Christoph Schäfer: Eumenes von Kardia und der Kampf um die Macht im Alexanderreich. Frankfurt am Main: Buchverlag Marte Clauss 2002: 194 S. (Frankfurter althistorische Beiträge. 9.).

Alexander’s secretary general, Eumenes of Cardia, was one of the defining personalities of the age of the Diadochi. Immensely successful in the military sphere, he engaged in an epic struggle with Antigonus the One-Eyed which ended with Antigonus the dominant military and political force in the eastern world. As royal general Eumenes opposed the separatist plans and imperial ambitions of Antigonus, and the satrapal armies from Hellespontine Phrygia to India were gradually enlisted by the two sides. Finally the two coalitions clashed on the edge of the Iranian salt desert. After two great battles Eumenes was betrayed by his own men (whose families and possessions had fallen into Antigonus’ hands) and executed, and the two armies coalesced under the leadership of Antigonus, who became the most powerful individual in the world of the Successors. This is a rich period, and the figure of Eumenes is fascinating and elusive. Yet it can be argued that Eumenes has been the most neglected personality of all the Diadochi. Until recently the only published biography was the doctoral thesis of August Vezin, which appeared in 1907 and is now almost unobtainable. There was also the doctoral dissertation of Edward Anson, presented at Ann Arbor in 1975 and available on microfilm, but no systematic, critical biography has been readily accessible in the public domain. The situation changed radically in 2002. After decades of neglect three substantial works appeared within little more than a year, Apart from the work under review my ‘Legacy of Alexander’, published at Oxford late in 2002, devoted its longest chapter to an exhaustive analysis of the climactic campaign in Iran, and in 2004 Anson at last published his long expected biography. Because of the time constraints the authors have not been able to engage with each other, and all have to contend with the comparative dearth of modern literature.

Schäfer’s biography is thoughtful and thought provoking. He gives a sober, well informed account of Eumenes’ life and career, covering the major episodes quite comprehensively, except for the military aspects of the final campaign, which might have been treated in more detail. Sch. is more concerned with the power struggle between Eumenes and his fellow commanders, and in large part contents himself with retailing the (admittedly rich) source tradition. The political struggle is his primary interest, and in his introductory chapter he conveniently summarises what he sees as the motivating forces (15–18; see also the conclusions 167–72). His interpretation falls between Vezin’s encomium, which views Eumenes as the selfless defender of royal authority, and the darker picture sketched by Anson, in which Eumenes’ championship of the royal house is simply a means for his own aggrandisement. Sch.’s position is closer to Anson’s. He

1 Richard Billows’ study of Antigonus (‘Antigonus the One-Eyed and the Creation of the Hellenistic State’. Berkeley 1990) deals extensively with Eumenes’ career, but primarily as a foil to the principal actor.
sees Eumenes as a contender for power alongside the Macedonian marshals, intent on creating his own ‘Hausmacht’ in Cappadocia, which would supply the military basis for expansion. Sch. rightly stresses the importance of Eumenes’ Cappadocian cavalry and the necessity, if their loyalty was to be retained, of adapting to their cultural traditions. On the other hand there are Eumenes’ Macedonian troops, in particular the famous Silver Shields. Sch., like others, tends to discount the tradition that Eumenes’ Greek origins weakened his authority over Macedonian troops. In his view the difficulties Eumenes experienced were no worse than those encountered by Macedonian marshals, and the enmity of his fellow commanders was proof that they saw him as a political equal, a worthy competitor in the power struggle.

The book begins (19–37) with the dramatic episode of the Alexander tent in 318, when Eumenes instituted a collective command. He and his officers met before an empty throne bedecked with the royal regalia: sceptre, diadem and ‘the weapons which he used to bear’. There was a strongly religious atmosphere. Before the throne was an altar on which the commanders burned incense, and ‘they offered proskynesis to Alexander as a god’. The result was that morale substantially improved. The troops believed that they were under the leadership of a deity. This is Diodorus’ interpretation, almost certainly based on the contemporary Hieronymus, but for Sch. it is excessively simplistic. He identifies two underlying motives. The symbolism of the empty throne appealed as much to Eumenes’ oriental troops as it did to the Macedonians, and the orientals formed 86% of his army (Sch. 25–32). Their cultural and religious beliefs needed to be accommodated. Secondly the equality of command was merely for show. Eumenes made sure that his tent was pitched next to the Alexander tent. He was closest to the deified king, and as such was the most appropriate to represent his policies.

These are interesting and attractive hypotheses, but they are rather shakily grounded. There is little in the procedure of the Alexander tent that hints at Iranian influence. One may willingly concede that the throne was regarded as a symbol of royalty in the ancient Near East, but what matters is that the throne is empty. Here the evidence relates to military processions: empty chariots are reserved for the gods, in particular Ahuramazda. We may assume that these chariots had thrones mounted (like the throne carriage of Sennacherib), but it remains a mystery why the empty throne of Alexander would have appealed to Eumenes’ Cappadocian cavalrymen. It would surely have been more of an insult than a compliment to associate the dead Alexander with the leading divinities of the Iranian pantheon. Nor do I see that the compliment to associate the dead Alexander with the leading divinities of the Iranian pantheon. Nor do I see that the

1 Diod. 18. 61. 2–3. Similar descriptions in Polyae. 4. 8. 2, Nep. Eum. 7. 2, Plut. Eum. 13. All derive, directly or indirectly, from Hieronymus.
2 This is reported by Polyaeus (4. 8. 2) alone, but it is credible enough.
3 Sch. 26–32 surveys the evidence. The empty, chariot borne throne of Ahuramazda is attested by Hdt. 7. 40, with Curt. 3. 8. 8, Xen. Cyrop. 8. 3. 12.
4 It is unfortunate that Sch. associates the altar (ἐσθία) with the ἐσθία that appears in Chares’ description of the proskynesis ceremony at Bactra (Plut. Alex. 54. 4 = FGrH 125 F 13a). The context there is a Greek symposium at which the bestia was a standard accessory (J. R. Hamilton, Plutarch Alexander. Oxford 1967, 152–3; see also the trenchant comments of E. Badian, in: ‘The Deification of Alexander the Great’, Ancient Macedonian Studies in Honor of Charles F. Edison. Thessaloniki 1981, 49–50). The procedure in the Alexander
procedure integral to Greek religious ceremonies, and proskynesis is offered to the gods as an act of worship in the Greek mode. Eumenes was presenting Alexander as a Greek god, not an oriental monarch, and there is every reason to believe that the Macedonians and Greek mercenaries in his army did come to think that they were led by a divinity. This was not an original idea. The procedure in the Alexander tent is (as Sch. recognises) a fusion of two proposals made at Babylon in the immediate aftermath of Alexander’s death. Perdiccas had the king’s empty throne, again decorated with his sceptre, diadem and arms, preside spiritually over the meeting, while Ptolemy pressed for the system of collective decision making that Eumenes implemented. The scene would have been vividly remembered by the Macedonians under Eumenes’ command, and there is no doubt that its implementation was popular. Their king was acknowledged a god, and as the recipient of the dream message Eumenes was seen as his mouthpiece; it was proper for his tent to be pitched alongside Alexander’s. All this makes perfect sense in a Greco-Macedonian context. Sch. is quite right to insist that the whole ritual of the tent buttressed Eumenes’ claims to command; but there is no compelling evidence of an underlying message to the oriental peoples.

For Schäfer the loyalty of the Cappadocian cavalry is a constant, and one of the most potent factors in Eumenes’ military success. Eumenes led them to victory; their interests were intimately linked with his, and there was a basis of mutual respect.

That may be granted, but is it the whole story? Sch. (64–5) draws attention to the remarkable rapidity of Eumenes’ recruiting, which resulted in no less than 6,300 volunteers (Plut. Eum. 4, 3–4). This is doubly remarkable, as only a few months before Cappadocia had suffered an exceptionally brutal invasion at the hands of Eumenes’ patron, the regent Perdiccas. Its Iranian dynast, Ariarathes had been crucified along with his kinsmen, and according to Diodorus battle casualties amounted to 4,000 with 5,000 taken prisoner. The beneficiary of the bloodletting was Eumenes. This was hardly a basis for cooperation and respect, and it comes as a surprise to find such massive and successful recruiting so soon after Perdiccas’ repression. Perhaps there was a general desire to get away from a ravaged land, and Eumenes’ offer of tax exemption and (in some cases) free mounts will have been attractive. But there was a darker side to the recruitment. It was designed to counter the insubordination of Macedonian troops operating with Neoptolemus in Armenia. The new force is explicitly termed a counter-formation (ὑποτροπία), and the Macedonians had the same reaction to them as Alexander’s men had to the arrival of the levies of the Epigonoi. From the Cappadocian side the prospect of killing Macedonians might have been attractive, and, as long as Eumenes gave them victory over armies with Macedonians, they were prepared to follow him. The situation changed after the defeat of Neoptolemus, when Eumenes incorporated a significant number of Macedonians into his army – the very people against whom the recruiting had been directed. It cannot have been a very comfortable combination, but Eumenes’ campaigns were fought exclusively against armies which con-

tent is most reminiscent of Ephippus’ description of the king’s impersonation of Greek deities: the floor was sprinkled with costly myrrh and fragrant wine, and frankincense and other aromatics were burned before him (Athen. 12. 538a = FGrH 126 F 5).

1 Sch. 34; cf. Curt. 10. 6. 4, 15–16; Just. 13. 2. 12. On the source tradition and political background see now Bosworth, The Legacy of Alexander, 38–45.

2 18. 16. 2; 31. 19. 4–5 cf. Arr. Succ. F 1.11 (Roos); Plut. Eum. 3. 12–14; Nepos Eum. 3; Just. 13. 6. 1–5 (garbled). The subsequent punitive campaigns against Isaura and Laranda cannot have endeared Macedonian rule to the peoples in the area (Diod. 18. 22. 1–8).

3 Plut. Eum. 4. 3–4; cf. Sch. 64–5 with P. Briant, Rois, tributs et paysans. Paris 1982, 49–73. For the Epigonoi see Arr. Anab. 7. 6. 1–2, 8. 2; Plut. Alex. 71. 1–2.
tained far more Macedonians than his, and the Cappadocians were prepared to tolerate Macedonians provided that they served against their fellow countrymen.

The allegiance of the Cappadocians was by no means as unconditional as Sch. assumes. According to Diodorus Eumenes suffered two major desertions during the critical campaign of spring 319, the second of which was instigated by his senior cavalry commander, Apollonides. For Sch. (113) this defection did not involve the Cappadocians; it is absolutely impossible (‘schlechterdings unmöglich’) in view of their close attachment to the supreme commander.

But is a Cappadocian defection unthinkable? In 319 the strategic initiative had passed to Antigonus, and the theatre of operations moved from Phrygia to Cappadocia. Eumenes’ cavalry were operating in their own terrain, only three years after the destructive operations of Perdiccas, and the longer the operations lasted, the worse the damage to their homeland. Accordingly they put an end to operations by changing sides at the decisive moment. The Cappadocians were as much fair weather friends as the Silver Shields later proved to be, and the damage to their land was perhaps as potent a factor as the capture of the Silver Shields’ baggage train. In both situations Eumenes was dispensable. The fact that he was able to raise some 2,000 local troops, cavalry included, after his release from Nora is no evidence to the contrary (contra Schäfer 65, 123). They were not recruited to fight in Cappadocia, but to join Eumenes in his occupation of Cilicia and, most importantly, the great treasury at Cyinda. There may have been some residual loyalty to Eumenes, but the lure of riches was stronger.

It is regrettable that the chronology of the period is unresolved. Sch. adopts the so-called ‘low’ system, which dates the battle of Gabiene, along with Eumenes’ arrest and execution, to January 315. It is a little unfortunate that he uses the Babylonian Chronicle of the Successors as his point of departure. This is an extraordinarily difficult document, full of corrections and erasures and only partially preserved. What remains to be read is often controversial, and Grayson’s

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1 The classic case is the battle against Craterus, who had an overwhelmingly large number of Macedonians (Diod. 18. 30. 4–5; cf. Sch. 87–90). Eumenes deliberately kept the Macedonians in his infantry in reserve and used his cavalry, which proved decisive against the smaller cavalry units at Craterus’ disposal. What is more, the cavalry on Eumenes’ left (he himself led the right) were commanded by a Greek, Phoenix of Tenedos (Plut. Eum. 7. 1; cf. Diod. 18. 42. 2) and an Iranian, Pharnabazus, who was related by marriage to Eumenes. Not a single Macedonian under Eumenes’ command was involved in the cavalry engagement with Craterus.

2 18. 40. The same ground is covered summarily and idiosyncratically in Plut. Eum. 9. 1–5; cf. Sch. 112–15.

3 Diod. 18. 40. 1; Plut. Eum. 9. 3. The operations over winter 320/19 had taken place in Antigonus’ satrapy of Greater Phrygia, and Eumenes had occupied the capital of Celaenae (Plut. Eum. 8. 7). The campaign is described in detail in the (relatively) new Göteborg Palimpsest (most conveniently consulted in B. Dreyer, Zum ersten Diadochenkrieg, ZPE 125, 1999, 19–60, esp. 45–54).

4 Diod. 18. 53. 7. Plut. Eum. 12. 6 states that Eumenes raised ‘a little under 1,000 cavalry’.

5 Eumenes received his commission as royal general very soon after leaving Nora (Diod. 18. 38. 1; Plut. Eum. 13. 1), and he was specifically directed to Cilicia and Cyinda.


7 BM 34660 = A. K. Grayson, Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles (ABC), Locust Valley, NY. 1975, 115–19, no.10.
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edition, which Sch. uses, is being drastically overhauled by new work, as yet unpublished.¹ For Sch. the pivotal entry is obv. (not rev.) lines 14–15, dated to Tishtiru of year 7 of Philip III (Oct. 317). Here there is a reference to action by troops of the king and the capture (no doubt by Seleucus) of the palace at Babylon. Sch. (134–5) relates this to Eumenes’ stay in Babylonia on his way to join the satrapal alliance in Persis, and assumes that Eumenes captured the palace before crossing the Tigris and left a garrison there. This has been a popular theory, but it is unsustainable. There is no reference to an attack on Babylon in Diodorus’ relatively full account of Eumenes’ actions in the satrapy,² which emphasises that Eumenes was forced away from Babylon towards the Tigris because the land had been deliberately stripped of provisions (19. 12. 3–4; cf. 13. 6). The problem is that we know nothing about events in Babylonia after Eumenes’ passage, and there could have been internal troubles. Babylon had two citadels and a garrison, which was probably not commanded by the satrap. It is possible that the garrison commander attempted to depose Seleucus, possible also that Xenophilus, the hostile commander of the citadel at Susa, made a strike against Babylon and temporarily occupied it.³ There are any number of possibilities, and no convincing reason to associate the disturbances with Eumenes.

This low dating entails a year of comparative inactivity between Eumenes’ occupation of Cilicia in summer 318 and his subsequent move to Mesopotamia, which Sch. dates to the winter of 317/16. During that period Eumenes was raising a mercenary army thanks to the treasures of Cyinda, and invaded Phoenicia to acquire a fleet for his patron Polyperchon. Diodorus (18. 61. 3), however, stresses the rapidity of the recruiting; the gold of Cyinda ensured a huge influx of mercenaries. What is more, Antigonus is described as perturbed by Eumenes’ acquisition of new troops and attempted to undermine him by diplomatic means. It is highly unlikely that he would have waited a year before taking military action, however concerned he may have been with the naval struggle around Byzantium.⁴

These details exemplify the richness of the period and the almost infinite scope that it allows for disagreement. With this biography, which is thorough, well documented and imaginative, Sch. has made a valuable contribution. One may feel that he presses the evidence too far on occasion, but his views are always worth close consideration, and his Eumenes has more and darker facets than any previous study. He is far removed from the selfless champion of royal authority that has been the traditional orthodoxy.

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¹ A new edition is being prepared by R. van der Spek and I. L. Finkel, and a preliminary text can be found on the internet: http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp-
diadochi/diadochi_04.html. See also G. F. Del Monte, Testi dalla Babilonia Ellenistica. I. Pisa 1997, 181–94.
² So now T. Boiy, Late Achaemenid and Hellenistic Babylon. Leuven 2004, 121.
³ For Xenophilus’ defiance of Antigonus see Diod. 19. 18. 1, 48. 6. One of the many difficulties of interpretation is the exact connotation of King’s troops, but the term could well include garrison troops independent of the satrap – or even troops who had been enlisted by the satrap but subsequently mutinied against him.
⁴ Diodorus (18. 73. 1) stresses the urgency of Antigonus, who intended to destroy Eumenes before he acquired even stronger forces. It is unlikely that he gave his enemy a free hand to consolidate his forces for fifteen months when he had recent, painful experience of his military abilities.