

Complicating the “Agency” of Royal Women

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A cloud of others surrounded royal women, but it's hard now to see that crowd and thus easy to underestimate the contributions many persons made to the agency of individual royal women. The ability of royal women to act could be shaped by or depend upon their own staff, allies foreign and domestic, on military forces, and on the action or inaction, presence or absence of family members. Extant sources rarely directly refer to the existence of women's staff, let alone name them. Similarly, though family members, even those at great distance, enabled some royal women to act independently and prevented others from doing so, our narratives may not directly inform us. We must, instead, deduce their action or inaction. I want to recognize the choices that individuals or groups at various levels in the power structure made to assist or prevent the agency of assorted royal women. My examples are taken from the early Hellenistic period. Situations differed, naturally, with period and dynasty, but my examples are suggestive. I will begin with a general discussion and conclude with a reconsideration of the agency of Cynnane and her daughter Adea Eurydice.

It is often difficult to determine the status of those serving royal women. Justin (14.6.9) refers to two women who accompanied Olympias as “*ancillae*,” a word that usually refers to female slaves; similarly, he describes (24.3.9) two women who fled with Arsinoë II as “*servulae*,” another word often used about enslaved women. Justin's diction, of course, may simply reflect his own presuppositions. Diodorus (20.37.5-6) says that after the attempt of Cleopatra, sister of Alexander, to escape the control of Antigonos' governor in Sardis and flee to Ptolemy, Antigonos, through his governor, had women (γυναικες) murder her and then had some of them killed, in turn, so that he could claim that they rather than he had plotted against her. Diodorus' diction does not specify the possibly mixed rank of these women.

Male and female members of elite families also formed part of the households of royal women. According to a speech in Curtius attributed to Amyntas, son of Andromenes (7.1.12, 37-40), Olympias sheltered in her household many young men avoiding military service, but Amyntas forced them to serve. Curtius names three young men in this group who are often assumed to have been recruited for the elite *Basilikoi Paidēs*.¹ Later, when Cassander besieged Olympias at Pydna, Diodorus specifies that Alexander IV and Roxane, Thessalonice, Deidameia (Aeacides' daughter and the possible fiancé of Alexander IV), and the daughters of Attalus,² accompanied her, as well as relatives of Olympias' most distinguished friends. Diodorus (19.35.5-7; see also Justin 14.6.3) criticizes her for having so many people around her not useful in war, but this criticism presupposes that she knew from the start that she would be besieged. Moreover, her grandson, Roxane, Thessalonice, and Deidameia would not have been safe anywhere else. Olympias' real problem was that she lacked sustained military protection, not that she had courtiers. One wonders if Diodorus/Hieronimus was really criticizing her for acting like a king in having a largish court. In 316, that was probably exceptional (though soon it would not be) and should probably be understood as a sign of the kind of public persona she wanted to generate.

Elite males served royal women in advisory and military capacities. Polyperchon offered Olympias a position in charge of her grandson and Eumenes gave her advice. At the beginning of the siege of Pydna, Olympias appointed as her *strategos* Aristonous (Diod. 19.35.4), one of the bodyguards of Alexander, later a supporter of Perdiccas and then of Polyperchon. He took charge of the remaining troops loyal to the Argead house; when Olympias surrendered, she ordered him to do so as well (Diod. 19.50.8).³ Adea Eurydice,⁴ once married to Philip Arrhidaeus, tried, via stump speeches, to woo the army in Asia away from the control of the male commanders and regents; Diodorus (19.60.2) and Arrian (Arrian *FGrH* 156 F1.33) both refer to a man named Asclepiodorus, described as a *grammateus* (secretary), who aided in her efforts. He may have been a prominent member of the Macedonian elite or simply a secretary, but probably not a slave.⁵ Arrian (*FGrH* 156 F 1.33, 39) also mentions a certain

Attalus as assisting in this effort; he too was almost certainly a member of the elite.⁶ After the home army abandoned Adea Eurydice for Olympias in 317, she was captured along with a man named Polyces, whom Diodorus describes as one of her counselors (*symboloi*; Diod. 19.11.3); he too could have been a member of the elite.⁷

What did the staff do, apart from domestic tasks and giving advice and support of various kinds? Many must have served as messengers for the apparently extensive correspondence carried out by royal women, but these same people, as well as others, may have gathered information and intelligence too. Royal women needed information to advantage and protect themselves and they often managed to acquire it even when, thanks to Alexander's conquests and the development of the Hellenistic dynasties, the desired information related to distant events. Olympias seemed knowledgeable about happenings in Asia throughout Alexander's reign, often advising him on people or matters happening at his court.⁸ Her ability to acquire information may, however, have waned after Alexander's death: poor intelligence about Asian events and about the deterioration of her interests in the Greek peninsula, not simply wishful thinking, could have been a factor in her defeat and death.⁹ Of course, once under siege at Pydna, she could hardly know about Eumenes' equally perilous situation in Asia, ignorance that may have contributed to her subsequent decisions.¹⁰

The social rank of human sources of information probably varied. Some were likely members of the elite. For instance, officers returning to Macedonia with veterans could have served as sources. Artists and actors, because they traveled for competitions and commissions, provided information, and acted as agents for male royals (Thessalus for Alexander; Plut. *Alex.* 10. 23) and may have done so for women as well. Cleopatra erected a tomb for a Samian flute player (Paus. 1. 44.6) who could have provided more than musical entertainment. Olympias offered to send Alexander a slave for him to buy, one who had skill at various rituals but perhaps he also had intelligence skills Olympias hoped to use

(Ath. 14.659f). Arsinoë funded the Arsinoeum at Samothrace (*OGIS* 15=*IG* XII 27); the artists she patronized then and later could also have acted as her agents since they, like actors, traveled.

Allies and enemies could empower or betray royal women. Olympias and Antipater became enemies early in Alexander's reign, a fact that so weakened her position that she felt compelled to leave Macedonia, though, later in Alexander's reign, her continuing enmity with Antipater empowered her (Plut. *Alex* 68.3). Adea Eurydice formed some sort of alliance with Cassander (Just. 14.5.4). Since she was married to Philip Arrhidaeus, Cassander could not have been hoping, at least immediately, for marriage,¹¹ but for women of marriageable age, allies were often suitors. Diodorus (20.37.4-6) claims that all Alexander's generals at one point or another had negotiated to marry Cleopatra (though he specifies Cassander, Lysimachus, Antigonus, and Ptolemy). Soon after Alexander's death, Cleopatra, still in Macedonia, proffered herself in marriage to Leonnatus (Plut. *Eum.* 3.5), to whom Antipater had already offered a daughter (Diod. 18.12.1), a fact that may have prompted Cleopatra's negotiations. Leonnatus was in Asia Minor when these discussion began, though he died at Lamia soon after his return to the Greek peninsula (Diod. 18.15.3; Just. 13.5.14). Next, Cleopatra entered negotiations with Perdiccas, who was in Asia, again she was doubtless aware that Antipater had already sent his daughter to Perdiccas.¹² Cleopatra likely had advocates and opponents in the courts of various Successors, particularly in the years before the death of Antipater in 319, when Cleopatra and Antipater's daughters functioned a rival brides for rival political alliances. After the death of Perdiccas, Antipater scolded Cleopatra for *philia* with Perdiccas and Eumenes, though in the latter's case, we do not know, specifically, of discussions of marriage with him.¹³ Much later Cleopatra, long under the control of Antigonus at Sardis, had a falling out with him (Diodorus' diction implies that initially they had been, if not allies, then not enemies) and tried to escape to Ptolemy, presumably to marry him (Diod. 20.37.3).

Military support often proved critical for the exercise of agency. That support could involve members of the elite, allies like Aristonous and Polyperchon or Cassander. Troops could enable women to act. Cynnane took military forces with her which enabled her to escape Antipater and reach the army in Asia. Regular troops or mercenaries sometimes helped but could destroy them. Soldiers attached to Olympias' court and other contingents supported her (Diod. 19.35.7) but troops associated with Cassander were involved in her trial. Polyaeus (8.57) implies that a naval forces stayed loyal to Arsinoë II, enabling her to escape from Sardis after Lysimachus' death. The lack of long-term control of significant military forces was a chronic problem for royal women and a serious limit on their agency, granted that only Cynnane is said to have engaged in combat, though some women appeared in front of armies and gave speeches to soldiers.

Families were critical to the agency of royal women. Kin could provide or withhold military support. Justin twice tells us that offended royal wives-- Olympias and Stratonice, wife of Demetrius II (9.7.7; 28.1.4) -- tried and failed to persuade their kin to attack an offending husband. Neither story may be true; this could be a kind *topos* of Justin's. Still, these two passages demonstrate how limited the agency of women was because of their inability to directly lead military forces. On the other hand, Olympias' nephew Aeacides, king of Molossia, twice tried to give her military aid. Later in the Hellenistic period, women did, through generals, command forces; moreover, granted that Ptolemaic kings did not go into battle and employed generals as did royal women, at least for this dynasty, the distinction disappeared.

Fathers, sons, or brothers usually decided whom royal women would marry. Granted that few women in general in the Greek world chose their own mates, this lack of choice was not distinctive, but since royal marriages often involved alliances with foreign powers, the birth family was often at a distance. Sabine Müller (2013) has argued that this was a critical factor in limiting Roxane's career. Barsine safely spent years with her son by Alexander in Pergamum, near her family's traditional seat of

power, but likely gave up that security up to support her son's claim to his father's throne and, in so doing, lost her life (Just. 15.2.3). The Ptolemaic pattern of brother-sister marriage tended to mean that Ptolemaic women were not as isolated as royal daughters in other dynasties often were. The fate of Berenice Phernophoros demonstrates how dangerous foreign marriage could be, but sibling marriage could render one's close kin dangerous too (e. g. Berenice III).

The inaction or action of family members could also make non-military initiatives by royal women possible or impossible. Our sources sometimes make this phenomenon explicit, more often imply it. Olympias almost certainly killed Philip's last wife, Cleopatra (Just. 9.7.12; Paus. 8.7.7). Plutarch (*Alex. 10.4*) asserts that Alexander was angry with his mother for having treated Cleopatra "savagely" (presumably a euphemism), but whether Alexander was angry or complicit, he did not kill Olympias, as she was doubtless sure he would not. According to Hypereides (*Eux. 19-20*), the Athenians associated Olympias and Alexander, assuming some sort of common policy or point of view. Throughout the Asian campaign, Olympias wrote Alexander. It may be true that he kept her letters secret (Plut. *Alex. 39.5*); she was his informant, likely a useful one. Though, early in the Asian campaign, Alexander allowed Antipater to win his struggles with Olympias, Plutarch (68.3) recounts that later Alexander was suspiciously tolerant of her feud with Antipater, supposedly allowing her and his sister to divide rule of Macedonia and Epirus between them. Olympias and Cleopatra, apart from probably ruling Molossia during this period, were able to exercise considerable freedom of action because Alexander, within limits, did not prevent them from doing so and indirectly encouraged them, probably as a counterweight to Antipater, of whom he was increasingly distrustful. The actions of Olympias and of Cleopatra in the period immediately after Alexander's death indicate that they knew that they no longer enjoyed this freedom of action and were no longer safe: Cleopatra suddenly demonstrated interest in remarriage and Olympias remained in Molossia, despite Polyperchon's invitations to return to Macedonia. When she did venture to involve herself in succession politics, Polyperchon proved a slender reed and Cassander was

able to eliminate her. Cleopatra passed into the control of Antigonos and, without adult male kin, was ultimately killed. The fates of Cynnane and her daughter Adea Eurydice were similarly sealed because they too lacked functional male kin.

Arsinoë II was both protected and endangered by her family. After her arrival at the court of Lysimachus, she and her sons became embroiled in a succession struggle with her husband's son Agathocles. Lysimachus let this rivalry brew—arguably encouraged it—for some years. Agathocles was killed in the end, whether by Arsinoë's agency or that of Lysimachus. After her husband's death, Arsinoë returned to Macedonia and controlled a portion of it, but was persuaded to marry her half-brother Ptolemy Ceraunus, by then king of Macedonia, over the objections of her eldest son. Ceraunus then killed her two younger sons but allowed her to flee to Samothrace and, of course, ultimately to Egypt. Her brother Ptolemy II had not rushed to defend her cause in Macedonia after Lysimachus' death, but surely Ceraunus didn't kill her because he was concerned that Ptolemy II would act if he did. Ultimately, she married Ptolemy II.

Let me now focus on Cynnane, Alexander's half-sister, and her daughter Adea Eurydice. Their circumstance and actions look different when one thinks of them not simply as plucky individuals, though they were, but also in the context of a faction, one going back to Amyntas son of Perdiccas, Philip II's nephew. As an infant or toddler, Amyntas may nominally and briefly have been king, but Philip II quickly was recognized as the ruler. Toward the end of his reign, Philip arranged the marriage of Cynnane, his daughter by his Illyrian wife Audata, to his nephew, Amyntas. By this point Philip was planning the Asian expedition and yet had only one viable son (his son Arrhidaeus was understood to have mental limitations); likely he intended Amyntas to be the backup heir. After Philip's assassination, Macedonia was in turmoil and Alexander apparently executed Amyntas and some of the sons of Aeropus, justly or not, for plotting against him (*Plut. Mor.* 327c; *Curt.* 6.9.17). Soon after, Alexander tried to arrange Cynnane's remarriage to an ally of his, but the prospective groom died suddenly, so Cynnane

remained a widow; supposedly she did not want to remarry. Cynnane taught her daughter the arts of warfare, as she had presumably been taught. Her situation and that of her daughter changed after the death of Alexander, when the army in Babylon forced the officers to accept Alexander's half-brother, now called Philip III Arrhidaeus, as king.

Cynnane escaped from Macedonia to Asia after the death of Alexander, in company with her daughter Adea Eurydice. Granted that she planned to marry her daughter to Philip Arrhidaeus, Cynnane must have been aware that the army had forced the elite to recognize him as king (perhaps seeing this event as a model for her own ambitions). She would have been familiar with her half-brother's limitations, whatever exactly they were. Cynnane, as we have noted, utilized a military force to defeat two attempts by Antipater to prevent her passage to Asia. In Asia, however, Perdikkas' faction managed to defeat and kill her, but the Macedonian army, outraged by the murder of Philip's daughter, forced through the marriage of Adea Eurydice's to Philip Arrhidaeus. Granted her daughter's ultimate success with the army, Cynnane must have had information about the mood and views of the soldiers and probably had some elite support.

Adea Eurydice, though likely in her early teens at the time of her mother's death, regularly spoke to the army in Asia, nearly succeeding in winning control of them away from the generals and Antipater. However natural a public speaker she may have been and however useful her mother's earlier training, the advice of Aesclepiodorus must have been critical to her remarkable success in addressing to the army. After Antipater finally ended her Asian speaking career and brought her and her husband along with his young co-king Alexander IV to Macedonia, she could do little, but the death of Antipater in 319 made possible the last and most dramatic part of her career. How she managed to get to Macedonia with her husband but without Polyperchon, who had replaced Antipater as regent, is unclear but must have been getting advice and support. Once there, she took effective control of the kingdom and made an alliance with Cassander, son of Antipater (Just. 14.5.2-4; Diod. 19.11.1). When

Cassander was out of the country, concerned about the imminent return of Olympias, Adea Eurydice sent a messenger to Cassander asking for immediate assistance, but also, by means of gifts and big promises to the most prominent Macedonians, tried to make them loyal. She marched out an army against one led by Polyperchon and Aeacides on behalf of Olympias and her grandson. The Macedonian army went over to Olympias' forces; Philip Arrhidaeus was captured immediately and Adea Eurydice and her advisor Polycles soon after and Olympias had the pair killed (Diod. 19.11.1-7; Just. 14.5.8-10).

Thus between 323 and 317, the daughter of Philip and widow of Amyntas Perdikka and her daughter, the wife of Philip III Arrhidaeus, retained support, if intermittent, from various members of the Macedonian elite and from regular troops; this support was not, for a variety of reasons, enough to keep them alive, but it demonstrates how embedded they were with the Macedonian elite, how relatively well connected they were with them and with some wider elements in Macedonian armies. They were supported by a faction, probably one not friendly to new practices or half Asian heirs. Thrilled though the Macedonians may have been to see Olympias again, the important truth is that while Olympias appeared in support of a young male heir Adea Eurydice had no son though she had been married for nearly five years. She and her mother got as far as they did because they were not just risk-taking individuals but leaders or figure heads (depending on one's point of view) of a faction or factions.

The decade after Adea Eurydice's death saw the institutionalization of the entourages of royal women; by c. 305 Phila, wife of Demetrius Poliorcetes, had officials in her employ (Demarchos, a guard in her entourage; Syll. 333.6-7) and Phila, daughter of Seleucus Nicator and wife of Antigonus Gonatas, had officials who reported to her.¹⁴ Royal *philoï*, sometimes the *philoï* of both husbands and wives, became institutionalized.¹⁵ In Seleucid and Ptolemaic lands this sometimes increase the possibility of female agency but could narrow it. Antigonid women, like the kings themselves, became officials of a sort, but ones with a somewhat defined and thus narrower job description. Thinking about women's

agency in the context of the actions of others makes one newly aware of how much monarchy depended on a host of differently placed actors, many not part of a ruling dynasty.

¹ Curtius gives three names (though implies there were many more): Gorgias, Hecataeus, and Gorgatas. Heckel 2006: 127,131 deduces that all three were members of *Paides* brought to Asia in 331.

² Heckel 2006: 64 that these were the daughter of Attalus, son of Andromenes, a prominent member of the Macedonian elite and commander in Alexander's army and Atalante, the sister of Perdikkas; their parents were dead by this point

³ Heckel 2006: 50.

⁴ Carney 1987: 496-502, Carney 2000: 132-37 on her career.

⁵ Heckel 2006: 57-58 considers the possibility that he was a prominent figure, the father of one of the "pages" involved in the Hermolaus conspiracy. See also Berve 2.88, no. 167.

⁶ Billows 1990: 68, n.31 thinks that he was Perdikkas' brother-in-law, the son of Andromenes. See also Heckel 2006: 63.

⁷ Heckel 2006: 225 speculates that he had been an officer in Alexander's army.

⁸ Correspondence with Alexander: Ath. 14.659f quotes from a letter of Olympias to Alexander in which she urges him to buy a slave from her who knew various rituals relevant to him. Knowledge of affairs in Asia: Diod. 17.108.7 says that both Antipater and Olympias demanded that the Athenians extradite Harpalus in 324, signifying that they knew of his escape from Asia and presence in Athenian areas. Plutarch's description of Olympias and Cleopatra forming a faction against Antipater (68.3) puts it in the context of the knowledge of the difficulties of his return from India, his serious wound among the Malli, troop losses, the uncertainty of his return and the bad acts of those he'd left in charge while gone. Curtius 7.1.36-40 has Amyntas son of Andromenes accuse Olympias of warning Alexander against him by letter (7.1.11). Diodorus 17.32.1 says that Olympias gave her son useful advice and told him to be on his guard against Lyncestian Alexander. Plutarch 39.4-5 has Olympias often urging her son not too many favors and rewards on her son's friends because he won't leave enough for himself

⁹ Diod. 19.35.3 says that though Olympias sent men to mountain passes to prevent the return of Cassander's troops but that her men got there only after Cassander's troops had passed through. Aeacides' effort to help was ended by his own troops and he was dethroned. Diod. 19.36.2-4. An officer of Cassander's managed to bribe Polyperchon's army in Perrhaebia away from him (Diod. 19.35.4) Olympias, with a largely female court, retreated to Pydna and appointed Aristonous (a former bodyguard of her son's) strategos, to carry on the war (Diod. 19.36.6)

¹⁰ Earlier but after the death of Alexander, both 18.58.2-3 and Nepos (Eum. 6.1-2) speak of a letter Olympias sent to Eumenes in Asia seeking his advice about accepting Polyperchon's offer and her receipt of his advice to turn it down till matters were clearer as to who would win. Once the dangers of her situation became clear, why did she stay on at Pydna when she could have escaped by sea Diod. 19.35.6. She apparently was waiting for help, may not have known of Aeacides' fall and Polyperchon's fade out (Diod 19.36.6). Aristonous wanted to hold out (Diod 19.50.8) when O wanted to surrender, partly because of a recent victory and did not yet know of Eumenes' death. Both Olympias and Aristonous didn't know how bad Eumenes' situation was. Diodorus consistently attributes the gradual decline of her support in Greece and Macedonia to Cassander's military success, saying that as it got increasingly obvious that Cassander was going to win, they changed sides, though reluctantly. Diod 18.54.2 says initially M public opinion favored Polyperchon and that the Athenians wanted to get rid of their pro-Cassander garrison 18.64.1-6; even the garrison leader feared to disobey Olympias because he'd heard she was about to return 18.65.1 the Athenians pleased with her 18.65.2)

¹¹ Orosius 3.23.39-40 thought that Cassander connected to Adea Eurydice out of lust. Carney 2000: 294, n. 61 points out that it may relate to political plan. These plans could have included marriage.

¹² See references in Carney 2000: 124-25.

¹³ See references in Carney 2000:

¹⁴ A Cassandreian inscription refers to an official who seems to serve as a liaison between Phila and the city.

¹⁵ Adeimantus of Lampsacus was perhaps the most important of Demetrius Poliorcetes' *philo*; he established a private cult for Phila in Athens (Ath. 254a, 255c).

- Easterling, Patricia Elizabeth; Hall, Edith (eds.), [*Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession*](#), Cambridge University Press, 2002. [ISBN 0-521-65140-9](#)
- McDonald, Marianne, Walton, J. Michael (editors), *The Cambridge companion to Greek and Roman theatre*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. [ISBN 0-521-83456-2](#)

Greek and Roman actors: aspects of an ancient profession, ed. by Pat Easterling and Edith Hall (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Pr., 2002 Pat Easterling's essay, "Actor as icon," 327-41