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## ELIZABETH D. CARNEY

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Interviewed by

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Elizabeth Donnelly Carney is one of the most renowned scholars on Ancient Macedonia. Carney's research has contributed to open the studies about Ancient Macedonia to the scope of Gender Studies. Her influence in many modern interpretations concerning the complex relations of power and court network in Argead Macedonia also includes topics like mutiny, social performances (like royal banquets) and court groups (like the Royal Pages). Her scope is wide, and she usually focuses on concrete topics from multiple perspectives. Books like *Women and Monarchy in Macedonia* (2000), or the recent *Eurydice and the Birth of Macedonian Power* (2019) (completing the works devoted to three generations of Macedonian Royal women with her *Olympias* (2006) and *Arsinoë of Egypt and Macedon: A Royal Life* (2013)) are now must-to works for world-wide researchers concerning Ancient Greece and Macedon. Among her many skills, the Editorial Board of *Karanos* wants to remark her kind proximity and her usual predisposition to comment and help, with her experience, to improve discussions, projects and papers with admirable knowledge.

In 1975, she got her PhD with a dissertation named "Alexander the Great and the Macedonian aristocracy" in 1975. From 1973 to our days, she has been affiliated with Clemson University, where she has developed her ground-breaking research career. Elizabeth D. Carney has introduced new perspectives into the Macedonian studies, highlighting the traditionally undervalued role of Macedonia and Hellenistic women, and breaking with some out-fashioned, but long-living assumptions. It is hard to select just a few of her pioneering works, but "The Sisters of Alexander the Great: Royal Relicts" (*Historia* 37, 1988), "Alexander and the Persian Women" (*AJPh* 117, 1996), and many others are unavoidable reference readings in the field. Worth of mention are

the papers about Olympias from Epirus: “Women and Basileia: Legitimacy and Female Political Action in Macedonia”, “The Politics of Polygamy: Olympias, Alexander, and the Murder of Philip”, Olympias and the Image of the Virago”, among many others. Her rich contribution to the Ancient Macedonian Studies means a breaking step concerning the view of Royal and Court Relationships and the place of women in Argead Macedonia and Beyond.

She has just edited with Sabine Müller *The Routledge Companion to Women and Monarchy in the Ancient Mediterranean World*. Also, in the last weeks, it has been published *Affective Relations and Personal Bonds in Hellenistic Antiquity: Studies in Honor of Elizabeth D. Carney*, edited by Monica d’Agostini, Edward M. Anson and Frances Pownall, that gathers together articles by the most reputed scholars on Ancient Macedonia, including Joseph Roisman and William Greenwalt, interviewed in the previous issues of this journal.

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**[INTERVIEWER]: Prof. Carney, can you start by telling us some biographical information about you?**

[CARNEY]: I grew up in the northeastern US (New Jersey, Pennsylvania). I did a BA in ancient studies at Smith College (1969) and then did my graduate work at Duke University, working primarily with John Oates, though also with Philip Stadter at the University of North Carolina. I finished the doctorate in 1975, but, before I had completed my doctorate, took a job in the history department at Clemson University in 1973, mainly because I’d changed my dissertation topic (was doing something on Polybius) and had run out of fellowship money. What I expected to be a temporary job became a career long one. I married another academic (William Arnes, now emeritus at Furman University), and we have one daughter, Emma Arnes, currently an administrator at New York University.

**Could you also highlight some important moments of your professional life? What do you think has made you get to where you are today?**

I took a seminar with Philip Stadter on the Alexander historians and wrote a seminar paper for that class on the murder of Cleitus. That, ultimately, was the origin of my dissertation. Work on the Macedonian elite led me look at various individuals in Alexander’s court. In the summer of 1981 I began to work on Olympias. An important Alexander scholar became hostile to my work early on, preventing my first monograph from being published. To cope with that semi-black listing, I began to publish in European journals rather than American ones. Though his actions nearly cost me tenure and thus my position, they also led me to learn to deal with disapproval and just keep working. Gene Borza and Peter Green helped to get my first book published. After that, things became easier. Especially after you’ve published one book, it often proves easier to publish another than to get articles published. I went to my first Macedonian conference in 1987 and that introduced me to other Macedonian scholars, an event that contributed to my thinking of myself as a Macedonian scholar. Plus, it was fun and fascinating.

**How you first become interested in becoming an expert about gender studies or particularly Macedonian studies?**

Both were accidental developments. In the 1970s, people didn't much talk or think about Macedonian studies; doing work on Alexander was doing Greek history. The discovery of the Vergina tombs really changed things. I found myself less and less interested in Alexander himself and more interested in the world that had produced him and in the people around him. The material history of the region fascinated me. Like many women classicists of my generation, I began teaching a Women in Antiquity course (didn't call it gender studies yet), first in 1977, but did not expect that interest to have anything to do with my Macedonian scholarship. In the summer of 1980, working my way around people in Alexander's court, I came to Olympias and discovered that little had been done on her and what had was hopelessly sexist. Within another year or two, I had begun to look at other Argead women (Adea Eurydice came next), and gradually I realized that I had a general topic and that I was interested in the role of women in monarchy, Argead and otherwise. I did a paper for the Berkshire Women's History conference on the emergence of a title for women (Bill Greenwalt was part of that session) and that really influenced me, as did Bill's work, especially his article on polygamy. I should add that early on doing political women's history/gender work seemed odd to other people working on women and gender; they often saw it as elitist, and just a bit tawdry and kind of Victorian, "great women" instead of "great men," but not much better. That isn't true any longer, but early on it was an issue.

**Your first publications were focused on Alexander the Great and his aristocracy. Could you tell me why you took such a big step to continue studying the women of the royal Macedonian house?**

I think I've already explained that though perhaps I should add that thinking about the female burials at Vergina (and elsewhere in Macedonia) contributed to it as well. The first burials at Vergina most consider royal were found in 1977 and 1978 and I think they had an impact on me. Also, I was the first woman in my department hired for a tenure track job and the 1970s and 1980s were not an easy time for me or other academic women; being the only woman in the room was not fun. I was co-chair of the Women's Classical Caucus 1989-90 and that job was a lesson in how common many of the problems I had personally encountered were. I did not consciously think to myself that these royal women were also women living and acting in a male dominated world (mainly I thought it was interesting and that nobody much had done it), but I suspect that an unconscious connection was an element in my interest.

**Could you please let me ask you for one of these exceptional women such as Olympias?**

What do you like most about her? Would you tell me which were her strengths and weaknesses? Well, granted our sources, it's virtually impossible to know what she was like in specific ways, but I suppose, judging more by her actions than what the sources say about her personality, I like her strength, bravery, and loyalty (she seems to have inspired loyalty as well, as shown by Aeacides and Eumenes).

Olympias was astonishingly assertive, in public, as several different Athenian speeches make clear. She was, obviously, quite murderous (probably including murdering Cleopatra and the baby), much as Alexander was and Philip too. I don't think Cassander defeated her because she had many followers of Cassander killed, but it didn't help, and, in doing so, she prized the short term over the long-term advantage. Olympias,

pretty much literally, took no prisoners; sometimes that worked and sometimes not. It's clear, after the death of Alexander, she was aware of how much danger she'd be in if she returned to Macedonia, but she did it anyway. Ancient sources tend to want to give famous people appropriate deaths, so it's hard to know how much credence to give to her defiant end, as described by Diodorus and Justin, but it does suit her earlier actions.

**In your paper “Olympias and the image of the virago” (*Phoenix*, 1993), which is one of my favourite articles, you stated:**

“Whereas the current historiographical trend in scholarship about the reign of Alexander disdains biography and resists speculation about the motivation of the great conqueror, most of those who deal with Olympias confidently assign motives to her actions, motives which are usually negative and almost always personal rather than political” (p. 30).

**Are you of the same mind? Or have you changed that point of view?**

No, I haven't changed my point of view, particularly about rejecting that stereotype of Olympias as witchy and bitchy and murderous without cause. I still think the expectation of “niceness” about her and other political women is insidious and remains powerful in contemporary culture.

**I wonder if you could provide us some information about any views or thoughts on how scholarship has changed with respect to the Argead women?**

Well, a lot more people are doing it and that is a good thing and I think that the understanding has become general that they are part, not apart, from Argead monarchy. There's been a tremendous increase in scholarship about Hellenistic royal women—particularly Seleucid—and that helps to put Argead women (for whom there is much less evidence) in some sort of broader context. Court studies help too, though they are more relevant for the Antigonid era than the Argead. My colleague Caroline Dunn (a medievalist) and I organized a conference here in South Carolina, via the Kings and Queens network, that contained many more ancient papers than was usual for that group, and forced people dealing with very different cultures and periods to look at each other's work (we edited a volume of papers from that conference).

**Do you consider yourself as the forerunner of the gender studies in ancient Macedonia? If that were not the case, who should take this prominent place in our field?**

Grace Harriet Macurdy should come first (Barbara McManus wrote an intriguing book about her), flawed though her scholarship was in many ways. Bill Greenwalt is important; he and I began working at much the same time; originally, he and I were going to do *Women and Monarchy in Macedonia* together. Daniel Ogden's *Polygamy, Prostitutes and Death* came out the year before my book; he and I had not seen each other's manuscripts, but we shared a number of assumptions, though we often reached different conclusions. Sylvie Le Bohec's work in the 1980s and 1990s is important. I co-directed Kate Mortensen's dissertation on Olympias and she certainly influenced my own thinking. I think, in other words, that it was more or less a generational thing, I suppose a boomer thing, if of a rather specific sort.

**Do you think there is sexism in our discipline when we analyze female personalities such as Olympia or Eurydice??**

It even, if you will allow me, could you specify why or give us some examples? Yes, partly because of continuing issues people have about political women (e.g. Hillary Clinton), but also because our sources are so negative about them. I think one of the most insidious problems, though, is that people assume that something found in ancient source couldn't be true because it violates what they believe to be true about Greek women generally and so conclude it isn't; often the assumed norm is Athenian. I'm not sure exactly what Olympias meant when she told the Athenians that "Molossia is mine," but her assertion speaks to a rather un-Athenian world view. Similarly, I see no reason to reject Diodorus' assertion that both Olympias and Antipater demanded Harpalus' extradition from the Athenians; Athenian speeches picture Olympias as aggressive. Oddly, scholarship has sometimes been more reluctant than ancient authors to recognize the agency of women.

**Recently, you have published a book about Eurydice, what could you tell us or highlight about it?**

Is Eurydice from your point of view the first historical female personality of ancient Macedonia? Well the first part of the book is a kind of what happened after what, complicated a lot by the fact that we don't know what happened after what, and so different scenarios are possible, since we cannot always tell if someone is reacting to something or causing something to happen. Still, I feel confident that she did act (perhaps stage is a better word) a public request for the Athenian admiral Iphicrates to come to her son's aid; I think the material remains related to her confirm this, that is to say that she created a public persona as a good mother and woman. I'd love it if the tomb Andronikos attributed to her were actually hers because it is such a remarkable structure, but I consider it unlikely. I'm about fifty/fifty on whether Eurydice married for a second time, to the man who killed her eldest son. She is certainly the first female personality in Macedonia we know anything about; I doubt that she was the first, though I do think that link between her individual career and that of Macedonia made for greater possibilities.

**What was the difference between Macedonian and Greek women? Would you point out anything in particular?**

Sylvie Le Bohec concluded, based on inscriptions, that ordinary Macedonian women, as widows, could act more independently than women in similar circumstance in southern and central Greece. Past that, it is hard to say much about ordinary women. Royal women, however, were elevated along with monarchy itself. It's difficult to know whether Macedonian aristocratic women shared in this situation, but the career of Phila, daughter of Antipater, suggests that they may have. If you begin by assuming that women had some agency in their lives and affairs, you find some evidence to support that view; if you begin with the opposite assumption, you may not see the evidence that way. Property ownership seems more directly to involve elite Macedonian women than women further south.

**What line of work or what projects are you currently working on??**

Sabine Müller and I are coediting a companion volume for Routledge on women and monarchy around the ancient Mediterranean world. I am interested in Molossian monarchy and the role of women in it. Elizabeth Meyer's book is stimulating, though she seems oddly hostile to royal Molossian women. I wonder about the role of women in Aeacid genealogy, power sharing (male and female), the end of Molossian monarchy, and the role of women in commemorating the dynasty.

I have also developed an interest in the impact of American and British missionaries on the Ottoman empire (there is a lot of work on that, though mainly for Anatolia and elsewhere, not Greece), particularly on the brief but intriguing effort to convert the Sephardic population of Thessaloniki (the majority of the population of the city until the twentieth century). One of my ancestors died in Thessaloniki in 1849, having committed to this peculiar mission. After only a few months, he went to see the region of Mount Olympus with a friend and they both, having been twice becalmed and bothered by mosquitos, soon died of malaria. He is buried in Thessaloniki, in the Protestant graveyard, with a lengthy inscription. I have seventeen of his letters, written from the city, including a fascinating ten page description of his trip to Olympus. In U.S. history, this is known as the period of the Second Great Awakening (particularly a revival of Jonathan Edwards' views) and that is the main motivator for this surprising failed event/effort. I am intrigued by this material and by my access to a number of other family letters (not the sort of material an ancient historian gets to work with) from other members of his immediate family. Ultimately, these papers will go to Amherst College's missionary archive (my ancestor, Eliphal Maynard, was an Amherst graduate), but I may do something with them first.