

# Dynastic Images in the Early Hellenistic Age: Queen's Power or King's Will?

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**Abstract:** Evidence from the Hellenistic kingdoms, particularly Ptolemaic Egypt, suggests that in the early years of the Hellenistic age, queens (specifically, the wife of the king) were associated with a set of common characteristics, such as beauty, love, and fertility. This queenly representation – evident in art, literature, and royal cult – has been interpreted as a sign of the importance, even the power, of the royal female; this is especially the case with Arsinoë II, whose public image during her brief marriage to her brother and after her death was so tremendously dominant. This paper argues, not that these queens were unimportant or insignificant, but rather that the emphasis on the queen as an avatar of love and beauty may have been rooted in the king's psychology rather than the queen's influence. It is possible that the assimilation of the king's mate to a goddess of beauty and sexual love, while intended to honour the queen, was intended even more to enhance the king's masculine status in a form of competitive mate display.

**Keywords:** Antigonids, Ptolemies, Seleukids; Representation of royal women; Ruler cult; Evolutionary psychology; Competitive mate display; Precarious manhood

How outstanding among women of sense was renowned Berenike, a great boon to her parents. The controller of Cyprus, the powerful daughter of Dione, pressed her delicate hands upon Berenike's fragrant breast; thus they say that no woman has ever yet so pleased her husband as Ptolemy loved his wife. Indeed he was much more loved in return. This is how one might with confidence entrust the whole house to one's children when going with love to the bed of a loving wife; the mind of a woman without affection is, however, always elsewhere, and for her giving birth is a light matter, and the children do not resemble the father. Supreme in the contest of beauty, queen among goddesses, Aphrodite, to your heart was this woman dear.<sup>1</sup>

Judging by Theokritos, Ptolemy I's spouse Berenike was a beautiful, loving, and faithful bride, an avatar of Aphrodite, the best – and sexiest – wife any man ever had. This paper explores the images of Berenike and other royal women of the third century BCE and proposes that the official images of the queens were manipulated less to honour the royal women than to enhance the status of the royal men in competitive display. The emphasis on the royal female

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<sup>1</sup> Theokritos, *Idyll* 17, lines 34-46; translation Hunter 2003.

image thus had little to do with the power any individual queen might have exercised; rather, I would argue, it reflected the king's will.<sup>2</sup>

This paper focuses on the early Hellenistic period, although it passes over the years immediately following the death of Alexander, when it was chiefly the lack of viable kings that was directly responsible for creating a power vacuum that was then filled by such women as Olympias, Kynane, Amastris, and Adea-Eurydike.<sup>3</sup> The last quarter of the fourth century might be seen as a period of dissolution rather than construction of monarchy. The period of the immediate Diadochoi does provide some models for female recognition – such as the significance of political alliance through a series of frenzied marriage games, the creation of a royal title for women, and the development of civic cult for women – but it does not for the most part provide examples of artistic or literary emphasis on the queenly image. The fact that it does not supports the contention that emphasis on the queen's image was fundamentally driven by the king's policy: with no viable Argead kings, there was no impulse to create and embellish a dynastic image for the queen.

By queenly image, I mean a number of things: the literary portrayal of queens in poetry and other genres; their visual portrayal in sculpture, coins, and other media; and their public role as it appears in the epigraphic record. These are the media most subject to official control and most likely to represent the image that the dynasty wished to present. Historians, particularly those writing at a later date, were less subject to royal control; nevertheless, they often reflect royal propaganda. The persona of Laodike I (wife of Antiochos II) in later authors such as Phylarchos and Appian, where she is a poisonous murderess, would not represent official messaging by the Seleukid court, though it might preserve Ptolemaic propaganda.<sup>4</sup> The scope of this paper does not allow for a study of all these images in detail, which has in any case been done by others: what I am offering here is a briefly synthetic approach with an alternative perspective. This perspective does not displace any of the detailed work that has been done in the past few decades on the subject of Hellenistic queens.<sup>5</sup> It simply offers an additional way of understanding the dynamics of the early Hellenistic period and the place of these women in the new dynasties.

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<sup>2</sup> Although the term *basilissa* was applied to royal Hellenistic women other than the king's wife, in the specific context of this paper the English word "queen" generally applies to the wife of the king (for reasons that will become apparent).

<sup>3</sup> See Le Bohec 1993; Mirón 2000; Carney 1995, 2000a: 114-52, 2011; D'Agostini 2020a; Carney 2021b; Müller 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Phylarchos *FGrH* 81 F24 = Athenaios 593b-d; Appian *Syr.* 65; see D'Agostini 2016.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Le Bohec 1993; Savalli-Lestrade 1994 and 2003; Roy 1998; Bielman Sánchez 2003; Le Bohec-Bouhet 2006; Carrez-Maratray 2008; Carney 2011, 2013; Caneva 2013, 2014, 2018; van Oppen 2015 (and several other articles by the same author); see also the essays collected in Coşkun and McAuley 2016, Bielman Sánchez et al. 2016, Cusset et al. 2020, and Carney and Müller 2020. The scholarship on this subject is vast, and within the context of this paper I can only offer some selective citations.

## **1. Queenly Images: Continuity and Change**

One of the most significant factors in the development of the Hellenistic monarchies was the interplay between the new dynasties and the lands they now occupied. Of the three great kingdoms, the obvious observation is that it was the Ptolemies who demonstrated the most interaction with existing indigenous – i.e., Egyptian – structures and institutions. From the perspective of Greco-Macedonian custom and precedent, the emphasis on the public face of royal women represents significant change; from the Egyptian perspective, of course, it represents continuity. The elevation and divinization of Ptolemaic queens, in the Egyptian context, found a ready audience and a set of cultural norms that facilitated and encouraged such actions.

By way of contrast, the Antigonids of Macedon were remarkably conservative, even reactionary, about their dynastic exhibition. Here too, though, the Antigonids were being responsive to the local milieu. There was no longstanding tradition of Macedonian monarchy that emphasized the dynasty as a whole, including its women.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the Greeks of the mainland had a frequently fractious relationship with the Antigonids, and were not prepared to embrace the notion of monarchy itself whole-heartedly, let alone the type of monarchy that elevated the family of the monarch to superhuman heights. The Antigonids were thus prevented from adopting too lofty a self-presentation.<sup>7</sup> They may also have been particularly conscious of the extraordinary actions of the late Argead women, and concerned to prevent any potential for repetition.<sup>8</sup>

As for the Seleukids, there was of course a tradition of exalted monarchy in the regions that made up the defunct Persian Empire. There was not, however, as there was in Egypt, a unified cultural foundation on which the Seleukids could build. It is certainly significant that it was only Seleukos I, of all the Successors, who made his indigenous Asian bride Apame his queen and the mother of his heir.<sup>9</sup> Seleukos also instituted a tradition of naming cities after royal women in his realm, though he was anticipated in this by Kassander's foundation of Thessaloniki. But an official dynastic emphasis on royal women, of the kind we find in Ptolemaic Egypt, does not appear in the Seleukid realm until the reign of Antiochos III.

To begin then with what we do *not* have: we have no surviving material portraits of queens from third-century Asia or Macedon (or rather, if we do have them, we do not know it). As far as we know, queens were never featured on Antigonid coinage, and the Seleukids only began putting queens on their coins in the early second century BCE, with Laodike IV.<sup>10</sup> The fact that women are absent from the numismatic record in these kingdoms in the period under discussion – and that female portraits from the Hellenistic period are in general quite generic –

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<sup>6</sup> See the contrasting interpretations of Le Bohec 1993 and Carney 2000a. As we shall see below, Philip II may have been experimenting with such a model.

<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy that both the mother and the wife of Philip V appear to have been Greek women of no particular status. Cf. Carney 2000a: 193-94; Carney 2011; but see also D'Agostini 2020b.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Carney 2000a: 201; Carney 2021a.

<sup>9</sup> Müller 2013; Widmer 2016; Ramsey 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Houghton et al. 2008 nos. 1318, 1332, 1368, 1371, 1407, 1421, 1422, 1441, 1477. See Widmer 2008; Ager and Hardiman 2016.

presents a major stumbling-block to identifying any surviving portrait sculptures (Smith 1988; Dillon 2007). We do know, however, that there were portrait statues of Seleukid queens raised for honorific or cult purposes by Greek cities in Asia in the third century,<sup>11</sup> though such statues do not generally represent a royally mandated dynastic program.<sup>12</sup>

There is some slight evidence that Antigonid queens appeared in statue groups of royal ancestors.<sup>13</sup> For this there was one significant Argead precedent: Philip II's dedication of statues of his family in the Philippeion at Olympia, including Olympias and Eurydike (almost certainly his mother, not his wife).<sup>14</sup> Philip, whom one might characterize as the last stable Argead king of Macedon, was clearly experimenting with a more complex dynastic image here, but the experiment was cut short with the hyper-masculine military career of his son Alexander. While it seems not impossible that some Antigonid women did receive honorific statues, there is little evidence for a significant Antigonid emphasis on royal females in the third century or indeed at any point in their history.<sup>15</sup>

Things were far otherwise in the Ptolemaic kingdom, where there was a plethora of representations of royal females in a variety of media. Already in the reign of Ptolemy II, if not earlier, royal wives and mothers were featured on the coinage; we have coin portraits of Berenike I, Arsinoë II, Berenike II, and Arsinoë III.<sup>16</sup> Both Egyptian-style and Greek-style sculpted portraits were abundant, in a variety of media.<sup>17</sup> Ptolemaic royal women appeared extensively in relief scenes on Egyptian temples, where the accompanying hieroglyphs give us some idea of the titles and characteristics associated with them.<sup>18</sup> As in the Pharaonic period, art and text tended to be formulaic and idealizing, and there is little to distinguish Ptolemaic

<sup>11</sup> The evidence is epigraphic; most of these inscriptions are collected in Kotsidu 2000 (nos. 123, 178, 197, 198, 231, 233, 238, 239, 269, 273, 282, 283).

<sup>12</sup> Honours and cults from Greek cities were not, we assume, ordered by the king; nevertheless, such honours and cults were clearly felt to be welcome to the king and queen, and we may also assume that the portrayal of the queen would be generally aligned with the image sanctioned by the king.

<sup>13</sup> Carney (2007, 2010, *contra* Le Bohec 1993) does not think Antigonos Gonatas's *progonoi* monument at Delos included women. Tataki 1988 suggests that a base discovered in Beroia may have supported a statue of Stratonike wife of Antigonos I, perhaps dedicated by Philip V (433); cf. SEG 43 471 (Eurydike, daughter of Sirras, mother of Philip II, at Vergina). Phila II, daughter of Stratonike and Seleukos I and wife of Antigonos Gonatas was honoured with a statue at Delos (IG XI.4 1098, OGIS 216). See Smith 1988: 22.

<sup>14</sup> Paus. 5.17.4; 5.20.9-10. See Le Bohec 1993; Carney 2000a: 77-78 and 211-15, 2000b, 2007, 2010, 2011; Schultz 2007, 2009; Palagia 2010; Carney 2019: 108-11.

<sup>15</sup> Phila II may be an exception: see Le Bohec 1993: 237-38 and Carney 2000a: 183 for summaries of the epigraphic evidence suggesting that she may have been more visible than other Antigonid women.

<sup>16</sup> Berenike I may have been portrayed on the coinage of Cos and Rhodes before the end of the fourth century (Carney 2013: 122 and sources cited there), and perhaps on coins minted in Judea between 300 and 283 BCE (Mørkholm 1991: 70 and no. 131; Lorber I.1 2018: 121); she also appeared on coins of Cyrene minted by her son Magas (Mørkholm 1991: 102 and no. 287). Issues: Smith 1988: 14; Mørkholm 1991: 102-110 and nos. 294-99, 307-308, 313, 322, 327; Müller 2009: 354; Carney 2013: 122. Arsinoë II already appeared on the coinage of Ephesos (Arsinoeia) while she was married to Lysimachos (Mørkholm 1991: 93 and nos. 257-58). See Lorber I.1 2018 for the most up-to-date catalogue of the extensive gold and silver coinage featuring third-century Ptolemaic queens.

<sup>17</sup> See Thompson 1973; Ashton 2001; Walker and Higgs 2001 (e.g., nos. 6, 8, 11, 13, 54); Albersmeier 2002; Stanwick 2002.

<sup>18</sup> For external dissemination of Ptolemaic family portraits, see Palagia 2013.

royal females from their earlier Pharaonic counterparts, though there is no Pharaonic precedent for the numismatic portrayals. Furthermore, the extreme emphasis placed on the figure of Arsinoë II by her brother-husband Ptolemy II and the great variety of her titles were unprecedented even by Pharaonic standards:

Great of Sweetness, Great of Completion, Great of Praise, King's daughter, King's wife, greatly beloved wife, King's sister (the king) who loves her and she loves him, King's great wife, Image of Isis, Beloved of Hathor, Beloved of Amun-Ra, Lady of the Two Lands, Mistress of Upper and Lower Egypt, Ruler of Egypt, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the Rightful, Princess, Daughter of Geb, Daughter of the Mehru Bull, Lady of Sweet Love, Beautiful in appearance, She who fills the palace with her beauty, She who is in the heart of the king, Mistress of Eternity, Lady of the solar disc [Aten], an appearance more beautiful than the sun and the moon.<sup>19</sup>

Arsinoë II may already have been worshipped as a goddess in her own lifetime, and certainly after death each of the Ptolemaic queens was elevated to the status of a deity, along with her husband, in the dynastic cult.<sup>20</sup> The Ptolemies were ahead of the game here as elsewhere: although Stratonike and some other Seleukid queens of the third century did receive cult worship in different Greek cities around the empire, it was not until 193 BCE that a Seleukid queen – Laodike III, wife of Antiochos III – was given a royal state cult.<sup>21</sup> We know of no royal state cult for Antigonid royal women (or men) in Macedon; this again would be in keeping with a cultural milieu that was not accustomed to the notion of exalted rulers and ruler-worship.<sup>22</sup>

Poets such as Theokritos, Kallimachos, and Poseidippos emphasized the queens, assimilating them repeatedly to goddesses. Aphrodite was not the only goddess featured – the characteristics of Artemis, Demeter, Athena, Hera, Hathor, and Isis were also attributed to queens – but the most consistent and by far the most common model, in image, literature, and cult, is that of the (or a) goddess of love.<sup>23</sup> In the Ptolemaic context, Hathor, with whom Berenike II was frequently associated, was also a deity of sexuality and fertility.<sup>24</sup> Although we do not have the same kind of literary production featuring the queens of the Seleukid or the Antigonid court (nor do we have the same robust evidence for identification with indigenous

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<sup>19</sup> This list represents an amalgam of some of Arsinoë's Egyptian titles; Nilsson 2012. See Carney 2013, in particular 83-124 on Arsinoë's role and image; also Caneva 2018. The unique position of this queen is unfortunately too large and complex a subject to be tackled here in any detail.

<sup>20</sup> See Kunst 2007; Pfeiffer 2008 and 2021; Weber 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Ma 2000 no. 37; Carney 2000b; Savalli-Lestrade 2003; Caneva 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Carney 2010, 2011 (though see also Le Bohec 1993: 242 and Carney 2000a: 183). Phila, wife of Demetrios Poliorketes, did have a civic cult in Athens, where she was associated with Aphrodite (Ath. 6.254a; Carney 2000a: 166, 218).

<sup>23</sup> See Tondriau 1948; Carney 2000a: 217-25, and 2000b; Bielman Sánchez 2003 and Savalli-Lestrade 2003 (who also reference the Attalid queen Apollonis); Barbantani 2005 and 2010; Thompson 2005; Kunst 2007; Müller 2007; Carney 2011; Llewellyn-Jones and Winder 2011; Carney 2013: 91, 96-7, 101; Caneva 2014; Clayman 2014; van Oppen 2015; Manakidou 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Llewellyn-Jones and Winder 2011; McAuley 2020.

deities),<sup>25</sup> we do have some textual evidence, both literary and epigraphic, where the emphasis on queens being assimilated to Aphrodite is also apparent. The evidence for statues of Seleukid and Antigonid queens is, as we have seen, epigraphic, and the details of some of the inscriptions do provide some information on the public personae of the queens.

What then was the value and the meaning of the queenly image? Although our view may be distorted by the inevitable emphasis on the Ptolemaic evidence, the material we have from the other kingdoms – where we have it – tends to align with the Ptolemaic image. I believe that what we find in the early Hellenistic age is the development of a primarily symbolic value vested in royal women, a value that had little to do with the queen as an individual – or with her own power – and more to do with the female principle or principles that she was held to embody. Numerous scholars have analyzed the character of these female principles and the values that queens represented, which fall into certain broad categories: economic (patronage, euergetism, and the prosperity of the realm); dynastic (fertility, legitimacy, stability, and longevity); and, in an attenuated way, political (supporting the king's policies; potential intercession with the king).<sup>26</sup>

Arsinoë II's repeated visual association with the *dikeras*, the double cornucopia, is emblematic of the beneficence of queens. Euergetism is one of the public actions commonly associated with queens, even in realms where the queen seems to have played a very subordinate role: so, for example, one of the extremely scanty tidbits of information we have on Antigonid queens is a notice in Polybios that Chryseis, mother of Philip V, sent supplies to Rhodes in the wake of the terrible earthquake there in the 220s (5.89.6-7). Laodike III, wife of Antiochos III, also gave gifts of grain to the citizens of Iasos in Caria, stipulating that part of the proceeds from the sale of the grain was to be set aside to be used as dowries for the daughters of poor citizens (*Iasos* 4).

Linked to both beneficence and prosperity, for the dynasty and for the realm, was the public face of the queen: the beautiful avatar touted in image and text, the wife who loves her husband the king, the mortal woman who can be likened to Aphrodite. Theokritos' *Idylls* 15 and 17 emphasize the beauty and the spousal love and fidelity of both Berenike I, wife of Ptolemy I, and her daughter Arsinoë II, but assimilation to Aphrodite is not restricted to Ptolemaic imagery. Stratonike, the wife of Seleukos I and subsequently of his son Antiochos I, was associated with the goddess in the civic cult of Aphrodite Stratonikis.<sup>27</sup> The association was particularly appropriate in her case, given the passionate love story – no doubt officially sanctioned – of Stratonike and her second husband Antiochos.<sup>28</sup> Some scholars, troubled perhaps by the regular association of queens with Aphrodite, a highly sexualized goddess, have emphasized Aphrodite's role as a goddess of marriage.<sup>29</sup> That Aphrodite functioned in this way

<sup>25</sup> Carney does, however, point to the literary production of Aratos of Soloi celebrating the marriage of Antigonos Gonatas and Phila (2000a: 183).

<sup>26</sup> See (e.g.) Bringmann 1997; Savalli-Lestrade 2003; Caneva 2013; Carney 2013; Müller 2013; Ager 2017.

<sup>27</sup> *FDelphes* III 4.153; *OGIS* 229; cf. Tacitus *Annals* 3.63.

<sup>28</sup> App. Syr. 10.59-61, 11.65; Lucian *De Syria dea* 17-18; Plut. *Demetr.* 38; Val. Max. 5.7 ext. 1. See Almagor 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Pomeroy 1984: 31-38. Caneva 2014 emphasizes the image of a "gentle courtly love" and of an "intense requited love" (the two descriptors seem contradictory) within the bounds of marriage; see also Caneva 2012.



cannot be denied – the poets too made this connection – but it would be an error to minimize the erotic side of Aphrodite, just as it would be an error to minimize the fundamental meaning of incestuous marriage among the Ptolemies.<sup>30</sup> After all, Theokritos's *Idyll* 17 has sister and brother going to bed together as its climax, and if Catullus 66 is accurate in its rendition of Kallimachos's *Coma Berenices*, then Ptolemy III evidently set off to war covered in hickeys.

Theokritos also references Helen of Sparta as a comparator for Arsinoë II's beauty (*Idyll* 15). The figure of the beautiful Helen, even in the sanitized version of her myth, would inevitably call to mind the intense competition between men for her favours, at least before her marriage if not also after it. This is the context in which I would like to situate the early emphasis on Hellenistic queens: I suggest that the elevation and exaltation of these women as avatars of beauty and love and fertility served largely to enhance the status of the royal men.

## **2. Evolution, Gender, Competition, and Status**

The Ptolemies found a ready-made paradigm when they took over Egypt – but that does not mean that the paradigm was exclusively Egyptian. Egyptian civilization had already tapped into a matrix of universal female archetypes, principles, and symbols, a matrix that has its origins in basic human psychology.<sup>31</sup> Multiple studies of status and perception in the fields of sociology, anthropology, and evolutionary psychology have confirmed the existence of a number of fundamental and undeniable human characteristics, characteristics that do not always sit very well with modern sensibilities about gender and social relations (evolutionary psychology is sadly indifferent to social advances).<sup>32</sup> The relevant ones here may be summarized as follows:

(1) Physical attractiveness in a person can lead others to ascribe more generalized positive attributes to that person, such as intelligence, kindness, and competence. Physical attractiveness can bias hiring decisions, and people have been found to be more comfortable getting on a plane if the pilot is good-looking. This is known as the *halo effect*, which is also evident linguistically: consider the various meanings of Greek *kalos* and English “fair”.<sup>33</sup>

(2) A connected transformation effect is that people tend to think more highly of individuals who are paired romantically with attractive partners.<sup>34</sup> Conversely, people tend to think less of individuals who are paired with unattractive partners; this negative perception is even stronger than if an individual is not paired at all. This is known as the *radiating effect*.

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<sup>30</sup> Müller 2009: 134-53; Krevans 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Loraux 1994.

<sup>32</sup> A recent example: Prokop's 2020 findings around the artificially enhanced attractiveness high heels bring to the female leg; cf. also Yarosh 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Etcoff 1999: 48-50; Horton 2003; Desrumaux et al. 2009; Moore et al. 2011; Tsukiura and Cabeza 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Sigall and Landy 1973, 1974; Thornhill and Gangestad 1993; Akst 2005; Little et al. 2008; De Houwer et al. 2019.

Furthermore, people (men especially) may flaunt attractive partners as a means of advertising status.<sup>35</sup>

(3) Physical attractiveness in both sexes appears to be linked directly to markers of fertility and genetic survival, a finding that holds true across cultures.<sup>36</sup> Femininity in women and masculinity in men, both driven by sex hormone levels, are attractive to the opposite sex.<sup>37</sup> Femininity in women, associated with higher estrogen levels and increased fertility, is marked by such physical features as a higher degree of facial neoteny (as compared to men) and a waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) of 0.7 or less.<sup>38</sup> Youthfulness in women is a significant attractor, since women's fertility declines with age, while men's does not.

(4) Evolutionary pressures have resulted in men and women having different mating preferences.<sup>39</sup> Men, who can theoretically have thousands of children and thereby maximize their genetic survival, have evolved to prefer youthful and physically attractive (i.e., optimally fertile) women and to desire a multiplicity of mates. Women, on the other hand, are limited in the number of children they can actually produce; a woman's genetic survival, therefore, is maximized not by a diversity of mates, but rather through the attachment of a mate willing to provide stability and resources for the caretaking of her children, a behaviour known as parental investment.

Finally, (5), masculinity, much more than femininity, is a social rather than a purely biological construct. Recognition of one's manhood can be "hard won and easily lost".<sup>40</sup> Cultures around the world and through time have featured various dangerous, painful, or degrading rituals of manhood which youths are expected to endure without flinching; consider the alleged Macedonian custom of not recognizing a youth as a man until he had killed a boar (Athenaios 1.31). Once won, manhood is under constant threat and can be lost for such seemingly inconsequential actions as bowing out of a football game because of a badly sprained ankle. This has little or nothing to do with what women think: "A man's status as a man requires constant vigilance and public affirmation because it is only through the esteem or fear of other men that a man can obtain and sustain such status".<sup>41</sup> This is the theory of *precarious manhood*.<sup>42</sup>

From an evolutionary perspective, men are conditioned to be competitive and aggressive, for the purpose of finding mates. Rather depressingly, the psychology literature suggests also that exposure to images of attractive women tends to make men more aggressive and pro-war.<sup>43</sup> It would seem that Aphrodite and Ares are indeed well-matched in myth, as Aristotle

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<sup>35</sup> Winegard et al. 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Berry 2000.

<sup>37</sup> Swaddle and Reiersen 2002; Little et al. 2008. The present discussion of course relates to heterosexual attraction.

<sup>38</sup> Keating 1985; Cunningham 1986; Etcoff 1999; Berry 2000. See also Lassek and Gaulin 2019 and Bovet 2019, with some challenges to this viewpoint.

<sup>39</sup> Buss 1992; Buss and Schmitt 1993; Berry 2000.

<sup>40</sup> Vandello and Bosson 2013.

<sup>41</sup> Winegard et al. 2014: 35.

<sup>42</sup> Bosson and Vandello 2011; Vandello and Bosson 2013; Winegard et al. 2014; Matos et al. 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Chang et al. 2011; Chen and Chang 2015.



pointed out (*Politics* 1269b). Such aggression then plays itself out in a variety of fields, not just that of securing a mate, but in a constant competition with other men to bolster and secure one's manhood. One way in which a man's status is enhanced among other men is certainly through flaunting his sexual success, whether it be through locker-room bragging about multiple conquests or through securing the most beautiful – and youthful – trophy-wife.<sup>44</sup> In the pages of Herodotos, the Lydian ruler Kandaules seals his own fate when he cannot resist the temptation to show off his lovely wife – naked – to his guard Gyges (1.8-12). Conversely, the loss of that commodity strikes straight into the heart of precarious manhood, and status must be regained at all costs, as Agamemnon discovered when he took Briseis away from Achilles. It may be significant that Briseis, as one of the few women whom Homer likens to “Golden Aphrodite”, is clearly extraordinarily beautiful (*Il.* 19.282).

To return then to the early Hellenistic period, for the Successors, who had campaigned with Alexander and ultimately against each other, and their sons, who presumably were also brought up with a Macedonian warrior ethos, the world was an intensely competitive place, where successful masculinity had to be on display both in battle and in bed. In the *Coma Berenices*, the taking of Berenike's virginity is described as a battle for her maiden spoils, even though Berenike was probably not a virgin, assuming her earlier marriage to Demetrios the Fair was consummated.<sup>45</sup> Male sensation-seeking and risk-taking (both of which raise testosterone levels) are particularly strongly correlated with the acquisition of physically attractive (fertile) female partners. It would be difficult to imagine a more testosterone-raising lifestyle than being a king in the first Hellenistic century.

Kallimachos, perhaps mendaciously, presents Berenike II as a virgin bride; he apostrophizes Arsinoë II too as a *nymphē*, a bride, despite the fact that her union with Ptolemy II represented her third marriage.<sup>46</sup> Theokritos emphasizes Berenike I's loving faithfulness to her husband Ptolemy I, commenting twice on the likeness of her child to his father; in so doing, he sublimates the fact that Berenike too had been married before and was the mother of three children by her previous husband.<sup>47</sup> While the veiled images of the queens on Ptolemaic coinage have usually been held to assimilate them to goddesses, it seems possible that this presentation was intended to evoke the bridal moment as well.<sup>48</sup> The radiating effect of having a beautiful, young, sexy bride was a token of the king's own accomplishment, and so even Berenike I and Arsinoë II – who were scarcely inexperienced or particularly young – could be characterized in this way. So much the better if the royal bride is also a goddess, especially the goddess of love: only a superman could make love to such a being and not be devoured.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Winegard et al. 2013: 3 (“flaunting to same sex individuals is predicted to enhance social influence”).

<sup>45</sup> See Clayman 2014: 38, 99; McAuley 2020.

<sup>46</sup> 228 Pf, even though this poem is about her death (or rather her deification). Presumably not even Kallimachos could suggest that Arsinoë was a virgin when she married her full brother.

<sup>47</sup> Lines 43-44 (negative) and 63-64 (positive). Cf. Hera's “renewable virginity” (Krevans 2012: 308; McAuley 2020: 189-91).

<sup>48</sup> Ager 2017: 174; cf. D'Arrigo 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Carney 2000a: 224; 2000b: 39.

Having a multiplicity of courtesans also spoke to the king's status as a man.<sup>50</sup> Plato was embarrassed by the fact that Zeus was presented in myth as a skirt-chaser, but that aspect of Zeus's behaviour must have resonated with the male subconscious better than a philosophy of sexual restraint. That Ptolemy II flaunted a record number of courtesans would not have been intended to suggest that he was ruled by women (as some took it), but in fact the very opposite: it was a sign of his successful masculinity and hence his fitness to rule (Athenaios 576e-f). Daniel Ogden suggests that information about the royal courtesans made its way into the record in the first place "because the kings either actively promoted them and their images or heedlessly flaunted them".<sup>51</sup> These two suggestions are not necessarily mutually contradictory, and I would remove the qualifier "heedlessly".<sup>52</sup> Ptolemy remained a widower for over two decades after his sister's death, no doubt because he had elevated her so highly that to replace her would have disrupted the Sibling Gods symbolism.<sup>53</sup> But his status as a man was no doubt continually enhanced by his courtesans, who were flaunted in much the same way as a royal wife might be: Theokritos, in a poem that pointedly does *not* mention any queens, remarks that one of Ptolemy's best points is what a lover he is (*erōtikos*).<sup>54</sup>

If we accept then that high-quality (in evolutionary terms) female mates were both an outcome and a mechanism of male-male competition and status display, the question then becomes, were Hellenistic queens the trophy wives of antiquity? The question is only half-serious: obviously, queens became far more than that as the Hellenistic age drew on. But the expectation that kings and princes will marry beautiful women is still in operation today: royal men are of the highest status and hence deserve high-quality females, a quality that is still measured in physical beauty. People expect couples to be roughly matched on the assets each brings to the relationship, and the radiating effect ensures that people are likely to think less of a man if his mate's beauty is not a match for his own status.<sup>55</sup> Equally, women are adapted to prefer high-status males, since that status ensures resources and parental investment.<sup>56</sup> Without impugning Prince Rainier III's and Princess Grace's love for each other, their marriage was a perfect exchange of their respective commodities: his royal status and her outstanding beauty.

The halo effect suggests that beautiful queens are good queens, so there is an incentive for both kings and queens to demonstrate the beauty of the queen.<sup>57</sup> When Prince Charles first announced his engagement to the 19-year-old Lady Diana Spencer, the media and the public were instantly fascinated with her beauty, not with any other accomplishments she might

<sup>50</sup> See Cameron 1990; Ogden 1999: 213-72; Kosmetatou 2004; Ogden 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Ogden 2008: 353.

<sup>52</sup> See Winegard et al. 2013. One wonders if Demetrios Poliorketes' excessive flaunting of his courtesan Lamia in particular was part of a competitive display with Ptolemy I, whose courtesan she had been; see Ogden 1999: 242.

<sup>53</sup> Müller 2009: 246; Carney 2013: 127.

<sup>54</sup> *Idyll* 14.61; Roy 1998: 120. See also Ogden 1999: 213-72; Carney 2000b; Carney 2013: 126-28.

<sup>55</sup> Bar-Tal and Saxe 1976.

<sup>56</sup> Thornhill and Gangestad 1993.

<sup>57</sup> Since Hellenistic queens mostly became royal wives because of their own rank and lineage (except perhaps among the Antigonids), there was no guarantee that a royal Hellenistic bride would actually be beautiful; the point is that her official image was.

have had. As Princess of Wales, Diana worked hard and successfully to develop her own brand of euergetism; but initially (if not throughout the entire marriage) it was the radiating effect of Diana's beauty that enhanced the Prince's status.

### 3. Queenly Power?

Some scholars have examined the emphasis placed on the queen's public image, especially in third century Egypt, and have linked that to queenly power, or at least made the argument that the queens were in some way personally responsible for their own prominence.<sup>58</sup> Such an assessment obviously begs the question of a definition of "power", and a full discussion of that subject goes well beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, I want to conclude by offering one or two thoughts on the use of the visual and literary enhancement of royal women to make assessments of the power of these women. Being rather stingy in my own definition of power, it seems to me that the only way to determine that a queen has some kind of truly independent power (as opposed to a traditional role – e.g., as a benefactress – assigned to her by the king) is to identify queenly actions taken contrary to or at least orthogonal to the king's will. Cleopatra II (who does *not* form part of this study) asserted her own independent power against Ptolemy VIII; while that power was insufficient in the long run, it certainly was real, and it was independent. Such scenarios, however, are likely to entail hostilities between king and queen; this reduces their value in assessing the approved institutional power of queens.

Elizabeth Carney has argued that non-institutionalized, but legitimate, influence is in fact a kind of power, and in principle I am in agreement with her.<sup>60</sup> But what Carney calls "influence", I might often label simply "input", an input of a kind that the king no doubt collected regularly from all those close to him, including queens. Such power is not inherent in the king's advisors or their offices: it is something that is granted – and can be taken away – by the king. Ptolemy II might have valued his sister's opinion, but nothing in the history of Ptolemy IV and Arsinoë III suggests that he cared what she thought.

In no way is this discussion intended to imply that early Hellenistic queens were not given places of respect and public significance, or that they had no opportunities to exercise their own abilities. They had their own property, their own *philoi*, and their own finances, and although Gorgo and Praxinoa do not mention seeing the queen, it seems impossible that Arsinoë II was *not* publicly visible and loudly applauded at the Adonis pageant that she had

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<sup>58</sup> Macurdy 1932; Pomeroy 1984; Roy 1998; Carney 2000b; Llewellyn-Jones and Winder 2011; Strootman 2011; Caneva 2013.

<sup>59</sup> Also beyond the scope of this paper is the important political role that queens played by representing the king in his absence or acting as regent for an underage heir; it was this role that led to the more overt power of some queens in the second and first centuries.

<sup>60</sup> 1994; 2011. Cf. also Strootman 2011: 79–80. Aelian reports, for example, that Berenike II admonished her husband Ptolemy III for taking an insufficiently sober approach to the matter of condemning people to death, and that Ptolemy thereupon changed his ways (VH 14.43). On the alleged influence of royal concubines see Buraselis 2017 and Strootman 2017.

personally organized (Theokritos *Idyll* 15).<sup>61</sup> It bears repeating that queens *were* clearly given extremely important dynastic and symbolic significance, and that my argument is not intended to undermine that significance. But we have no clear evidence that the spectacular emphasis that Ptolemy II placed on his sister-wife actually translated into real independent authority. Aside from her questionable role in the later literary tradition, we know nothing of Arsinoë II that Ptolemy II did not choose to tell us. Ptolemy liked to advertise his consultation with his sister-wife – he does so in the Chremonides Decree and on the Pithom Stele – but he certainly would not have intended to advertise that he did her bidding.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, it could be argued that the cultivation of a special image for royal females was also a way of keeping them in their place, a public demonstration that *these* were the prescribed roles for royal women: love, fertility, and beneficence were their spheres of activity, and there was no room in this model for another Olympias or Adeia-Eurydike. Hellenistic history demonstrates that as time went on many of these women refused to adhere to such prescribed roles, and that some did indeed wield independent power. But we measure that power by their actions, not their images; indeed, Cleopatra II and Cleopatra III, two of the most formidable of the Ptolemaic women, left behind little in the way of images beyond the stereotypical Egyptian-style representations. I believe that we can find a perfectly sufficient reason for these early dynastic images of royal women – literary, epigraphic, numismatic, and sculptural – in the status of the royal men, particularly vis-à-vis other men. Not queen's power – but king's will.

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<sup>61</sup> On Ptolemaic women as both objects of artistic depiction and patrons (?) of the arts, see Barbantani 2021.

<sup>62</sup> It may be significant that, in both cases, Arsinoë was probably already dead (as of 270 or 268).

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