
Argead Women and Religion

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ABSTRACT The studies on the relationship between religion and Macedonian monarchy have been mainly focused on male rulers. This paper tries to compile and analyse the evidence for Macedonian royal women. This article demonstrates the importance of public religion and patronage for those women through archaeological, epigraphical, and textual evidence. The corpus shows that religious affairs in Macedonia were necessarily entangled with political and cultural aspects, hindering straightforward conclusions about the range and evolution of the royal women in the public religion of Argead Macedonia.

KEYWORDS Eurydice, Religion, Olympias, Vergina, Argeads.

Although the Argead dynasty ruled Macedonia from at least the sixth century BCE until c. 308 BCE and a body of extant material provides information about the political role and actions of various Argead royal women during the 4th century BCE, far less is known about the religious roles and action of Argead women, primarily because comparatively little evidence available clearly relates to their religious activities and much of that is problematic. Moreover, what has survived and what has not may be quite arbitrary; cults and religious experiences that appealed to much of the population, especially the female population –for instance the cults of the Mother of the Gods and of Artemis– do not currently have any royal connections¹. Though evidence about the role of Argead women in religious cults is scant– a hodgepodge of often dubious literary sources heavy on anecdote and alleged oral remarks, a few inscriptions, references in speeches, and archaeological evidence not securely connected to specific royal women– discussion of the likely and possible role of royal women in religious experiences is important for understanding Argead monarchy and the role of religion in that monarchy.

Granted the difficulties of our sources, I will pay more attention to physical evidence explicitly tied to individual royal women and less to burials believed to be royal but lacking indisputable connection to an individual woman or straightforward signifiers of royal status. Inscriptions and contemporary speeches are vital. In terms of literary evidence –most of it about Olympias the mother of Alexander– we need to read against the sexual/ethnic/cultural stereotypes of our mostly second century CE authors (Plutarch, in particular) but value information in those sources that seems less tied to gender stereotyping and thus less likely to be invented or highly colored; we should prize what is not the main point of an anecdote and thus somewhat less likely to be

¹ CHRISTESEN–MURRAY 2010, 431, for instance, mention the importance of the cult of Artemis, yet currently no royal women are known to have a connection to it. The same applies to that of the Mother of the Gods: a sanctuary existed from at least the 4th century BCE at Aegae (DROUGOU 2011, 250-51) and at Pella (AKAMATIS 2011, 404-5).

invented. Reported conversation and witty remarks should be treated with extreme suspicion. References to public acts, not behind the scenes drama deserves greater credence. This paper is therefore consciously minimalistic in approach, in hopes that we better recognize how little we know and how much of what has survived that appears to be relevant is problematic at best.

Although no literary or physical remains from the sixth and fifth century can be tied to individual named women, at Vergina (now generally acknowledged as the site of Aegae, the original capital of Macedonia and burial place of Argead kings), “clusters” of burials distinct from the general necropolis area and widely considered royal have been excavated. Kottaridi has excavated one cluster (Beta, termed by her the “Queens’ cluster”) she believes to have contained only female burials, nine in all, dating from the beginning of the 5th century BCE to the late 4th or early 3rd century BCE². Argead women had no known title, certainly not one that distinguished among multiple wives of kings. Thus, when burials of women believed to be royal are discussed, we have no way to know if they are sole wives of ruling monarch, one of several, the mother of a king, the widow of a king or the daughter of a king. It does, however, seem likely that the burials in Beta cluster were all associated with the royal family and thus I will refer to them as “royal women”. Philip II and Alexander III and quite possibly Philip’s father Amyntas III were polygamous and earlier kings like Alexander I may have been too; Kottaridi concludes that the women of the royal family must have been ranked or categorized in some fashion since far more than the ten in the cluster must once have existed³, but we do not know whether women buried in this cluster were distinguished in any formal way from other dynastic women and whether such distinctions, if they existed, had to do with any religious belief or practice.

Of the ten burials known from the cluster, only one was discovered un-looted, ‘The Lady of Aegae’, a spectacularly rich and large (four by five meters) pit burial dating to about 500 BCE, was first excavated in 1988⁴. The dead woman had been placed in a wooden coffin; nearby were an iron trivet, a bronze cauldron, and a jug and cup. A remarkable collection of gold ornaments and jewelry (including a diadem embellished with mythological scenes) decorated her three-part costume. The excavator Angelika Kottaridi concluded that the woman was a priestess (sometimes she terms her a “queen-priestess”) because of some these grave goods: a miniature iron cart; iron spits (understood to be for sacrifice); a silver ‘wand’; a tubular object she believed to be a distaff, numerous vessels she interpreted as libation vessels and an object she terms a “sceptre”. Kottaridi considers another burial in the cluster also that of a queen-priestess: though looted, it contained twenty-six terra cotta heads, some Kottaridi identifies as “demons and deities”. She interprets the *phialai* and *pateras* found in most of these graves as libation vessels. Her designation of the ‘Lady’ as a priestess, however, has not won general support. Nothing in this burial array can be tied exclusively to priesthood; royal status alone could explain all items present. We know that Argead women in the fourth century enjoyed power and prestige; nothing prevents the same for being true about women a century or more earlier. Saripanidi reads the vessels found in

² KOTTARIDI 2004, 139. There were four large pit tombs (Lambda I (540-30 BCE), II (500-490 BCE), III (480 BCE) and IV (470-60 BCE)), three monumental stone-built cist graves (Kappa 2 (430-20 BCE), Kappa 2 (420-10 BCE), Kappa 3 (350-30 BCE)) and two Macedonian type tombs. SARAPANIDI 2017, 82, though disagreeing with Kottaridi about interpretation of these burials (as well as the male burials in Gamma cluster) concedes that they were indeed “very likely” royal.

³ KOTTARIDI 2004, 140.

⁴ ANDRONIKOS 1988, 1-3; KOTTARIDI 1989, 1-11; 1996, 79-92; 2002, 75-83; 2004, 139-147; DROUGOU 2011b, 275-80. A photograph of the major elements of her costume appears in KOTTARIDI 2004a, 141.

this and other burials as part of banqueting sets, possibly intended for use in some feasting in the afterlife⁵. Moreover, no written evidence attests to the existence of specific priesthoods in Macedonia held by members of the ruling dynasty⁶. Simply being a female member of the royal family may have enabled a woman to perform ritual acts associated with various cults and with the possible domestic cult of the ruling family (see below for a discussion of a passage that seems to suggest this for Olympias)⁷. This fabulous burial may well attest to the power and importance of the dead woman but tells us little about her religious beliefs or those of the people who organized her interment⁸.

Much more evidence about the religious beliefs and practices of two royal women who lived in the fourth century, Eurydice wife of Amyntas III and mother of three kings (including Philip II) and Olympias, wife of Philip II and mother of Alexander the Great. In both cases, however, this evidence must be read with care because the extant literary tradition about both preserves some extremely hostile material, probably because both were powerful (and possibly murderous) and certainly controversial figures in their own day. Luckily inscriptional and some material evidence survives that enables us to contextualize their careers and actions. Eurydice, daughter of Sirras, married Amyntas III toward the end of the 390s and had three sons with him, all of whom became kings (Alexander II, Perdiccas III and Philip II)⁹. Though Amyntas had another wife who also had three sons, none of them became kings (Just. 7.4.5). Our sources preserve accusations that Eurydice took a lover for whose sake she tried to murder, in turn, her husband and sons (7.4.7-8, 7.5.4-9; *Suda s.v.* ‘Karanos’.) This lover may or may not have been the Ptolemy who killed Alexander II and whom Eurydice may or may not have married (D.S. 15.71.1; Ath. 14.629d; Plu. *Pel.* 26-27; *Schol. ad Aeschin.* 2.29). On the other hand, a nearly contemporary Athenian speech recounts that when her sons’ succession seemed threatened some time after her husband’s death, Eurydice saved the throne for them by summoning the Athenian admiral Iphicrates and persuading him to give aid (Aeschin. 2.26-29; *Suda s.v.* ‘Karanos’; Nep. *Iph.* 3.2). She likely lived well into Philip’s reign but was probably dead by 346¹⁰.

Evidence suggests that Eurydice (and probably Philip), confronted with the scandalous tradition (which brought into question the legitimacy of her sons) used religion to elevate her own prestige and thus, indirectly, that of her sons. An essay

⁵ CONNELLY 2007, 14, 86 points out that while keys (not present in this burial) are often associated with priestly status, scepters and rich jewelry were symbols shared by priests and priestesses, kings and queens, and divinities and were also (2007, 91) theatrical costumes. CONNELLY 2007, 226 specifically rejects Kottaridi’s identification. Sarapanidi 2017, 85 rejects the notion that the ‘Lady’ was a priest because she interprets the many *phialai* in these graves as well as many others not thought royal (many of them ‘miniature’ vessels) as evidence for feasting, not necessarily libation.

⁶ Translating the Greek word ‘*hiera*’ as ‘priest’ unfortunately carries a lot of Christian baggage, particularly since Greek priesthood was not necessarily focused on belief. GOFF 2004, 61 objects to the standard translation because she understands the ancient office as more connected to community and culture than spirituality. Her view, however, seems to trivialize the office because it was not like Christian priesthood.

⁷ CONNELLY 2007, 14 points out that all women were effectively priestesses within their own households.

⁸ MITCHELL 2012 offers a helpful general discussion of the women of ruling families in the Archaic period which gives a plausible context for the role of the Argead women in this period.

⁹ On Eurydice’s career, see CARNEY 2019; see also MACURDY 1927; GREENWALT 1988; 1989; MORTENSEN 1992; MIRÓN PÉREZ 1998; MOLINA MARÍN 2018.

¹⁰ Her dedications at the Eucleia sanctuary suggest that she lived into the middle of the fourth century (see below) but Aeschines’ failure to mention her as someone who could certify to the truth of the anecdote he recounts implies that she may have been dead by the time Aeschines delivered his speech to Philip in 346 and even more likely by 343 when he delivered it to the Athenians (CARNEY 2019, 97).

preserved in the corpus of Plutarch's works (Plu. *Mor.* 14b-c) holds up Eurydice as a model for the education of her children; it includes a version of a dedicatory inscription of hers. The author says that the reader should emulate Eurydice who, though an Illyrian and barbarian three times over, took up education after the prime of life, for the sake of instructing her children. He believes, possibly mistakenly, that her dedication to the Muses demonstrated her love for her children. Granted some problems with the text, the dedication may not have been to the Muses but to female citizens. Here is my translation of one version of the text:

“Eurydice, daughter of Sirras, dedicated this for/to citizen women, having gained the desire of her soul, through the Muses. She, already the mother of sons who had reached adolescence, labored to learn letters, which are the memory of words”¹¹.

We do not know what exactly she dedicated¹², but it probably happened during the 360s, granted the reference to the ages of her sons. Her offering may have been made at Dion where there was a sanctuary to Zeus and the Muses (and a festival in honor of the Muses; D.S. 17.16. 3-4) or at Aegae where her other dedications were made (see below). Some scholars continue to believe that she dedicated to the Muses themselves and called herself a citizen woman¹³. Konishi argued that the Muses were originally associated with literacy, an association this inscription seems to confirm¹⁴. It is notable that Eurydice identifies with the other women of the community and yet is a model for them. Eurydice's dedication is boastful in a way that recalls Cynisca, the Spartan royal daughter and only woman to win an Olympic victory; her team of horses won the chariot race (twice). Cynisca dedicated a bronze statuary group with an inscription at Olympia depicting herself, her charioteer, her chariot and horses and another dedication and inscription at Sparta¹⁵. Eurydice seems to use the cult of the Muses to burnish her own image and indirectly that of her sons, clearly portraying herself as the ‘good’ Eurydice of one tradition rather than the bad woman of the other tradition. Macedonian court culture was extraordinarily agonistic, even compared to other cultures on the Greek peninsula, and here we see Eurydice playing her part in that competition, in which there is an element of the heroic¹⁶.

¹¹ WILHELM 1949, 625-633 made this emendation, followed by ROBERT-ROBERT 1984, 450 and apparently by LE BOHEC-BOUHET 2006, 191. HAMMOND 1994, 17, unaware of Wilhelm's emendation, considers it a dedication to the city's muses. MOLINA MARÍN 2018, 80 seems to follow Hammond, although he says that he accepts Wilhelm's emendation. LE BOHEC-BOUHET 2006, 191 deduces that the citizen women have somehow aided in Eurydice's education; I am not sure I agree.

¹² Various suggestions have been made: SAATSOGLU-PALIADELI 2000, 401-02 suggested an image of Pothos (desire), as in the desire for accomplishment *contra* OIKONOMEDES 1983, 64 who suggested that it was a statue of Eurydice herself or perhaps Apollo or a tablet showing the Greek alphabet. Saatsoglou-Paliadeli argues convincingly that the antecedent must be masculine and thus not an image of Eurydice. See further CARNEY 2019, 139-40 n. 21.

¹³ So SAATSOGLU-PALIADELI 2000, 401-402 who understands it as a reference to Eurydice's residence in Aegae because she thinks that the noun *polietis* (citizen woman) is nominative in the text and thus appositive to Eurydice rather than dative as Wilhelm emended it; LANE FOX 2011, 268, though citing Wilhelm and Mortensen, agrees with Saatsoglou-Paliadeli.

¹⁴ KONISHI 1993.

¹⁵ Paus. 3.8.1-3, 6.1.6; *IvO* 160

¹⁶ GOFF 2004, 71 argues that the dedications of Athenian women could be an element in male agonistic Athenian culture, but I see no reason to attribute these values to men alone, certainly not in Macedonia. MOLINA MARÍN 2018, 81 rightly notes the similarity between Eurydice's use of *pothos* and its use in terms of Eurydice's grandson Alexander the Great. STEWART 1993, 84-86 convincingly put Alexander's *pothos* in a heroic context, in a desire to surpass others. Eurydice shares similar values. SARIPANIDI 2017,

Eurydice made a second dedication of greater proportions and more lasting impact. In 1982, Chrysoula Saatsoglou-Paliadeli, excavating at Vergina/Aegae, discovered the remains of a sanctuary on the edge of the agora¹⁷. The sanctuary included a Doric temple, a stoa annex, a building with a central court, and an altar. Three marble bases for dedications were found, two of which (one in situ, another in a pit) contained dedicatory inscriptions by Eurydice to Eucleia. The structures mentioned were erected in the fourth century, probably about the middle of the century, though additions and alterations were made in subsequent centuries. The Eucleia complex apparently formed part of Philip II's urban plan for Aegae: it was just downhill from the palace and theater. Though heavily damaged at the time of the Roman conquest, some parts of the site continued in use into the first century CE. In one of the four deposit pits near the sanctuary a larger-than-life size peplophorus female statue was found; the statue was headless but parts of the head and neck were also discovered nearby, as well as two more statue heads. In another statue pit, fragments of a marble statue of a huge snake (1.8 meters high) were unearthed.

Eucleia was the goddess of good repute, a goddess as well as a personification. The cult in Macedonia may have predated Eurydice's day. We know a bit about cults of Eucleia elsewhere in the Greek world; in some of these she was associated with military victory and in others she was associated with Artemis; we do not know if the Vergina cult involved a similar combination, though the two extant dedicatory inscriptions say simply "Eurydice, daughter of Sirras, to Eucleia" and do not couple her with another deity. In terms of Aegae and Eurydice in the 350s, it is best to understand her dedications in the context of good repute¹⁸. Eurydice's had been challenged and her dedications seem to try to erase the bad repute she –and indirectly her sons– had experienced and replace it with good repute.

From the fourth century on, women began to be honored much more regularly with portrait statues, typically placed in public places. Distinguishing a goddess from a mortal woman, in terms of Greek art, is always difficult. Moreover, statues of priestesses often reproduced the archaic dress of goddesses. This statue wore old fashioned dress –a peplos not a chiton– and so some have wondered if Eurydice was a priestess of Eucleia, though the inscription does not give her that title and inscriptions related to priestess statues often did¹⁹. Greek female portraiture was always idealized but the face of this statue does display some indication that it is not intended as that of a young girl or an immortal goddess but that of a middle-aged woman²⁰. Confusingly, some scholars believe that the 'face' we now have, the one found near the statue body,

discussing Archaic Macedonia, sees an Argead political construct heroizing themselves as well as Macedonians generally; see above for the mythological images of the diadem of the Lady of Aegae.

¹⁷ See SAATSOGLOU-PALIADELI 1996 and KYRIAKOU-TOURTAS 2013, 299-301. See further CARNEY 2019, 82-92 for discussion and references.

¹⁸ See CARNEY 2019, 88-90. There is a possibility that the cult in Macedonia existed before the fourth century; see SOURVINOU-INWOOD 2003, 40-45. SMITH 2011, 71 notes the early military background of the cult but adds that it broadened. Eucleia was sometimes associated with Aphrodite and can have an erotic context, possibly because sexual probity was for women so important to maintain. See BORG 2005. Granted that Eurydice's sexual probity had been challenged, a dedication to a deity sometimes associated with good sexual conduct might seem particularly appropriate.

¹⁹ On female Greek portraiture and this image specifically, see DILLON 2007, 65-66, 76-80. On the difficulty of distinguishing mortal women from goddesses, see also CONNELLY 2007, 85-87. KOTTARIDI 2020, 170-82 argues that she is depicted as a priestess and believes that the missing hands would have held a scepter and a *phiale*.

²⁰ SCHULTZ 2007, 230, n 65 and 66; DILLON 2010, 78-79 see signs of age in the portrait and individualization, as does KOTTARIDI 2020, 170-8. PALAGIA 2010, 39-40 denies that the face we have is individualized.

is not the original face of the statue and that it was changed, perhaps at the time the statue was moved into the stoa, long after the Argeads were gone²¹. It is possible that Eurydice not only dedicated the two statues whose bases survive but the entire sanctuary. Nothing absolutely confirms or prevents that, though the sanctuary's apparent connection to Philip's city planning and possibly the unusual burials (see below) near the Doric temple may imply a royal dedication. As with the Lady of Aegae, there is no direct evidence that she served as a priestess. Moreover, perhaps neither woman needed to be designated as a priestess because being the wife or daughter or mother or widow of a king was more important and implied ability to perform ritual function.

The large marble snake found in one statue pit at the sanctuary relates to an entirely different cult, probably one to Zeus Meilichius (the gentle Zeus); a fragmentary dedicatory inscription by Laodice, wife of the last Macedonian king Perseus, refers to a male god. Women and family groups often dedicated to Zeus Meilichius; he was understood as a protector and guarantor of fertility (human and agricultural). The shattered remains found in the pit may have been those of the cult statue; this cult often shared sanctuary space with other deities²².

What is striking is how long veneration of Eurydice's dedication continued. Even after Roman conquest, the Eucleia statue and presumably the sanctuary received respect and, after a natural disaster when the city was abandoned in the first century CE, Eurydice's state was ritually interred²³. Moreover, in 2008 and 2009, three burials were found on the northern edge of sanctuary, having seemingly concealed soon after they were made. The excavators of these burials have suggested that these are the remains of Alexander's other son, Heracles, his mother Barsine, and some unknown yet important child. The remains of a male in his late teens were placed in a large golden container, itself neatly packed into a slightly larger bronze one. A golden oak wreath was placed with these remains; the only comparable wreaths are those found in the tombs of the royal male from the main chamber of Tomb II at Vergina (supposed to be either Philip II or his son Philip III Arrhidaeus) and the young male in Tomb III at Vergina, generally believed to be Alexander's son by Roxane, Alexander IV. The second burial in the sanctuary was of an adult of undetermined gender, but it was placed in a hinged silver vase (purpose-made for funerary purposes) very like the one that contained the remains of 'the Prince' in Tomb III. The third and most mysterious of these secret/private burials in the sanctuary is that of a very young child of indeterminate sex²⁴. These remains were placed in a remarkable silver vessel, shaped like a panathenaic vase, etched, and decorated with gold. The scenes on this vase seem to show, among other things, an armed figure with a hairdo very like that of Alexander, clasping the hand of a youth²⁵.

At least three other burials at Vergina from the fourth century are likely to be those of royal women. One is a famous and striking Macedonian type tomb first attributed to

²¹ Some believe that the statue was altered at some point, possibly when it was moved, and that final product, the statue and face, may have resulted from a combination of the body of the original statue with a more portrait like face from another KYRIAKOU–TOURTAS 2015, 369. For images showing the head and body together, as restored, see KOTTARIDI 2020, 180, figs. 20a and 20b.

²² See SAATSOGLU-PALIADELI 2000, 289-92. On the cult generally, see OGDEN 2013, 272-83. Philip V made a dedication to Zeus Meilichius: SAATSOGLU-PALIADELI 2000, 391 n. 22.

²³ SAATSOGLU-PALIADELI 2000, 400-01; KYRIAKOU–TOURTAS 2013; 2015.

²⁴ See KYRIAKOU 2014 for an overview.

²⁵ SAATSOGLU-PALIADELI 2021. See especially the preliminary reconstruction of the scenes etched on the vase: SAATSOGLU-PALIADELI 2021, 697 fig. 15, and 698 fig. 17.

Eurydice by its original excavator Manolis Andronikos; Angelika Kottaridi continues to endorse this identification²⁶. It too is part of Cluster Beta. The ‘Tomb of Eurydice’ has yet to be fully published and was heavily looted, but fragments of jewels suggest that a woman was buried there, though it is possible that a man was as well. Whatever her identity, she was an important woman: she was cremated in a huge, house-like pyre, very similar to that of the man interred in Tomb II. This tomb had no temple/palace-like façade, but the back wall of the main chamber of the tomb was a lifelike façade and door, so realistic that robbers tried to enter it. In the main chamber, in front and to the right of this ‘doorway’ was a huge marble throne and marble step stool. A marble box, probably once placed on the seat of the throne, had contained the remains of the cremated dead, but the remarkable thing is the scene painted on the back of the chair: Hades and Persephone, standing in a horse chariot, stare at the viewer. Fragments of panathenaic vases dating 344/343 are associated with the tomb’s pyre, meaning the tomb must have been constructed after that date. Granted that Eurydice was likely (though not certainly) dead no later than 343, this tomb was probably the burial of another royal woman, perhaps one who died in the later 340s. Whichever royal woman, alone or in company, was interred here, the striking painting of Hades and Persephone directly refers to the afterlife, particularly because the cremated remains were once placed on the throne on which it was painted, and the eerie back wall of the tomb strongly implies a belief by those who buried her in the afterlife and a possible understanding that the tomb played a role in reaching a happy afterlife.

A somewhat earlier cist tomb, once covered by the Great tumulus at Vergina (Tomb II), contained the remains of a woman, but also several infants and an adult male; granted that the tomb had been robbed, it is possible that other human remains intruded, especially at the time the Great Tumulus was constructed, but now we must conclude that this tomb was a multiple burial, including a woman somehow connected to the Argead family. On one wall of this tomb is a remarkable painting of the Rape of Persephone. Once again, in a beautiful painting, we have a connection to Persephone and Hades²⁷.

A third fourth century burial at Vergina is that of royal women: Tomb II contained the burial of a male in the main chamber, but in the antechamber a woman was buried. The man is usually believed to be either Philip II or Philip III and the woman as either Adea Eurydice, wife of Philip III, or one of the wives of Philip II. The dead woman’s cremated remains were interred in a beautiful golden box, one somewhat smaller and simpler than that of the male, and included a beautiful diadem. The distinctive thing about this burial is that it contained several military items, suggesting that she was commemorated as a warrior, but these items tell us nothing about any religious beliefs of the woman or those who buried her²⁸. Thus two of the three tombs suggest not only the popularity of the cult of Demeter and Kore but the association of the cult with beliefs about the afterlife. Of course, we have no guarantee that the women whose remains were placed in these tombs were particularly devoted to Persephone and Demeter, but we can deduce that those who commemorated them were or understood such references as appropriate to their burial.

The most famous –some would say notorious– Argead royal woman was the mother of Alexander the Great and wife of Philip II, the woman known to us as Olympias. She

²⁶ KOTTARIDI 2006 gives a detailed description of the tomb and burial. See also CARNEY 2019, 98-106

²⁷ Much of the discussion about Tomb I and Tomb II has involved the dispute about the identity of the occupants of Tombs I and II. For the purposes of this discussion, it matters only that the woman interred was likely royal.

²⁸ See CARNEY 2016.

was an Aeacid, the daughter of Neoptolemus, King of Molossia. (As we examine the eclectic mix of evidence about Olympias' religious practices and beliefs, we should prize contemporary material –inscriptions and speeches– over non-contemporary and pay attention to the sexual politics, ancient and modern, of her depictions, especially in literary sources). She was sometimes brave, sometimes violent, politically brilliant, and obtuse by turns. In these traits, and more, her famous son resembled her²⁹.

Some aspects of Olympias' life in relation, in whole or in part, to religion are comparatively uncontroversial³⁰. Plutarch (*Mor.* 401), discussing the use of 'nicknames', mentions that Olympias was first called Polyxena (in keeping with the then current Aeacid genealogy including both Achilles and Priam), then Myrtale, Olympias, and Stratonice. Justin (2.7.13) also says that she was known as Myrtale as a child. 'Myrtale' probably relates to a religious experience, likely a coming-of-age ceremony³¹. 'Olympias', was apparently the name by which she was long known in Macedonia, quite possibly in connection to the festival of Olympian Zeus³². 'Stratonice' may refer to Olympias' great though ephemeral victory in 317. We do not know whether Olympias herself chose these names or whether some or all were imposed upon her, but at least two name choices connect her very identity to religious experiences. No one has doubted that, escorted by her uncle Arybbas the current king of Molossia, she and Philip, on their betrothal, became initiates at Samothrace (as did Arybbas; *Plu. Alex.* 2.1). Several Macedonian rulers, probably starting with Philip, served as patrons there³³. Athenaeus (14.659f-60a) preserves a letter urging Alexander to buy a certain sacrifice cook named Pelignas from his mother because the cook knew the ancestral [sacrificial] rites, Argead and Bacchic, and all those Olympias offered³⁴. In other words, Olympias owned a cook who dealt with all these rites, presumably because she had needed one who was familiar with them and now Alexander, apparently could/should own a slave with such skills. Thus, Olympias was somehow involved in or responsible for such rites, apparently playing a conventional Greek female role in family cult as well as in more public one. Olympias may have arranged for a dedication of golden crowns at Delphi (*SIG* 252N, 5-8), if she personally gave the sanctuary 190 darics for this purpose (Persian gold coins), possibly paid for with wealth given her by her son after Granicus (*FGrH* 151 F 1) and the siege of Gaza (*Plu. Alex.* 25.4)³⁵. Doubtless she participated in many rites appropriate for a royal wife and mother about which we happen to have no record.

²⁹ On her life and career generally, see CARNEY 2006; O'NEIL 1999 offers a very different view.

³⁰ CARNEY 2006, 88-103 offers a discussion of her role in religion.

³¹ HECKEL 1981 discusses all her name changes. CARNEY 2006, 93-94 discusses the reasons why 'Myrtale' was probably not connected to the Great Gods at Samothrace: *contra* HECKEL 1981, 84. Myrtle was sacred to Aphrodite, but myrtle was connected to other cults as well, many of them mystery cults.

³² See discussion and references in CARNEY 2006, n° 75 and 76. HATZOPOULOS 1982 suggested that her wedding was tied to the festival of Olympian Zeus.

³³ See COLE 1984, 16-17, 21, 39-40 on Argead patronage at Samothrace. See also CARNEY 2006, 94-95, particularly for the possibility, raised by MORTENSEN 1997, 24, that the engagement happened in the context of the annual festival, that Philip combined the royal event with a religious festival, as he would later do with his daughter Cleopatra's marriage (*D.S.* 16.92.1).

³⁴ There are certainly fictional letters included in the corpus of works dealing with Alexander and the apparent quotation in this one may be anything but genuine, but the 'facts' of the letter as described seem plausible enough and the treatment of religion and Olympias' role has a matter-of-fact tone, not sensational. On the problem of dealing with the letters, see further CARNEY 2006, 53-54.

³⁵ Her name is restored to line 5 of the inscription. Marchetti 2011 now doubts that the darics, whether paid for by Olympias herself or given to honor her, were ever made into crowns.

A more unusual and complicated incident involving Olympias and religious issues (as well as political ones) is referred to in an important speech of Hypereides in defense of Euxenippus, a speech delivered in the 320s³⁶, at a period when Olympias may already have returned to her native Molossia where her daughter Cleopatra, the widow of her brother Alexander I of Molossia, now likely served as quasi-regent. Subsequently Cleopatra may have shared this role with her mother. Late in Alexander's reign Olympias likely took sole responsibility after Cleopatra departed for Macedonia³⁷. Euxenippus, among other things, supposedly needed defending because he had allowed Olympias to dedicate a *phiale* (a shallow libation cup or bowl) to Hygieia at the Athenian sanctuary. Hypereides argues that Euxenippus' accusers' mention of Olympias and Alexander (*Eux.* 19-20) was made simply to inflame the jury against him and to imply that Euxenippus is simply a puppet of Olympias and other Macedonians. Then Hypereides says that Olympias has made complaints (which he terms unjustified) about events at Dodona, the oracular shrine to Zeus in Molossia. He claims that Athenians were commanded by the oracle to 'embellish' the statue of Dione and so the Athenians made a beautiful face for the goddess and prepared other embellishment for the goddess, as well as a procession and sacrifices (*Eux.* 24). Olympias, in turn, sent written complaints and assertions about Athenian actions at Dodona, specifically that Molossia—the site of the sanctuary—belonged to her and so the Athenians had no right to upset things there (*Eux.* 25). Hypereides then argues that if the Athenians find Euxenippus guilty about the bowl, they are effectively condemning what they themselves did at Dodona (*Eux.* 26).

Hygieia, the daughter of Asclepius and often paired with him in cult, personified health³⁸. We do not know specifically what motivated Olympias' donation, but it has usually been assumed Olympias made her offering on behalf of Alexander, who was often endangered by wounds or sickness. Women were frequent patrons of healing gods, typically out of concern for their children. The *phiale* (whether terracotta or made of a precious metal) was a conventional female dedication because women usually held the *phiale* before a man took it, the woman poured liquid into the cup and then the man poured the libation on the ground³⁹. In the past, I have interpreted her offering as stressing "the submissive role of women in this form of worship"⁴⁰. I think I was wrong. Baslez has argued convincingly that the Athenian actions and those of Olympias were more parallel than had been understood, that both cases involved significant alteration to a cult statue, specifically that Olympias' *phiale* was not simply an offering, but was intended for the cult statue of the goddess, who was often depicted holding a *phiale*. Baslez notes that Olympias' image was assimilated to that Hygieia by late antiquity⁴¹.

³⁶ WHITEHEAD 2000, 155-57, after discussion of the evidence, concludes that 330-24 is the most specific a date that can be supported.

³⁷ Diodorus (18.49.4) says that Olympias fled Macedonia because of her quarrel with Antipater, though Plu. *Alex.* 68.3 implies that her departure was voluntary. Livy 8.24.7 describes her as being present in Molossia by the time of the arrival of her brother's remains and Hypereides (*Eux.* 25) suggests that she was there by the time of the speech. At some point, probably late in the reign of Alexander, Cleopatra, the widow of Olympias' brother Alexander I, left Molossia for Macedonia. Olympias and Cleopatra may have shared the rule of Molossia for some period: see CARNEY 2006, 52-53; BERNARD 2007, 258 suggests something similar, on somewhat different grounds.

³⁸ See STAFFORD 2005; WILKINS 2005; BEUMER 2016.

³⁹ DILLON 2002, 18 describes the process, though convention may have varied.

⁴⁰ CARNEY 2006, 95.

⁴¹ BASLEZ 1999. Many other aspects of her argument are unconvincing, among them that Olympias was trying overtly to assimilate herself to Hygieia. OGDEN 2015, 121, unaware of Baslez' work, concludes that the Romance vignette of Olympias and the snake at the banquet and the Baalbek mosaic were developed on the model of Hygieia's iconography.

This dispute obviously also relates to tensions between the Athenians and Macedonians, but the speech depicts Olympias acting aggressively, drawing authority from both kingdoms, and perhaps from her family's Athenian citizenship.

People often associate Olympias with Dionysus and with snakes. Euripides' *Bacchae* (101-4, 698, 767-8), probably composed at the court of Archelaus, depicts Bacchantes whose snakes lick their cheeks and twirl about in their hair; these same Bacchantes ultimately commit a horrible murder, an action perhaps even more frightening because some of them are, like Olympias, royal women (though Theban, not Macedonian). Plutarch's *Alexander*, however, is largely responsible for both associations (Dionysus and snakes) and particularly for reading them in a negative way⁴². Religiosity about Dionysus took many forms, not necessarily mutually exclusive: he could be the god of wine, involving both men and women; he could be an ecstatic god venerated by women in groups who biennially departed for the mountains⁴³; and he could be the god who helped insure the path to a happy afterlife. All three aspects of the god were popular in Macedonia. Plutarch (*Alex.* 2.5), calling the following account a *logos*, says that

“All the women in this area [presumably Macedonia] had been subject to Orphic experiences and secret Dionysiac rites from ancient times (called Klodones and Mimallones) and did many things like those of the Edonian women and Thracian women around Mt. Haemon (from whom it seems the term *threskeuein* began to be applied to intense [or excessive] and elaborate [perhaps superstitious] religious ceremonies). Olympias pursued these possessions more than others and carried out these enthusiasms more barbarically, introduced large tame snakes to the bands of bacchantes; the snakes, often appearing from the ivy and cult baskets and winding around their wands and the garlands of the women, they repelled the men”.

Plutarch is obviously himself repelled by this religious experience, though snakes apart⁴⁴, it sounds like other Dionysiac women's festivals⁴⁵. Olympias clearly acts as religious patron, not surprising granted that elite women often patronized cult festivals, the snakes possibly being her innovation⁴⁶. A fragment of Duris, dating to early in the third century CE, whether literally true or not, confirms Olympias' devotion to (possibly identity with) the cult. It also demonstrates that this association was made within or soon after her lifetime. Duris (Ath. 13.560f) says that in 316, when Olympias accompanied an army sponsoring her grandson Alexander IV which was coming to

⁴² ASIRVATHAM 2001, 95 notes, Plutarch uses foils (Olympias and Philip) to demonstrate Alexander's Greekness by highlighting his parents supposed lack of that quality. She observes “...Plutarch embellishes on rumors surrounding Olympias' religion, using the snake as a potent symbol for its nefarious and barbaric nature”. As she also comments, the portrayal of Olympias in the *Alexander* is generally negative and “uncharitable”. (2001, 100).

⁴³ Scholars have struggled to understand how literal ecstatic possession in the cult was and practices clearly varied from place to place and period to period: DILLON 2002, 139-49 debates how integrated the cult was into communal values; GOFF 2004, 7 suggests it was “intellectually creative”; see also GOFF 2004, 214-17, 271-5.

⁴⁴ ASIRVATHAM 2001, 98 notes that snakes in baskets were a common phenomenon in cults of Dionysius and Demeter and Kore but concludes that “the actual handling of snakes” was meant to seem barbaric.

⁴⁵ ASIRVATHAM 2001, 97 concludes that Plutarch indicates that Olympias' supposed behavior is “inauthentic”; at 98 n. 12 she deduces that in the Plutarch passage she was “making a calculated effort to play on the superstition of others”.

⁴⁶ DILLON 2002, 144 asserts that male surprise suggests that the snakes were Olympias' innovation. ASIRVATHAM 2001, 99 points out that in Greek culture snakes were not always understood in a negative way and were sometimes used in cult.

confront forces headed by her grandson's co-king Philip III Arrhidaeus and his wife Adea Eurydice (who had been trained by her mother in warfare), Olympias advanced like a Bacchant with a tympanum (a Dionysiac drum) and Adea Eurydice like a Macedonian soldier; he calls the incident the first war between women. Both women, at least according to Duris, played to the public persona each had established. Monarchy involved stagecraft of a kind; apparently Olympias had the winning role, granted that the opposing army went over to her when they saw her.⁴⁷ Alexander himself was a devotee of Dionysus, but his focus was more sympotic and connected to Dionysus as a conqueror of the East. Plutarch himself (*Mor.* 611d), though hostile to Olympias' and Alexander's Dionysiac experience, was apparently an initiate in one of the Dionysiac cults that promised a happy afterlife.

Now to the topic of Alexander's divine parentage. Plutarch refers (*Alex.* 2.1-4) to portents of the future importance of Alexander: the night before her wedding, Olympias dreams that a thunderbolt descended on her womb and Philip, somewhat later, dreamed that he had put lion seal on his wife's womb. Plutarch then adds that a snake was once seen sleeping stretched out by Olympias and "they say" that this really dampened Philip's sexual interest in her, so that he rarely spent time with her, whether fearing spells and potions against him (see below on Olympias and charges of the use of magic) or because he feared sexual relations with her because she was having intercourse with someone greater [i.e., a god]. Alexander would, of course, announce after his visit to the shrine of Zeus Ammon at Siwah in Egypt in 331 that he was the son of Zeus Ammon (*Arr. An.* 3.3.2), but Plutarch (*Alex.* 3.1-2) has Philip, years earlier, receive a response from Delphi to honor Ammon but also warning him that he would lose the eye through which he had seen his wife sleeping with the god in serpent form. He then cites Eratosthenes for the story that before Alexander left on the Asian expedition (oddly Olympias is described as sending him), she told him alone the secret of his genesis and commanded him to contemplate things worthy of his birth. Plutarch adds that other writers say that she acquitted herself of this charge (sex with the divine snake) and said that Alexander should stop slandering her to Hera. Though Justin (11.11.2-11; *Luc. Alex.* 7) claims that Olympias told Philip that a large (unidentified) snake fathered Alexander, consequently causing Philip to divorce her and to deny his paternity of Alexander and Alexander to bribe the priests of Ammon at Siwah to greet him as the son of Ammon, few other ancient authors found the issue of Alexander's paternity so straightforward, as the Plutarch passage demonstrates. The omen interpretation at the beginning of *Alexander* seems to allude to different possible fathers including Zeus and a divine snake whose identity is problematic. Gods who were represented as snakes were fairly common –we have already noted two, Zeus Meilichius and Asclepius/Hygieia)– and snakes played a role in Olympias's native Molossia too; it is possible that she kept snakes around the house, though that story seems more connected to Plutarch's obsessively phallicism than with Olympias' religious practices⁴⁸. In Alexander's day (and after) Zeus Ammon was pictured primarily as ram-headed (though there were the snakes who lead Alexander and his troops to Siwah, according to Ptolemy; *Arr.* 3.3.5). Much uncertainty remains about which god was understood as

⁴⁷ See discussion and references in CHANIOTIS 1997; 2013 on the theatricality of Hellenistic monarchy and Hellenistic historiography ('tragic history'), he understands reported theatricality as a product of both royal actors and historians.

⁴⁸ Zeus Ktesios, for instance, a protective god of the household, was often represented as a snake: FARAONE 2008, 217; BOEDEKER 2008, 230-31. Aelian (*N.A.* 11.2) describes a prophetic cult to Apollo in Epirus that used snakes to make prophetic utterances. The existence of household snakes –domestic pets– is hard to demonstrate (OGDEN 2013, 303-05).

Alexander's divine parent at the time, though Ogden argues that Zeus Meilichius is the best contemporary choice⁴⁹.

Did Alexander's parents and their heroic genealogies generate or help to generate the idea of a divine parentage for their son and thus inspire Alexander's assertion? Minimally, they gave it context. Olympias believed herself the descendant of both Priam and Achilles (Theopompus *FGrH* 115 F 355) and Philip understood himself the seed of Zeus via Heracles (as did Alexander) and he stressed his connections to Zeus. The distinction between being the descendant of Zeus and the son of Zeus is not so great; moreover Philip had flirted with equating himself to the gods⁵⁰. Ogden points out that these associations suit an understanding that both Philip and Zeus were his father, a view that enabled Alexander to continue to claim to be hereditary ruler of Macedonia⁵¹. Curtius alone (9.6.26; 10.5.30) asserts that Alexander also planned to deify Olympias after her death; Curtius' assertion may not be historical, though Alexander had hoped to deify Hephaestion and deifying Olympias would have further supported his own deification by giving him two divine parents⁵².

As we have seen, Plutarch refers to a tradition, ascribed to Eratosthenes, that Olympias told Alexander that he was the son of Zeus in 334, years before his 331 visit to Siwah. Arrian (4.10.2) maintained that Callisthenes, Alexander's official historian, asserted that Alexander's divinity depended on him rather than on Olympias' lies about his origin⁵³. It is difficult to tell whether Arrian refers to Callisthenes' text or to oral comments by Callisthenes in person, presumably at court⁵⁴. Arrian pictures Callisthenes as an arrogant and difficult man (a portrait at least partially a product of an attempt to dirty his image after his arrest) but he does, in recounting Callisthenes' assertions, insert the phrase "if it is recorded truthfully" (4.10.1). In any event, my concern is not whether Callisthenes said or wrote it, but whether Olympias asserted it before Alexander did, perhaps even believed that a god had fathered her son. Alexander went to Siwah to achieve the answer he wanted, but when and how did he begin to want it? Apart from the heroizing tradition that both Philip and Olympias embraced, one could surmise that Olympias, after Philip had allowed Attalus to question publicly Alexander's legitimacy, had no reason to like Philip. Conceiving of someone else as Alexander's father could have been appealing to her, whichever god she imagined him to be. Once Alexander had asserted his divine sonship, he may have claimed that his mother would confirm it and she would surely not have contradicted him. But did she embrace the belief and publicize it before Alexander himself did? I think not⁵⁵. Philip's mother Eurydice, as

⁴⁹ OGDEN 2011, 52.

⁵⁰ OGDEN 2011, 9-12 makes several relevant points. Heracles appeared on many Argead coins and Alexander's. Alexander kept on emulating Heracles during his campaign, especially during the siege of Tyre, and he called his son by Barsine 'Heracles'. Philip himself stressed his ties to Zeus (he was first Argead to put Zeus on coins; famously, he had his image processed with those of the twelve Olympians and there are the altars to 'Philippian Zeus' and other associations) and, after his death, Philip continued to be associated with Zeus.

⁵¹ OGDEN 2011, 11-12.

⁵² See further MIRÓN PÉREZ 1998, 215, who sees it as an attempt to allude to Julio Claudian practice in a critical way; CARNEY 2006, 101-02.

⁵³ COLLINS 2012, 4-5 notes that the language of the passage *Alex.*3.3-4 resembles that of *Alex.* 27.5, also said to be a letter this time from Alexander to Olympias. Collins concedes, however that the authenticity of all the letters of Alexander is in doubt and that this one in particular is dubious.

⁵⁴ OGDEN 2007, 20 concludes that it is more likely that the views attributed to Callisthenes referred to actual spoken words rather than to his writings; COLLINS 2012, 7 agrees. BOSWORTH 1995, 76 considers it "grossly implausible" that the "historical Callisthenes" would have mentioned her views let alone labeled them untruths.

⁵⁵ BOSWORTH 1995, 76 judges that "there is little evidence that Olympias fomented" such ideas.

we have noted, still had to deal with charges of adultery against her, long after the death of her husband, charges still probably having some resonance when Olympias arrived in Macedonia and Olympias herself had been humiliated by Attalus' toast indicating that Alexander was somehow not legitimate. Charges of adultery in the Greek world were disastrous for women and Alexander, one notices, did not proclaim his divine sonship until after he was well on his way to being 'the Great'. Even then, Alexander seems to have come to believe that he was the son of both Philip and Zeus, a view that conveniently dealt with Alexander's role as king of Macedonia⁵⁶.

Some passages associate Olympias and, more broadly, women of northern Greece or Epirus, with magic. Plutarch twice (*Alex.* 2.4; 77.5) connects Olympias to the use of sinister magic: as we have noted, he imagines that Philip may have stopped having sex with Olympias because he feared her use of *mageia* (charms) and *pharmaka* (potions or drugs) or that she was sleeping with a divine being. At the very end of the *Alexander* (77.5) Plutarch blames Philip Arrhidaeus' mental problems, whatever they were, on *pharmaka* Olympias managed to give him. A passage in Plutarch's *Moralia* (141b-c) also involves Olympias in suspicions of the use of *pharmaka*, but in a context that makes Olympias not the one who employs *pharmaka* but the one who tries to protect her husband from them: a Thessalian woman (possibly Philinna, mother of Philip Arrhidaeus, Philip's only other son), was the suspect, but when Olympias met the accused, she concluded that she was a lovely person whose only use of *pharmaka* was her good character and birth. Thessalian women were commonly associated with magic and Macedonian women sometimes actually employed it⁵⁷. Ogden, noting that accusations of witchcraft are common cross-culturally in polygamous situations, suggests that our sources retain remnants of a succession struggle between the mothers of Philip's two sons, perhaps facilitated by the northern Greek origins of both women⁵⁸. Some of Olympias' Bacchic activities, as recounted, seem to have magical overtones too⁵⁹.

Nothing survives about the religious activities of the other wives of Philip or his daughter Cleopatra (other than her receiving of *theoroi* in her husband's absence *SEG* XXIII 198;) or his daughters Thessalonice or Cynnane or his granddaughter Adea Eurydice, but there is one final piece of relevant information relating to Roxane, the first of Alexander's wives and the last surviving wife of an Argead king. Roxane was a Bactrian. During Alexander's life she was overshadowed by his Achaemenid bride/s but was pregnant with the future Alexander IV at the time of her husband's death. During the era of the Successors, she appears to have had little sway, only accompanying her son under the supervision of the ever-changing roster of regents. In 319 Antipater brought Alexander IV and Roxane to the Greek peninsula (as well as the other co-king Philip III Arrhidaeus and his wife Adea Eurydice). She and her son accompanied Olympias and the army that restored them to Macedonia in 317, but Cassander soon defeated and killed Olympias and imprisoned Alexander IV and

⁵⁶ Collins' claim (2012, 8) that "Olympias had nothing to fear from slanderers and her enemies once Philip was dead", is remarkably implausible; indeed, the tradition about divine sonship demonstrates how problematic it continued to be, particularly because so many Macedonians were alienated by its apparent denial of Philip. Even less plausible is LANE FOX 1973, 215 idea that Olympias asserted the story after Attalus' aspersions on Alexander's legitimacy, before Philip was dead and her son was king.

⁵⁷ VOUTIRAS 1998 provides a detailed discussion of the context of a real curse tablet from fourth century Pella, one that is generated by a woman who wanted to make her lover marry her, not take another woman, and grow old with the author of the curse tablet.

⁵⁸ OGDEN 2007; 2011, 114-20.

⁵⁹ ASIRVATHAM 2001, 96-9.

Roxane. A few years later he had them secretly killed⁶⁰. Cut off from her kin and discriminated against because of her Asian ethnicity, Roxane's life seems grim. Her name, however, appears on an Athenian inventory list of dedications of votives (hers was a golden rhyton and other golden jewelry) offered to Athena Polias (*IG II² 1492A 45-57=Syll.³ 334*). The inscription is damaged, so its date is disputed, particularly since Roxane need not have been present in person to have a dedication made; the dedication could have been done by proxy any time after her marriage in 327. It is likely, however, that she made her dedication after her son's birth in 323, probably soon after her arrival in the Greek peninsula in 319 and before her imprisonment in 316⁶¹, perhaps on the advice of Olympias or Polyperchon the current regent, in order to publicize her son's existence and claim to the succession⁶². While the dedication is unlikely to demonstrate her personal religiosity, Roxane's offering does highlight how important, culturally and politically, public reverence to the deities of major cults was for royal women.

This brief survey of extant testimonies generated over a span of nearly two centuries to religious beliefs and practices of the women of the Argead dynasty demonstrates the importance of public religion and patronage for royal women but also how difficult it is to prove that any of our evidence indicates personal, individualized belief or even practice. It is easy to find the political calculation in virtually all the instances I have discussed and the power of cultural conventions, much more difficult to know what these women or those around them believed or how they understood the significance of their acts. When, however, one recalls that the statue Eurydice dedicated was preserved and venerated for nearly four centuries after its dedication and that the story of Alexander's divine sonship retained an appeal for many centuries longer, it is unwise to underestimate the force, the staying power of these beliefs and the potency that came to some women by their veneration of the gods.

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⁶⁰ On Roxane's life, see MÜLLER 2012; 2013.

⁶¹ MIRÓN PÉREZ 2000, 45 dates it to her widowhood and thinks it helped to legitimate Alexander IV and publicize his Hellenism; DILLON 2002, 18 dates the dedication to 319, to the period when Roxane first arrived on the peninsula. THEMELIS 2004, 164-68 also dates it to 319/8; KOSMETATOU 2004, 75-80 concludes it could have been any time between 327 and 316, MÜLLER 2012, 300 dates to her widowhood; HARDERS 2014, 372 thinks it dates to Alexander's lifetime because she is termed the "gune" of Alexander.

⁶² BRINGMANN–VON STEUBEN 1995, 19-20 n^o. 3, 55 observes that the border between personal religion and worldly self-presentation was not always defined, especially in dedications of female members of ruling dynasties of personal religiosity. Roxane's dedication, because of its value and the identity of the dedicator, is unusual and a public honoring of the city goddess not without political concerns but specific intentions can't securely be found, always true for Greek dedications. MÜLLER 2021, 302 n. 22 points out that Alexander himself had also dedicated to Athena Polias.

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