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Cleopatra a life stacy schiff pdf

Cleopatra's palace shimmers with onyx and gold, but is still richer in political and sexual intrigue. Although her life lasted less than forty years, it reshaped the contours of the ancient world. She was married twice, each time with an older brother. She conducted a brutal civil war against the first civil war and she poisoned the second. Incest and assassination are family specialties. Cleopatra appears to have had sex with only two men. However, they occurred as Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony, two of the most prominent Romans of the time. The two were married to other women. Cleopatra had a son with Caesar and - after being killed, three more with his patron. Famous long before fame, Cleopatra went down in history for all the wrong reasons. Shakespeare and Shaw speak in their mouths. Michelangelo, Tiepolo, and Elizabeth Taylor put a face to her name. Along the way the supple personality was lost. In a masterly return to classical sources, Stacy Schiff here boldly separates reality from fiction to rescue the world queen whose death opened up a new world order a generation before the birth of Christ. Rich in detail, in scope, Schiff is a bright, insightful original reconstruction of a brilliant life. What we least know about Cleopatra has come to us through Hollywood fiction and production. Strangely, the truth about her comes from a variety of sources that have different levels of trust and often contradict each other. In this, she will always be a little mysterious, her life and motivations open to explanation. But for a story that is much more complex and compelling than simply the story of a man who seduces two of the Most Recognized Men of the Roman Empire (Julius Caesar, Mark Antony), I must appreciate Cleopatra's suggestion: A Life of Pulitzer Prize-winning author Stacy Schiff. Last summer Cleopatra graced the pages of National Geographic and I was forced to look for the nearest traveling Cleopatra museum exhibition (Milwaukee!). And as the way leads on the way, someone reading my blog post on this issue, recommends the book. The critic of Cicero and Octavius, historians such as Plutarch, Dio, Appian and Josephus - just a few of the sources drawn to the book - all have their own take on the woman and the events surrounding her. And as people write with their biases and to audiences with their own political leanings, even what has been written must be carefully judged. Cleopatra was seen as a scandalous woman who used sex as a weapon to manipulate powerful men to play victims in the story, even some of her cone believed this (as they had to let them write to the Romans, and how to explain how superiors roman men would only share wealth and glory with not just a non-Roman, but (panting) a woman!) Cleopatra: A Life, however, is a more complex portrait a smart, strong woman who restored herself as the leader of Egypt after being kicked out of Alexandria by her brother, Ptolemy XIII. There are many conspiracies, deals made, murders, wars, and incest royal marriages. She was multilingual, the first Ptolemaic ruler to actually speak the language of those she ruled. Some may think of her as the woman who brought the end to the Egyptian Empire. (No small opponents. And even that turning point in history could go in a completely different direction if Antony wins over rival Octavius.) Schiff makes it clear what is certain, likely, possible, or simply impossible to know. She tells Cleopatra's story with the tempo and excitement of a person who rotates the page according to the plot, and attracts the reader with wit and playfulness, a smart phrase, or even an ironic statement or three. This is hard to do as we all know how the story ends. Or we think we do, anyway. Along the way, we also get an enlightening comparison of the Greek Egyptian Empire and its culture (most notably its attitude towards and the treatment of women) with the Romans (The Testosterone Empire). Plus, the stories of Cleopatra's two famous Roman wives get a powerful story. You don't have to be a history buff to enjoy a book like this. Schiff is a great story teller, and Cleopatra is a subject we can't seem to have enough of. One of my favorite reads of 2011! Get a copy or download it for kindle. Find cheap holiday deals at the travel supermarket © 1996-2014, Amazon.com, Inc. or its affiliates. A conversation with James Mustich, Editor-in-Chief of The Barnes & Noble Review Nobody sat on her back when she was a child and thought, 'I wanted to be a biographer when I was growing up.' Stacy Schiff told me when we met at breakfast in Manhattan's east side. Cleopatra: A Life. Schiff was drawn to her interest in Antoine Saint-Exupéry, an appeal so strong that she eventually left her career as editor at Simon & Schuster to compose her first book, a life of French aviation pioneer and author of classics such as The Little Prince and Wind, Sand and Stars. Schiff followed Saint-Exupéry's success with Véra (Vladimir Nabokov), was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Biography in 2000, and A Great Impression: Franklin, France, and the of America, winner of the George Washington Book Prize. Despite their various themes, Schiff's book shares a literary character and integrity - in addition to their meticulous scholarship - that makes them both rewarding and a pleasure to read. Cleopatra is no exception, and our discussion of and its content proved to be animated, stimulating and vivid with her palpable fascy to life and legends about her latest protagonist. What follows in an edited transcript of our conversation. - James Mustich James Mustich: It's been 5 years since you were being groomed for the throne, they're opposites, exotics to each other. But the truth of the matter is that they were basically graduates of the same elite organization. They can cite the same poem: they read the same book and pondered the same question. They only happened to see each other for the first time. JM: Talk a little bit about what the curriculum is. Homer is an important part of it. SS: Homer is the foundation. Basically, stable diets are Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and with them a vast training in rhetoric - how to talk, how to present yourself, how to express yourself properly. It's a speechifying culture. Which, especially if you are being groomed for the throne, is something you would have taken seriously. JM: And Cleopatra knows eight languages? SS: Nine if you include Greek. We don't know if or how she speaks Latin, however. My guess is she would have said it well, but with an accent of some sort. But that's absolute speculation. JM: Surprisingly, she was the first Egyptian king in a while to really know Egypt. She made a point of learning it. SS: Plutarch claimed that she was the first Ptolemy who bothered to learn the languages of those she ruled. Who knows why? Perhaps her father suggested it, or maybe she was particularly gifted in terms of language, as Plutarch asserted. But whatever the reason, it helps, because she had to hire troops and maintain peace in a very restless country at the time; it would be a huge advantage to be able to speak Egyptian. There is one thing I should mention when you ask me about landscape reconnaissance, as you put it. I interviewed David Herbert Donald, the Historian of Lincoln, and we talked, how one deals with secondary sources and previous biographies. He said something just come back to me when I worked for Cleopatra, Cleopatra, are: No new materials; only new questions. There are a large number of new scholarships, for example, of Greek education, and on women in the Greek world, but few major documents are likely to appear. Cleopatra's diary will not suddenly appear in the port of Alexandria. We have to go. But I did, however, have new questions. The first is how she transformed herself from her desert exile back to the Palace of Alexandria in response to Caesar, a question that stumped a few of the scholars I consulted. JM: If you could have a primary source for a problem or conversation, what would it be? As you know, she was in Rome when Caesar was murdered. Two such events are tantalizing. We really don't know all the reasons behind Caesar's murder. We know he's comporting himself as an autocrat, and paying little attention to the political climate. Honor is being heaped on him as if he were some kind of god, which rubbed the good republicans in Rome the wrong way. But does the fact that he has the Queen of Egypt living across town, with his children, in his villa, have any bearing on what will happen? There the silence speaks volumes; none of Caesar's fans had any reason to write Cleopatra into his life. And after his death, he was god. There is no room for an Egyptian queen in that story. So my answer to your question would be: she is up in her villa, he was killed mid-day. Someone has to hustle there very quickly to deliver the news. She and Egypt have barked on him. What was her reaction? It's so frustrating there wasn't any sense of what that moment might have been like. She would be in danger at the time. And she knew she was going to have to start over. She doesn't know what's going to happen. The desperation must have been quite large. She is a woman who usually does not lose her temper. How does she react? JM: In your other three books, you clearly have a sense of your subject's voice, which you share with the reader through their letters and the like. There is a literary record in each case, allied with the reader's knowledge, at least in the case of Saint-Exupéry and Franklin, of these people outside of your pages, so they are present in such a way that Cleopatra can not. With Cleopatra, you have a protagonist from which only one word has come down to us, an approval of a royal decree: Ginessho, which means Let it be done. SS: If that. I'm pretty skeptical about that. JM: Does this give you access to a different layout? Because you have a voice attached to the stories of other books that you are not here. SS: That's a really good question. Someone asked me recently, When did you know the book could be The answer to that is, when I'm done writing it. We have to go. Seriously. After I wrote a chapter, I thought, OK, maybe, but only if I finish the whole I'm sure. Or at least as sure as I've ever received. But what made me realize it could be written was the few lines of dialogue in Plutarch, and then only after I'd gone back to Plutarch two or three times did I actually see it. It was an afternoon Alexandrian sultry: Cleopatra and Mark Antony were out fishing with their friends. In retaliation for a prank in which he enticed her, Cleopatra tricked Antony by attaching a salted herring to his line. This he offers up to all the laughter around. Then she said this wifely: But darling, you shouldn't be fishing; You should be out of the conquering kingdom. There was something in the shout that was very true to me, a bit like, You shouldn't play golf; You should stay with the kids. I thought, but really, we have a 2,000-year-old dialogue. Suddenly I felt you could set up a scene. You really had a sense of Cleopatra's cosiness and her sauciness and her wit. Even from very, very few lines, I think you can start to glimpse a personality. Otherwise, the answer is: I feel as if this requires more work from the biographer, more of the biographer's voice. When the subject is inert, or coy, or for that matter missing from his own life, the biographer engages in a lot more legwork. I had a similar problem with Véra, where I had to spiral around an object that didn't want to animate him and coax her out. With Cleopatra it is clear that it is worse; You can't get very close. As a result there are many of my voices in this book, which is not a coincidence, as I was in the first place looking to write something looser, more essay, than I had before. JM: Were there moments when you tried to speculate or invented a scene? SS: No. JM: You can't even rely on geography. SS: Tell me about it. JM: Alexandria has changed a lot since Cleopatra, right? SS: Yes. The Nile is in the wrong place. The Nile has moved? SS: Culture is different, religion is different, and yes, even the Nile has moved. It's almost two miles east. Alexandria is flattered today; Cleopatra's palaces, museums and libraries all disappeared. The sky is the same. I went to Alexandria for two weeks, and when I sat there, I thought: the weather is the same, the tide is the same, the sunset is the same, and the color is the same. Then all bets are off. Once I felt that this was not true when I went out where Cleopatra would be camped out in the desert, exiled because of her fight with her brother, at the time that the biography opened. Today, it is located just east of the Suez Canal. Now, the coast is not in the same place as it was, and the fortress is rubble (although it is being excavated - it is actually quite incredible), but you can get a real sense of what it would have been like in the first century B.C. In addition, part of the Turkish coast has not yet developed and look exactly as they would have 2,000 years ago. Otherwise you are on your own. Fortunately, many visitors to Alexandria in and around the Cleopatra era wrote about it in great detail. JM: There is a section in which you describe quite the quite dynamic rambunctiousness of the ancient population - the volatility with which the city reacts to the actions of leaders or failures to act. SS: It's entirely from ancient sources. The problem, obviously, is that almost everyone is inimical to Egypt either east or Cleopatra. So when someone writes, a century later, Oh, the Egyptians are incredibly lawless, you have to remember that he was a Roman officer and by definition would say as much. But even alexandria natives and others from the Greek world have spoken about Alexandria as people now talk about New York: a city where you got your wallet stolen in the corner of 57 and 5, and where everyone always talks loudly and at the same time. That's exactly how John Adams described New Yorkers in the 17th century. We have to go. Alexandria's accounts are entirely consistent. In addition, they make palpable physical details of that world. So although we see none of them today - there is a bit of Roman Alexandria left, but almost nothing of Greek Alexandria - the accounts are so vivid and lavish that it is easy to rebuild a city from them. JM: Caesar has become history, you write at one point. Cleopatra became a legend. That seemed to me to provide the seed of division from which the story grew; it is a narrative line in which the main trunk of events is fastened with vines of sex and exoticism. What an interesting historical moment, when the famous Roman world met, if Cleopatra was any guide, was also practical, but never seen so. SS: Yes. JM: Maybe that's because the shadow of the pyramids falls on whatever we think of Egypt; Whatever takes place in the shadow of these mysterious monuments is strange to us. And the sexual dimensions of Caesar and Antony's experience in Egypt certainly mystifies any simple idea of conquest. One of the fascinating things about the book is how you reveal Cleopatra in their equality as a leader and a strategist; She may have been romantic doyenne, but she is definitely a master of realpolitik. SS: Yes. Interestingly, she happened to fall in with the two most powerful Romans of the day, didn't she? What a coincidence. We have to go. Much of what I hope will thread through the book, in a way that won't interrupt the story if at all possible, is the idea that history comes down to us as propaganda and gossip. Sources should always be read that light. How history is written is as important as what it shows us. In this case, three things stunned the Romans: the mystical, alien East; its cognitive feminine, and with that sovereign women; and Egypt's wealth mind-boggling. No Romans ever came to the palace of Alexandria without finding him without a vocabulary to describe it, it produced an extraordinary contrast to the first century. C Roman, primitive by comparison. Cleopatra's personal charm aside, her wealthy and luxurious country, her fortune, was in themselves quite attractive. Attractive and jealous do, I should say. JM: And production worries. There's a great line at the end of the book: She makes Rome feel uncomfortable, insecure and poor enough cases of anxiety without adding sex to the mix. Caesars conquest may have been on her way to becoming god, but she was a God. SS: She's already there. And worse, she's a woman. JM: Faced with his wealth and his stature and his sophistication, the Romans did not know how to behave. They are uncomfortable on her terrain. SS: I just wrote a piece in which I drew a parallel between how the Romans felt about Cleopatra's train and how we feel today in Paris or London, when that convoy of Maybachs with security details descended on our neighborhood café. It was impressive that Cleopatra was able to make. Everything in Egypt belongs to her. Nothing leaves that country without enriching its co-co-ordi back. Her corn supplies are to some extent ancient versions of today's Middle Eastern oil supplies. Rome stands at an uncomfortable level at her mercy. JM: You don't say it quite like this, but you imply that the era specified as B.C. could easily be called Before Cleopatra was Before Christ. I think you said you could date the modern world from Cleopatra's death. SS: There's a gradation there, yes. The funny thing is that everything that she is held to as a bad example - she is a dethly woman who spends unnecessary and kills relatives, who hold the court in a luxurious world of pure morality - all this, of course, came true of the Roman Empire itself within a minute and a half of her death. The fact that the Roman Republic, in its moral, pure state, pretty much ends with Augustus, which is to tell the death of Cleopatra, is telling. She left a good impression on Rome after her suicide. It seems to me that this is the first real wrestle of East and West, one that we are still evoking today. Here we are two thousand years later, and geography has changed, the division of East and West has changed, religion has clouded the image, but the problems remain constant. There is something still very sexual and dissolute and primitive to our minds when we look East, while we consider ourselves towards think of rectitude. JM: Also, the Romans, like us, had a hard time imagining subtle elsewhere. SS: Exactly. JM: One of my favorite passages in the book is your description of preparing for a sea battle, in which the Egyptians built a larger fleet of Rome in two weeks. Out of spare parts, more or less. SS: For a Roman, ingenuity is a Roman specialty. It bothered him that Alexandria was such an advanced civilization, and that Rome was a comparative backwater. That, too, will change within a minute, and that change fascinates me. How could life have been so incredibly sophisticated in the first century B.C. in Egypt, and then how could we have lost so much of that culture for hundreds of years? Similarly, how can it take two thousand years for women to become independent members of society again, as they have come to a great extent during the day of Cleopatra? And can we go backwards again? JM: We have a hard time thinking of the Roman Empire as doing anything other than bestridding the ancient world with confidence. But as you say, they have encountered a more sophisticated, more splendid, and older civilization of them. So they were kind of innocent people abroad, if you wanted to. SS: Well [LAUGHING], that's why Mark Twain creeps into the book a few times. Reacting to Cleopatra's world is like that of an American going abroad in Twain's time, and trying to decide, Is this barbarism or is this debacle? They can not imagine any other option, because they are very unsm suitable for what they are considering. That's one of the reasons I had so much fun with Cicero. He never had a good thing to say about anyone. He has a problem with women. He can't stand anyone who has a better library than him. And he has a profound and angry angness to wealth and royalty. He resisted an appointment to Egypt because he thought the post-world might think less of him to take it. So you can guess how he would have felt about Cleopatra. It is easy to see how he will not take to this woman, no matter what she did to him. Cicero came as a relief, too, because to him I finally had a voice, and an incredibly quotable. JM: Much of Cicero's considerable interest, and not just in Cleopatra's case, is how his great rhetoric is transported, and ultimately, inconsistent with the blunter truths of his consciences. SS: To the extent I have a weakness for discontent, I love him. It's just amazing how he always offers that little twist of the knife. JM: So am I. What's next for you? You've decided what you... SS: Do you have an idea for me? JM: [LAUGHING] I wish I did. SS: I don't know. I'm bad at predicting. After I finished my first book, I told myself that the second subject would have to speak a Romance language, having a good sense of humor as did Saint-Exupéry, has left great letters. Those are three criteria, none of which apply to Ms. Nabokov, about whom I wrote next. She has a limited sense of humor, her letters to her husband have never appeared, and she has not lived her life in a Romantic language. So I won't book believe in any predictions I make now. Well, I'll venture a prediction: give me a great repository, please. Easy to read, machined, and mofd free. And it's best within 100 miles of my front door. JM: What do you find appealing about biography? What attracts you to it? SS: Well, it was called gossip with captions for a reason: I love reading my history through the lens of a personality. I don't think I'm alone in that. To be able to somehow to see historical events through their impact on and through the eyes of an individual thrills me. Then, of course, there is always a beginning, a middle, and an end in biography. And there is a special satisfaction for this genre: you can finally kill your subject. We have to go. As a biographer, you see things that your audience never sees. Nabokov wrote to his mistress using the same word he had used fourteen years earlier to write to his future wife. I'm sure you never realized that. But I know that. It is possible to locate the subject consistency throughout life, to illuminate motivation and explain decisions as people living lives could never have done, delights. It's a great intellectual puzzle, if one you by definition can't solve for yourself. --October 18, 2010 2010

