

READING GROUP GUIDE

DAUGHTERS OF THE NILE
A Novel of Cleopatra's
Daughter
Hits Bookstores
December 4, 2013

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A reader's guide for
Stephanie Dray's
latest novel based on
the life of Cleopatra's
Daughter

Start the Discussion!

ABOUT THE BOOK

After years as the emperor's captive in Rome, Cleopatra Selene has found a safe harbor. No longer the pitiful orphan of the despised Egyptian Whore, the twenty year old is now the most powerful queen in the empire. But when Augustus jealously demands that her children be given over to him to be fostered in Rome, she's drawn back into the web of imperial intrigue that she vowed to leave behind. Can she find a way to overcome the threat to her family and her faith? Or will she be the last of her line?

ON THE STORY & HISTORY

How do Cleopatra Selene's feelings about her famous mother's legacy change?

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ON MOTHERHOOD, FEMINISM & RELIGION

How did Isis worship clash with the more traditional Roman view of the relationship between man and the gods?

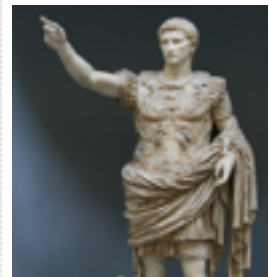
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The Egyptian goddess Isis fell into disfavor with the first Roman emperor, Augustus



The remains of Cleopatra Selene's tomb



Augustus of the Prima Porta

As one of history's most famous women, images of Cleopatra are iconic. But **DAUGHTERS OF THE NILE** explores the life of her less famous--but arguably more successful daughter--in the context of a changing world and a religious revolution.

On the Story & History

DISCUSS THE CHARACTERS, THE MAGIC, AND THE MEANING

1. At the start of the book, Cleopatra Selene and her husband Juba have a cordial but fragile relationship. Why does Cleopatra Selene resist loving Juba? What does her forced marriage to him represent to her?
2. What role does Selene's twin brother play in her life? How does her relationship with him differ from any of her other siblings?
3. Does the emperor really believe that he is the father of Cleopatra Selene's son, Ptolemy the Elder?
4. When Cleopatra Selene decides, on the night of the Secular Games does she mean it? And if so, why is it a sacrifice for her?
5. What does Selene's magic represent both in terms of her evolution as a woman and in the context of her role as a religious figure?
6. Does Julia have a faithless heart? Is she right when she says that it isn't possible to truly love more than once?
7. What role does the friendship between Julia and Selene play in the story and how do their lives echo one another?
8. Is Augustus Caesar actually a good emperor? Is Juba's admiration of him understandable?
9. How does King Herod serve as a guide for Selene's behavior as a monarch and a parent throughout the story?
10. How do Cleopatra Selene's accomplishments surpass those of her parents? What was her legacy?
11. Having been a prisoner in Rome for so long, her survival dependent upon her ability to deceive, Cleopatra Selene is secretive and mistrustful. Is this an unforgivable character flaw or does she redeem herself in the end?
12. Why did Selene never hate Agrippa as much as she hated her other enemies?
13. What did Selene's relationships with her servants and courtiers reveal about her character?
14. Marriage in the ancient world was seldom a match of equals, but the historical evidence suggests that Cleopatra Selene and Juba's may have been. How does Juba's character evolve over the course of the novel? What did it cost him to tell Selene to turn to him, in spite of the secrets she held?
15. Does this novel actually end happily?



by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema

“Selene’s life is a lesson to us that the trajectory of women’s equality hasn’t always been a forward march. In some ways the ancients were more advanced than we are today; there have been setbacks before and may be more in the future.”

~Stephanie Dray

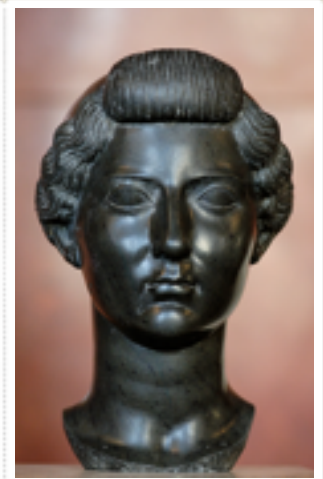
On Motherhood, Feminism & Religion

DISCUSS ROME, EGYPT, AND THE AUGUSTAN AGE

1. After the death of Cleopatra, Rome went through a period of Egyptomania, fueled, in part, by Octavian himself. Why did he remain so fascinated with the nation and woman he had conquered?
2. During the Augustan Age, wealthy parents wouldn't normally have been intimately involved in the upbringing of their children. Why might Selene have raised her children differently and was she, by modern standards, a good mother?
3. A girl would have had no expectation of marrying the man of her choice in the Augustan Age. Why does Selene's daughter resist marrying a foreign king? How did Selene contribute to her daughter's rebellion?
4. Selene's courtiers argued that her son and daughter should marry, citing good political reasons for the incest tradition of the Ptolemies. What might those reasons be?
5. Cleopatra Selene died only a few years before the birth of Jesus Christ. She too had been hailed a messiah at her birth., but during her lifetime, it was Augustus Caesar who was thought to be the savior. How does this ancient religious struggle still play out in our lives today?
6. During the Augustan Age, Isis worship was imperiled, but, in no small thanks to Cleopatra Selene, it would go on to be the dominant religion until the rise of Christianity. What elements of female divinity have we lost with the fall of Isis worship?
7. When Cleopatra Selene's son died, she couldn't bear even the grace of her own goddess. Does it ring true that even in the darkest of times, we sometimes turn our backs on spiritual comfort? If so, why?
8. Though Selene loved her sons, it was her daughters she took to the "source of the Nile." Is there a part of a mother's legacy that only a daughter can carry on? Do we have a responsibility to foster in our daughters something beyond that which we bestow upon our sons?



The famous "Tellus Panel" on the Ara Pacis: the mysterious goddess and her winds



Livia Drusilla, the emperor's wife