**PUBLISHER'S NOTE:** The facts on which the story in this book is based have been thoroughly researched. Documentation of such research can be found on pages 45. While every possible effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the publisher will not assume liability for damages caused by inaccuracies in the data, and makes no warranty on the accuracy of the information contained herein.

To reflect current usage, we have chosen to use the secular era designations BCE ("before the common era") and CE ("of the common era") instead of the traditional designations BC ("before Christ") and AD (*anno Domini*, "in the year of the Lord").

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can be found on page 46.



Many women have portrayed the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra on stage and in films. This photo shows British actress Lillie Langtry when she starred in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The production was featured at London's Princess's Theatre in 1890.

# CHAPTER 1

## Finding the Truth

**Cleopatra's**\* name is known throughout the world. Although she died more than two thousand years ago, Cleopatra's life is still the subject of numerous books and plays written by **Plutarch**, William Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw, and others. Many glamorous stars on the silver screen have portrayed Cleopatra. Images of the Egyptian queen have been used in postage stamps, paintings, and statues. But what do we truly know about the woman we call Cleopatra? Was she as beautiful and bold as the legends about her maintain? Was she an evil enchantress or a shrewd mastermind?

The Greeks and the Romans wrote much of the information that has been unearthed about Cleopatra over the centuries. This isn't surprising. After all, Greek was the common language during Cleopatra's time. Nearly every Roman scholar knew how to speak and write Greek. Cleopatra was of Greek descent herself and spoke the language fluently. But Greek and Roman history may not be the most reliable source for accurate information about the Egyptian queen.

\*For pronunciations of words in **bold**, see page 46.

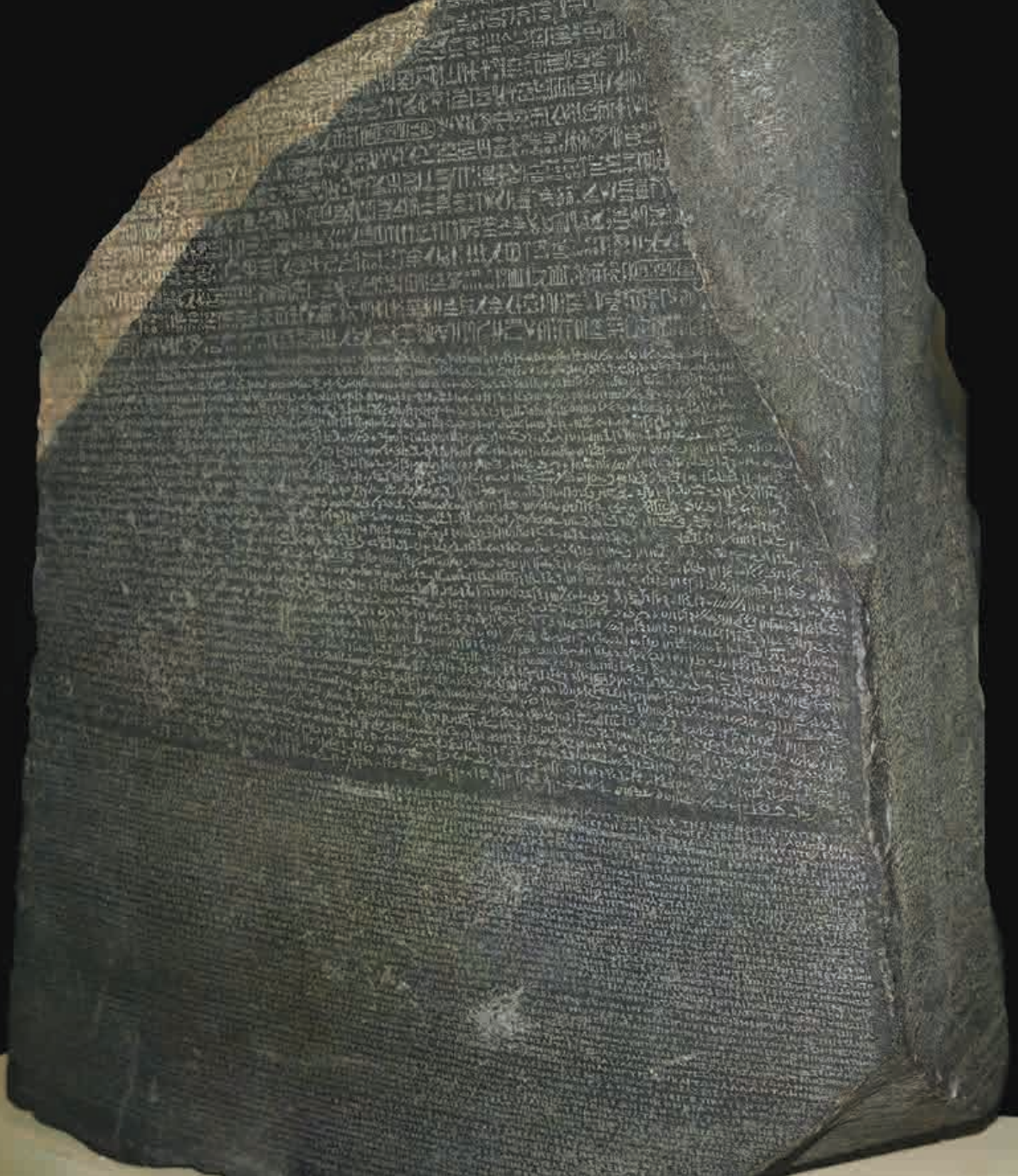
One of the benefits of winning a war is that the victor gets to write the history books. The only problem with this arrangement is that the winner's account of the enemy is one-sided. The Romans disliked Cleopatra immensely. They thought she possessed too much power, especially for a woman. They accused her of using her beauty to get what she wanted. And they dismissed her as self-indulgent and small-minded.

Certainly not everyone accepted the Romans' negative view of the Egyptian queen. A fair number of historians wanted to learn the true nature of Cleopatra. But it was nearly impossible for them to learn the ancient Egyptians' side of the story—at least at first. It wasn't until the nineteenth century that historians could even read Egyptian hieroglyphs.

The discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799 finally gave the world the means of understanding what those ancient symbols meant. But reliable translations took time. As the *Wall Street Journal* explained, “[The Rosetta Stone] featured texts in Greek, demotic [commonly spoken] Egyptian and hieroglyphics; the Greek indicated that the three passages were identical . . . But it wasn't until 1822 that **Jean-Francois Champollion** decoded the hieroglyphs.”<sup>1</sup>

Scholars could also only study the artifacts that had been discovered. Egyptian history wasn't as neatly arranged as the books written by the Greeks. A little was found here; a bit more discovered there. Archaeologists and historians worked together to decipher the writings on various artifacts from Cleopatra's era. And as they did, they gradually assembled a new view into the lives of the ancient Egyptians and their beloved queen. This history had been recorded by the people who knew her best.

What most Greek accounts of her life overlooked was Cleopatra's impressive intelligence. “She was a very clever woman,” wrote archaeologist Joyce Tyldesley. “She ruled for over 20 years and managed to delay the Romans taking over Egypt, which was something that was threatening throughout her reign. Plus, she took over a



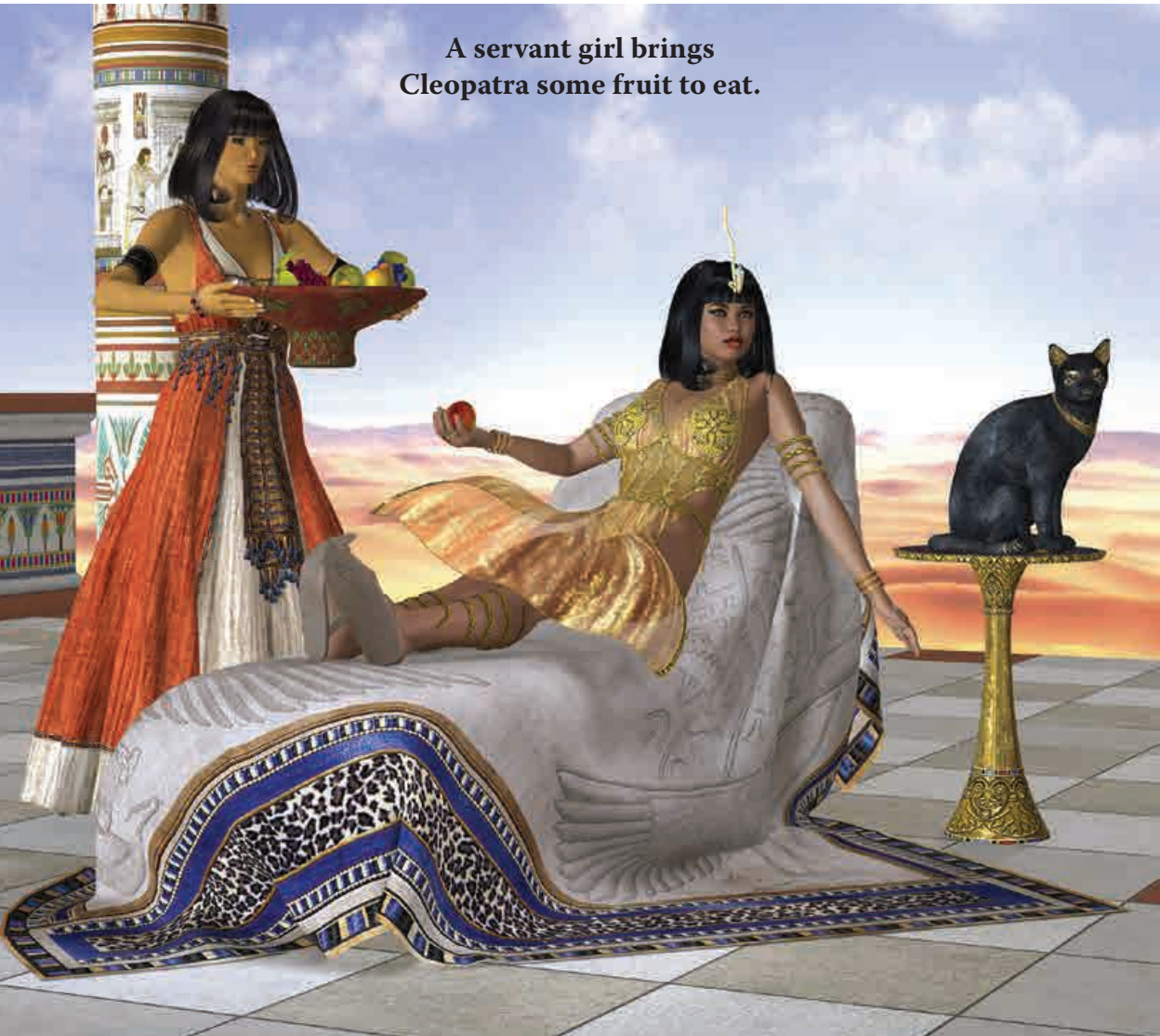
The Rosetta Stone gave the modern world a much more detailed view of life in ancient Egypt. Until the discovery of this incredible artifact, most of what we knew about Cleopatra came from the Romans. As her enemy, they were not the best source of accurate information.

## CHAPTER 1

country from her father that was fairly poor and strengthened the economy so that when she died, Egypt was in a good position.”<sup>2</sup>

While they held different opinions about Cleopatra, the Greeks and the Egyptians always appeared to agree on one thing: Everyone who encountered the queen found her especially captivating and fascinating. As Plutarch wrote, “[T]he charm of her presence was irresistible, and there was an attraction in her person and her talk, together with a peculiar force of character which pervaded her every word and action, that laid all who associated with her under her spell.”<sup>3</sup>

**A servant girl brings  
Cleopatra some fruit to eat.**



## The Missing Piece

The quality that most of the early texts about Cleopatra left out was how bright she was. Joyce Tyldesley, the author of *Cleopatra: Last Queen of Egyptians*, explained that the Romans did not simply overlook that important trait. Instead, Tyldesley thinks that they left it out on purpose. “There’s a lie by default because few have ever credited her with being clever. She is mentioned in Arabic histories, where she is reported as an intelligent woman capable of many things.”<sup>4</sup> The evidence supports this claim. The idea that Cleopatra relied on her looks to get what she wanted makes for more exciting stories. But the most thrilling tales can also distract the reader from the truth. As Tyldesley pointed out, “In a way, it’s not as interesting when we get her back to who she really was—but of course, it makes her into a real person and not a stereotype, which is much better.”<sup>5</sup>

A statue of Cleopatra  
on her deathbed



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