

*Olympias, Mother of Alexander the Great.* By ELIZABETH CARNEY. New York and London: Routledge, 2006. Pp. xvi + 221. Cloth, \$33.95. ISBN 0-415-33317-2.

In her book, the first modern biography of Olympias, the mother of Alexander the Great, Elizabeth Carney has produced a welcome addition to the ever-growing body of scholarship on the period spanning the reigns of Philip II, Alexander the Great and the struggles of the Diadochoi to 316 BC. In fact, Olympias is perhaps the only significant figure from this period to have maintained and increased his/her prestige, power and influence throughout this period. The author's biographical approach to these years, therefore, provides not only significant insight into the life of Olympias as well as royal women in general, but it also provides a unique glimpse into these years that shaped the early Hellenistic world itself.

Carney's primary goal in *Olympias* is "to place Olympias in her historical and cultural context and to determine, as much as possible, why she acted as she did" (p. 4). In order to do so, the author has chosen to emphasize unbiased sources that are contemporary with the queen's life and actions, while relying less heavily upon later, hostile, and largely anecdotal sources and the moralizing element inherent in them. In sum, the information available from the former is remarkably little. We know only of four accomplishments, and these all occurred within a brief span of time: Olympias purchased grain from Cyrene, she made a dedication to Hygeia in Athens, she prevented the Athenians from making a dedication at the temple of Dione in Molossia and she made dedications at Delphi. To supplement this meager picture of Olympias' life, Carney is able to draw some plausible conclusions about her actions from the later and largely anecdotal sources (e.g., Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch, Justin) by focusing her attention on Olympias' Aeacid heritage. This has allowed her to identify examples of Olympias' female royal ancestors in epic and tragedy that "may have shaped her public conduct at critical moments in her life" and to argue that "epic and tragic images of royal women functioned as models and a script of sorts for how this woman ... shaped her public presentation" (p. 3).

*Olympias* is divided into six chapters with one appendix. Within the first four chapters Carney approaches Olympias' life chronologically, examining her life in Molossia (Chapter 1), her married life with Philip II (Chapter 2), her activities as mother of King Alexander (Chapter 3) and her role in the period of the Diadochoi until her death (Chapter 4). In the second half of the book, Carney examines Olympias in two thematic chapters. The first is an examination of Olympias and religion (Chapter 5), the second (Chapter 6) an investigation of Olympias' image in the years following her death through

the late Roman Empire. The appendix discusses the extant sources for Olympias' life.

Olympias (twice) and her daughter Cleopatra (once) are the only individuals listed among many *poleis* on the famous inscription from Cyrene (*SEG IX 2*) that records the purchase of grain and its shipment to Greece during a particularly difficult famine. Carney supports the belief that Olympias donated the grain she purchased to Macedonia itself. In her estimation, Olympias' ability to exert authority in this manner demonstrates the degree of authority and power she held while her son was campaigning in Asia. Carney contends, on the basis of the inscription, that both Olympias and Cleopatra "were functioning here as heads of state" (p. 51).

Hypereides (*Eux.* 19), supplies the testimony that Olympias made an offering to the goddess Hygeia in Athens, probably, Carney speculates, for her son's health (p. 49). She also places great weight on Hypereides' claim (*Eux.* 24–6) that Olympias prevented the Athenians from dedicating a "beautiful face" and other objects that accompanied it to the goddess Dione at Dodona, citing this anecdote to bolster her claim that Olympias used "patronage and the denial of patronage at a major sanctuary to assert her own power and prestige" (p. 91).

Olympias is also attested as arranging splendid offerings at Delphi (*SIG<sup>3</sup> 252N*). Carney believes that Olympias may have used the darics Alexander sent to her following the siege of Gaza to fund these dedications (p. 96). Throughout his campaign, Alexander sent money to his mother and this interpretation may provide the only evidence for how Olympias used it.

In addition, archaeology can to some degree supplement the picture that emerges from the record discussed above. Most important is the Philippeion in Olympia, which Pausanias (5.17.4; 20.9-10) claims once contained sculptures of Olympias and other members of Philip II's family. Carney concludes that the inclusion of Olympias' image was tantamount to proclaiming her (and the others individuals represented) as "*isotheos* ... and perhaps more" (p. 101). Formation of *dynasteia* was foremost in Philip's mind and one can use the inclusion of Olympias' image neither to speculate on the state of their relationship nor to date the Philippeion's construction.

Several well-known and controversial aspects of Olympias' life deserve attention. According to Plutarch (*Mor.* 401a–b), Olympias was the third of four names by which Alexander's mother was known. He claims that she was called Polyxena and Myrtale prior to adopting the name Olympias, and eventually chose Stratonice for her fourth name. Carney argues that her given name was Polyxena, a name derived from the Trojan royal family and fitting for a member of a Molossian family that claimed descent from Troy (pp. 16, 93–5).

Polyxena changed her name to Myrtale prior to her marriage to Philip as part of her initiation into an unknown mystery cult. After her marriage, Myrtale adopted the name Olympias, probably not in connection with her husband's Olympic victory, but in association with a festival of Olympian Zeus during which their marriage was celebrated. The name Stratonice, Carney suggests, was more likely an epithet attached to Olympias following her victory over Adea Eurydice in 317. Concerning the assassination of Philip II, Carney argues that Olympias (and her son) were not complicit in the crime (pp. 39–41). The conflict between Olympias and the house of Antipater originated during Alexander's campaign, but after his death Olympias escalated it. Carney speculates that she named Antipater and his sons as Alexander's murderers in a public lament probably performed not long after news reached Molossia that her son had died (pp. 62–3). Carney furthermore interprets Olympias' actions in this instance according to models found in epic and tragedy. For example, Thetis raised the lament for Achilles, as did the Trojan women who similarly lamented and prayed for vengeance. Carney also believes that although Olympias was responsible for the murder of Cleopatra (Philip II's seventh wife) and Cleopatra's infant daughter Europa, the act was not one of "passionate violence," but of "calculation," consistent with Macedonian dynastic struggles (pp. 43–6). She arrives at this conclusion through a comparison of Olympias' actions with similar examples of dynastic struggles from myth and history (p. 47). Finally, many scholars have attributed Olympias' demise to her treatment of Adea Eurydice and Philip III Arrhidaeus, but Carney contends that her murder of the pair did not lead to her rapid decline from power, but that the military losses she and her allies suffered account for this (pp. 75–9).

Overall, Carney's *Olympias* is a balanced treatment of the queen's life and her impact on the world around her. A few omissions nonetheless deserve notice. Given the significance Carney attaches to the contemporary sources for Olympias' actions, one would like to see reference to several important works on them not included in her discussion. For example, Carney's analysis of Hypereides' statements concerning Olympias (*Eux.* 19, 24–6) might have included reference to D. Whitehead's excellent commentary on the speech (*Hypereides. The Forensic Speeches.* (Oxford, 2000) especially pp. 155–7 and 215–29). This is most important for an understanding of why Olympias dedicated the *phiale* to Hygeia in Athens, for Whitehead demonstrates that the goddess' cult statues were dedicated by one Pyrrhus and that an Aeacid connection with the cult might have prompted Olympias' dedication. Carney offers no date for the inscription that records Olympias' dedications at Delphi; but see now the most recent edition of the stone (*CID II 97*), where it

is dated to 327/6 BC. The inscription from Cyrene (*SEG IX 2*) has also received detailed treatment recently, by A. Laronde, *Cyrène et la Libye hellénistique* (Paris, 1987) pp. 30–4, and P.J. Rhodes and R. Osborne, *Greek Historical Inscriptions, 404–323 B.C.* (Oxford, 2003) no. 96, pp. 486–93).

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