**2. Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt**

Shortly before the birth of Christ, Egypt was still ruled by a living goddess, Cleopatra, a Greek descended from one of Alexander’s generals. She looked back to the Golden Age of Alexander’s world empire and was determined to do even better herself.

Alexander died at the age of 32. By the time Cleopatra was 23, she had gone ever further than Alexander making her entrance into Rome as Queen of Egypt and consort of Julius Caesar, the most powerful man in the world.

These were complex times. To keep your throne, you had to be adaptable, ruthless, intelligent and a great politician. Cleopatra had all these traits which is why history has provided us with lots of interpretations of Cleopatra. Renaissance poets saw her as a heroine dying for love. And painters alluded to her eroticism in their bare breasted portrayals of the dying queen. Hollywood reinforced the image of Cleopatra as a vamp starting with Theda Bara’s seductive portrayal in 1917.

But who was the real Cleopatra? What did she really look like?

We’re in Berlin because this is the best portrait of Cleopatra in the world. There are very few ancient sculptures that exist. So this is probably as close as we’re ever going to get to how she really looked. She’s rather plain looking, isn’t she? Look at her hair. It’s tied up in a simple bun. It’s a classical Greek hairstyle. It’s practical but not exactly designed to captivate a Roman general.

As a intellectual, Cleopatra would have been heartbroken: when during fighting between Egyptians and Caesar’s Roman troops, there occurred one of the greatest tragedies of the ancient world - the burning of the library of Alexandria. It’s sad to think about what was lost in the fire at Alexandria. There are the missing manuscripts of Aristotle and Plato. They were probably there. There was an entire room with editions of Homer. There may even have been early manuscripts of the Old Testament, which could probably help settle Biblical questions today.

Cleopatra was eventually able to replace 200,000 of the manuscripts. Books were very important to her. It’s ironic that today everybody knows her for her beauty, but it was her intelligence that was most important asset she had.