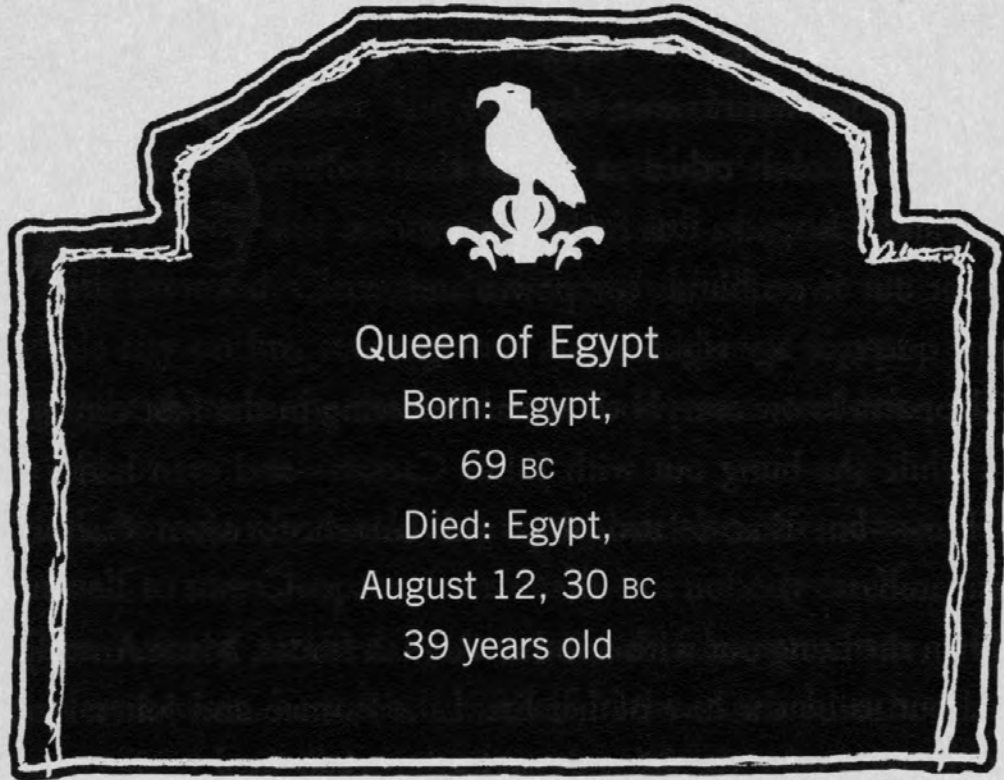


#1 ACROSS



CLEOPATRA DIED OVER two thousand years ago, and still nobody can forget her. She was smart, ambitious, and glitzy. Her style was big, with a lot of bling. If you're a girl, it's fun to be her on Halloween, with her black eye makeup and distinctive hairdo.

Some people think they know how Cleopatra died because they do crossword puzzles. #1 Across: Cleopatra's killer, three letters. Answer: ASP. That rumor started because of the death scene in Shakespeare's play *Antony and Cleopatra*, which showed her aiming a

HOW THEY CROAKED

poisonous snake at her chest and arm. But the truth is, Cleopatra's death was more like the last scene in *Romeo and Juliet*.

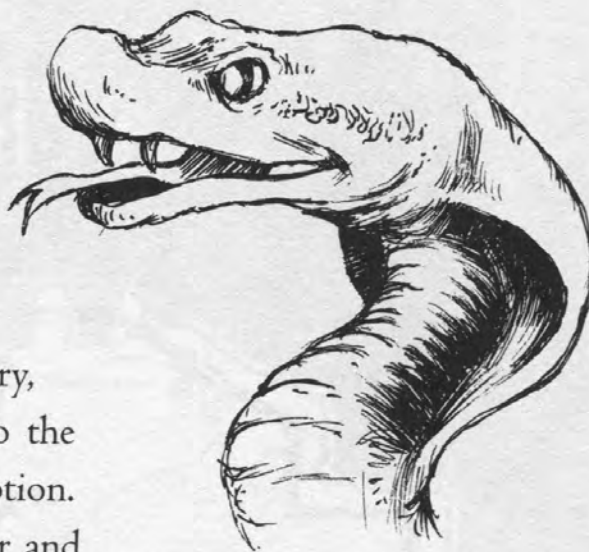
Cleopatra's family had ruled Egypt for hundreds of years. Family members were known to marry, trick, and kill each other to get to the throne, and Cleopatra was no exception. She beat out five siblings for power and became queen at age eighteen.

Cleopatra knew everybody worth knowing in the first century BC. For a while she hung out with Julius Caesar—and even had a child with him—but that relationship was cut short when Caesar was assassinated.

Then she hung out with another Roman leader, Mark Antony. He turned out to be the love of her life. Like Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra were secretly married—but their love affair lasted for years, until the day they died. She had three children with Mark Antony. Her love affairs with Caesar and Antony earned her the title the “Queen of Kings.”

Besides being madly in love, Antony and Cleopatra had an insane desire to take over the world, including Rome. The Romans, led by Octavian, waged war against them. Antony and Cleopatra lost at the Battle of Actium, off the coast of Greece, but they survived. They split up to better their chances for survival.

Cleopatra ran for her life. It was only a matter of time before the Romans would catch her, kill her, and take over her beloved Egypt.



CLEOPATRA: #1 ACROSS

She hurried back home and started gathering every gold-headed figurine and gem-inlaid bowl she could get her hands on, not to mention all the royal jewelry, and stashed it in a mausoleum (tomb) she had built for herself in the royal cemetery.

When the Romans got to Egypt, she was ready. Cleopatra, her hairdresser, and her lady-in-waiting slipped inside the treasure-stuffed mausoleum and barricaded the doors. Every nook and cranny that wasn't full of gold was filled with firewood. Cleopatra had enough kindling to set the whole city on fire, starting with all the riches of Egypt sitting right there in the mausoleum. The Romans couldn't touch her.

Mark Antony, who was hiding someplace else, offered to kill himself to save Cleopatra from death. But nobody cared.

Then Antony received a message that Cleopatra was dead. Heartbroken, he stabbed himself in the stomach with his own sword. He was hanging on for dear life when another message arrived: *Please disregard the last message. Cleopatra is fine.* Antony was in no condition to travel, but he had a couple of men take him to the mausoleum so he could see for himself.

Before Antony got there, Cleopatra received a message that Antony was dead. So when Antony came banging on the mausoleum door, Cleopatra wouldn't let him in. She thought it was a trick. The women with Cleopatra saw Antony from an upper-story window, so they threw down ropes and hoisted Antony up and into the window.



HOW THEY CROAKED

Antony saw for himself that Cleopatra was alive. But then he died in her arms.

Clearly, there were major kinks in the way messages were sent back and forth, so Cleopatra didn't bother sending a message to the Romans that Antony was dead; she sent his bloody sword.

Turns out, Antony had given the Romans a good idea. They got themselves a ladder, climbed into the same mausoleum window that he had, and ambushed Cleopatra. She lunged for a dagger so she could stab someone—maybe herself—but more likely one of them. In any case, they wrested the knife out of her hands and she stabbed no one.

Because she was a woman, and also because it would be bad press for the new emperor, the Romans didn't kill Cleopatra. Their plan was to shackle her in chains and parade her in the streets of Rome. At best, she would spend the rest of her days as a sideshow attraction.

Cleopatra was placed under "palace arrest" while preparations were made for the trip to Rome. One night, Cleopatra, her hairdresser, and her lady-in-waiting were in the ex-queen's chambers having what must have looked like a slumber party. They dressed up and ordered a basket of fruit to be delivered to the room. Then Cleopatra sent the Romans a message asking to be buried next to Mark Antony when she died.

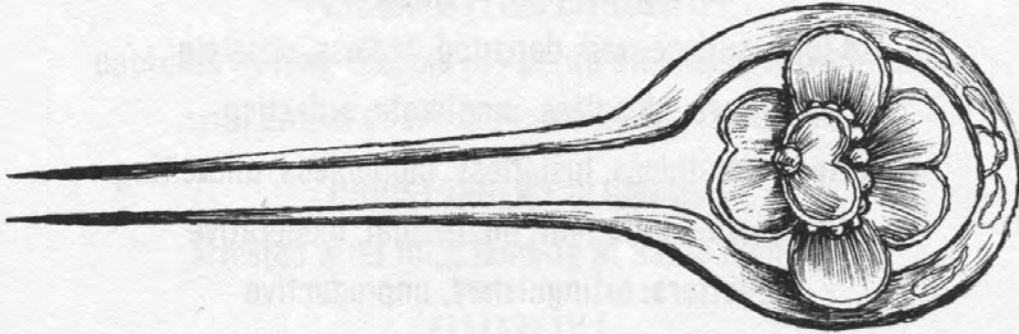
Gee, what did she mean by that?

The Romans charged into her room. Cleopatra was stretched out on a golden couch. There was no blood or sign of a struggle. She was dead. Expired at her feet was her lady-in-waiting. Her hairdresser was doing one last touch-up, placing a wreath of flowers on Cleopatra's head. Then she dropped dead, too.



CLEOPATRA: #1 ACROSS

The poison trade was big business in Egypt then, and toxic plants like aconite, henbane, and hemlock were easy to come by at your local pyramid. Cleopatra had two prick marks on her arm, not from the bite of a snake, but from a poisoned hairpin.



Cleopatra had been the queen of Egypt for twenty-one years. She was thirty-nine years old when she died on August 12, 30 BC. Egypt became part of the Roman Empire for the next four hundred years. Records say Cleopatra was buried with royal honors next to Mark Antony, but their tomb has never been found.

The message of how Cleopatra died got garbled over the past two thousand years. It should just be a matter of time before crossword puzzles are changed. #1 Across: Cleopatra's killer, six letters. Answer: POISON.

