

## Princess, Prisoner, Queen: Searching for Identity and Agency in the Life of Kleopatra Selene

Kleopatra Selene is one of history's forgotten women, mentioned only as a footnote to her infamous parents, the Roman general Marcus Antonius and the last queen of Egypt, Kleopatra VII. Details of her life are scarce, and little is known about her self-identification. Did she identify as a Roman and queen only through her marriage to Juba II? Or did she consider herself a Ptolemy, and perhaps the legitimate queen of Egypt in exile? Recent scholarly attention allows us to view Selene's life as a progression from a childhood and adolescence in which others controlled her image for their own purposes to an adulthood when she was able to exercise agency over her depictions. G. Capriotti Vittozzi proposed a theory identifying a statue of two child-gods found at the Temple of Dendera as Kleopatra Selene and her twin, Alexander Helios. Selene is also featured in a recent book by Duane Roller, although it focuses on her husband, with Selene relegated to a supporting role.

However, Selene has never been explored as a historical figure in her own right. What we know of her suggests that she was an independent and politically active woman who was strongly associated with Egypt and the Ptolemaic dynasty. For the first time, we are able to trace ownership of Selene's representation throughout her life. First, she was an Egyptian princess whose image was carefully crafted by her mother as an embodiment of Ptolemaic power and the unique cultural syncretism of their dynasty, as seen in the Dendera statue (Capriotti Vittozzi, 2011). After her parents' defeat, Selene was Augustus's prisoner and political pawn, marched in his Egyptian triumph as a symbol of her fallen dynasty and conquered nation. As queen of Mauretania, she appeared on coins with Juba, wearing the diadem and melon coiffure of Ptolemaic queens. She issued solo coins with politically incendiary symbols such as the regalia of Isis and a crocodile, a reclamation of the crocodile imagery used by Augustus in his 'Egypt

captured' coins. Her coins always bore the Greek legend *basilissa Kleopatra*, her mother's title (Macurdy and Forrer, 2012). This suggests that Selene exercised agency as queen of Mauretania, and chose to express her identity as a Ptolemaic queen in exile (Roller, 2003). When the scattered corpus of ancient material culture and texts relating to Selene is unified and analyzed through a feminist lens, a new understanding emerges of her increasingly empowered agency and self-identification as a North African queen.

### Bibliography

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