

## Despised and Reviled: the Infamy of Cleopatra Tryphaina

Cleopatra Tryphaina, the eldest daughter of the notorious Ptolemy VIII of Egypt and his niece-wife Cleopatra III, was, like other princesses, employed by her parents as a marriage pawn in the Hellenistic game of thrones. Married about 124/3 BCE to her first cousin, the Seleukid king Antiochos VIII Grypos, Tryphaina became embroiled a decade later in the struggle between her husband and his half-brother Antiochos IX Kyzikenos for control of the disintegrating Seleukid empire. Of all the actions of infamous Hellenistic queens, Tryphaina's behaviour stands out as the epitome: when Antiochos IX's wife – Tryphaina's own full sister, Cleopatra IV – was besieged in a temple, clinging to an altar, Tryphaina ordered that her sister's hands be cut off so that she could be dragged out of the sanctuary and despatched. Within the year, Tryphaina herself was captured by her grieving brother-in-law and executed as an offering to his wife's ghost.

The story appears only in Justin, and is virtually the only ancient testimonium we have concerning Tryphaina, though we also know that she bore her husband five sons who would all go on to be kings, however briefly. In this paper I will re-examine the historiographical portrait of Tryphaina, in particular Justin's account of the debate between Tryphaina and her husband over the fate of Cleopatra IV. Older scholars accepted unquestioningly the veracity of Justin's description of Tryphaina, and vilified her as a horrific example of the moral degeneration of the Ptolemaic and Seleukid dynasties (Mahaffy 1895; Bevan 1902 and 1927). More recent and judicious accounts of later Seleukid history still tend to accept Justin's picture uncritically, though perhaps with less moral outrage than Mahaffy and Bevan (Whitehorne 1994; Ogden 1999; Hölbl 2001; Huß 2001; Ehling 2008).

This paper will challenge the reliability of Justin's portrait of Tryphaina, and will argue instead that Tryphaina was probably the victim of Seleukid propaganda: perhaps that of her brother-in-law, but even more likely, that of her own husband, Antiochos VIII.

### Bibliography

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