

## Olympias, Cleopatra, and the Development of Hellenistic Aeacid Monarchy

Traditionally, scholars have considered the death of Alexander the beginning of the Hellenistic period because it initiated the struggle for control of his empire that ultimately led his generals to claim kingship for themselves. Hellenistic kingship began as a series of improvisations, many of them with their roots in Argead monarchy in the era of Philip II and Alexander III. In that same era, two marriages linked the Argeads of Macedonia and Aeacids of Molossia in an unequal alliance, a circumstance that ultimately led to the quasi rule of Alexander's sister Cleopatra and his mother Olympias in Molossia during the period from 334-317 (Carney 2006; Bernard 2007). They served as prototypes for subsequent Pyrrhus' full on development of Hellenistic kingship in Molossia/Epirus (Raynor 2019).

In 357, Philip II married Olympias, daughter of Neoptolemus, the late king of Molossia. (Her uncle, Arybbas, now king, arranged the marriage, part of a Molossian/Macedonian alliance. Her son Alexander III was born in 356. In the late 350s, Olympias' brother Alexander (I) of Molossia arrived in the Macedonian court. C. 342, Philip forced Arybbas into exile and put his brother-in-law on the Molossian throne. In 337, Olympias and her son—till then Philip's presumed heir-- appeared in Molossia because of a public insult by the guardian of Philip's latest bride, though a reconciliation was soon reached. As a symbol of restored intra dynastic order, Philip arranged the marriage of Cleopatra, his daughter by Olympias, to Alexander (I) of Molossia, but an assassin struck Philip down during the festivities. Alexander III took the Macedonian throne, defeated all comers, and departed for Asia in 334, at the head of expedition his father had planned. About the same time, Alexander of Molossus departed for his invasion of southern Italy. Despite initial success, he died in Italy c. 331. Alexander the Great, of course, had far greater success, but died in 323.

Cleopatra remained in Molossia until about 325, performing public functions there, some typical of a head of state. No one is attested as Molossian king during this period, though Cleopatra may have had a young son called Neoptolemus for whom she ruled. She remained closely tied to her brother. Olympias joined Cleopatra in Molossia c. 331, frustrated by her power struggle with Antipater, Alexander's *strategos* in Macedonia and Greece. Olympias also performed public functions, notably telling the Athenians that the country of Molossia was hers (Hyp. *Eux.* 25). She intervened, with mixed success, in affairs involving Alexander's court and in Greek affairs. Hypereides (*Eux.* 219-20) associates Olympias with the actions of Alexander, but also those of the Macedonians. Plutarch (*Alex.* 68.3) claimed that, in the last year or so of Alexander's reign, Olympias and Cleopatra formed a faction against Antipater, with Olympias taking rule of Epirus and Cleopatra of Macedonia.

After Alexander's death, Cleopatra, in pursuit of a new marriage, departed for Asia but Olympias remained in Molossia. Her nephew Aeacides became king. On the invitation of Polyperchon (the new guardian of the nominal co-kings Alexander IV, Alexander III's son, and Philip Arrhidaeus, Alexander III's half-brother), Olympias returned to Macedonia with her grandson, supported by the military forces of Aeacides and Polyperchon. When the home Macedonian army saw Olympias, it deserted Philip Arrhidaeus and she had him killed, as well as a number of the supporters of her enemy, Cassander, son of Antipater. Olympias' military support, however, quickly deteriorated; besieged by Cassander, she surrendered, and he had her killed. Aeacides attempted to come to her aid, but his troops revolted. Exiled; he returned, but was later killed in battle.

Aeacid kings ruled Molossia from the fifth century (or earlier) until 232: Aeacid monarchy was thus both classical and Hellenistic (on the disputed dating of the evolution

of Molossia/Epirus, see Meyers 2013, Raynor 2017). Cleopatra and Olympias were important actors in this transition: they practiced euergetism on a significant scale, used religious cult to political ends, utilized their wealth to publicize themselves and their family, weaponized their access to power and to *philia* relationships, employed military forces, corresponded and intrigued with individuals and states over vast distances, deployed the theatricality of dynastic rule for their own ends, and acted with boldness, coping with many changes in fortune.

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