

READING GROUP GUIDE

LILY OF THE NILE:
A NOVEL OF
CLEOPATRA'S
DAUGHTER
Hits Bookshelves
January 2011

Join the Newsletter at stephaniedray.com

A reader's guide for
Stephanie Dray's
forthcoming series of
novels based on the
life of Cleopatra's
Daughter

Let's Start the Discussion!

ABOUT THE BOOK

After her parents commit suicide, the daughter of Cleopatra and Mark Antony is left at the mercy of her Roman captors. Heir to one empire and prisoner of another, it falls to Princess Selene to save her brothers and reclaim what's rightfully hers...

ON THE STORY

1. How do Selene's feelings about her mother's death change over the course of the novel?

Continued on Page 2

ON THE HISTORY

1. While much is known about the allegedly scandalous Cleopatra, her more cautious daughter is virtually unknown. Why do you think this is?

Continued on Page 3

ON CULTURE, FEMINISM AND RELIGION

1. Rome was generally very tolerant of religious diversity in the peoples that they conquered, but during the Age of Augustus, the Isiac faith was actively persecuted. Why?

Continued on Page 4



Rixen's Death of Cleopatra



Cleopatra meets Antony by Lawrence Alma-Tadema



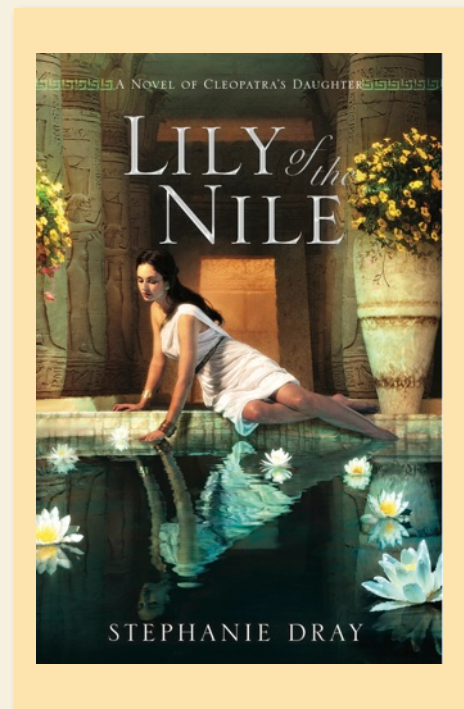
Waterhouse's Cleopatra

As one of history's most famous women, the images of Cleopatra are iconic. **LILY OF THE NILE: A NOVEL OF CLEOPATRA'S DAUGHTER** 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

DISCUSS THE CHARACTERS, THE MAGIC, AND THE MEANING

2. In antiquity, girls were considered to be grown women at the age of twelve, but what experiences in Selene's life made her older and wiser than her years?
3. How do the powers Cleopatra gives to her children suit each of them, and do you think their characters would have changed had they been matched with another power?
4. What role does Selene's twin brother play in her life? How does her relationship with him differ from any of her other siblings?
5. Selene learns to lie at a very young age and we watch her evolve into a schemer. Can these traits be forgiven as the tools of survival or do they represent a fundamental weakness in her character?
6. Octavian's desire to rebuild the Roman Republic and end the civil wars is juxtaposed against the unhappiness of the many children that he's decided to adopt as his own. Does Selene give him enough credit for sparing her life and for trying to be a just ruler?
7. In what way does Selene become more like the emperor than she is like her mother or father?
8. There is an emphasis placed on magic throughout the novel. Discuss what magic is to the Romans and the attitude that they hold for it, as well as what magic means to Cleopatra's children and the followers of Isis. Are their attitudes at all similar and how do they change throughout the course of the plot?
9. When Selene refuses to run away with their old wizard, it puts a barrier between her and her brothers. Is this a breach that can be healed?
10. In the middle of the book, Selene abandons her faith and removes her frog medallion. Why do you think she turns her back on Isis when she seems to need her most, and how does this decision impact the story?
11. Helios was furious with Selene for helping the emperor deprive him of his name during the Trojan Games. Did you agree with her choice or with Helios?
12. How is Selene a different person once Helios goes missing?
13. Julia faces a harsh reality when she realizes that she has no choice when it comes to her future. Every decision is made for her and serves a specific purpose for Caesar. What do you wish for Julia, and what kind of woman do you think she will become?
14. Is Selene disloyal to her family for coming to love some of the Romans?
15. Should Selene forgive Juba for his part in her parents' defeat?
16. What do you think the emperor means when he says that he wants Selene to be *his Cleopatra*?



On the History

DISCUSS ROME, EGYPT, AND THE AUGUSTAN AGE

2. Cleopatra's death has caused speculation and sensationalism for centuries. Given accounts that Octavian called for snake-poison healers to try to revive her, and her subsequent portrayals in his triumph, it has long been believed that she died by the poisonous bite of an Egyptian cobra. More recent theories include the idea that she was poisoned or was forced to kill herself because she was an inconvenience to Rome. How do you think she died?
3. After Cleopatra's death, Rome went through a period of Egyptomania, fueled, in part, by Octavian himself. Why do you think he remained so fascinated with the country and the woman he had conquered?
4. It is said that Caesarion was killed because "two Caesars is one too many." But Antony's son Antyllus was also killed along with Selene's cousin Petubastes of the priestly family of Ptah. What does this tell us about Rome's intentions towards Egypt?
5. One of the most noticeable features of Rome today are the many obelisks that were transferred from Egypt and placed around the city. In the book, Selene takes notice of Octavian's obsessive behavior towards her mother. How did it benefit him to keep the legend of Cleopatra alive?
6. The society of Egypt and that of Rome are often compared throughout the novel. One serves as a symbol of success through a fostered liberty under a monarch, and the other serves as a symbol of success through organized power under the guise of a republic. How do both of these symbols interact throughout the novel and why do you think it is important to see them functioning side by side?
7. There are often references of a *Golden Age*. Augustus' reign lead to two centuries of peace known as the *Pax Romana*. How was he able to bring this about?
8. Whereas Julius Caesar was assassinated by those he had counted as friends, Augustus' reign featured many loyal allies including Agrippa, Maecenas, Juba, Livia, Octavia and others. How was he able to secure such loyalty?
9. While Augustus' family grew to an enormous size, including many grandchildren, nieces and nephews, the Julio-Claudian dynasty was ultimately dominated by Livia's side of the family. Why do you think this is?
10. The month of August is named after Octavian. What other traces of his rule can be found in the world today?



Fragment of equestrian statue of the emperor Augustus. 1 century AC, National Archaeological Museum in Athens

On the Cultural Implications of the Novel

DISCUSS RELIGION, FEMINISM AND PROPAGANDA

2. How did the Isiac religion clash with the more traditional Roman view of the relationship between man and the gods? Why should it matter that slaves and women were allowed to worship in the temple and participate in rites as equals to their male counterparts?
3. Selene was born approximately forty years before the birth of Christ, and was heralded upon her birth as a savior. The entire ancient world was awaiting a Golden Age. What light does this shed upon Christianity? And how might Jesus have fared differently if he had been born into a world ruled by Cleopatra and Antony's heirs, rather than Augustus' successors?
4. Isiacism was one of the first religions of the ancient world to concern itself with social justice. Slavery, warfare, and care for the less fortunate were themes these religions addressed, to the consternation of the ruling elite. How have these traditions come down to us today?
5. Virgil's *Aeneid* was, as they say, *an instant classic*. Commissioned by Augustus, and passed down as the quintessential creation myth of the Roman state, it tells Rome's story as the Romans themselves would have wanted us to see it. Was Augustus wise to hire a cadre of esteemed artists such as Virgil to create his propaganda?
6. *Lily of the Nile* examines the hardships of even a high-born Roman woman's life and the lengths that society went to preserve a

woman's sanctity and meekness. Selene's antithesis, Octavian, shadows his household's every decision. How does his presence and his beliefs shape the plot of the novel? How would the plot change had he not been adherent to his strict policies and viewpoints on the role of a Roman woman?

7. Could Selene's story be used to empower young women in society today? Why or why not? Are there any parallels between the decisions that she has had to make for her family and the decisions some young women make for their families today?
8. How did Augustus' morality and attitudes towards women shape Rome and influence our society even today?
9. Selene had a variety of female role-models to choose from. Her mother, Livia. Octavia. And even Marcella. How do each of these women embody a different approach to the patriarchal world into which they'd been born?
10. Discuss the personalities of the male characters and their contribution to the storyline. What were the expectations for a Roman man, and how does this impact Juba, Helios, and even the sickly emperor himself?



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