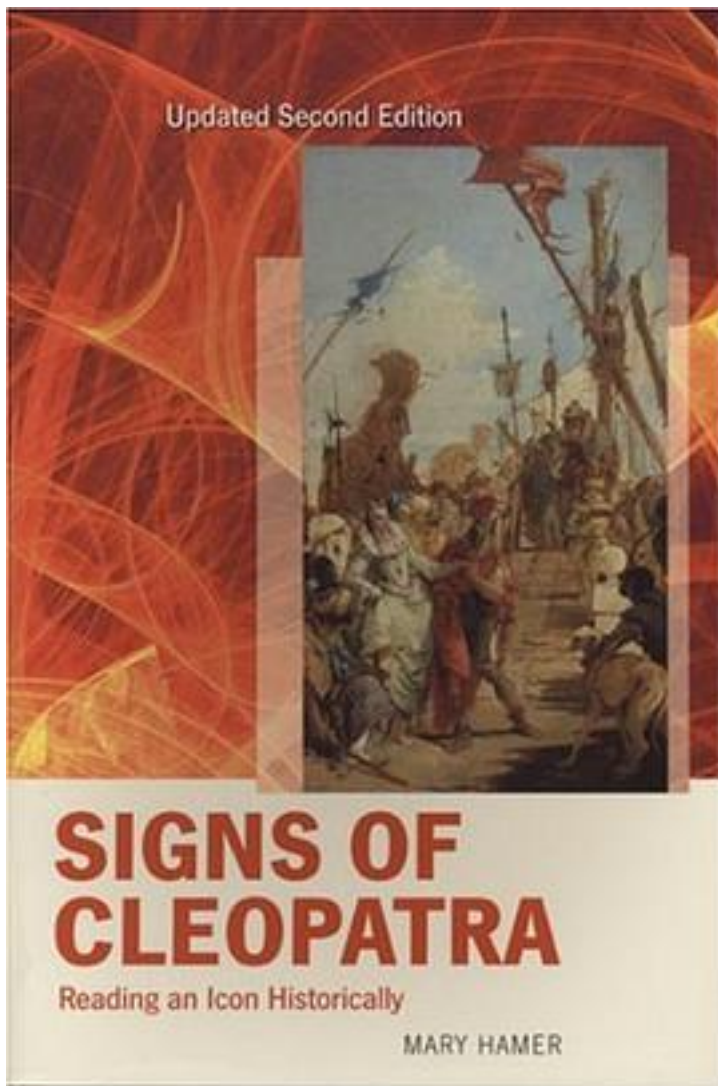


Signs of Cleopatra



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Cleopatra has been dead for twenty centuries, but her name still resonates in the west. Her story has the status of a foundation myth. As such, artists of all periods have drawn on it in order to raise questions concerned with the world in which they found themselves living. This study chooses a number of key occasions from European history on which writers and painters re-imagined Cleopatra. In doing so, Mary Hamer takes the reader on a pleasurable intellectual treasure hunt through the ages. In addition, by restoring these works to their original context - political, philosophical and aesthetic - the author opens up unexpected new readings of images and texts which had previously appeared to be self-explanatory. The purpose of this book is to raise questions about how these images of a dead Egyptian queen were read. Through careful analysis Hamer traces attempts to manipulate attitudes to women and power, women and sexuality and to desire itself. In the case of Tiepolo's Cleopatra, for example, the Queen embodies the desire for knowledge; in post-Revolutionary France, she symbolises political freedom. In the new introductory essay, we discover that Cleopatra's role as a focus for cultural debate continues, and that, as previously, much is at stake: it is now the question of her race that is highly contested. This work includes a major new introductory chapter analysing the fight over Cleopatra's race in the 21st century. The key images discussed are reproduced alongside Hamer's text for close analysis by the reader. The author was curator of the 'myth' section of the British Museum's exhibition 'Cleopatra of Egypt: from History to Myth'.

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