Twitter Thread by Scary Parcak ■■



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Whew here we go. Lots of folks are upset about this choice. A thread about Cleopatra, and her ethnicity/ “look”, and why this is considered controversial 1/?

(FWIW: I’m an Egyptologist and I have looooong been obsessed w Cleopatra)

> \u2018Cleopatra\u2019 Epic To Re-Team \u2018Wonder Woman\u2019s Gal Gadot & Patty Jenkins; Paramount Wins Wild\xa0Auction https://t.co/GRZ3oh5mGj
>
> — Deadline Hollywood (@DEADLINE) October 11, 2020

Also: Classicists and Egyptologists fight over where Cleo (as I call her affectionately) belongs. She’s ours. Will not argue about this. 2/?

Seriously though: Cleopatra was Cleopatra VII (yes there were many others!). She was of Macedonian Greek descent (father= Ptolemy XII Auletes) but... was was her mother’s ethnicity? Egyptian? Greek? Other? Many possibilities. We don’t know for sure 3/?

Her mom was *probably* Cleopatra V, the only attested wife of Ptolemy XII. We know of one child she had, it’s not 100% certain she is the mother of Cleopatra. Cleo V’s ethnicity is unknown, very little known about her generally, hence Cleopatra’s ethnicity= 50% Greek, 50% ? 4/?

Do we know what Cleopatra looked like? YES! (as much as any ancient ruler). We have coins and sculptures/busts of her, and... Elizabeth Taylor/ Gal Gadot she was not, with a hooked nose and sharp chin. However, she was a GENIUS 5:?

Like if she’d been alive today, she would have been a Nobel Prize winning scientist, or a world renowned author... she could speak and read at least 9 languages (if not more), including Egyptian, which made the people of Egypt love her 6/?

Now, sculptures of Cleo are a bit kinder. We know of a lot more b/c of the work of Dr Sally-Ann Ashton, who identified the triple uraeus (the snakes on a crown) as a likely attribute of Cleopatra sculptures. 7/?

Regardless of what she actually looked like (someone with strong features), her brilliance and charm would have been mesmerizing. Think of the best college prof you had with the electricity of a magnetic politician with the presence of a Hollywood actor. That was Cleopatra 8/?

Julius Caesar could not resist her (although that was a political move on Cleo's part in part) but WHEW can you imagine an older man swept off his feet by a sheer force of courtly genius, dressed to the nines? We've seen that story just a few times. I am sure Cleo dressed ■ 9/?

I am sure the sex was very very hot. It's about the mind mostly. Yes this is what we Egyptologists think about. Well I do. *moving swiftly on* 10/?

So what *could* she have looked like? The people of Alexandria today (yes Alexandria was Egypt's capital during the Ptolemaic Era) have much lighter skin compared to people in southern Egypt, many with reddish hair and green/blue eyes 11/?

Of course there is Turkish influence and I'm not saying that the people of Alex today look like people did 2000+ years ago. However- Alex was a hugely cosmopolitan city in Cleopatra's time. You would have seen every type of person imaginable from all over the known world 12/?

Cleopatra probably had lighter skin, not unlike the people of Alex today, but *we don't know for sure*. Her mom could have been from southern Egypt, or Macedonia, or anywhere in the Ptolemaic world (and if she was a secondary wife or concubine all bets are off) 13/?

We can say based on Cleopatra's coins and sculpture that she did look Macedonian in her features (she does look a bit like her dad), her eyes always looked Egyptian to me but I'm biased. So, on to the choice of Gal Gadot vs an Egyptian actress 14/?

Don't cancel me for what I'm about to say. Just stating the facts. This will be a HUGE big budget movie. Like Gladiator level. @PattyJenks is a world class director (and human being), and I think she'll do the story serious justice+ will pay attention to the history 15/?

The way Hollywood financing works, major big budget movies like this=multiple big ticket actors. Otherwise they don't get made. Of course representation matters, and if we knew 100% that Cleopatra was 100% ancient Egyptian (a la Hatshepsut) I'd be angry too about the choice 16/?

Archaeology and history tell us she wasn't 100% Egyptian, even if she acted like a proper Egyptian queen and spoke/read Egyptian. She was half Macedonian and half who knows, but probably more than 50% Macedonian playing the odds. 17/?

So, hiring a hugely bankable Mediterranean actress to play Cleopatra is... not as off as you might think. I'm not touching the issues around Israeli-Egypt relations with a 1000km pole, no thanks, not my business to comment. 18/?

These issues are so touchy, as they should be. We all have to interrogate the choices made for art and movies with major global influence. However, we have to do it, in cases like Cleopatra, putting the archaeological/historical evidence front and center. 19/?

Gal Gadot is 100x a better choice than Angelina Jolie. I think she'll be incredible in the role. She'll study like mad and make a powerful on-screen Cleopatra 20/?

Don’t forget that Cleopatra was reinvented for every age- from the Romans who vilified her, to Shakespeare who made her a harlot, to the 1920s where she was portrayed as a sex goddess. Patty Jenkins will reinvent her for us. Cleopatra transcends time 21/?

We all need a powerful on female character who suffers no fools, is worshipped for her genius+ leadership, and who does her best to save Egypt from Roman rule. Whew. I cannot imagine what Cleopatra went through. 22/?

Whether you agree or disagree with my assessment, I hope you learned something, and that history is complex and rich and still has enormous influence on our modern culture FIN

CODA: Octavian can go blow a goat