

The Role of Berenice II in the International Relations of the Ptolemaic Kingdom

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Abstract: This paper examines the political role of Berenice II in the international relations of the Ptolemaic kingdom during the second half of the third century BCE. While scholarship has extensively analyzed her biography and public image, less attention has been paid to her concrete function in Ptolemaic foreign policy. Through an analysis of literary, documentary, and numismatic sources, the study argues that Berenice II played an active and strategically significant role in shaping and disseminating the dynastic image beyond Egypt's borders. From the outset of her reign, especially during Ptolemy III's absence from Egypt, she leveraged artistic patronage, coinage, and carefully constructed propagandistic representations to project Ptolemaic power across the Greek-Macedonian world. In mainland Greece and in the Argolid, her Panhellenic equestrian victories reinforced the dynasty's Macedonian legitimacy; in the Aegean, her assimilation to Demeter, Agathe Tyche, and the Dioscuri positioned her as protector of maritime routes and guarantor of abundance; in Athens, her association with Athena Parthenos underscored her martial authority; and within the Aetolian League, she served as both symbol of dynastic stability and guarantor of political continuity. By weaving personal biography into dynastic propaganda, Berenice II redefined the political role of royal women in the Hellenistic age, emerging as both a symbol and an agent of Ptolemaic power, maritime authority, and cross-regional political influence.

Keywords: Berenice II; Ptolemaic queens; Hellenistic queenship; Ptolemaic foreign policy; royal propaganda

Introduction¹

The actual political role played by Hellenistic queens is difficult to determine². One of the reasons is that their conventional representation in literary sources rarely focuses on their political influence. Moreover, the spatial and temporal distance of these sources from the events they describe makes the information more susceptible to historical and cultural misunderstandings or to value distortions that ultimately reduce the image of these queens to a stereotyped *topos*. From the third century onwards, as royal women increasingly became part of blood-related marriages and, through these unions, gained greater integration within the ruling dynasty, it becomes even more challenging – based on the available sources – to distinguish their specific role from that of their husbands and to assess their degree of autonomy and responsibility in the decision-making process, particularly regarding the construction and dissemination of the dynastic image³.

Recently, scholarship on the political role of women in ancient monarchic institutions and the reception of female rulers has expanded significantly. At the same time, there has been a renewed

¹ All dates are BCE unless otherwise stated.

² For a general discussion on the public role of Hellenistic queens, see Savalli-Lestrade 1994 and 2003; Bielman Sánchez 2003; Caneva 2013c; Carney and Müller 2020, exp. 3-7; Ager 2021;

³ On this topic, see Roy 1998.

interest in Berenice II, who has been the subject of several articles and two dedicated monographs⁴. Born in Cyrene, Berenice was the only daughter of Magas – appointed governor of the region by Ptolemy I as the son of his second wife, Berenice I, and her first husband, Philip – and Apama, herself the daughter of the Seleucid rulers Antiochus I and Stratonice⁵. After her father's death, Berenice married Ptolemy III, becoming one of the most renowned Ptolemaic queens. Her image was immortalized through the catasterism (transformation into a constellation) of the lock of hair she cut to ensure the safe return of her husband from war, a gesture celebrated by Callimachus and transmitted to us primarily through Catullus' Latin translation. From her early years in Cyrene and especially during her reign as queen of Egypt alongside Ptolemy III, Berenice II played a crucial role in political, cultural, propagandistic, symbolic, and religious spheres.

The most recent studies have retraced Berenice II's biography from her youth in Cyrene, addressing the most debated chronological aspects and shedding light on the main features of her public image both within and beyond Egypt. These studies have analyzed her communicative and symbolic strategies⁶. However, such analyses have rarely led to an in-depth understanding of the actual political role that Berenice II played in Ptolemaic foreign policy through her public image. The present study aims to identify the role of this Ptolemaic queen in the international relations of the Ptolemaic kingdom, focusing on how and to what extent she influenced the presentation and perception of the dynastic image beyond Egypt, not only legitimizing Ptolemaic rule but also strengthening the dynasty's influence in the eastern Mediterranean. Through an analysis of the historical context, literary and documentary sources, and propagandistic representations, this study will highlight Berenice II's significance in the political and diplomatic dynamics of the second half of the third century.

By the time Berenice II ascended to the Ptolemaic throne, the Egyptian court and the broader international community must have already regarded the queen as a highly influential figure. The portrayal of her predecessor, Arsinoe II, both during her lifetime alongside Ptolemy II and posthumously through the effective and pervasive court propaganda and the widespread diffusion of her cult, had contributed to the general perception of the queen's significant influence, including in the political sphere⁷. From the outset, Berenice II had to manage the weighty legacy of Arsinoe II, while simultaneously embodying the prerogatives that had, for years, been represented exclusively through the deified posthumous image of her predecessor. Perpetuating the political profile shaped by Arsinoe II and her Greek and Egyptian subjects, Berenice II also had to construct a distinct personal image that would differentiate her from the former queen. The identification, elaboration, and propagandistic dissemination of these prerogatives across the Greek-Hellenistic world, and thus the construction of a defined royal identity, required Berenice II to play a leading personal role. Through this role, she conveyed specific political messages within the framework of Ptolemaic international relations.

⁴ The monographs are Clayman 2014 and van Oppen 2015. Among the numerous articles on the Ptolemaic queen, the recent studies by McAuley 2020 and Müller 2020 are particularly noteworthy.

⁵ Paus. 1.6.6; 1.7.3.

⁶ See Clayman 2014; van Oppen 2015; McAuley 2020.

⁷ Among the numerous studies dedicated to Arsinoe II, the following are particularly noteworthy: Barbantani 2008; Carney 2013; Caneva 2015.

Shaping Berenice II's International Image: Artistic Patronage and Coinage

One of the first initiatives undertaken by Berenice II upon ascending the throne was the patronage of the arts, which enabled her to influence and control court propaganda⁸. Shortly after her marriage to Ptolemy III – likely in 246⁹ – Berenice ruled alone for approximately two years due to her husband's departure for a military campaign in Syria against the Seleucids¹⁰. Her position at court immediately after her accession was far from easy. Not only did she have to manage her husband's absence at a crucial moment for consolidating power, but the war against the Seleucids was initially justified by Ptolemy III as an intervention in support of his sister, Berenice Syra, the second wife of Antiochus II¹¹. After her husband's death, she found herself embroiled in a bitter dynastic struggle with Laodice II, Antiochus II's first wife¹². Therefore, within the Alexandrian court, some might have viewed a possible marriage between Ptolemy III and his sister Berenice Syra as the most advantageous way for Egypt to claim territorial rights over Syria. Such a marriage would have been in continuity with the sibling-marriage tradition inaugurated, and strongly promoted, by Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II, whose memory was still fresh¹³. Furthermore, sources indicate that in 245, a significant rebellion broke out within Egypt, forcing Ptolemy III to abandon his Asiatic military campaign and return to Egypt¹⁴. A careful analysis of the available data suggests that these internal disturbances were caused by socio-economic difficulties and widespread discontent throughout Egypt. This unrest stemmed from structural issues within the Lagid economic, bureaucratic, and land distribution systems, exacerbated by the desertion of Greek mercenaries and a severe famine¹⁵. Finally, from an international perspective, by 245, the initially promising Ptolemaic campaign in Asia was encountering serious challenges, with the first signs of a Seleucid counteroffensive emerging¹⁶.

Thus, at the beginning of her reign and in her husband's absence, Berenice II faced multiple challenges: she had to defend her authority and legitimacy at court while asserting her political advantage over Berenice Syra. Additionally, she had to manage the initial phases of a violent internal rebellion without access to most of the royal army, which was engaged in the Seleucid campaign. Finally, on the international stage, she needed to present her newly established rule as strong and stable. To achieve this – and probably through an epistolary exchange that ensured a

⁸ See Barbantani 2020.

⁹ The date of the wedding is not explicitly attested in any source; the only reference comes from the verses in Catullus' translation of Callimachus' *Lock of Berenice* (Cat. 66.11-12). The dating of the marriage to 246 is accepted by most scholars. *Contra*, Criscuolo 2003, who suggests placing the wedding around 249.

¹⁰ It is the first phase of the Third Syrian War, fought between the Lagids and the Seleucids. On this conflict, see Grainger 2010, 153-170.

¹¹ *P.Gurob* (= BNJ 160 F1); Just. 27.1.6; Polyæn. 8.50.22-29; App. Syr. 65; Porphy. in BNJ 260 F43 (= Hieron. *Comm. in Dan.* 11.6-9).

¹² The Third Syrian War is also known as the Laodicean War, named after Antiochus II's first wife, Laodice II, who played a central role in the conflict. On Laodice II, see D'Agostini 2018.

¹³ See Llewellyn Jones and Winder 2011, 250-252.

¹⁴ Just. 27.1.9; Porphy. in BNJ 260 F43 (= Hieron. *Comm. in Dan.* 11.6-9); *P.Haun.* 1.6.15-17.

¹⁵ Cf. Mahaffy 1895, 204; Bouché-Leclercq 1903, 253; Rostovtzeff 1922, 170; Préaux 1936, 523-525; Peremans 1981. Among more recent studies, see Veïsse 2004, 3-5; Grainger 2014, 190.

¹⁶ A tablet from Uruk, containing a chronicle of the accession of the Seleucid rulers (cf. Clay 1913, II, no. 17), records that as early as the 22nd day of the month of Simānu in year 67 of the Seleucid era – that is, from 11 July 245 – Seleucus II, the son of Laodice, was officially recognized as ruler in the Babylonian region, where Ptolemy III had arrived. On the Seleucid counteroffensive, cf. Just. 27.2.1-3 and the reconstruction by Grainger 2010, 163-170.

certain degree of coordination with Ptolemy III – Berenice II played a crucial role in shaping both her personal image and that of the Ptolemaic kingdom through cultural, propagandistic, symbolic, and religious strategies, both within and beyond Egypt.

Beyond certain domestic political measures¹⁷ – outside the scope of this study – the queen's main initiatives in the early years of her reign appear to have been the careful selection of her closest advisors and her patronage of the arts, a role expected of a Hellenistic queen. Through these choices, she contributed significantly to defining the kingdom's cultural direction. In keeping with the tradition of previous Ptolemaic rulers, Berenice II and Ptolemy III jointly promoted cultural development, expanding the Museum and the Library of Alexandria¹⁸. However, the queen's Cyrenean origins influenced the selection of key figures such as Callimachus and Eratosthenes – both from Cyrene – who were appointed to prominent cultural and propagandistic roles. Callimachus became one of the most important court poets under the reign of the Euergetae, frequently celebrating and glorifying the Cyrenean region in his compositions¹⁹. Eratosthenes, on the other hand, was appointed head of the Library of Alexandria and later became the tutor of the future Ptolemy IV²⁰. Berenice II's connection with Callimachus and Eratosthenes arguably originated from their shared youth at the Cyrenean court of Magas. The royal court of Cyrene was renowned for its vibrant cultural scene and international reputation. Notably, it was among the destinations of Ashoka's Buddhist missionaries²¹. The intellectual climate of Cyrene was historically characterized by a strong Greek cultural influence and a stimulating philosophical environment²², and might have played a role in shaping Berenice II's intellectual interests. The region also placed particular emphasis on the education of women, as illustrated by the figure of Arete, an eminent representative of the Cyrenaic philosophical school. Daughter of Aristippus the Elder and trained in philosophy under his guidance, Arete wrote forty works and, following thirty-five years of public teaching, succeeded her father as head of the school. She subsequently transmitted her knowledge to Aristippus the Younger, thereby playing a pivotal role in the continuity and development of the Cyrenaic philosophical tradition²³.

By making use of her Cyrenean origins, Berenice II surrounded herself with loyal intellectuals, entrusting them with the task of shaping the kingdom's ideological and propagandistic narrative. Her central role in Ptolemaic cultural policy is evident in Callimachus' literary works, where the legitimization and exaltation of the ruling couple consistently emphasize the figure of the queen²⁴.

¹⁷ On Berenice II's role in the domestic politics of the early years of the Euergetae's reign, see the references in Clayman 2014 and van Oppen 2015.

¹⁸ Galen, *Comm. II on Hipp.* 17.239.

¹⁹ For a general overview of Callimachus, see Lehnus 2006. On chronology and literary production, see Lehnus 1995; Capel Badino 2005; Harder 2012, 21-22, with relevant bibliography.

²⁰ *P.Oxy.* 1241; *Suda* s.v. "Ερατοσθένης" and s.v. "Απολλώνιος"; Tzetz. *Proleg. ad Aristoph.* Pb I 21. For a general overview of Eratosthenes, cf. Zaminer and Tosi 2006.

²¹ *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* I 25 (= *Major Rock Edict* 13). Cf. Chamoux 1956, 22; Clayman 2014, 33; van Oppen 2015, 9, n. 12.

²² The contacts of Socrates and Plato with leading Cyrenean intellectuals and the influence of the Cyrenaic philosophical school from the fourth century onward are well known. See Laronde 1987, 112-113 and 137; on the Cyrenaic philosophical school, see Diog. Laert. 2.102-103.

²³ On Arete, cf. most recently O'Reilly 2023.

²⁴ Without delving here into the long-standing debate on the compositional history of the *Aetia* (on this, see Massimilla 1996, 34-40 and 2010, 41-54, 61-64), and limiting oneself to considering the arrangement of the elegies as they have come down to us, it is noteworthy that the second part of the work is framed by two poems explicitly dedicated to Queen Berenice II: the first, the so-called *Victory of Berenice*, placed at the opening of Book III, and the second, *The Lock of Berenice*, positioned at the end of the fourth and final book.

While it is difficult to determine the extent to which the content of Callimachus' works – or, more broadly, the court's propaganda – was dictated by Berenice II herself, the dissemination of these narratives must have required royal approval, especially in the years 246-245, when she directly represented the ruling authority in Alexandria. Given the prominence afforded to Berenice II in Callimachus' *Aetia*, it is plausible that the queen 'commissioned' the work to commemorate the conclusion of a particularly delicate period of independent rule in her husband's absence²⁵. Further evidence of Berenice II's patronage of Callimachus can be found in Epigram 52:

Τέσσαρες αἱ Χάριτες· ποτὶ γὰρ μία ταῖς τρισὶ τήναις
ἄρτι ποτεπλάσθη κῆτι μύροισι νοτεῖ.
εὐαίων ἐν πᾶσιν ἀρίζηλος Βερενίκα,
ᾗς ἄτερ οὐδ' αὐταὶ ταὶ Χάριτες Χάριτες.

Four are the Graces; for beside those three another has been fashioned lately and is yet imbued with perfume. Happy Berenice and resplendent among all - without whom even the Graces themselves are not Graces.

The Graces, daughters of Zeus and the nymph Eurynome, were traditionally associated with harmony, beauty, and elegance, often invoked by poets for inspiration and support in composition. Their worship, widely spread throughout the Greek world, was particularly linked to themes of reciprocity and gratitude for received favors. In identifying Berenice II as the fourth Grace, Callimachus integrated the queen into a narrative directly tied to traditional Greek cultural values, elevating her to a semi-divine *status* and portraying her as a benefactress²⁶. The final verse clarifies the nature of these benefits: without Berenice, even the Graces would not exist. This suggests that without her patronage, poetic creation itself would not be possible. It is also noteworthy that Callimachus's mention of Berenice's statue being «imbued with perfumes» may allude to her engagement in the production of perfumes: according to Athenaeus, she is said to have pursued this activity in both Cyrene and Alexandria and the author specifies that this perfume was made using a particular rose extract, a flower traditionally associated with one of the Graces²⁷. This activity would, moreover, have provided Berenice with a personal source of income²⁸.

Thus, upon her arrival in Alexandria, one of Berenice II's first actions was likely to surround herself with trusted *philoï*, particularly intellectuals from her homeland, over whom she could exercise direct patronage. This enabled her to exert control over the arts and the main cultural institutions of the city, where she governed alone for the first two years of her reign. Effectively, Berenice II presided over the leading center of Greek *paideia*, and the intellectuals under her patronage worked to disseminate her carefully crafted image throughout the Greek-Macedonian world, thereby assigning her a specific political role. On the one hand, drawing inspiration from the model of Arsinoe II and with the support of the local priestly elite, references to Egyptian traditions²⁹ were intended to consolidate Berenice II's legitimacy within Egypt. On the other hand, from the outset, the court's literary propaganda aimed to construct and promote her image for audiences beyond the borders of the kingdom. In this context, Berenice II blended Cyrenean traditions with typically Greek-Macedonian elements.

²⁵ See Barbantani 2020, 113.

²⁶ See Clayman 2014, 57-61.

²⁷ Athen. 15.689a and 682e.

²⁸ Cf. Clayman 2014, 60, 103.

²⁹ See Hauben 2011 and Clayman 2014, *passim*.

In addition to her patronage of the arts, another crucial strategy adopted by Berenice II to establish herself as the new and legitimate Ptolemaic queen in the Hellenistic world was the issuance of coinage. Pollux, in listing coins named after the rulers who minted them, mentions the *Berenikeion nomisma*, assigning it a place of particular importance³⁰. This refers to a series of gold and silver coins issued in Berenice II's name, featuring the legend ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ («of the queen») on the reverse³¹. The presence of this title on coins issued during the queen's lifetime was an unprecedented phenomenon initiated by Berenice II³² and remained uncommon among later queens.

The exceptional nature and significance of these coins emerge from several key aspects³³. First, they were the heaviest and most valuable coinage issued during the Ptolemaic reign. Additionally, they featured unusual denominations, including decadrachms, pentadrachms, drachms, hemidrachms, quarter-drachms, and 2.5-drachm pieces in gold, as well as pentadrachms and 2.5-drachm pieces in silver. Another distinctive feature was the adoption of the Attic weight standard, which had been abolished in Egypt by Ptolemy I in 305. Moreover, several elements suggest that Berenice II herself was directly responsible for their minting³⁴. This is indicated by the testimony of Pollux, who explicitly attributes the issue of these coins to Berenice II, as well as by her central role in Alexandria during the early years of her reign – when she governed in her husband's absence – and by the unique legend on the reverse, which confirms the extraordinary nature of the emission.

These issues not only attest to Berenice II's prominent political role in Alexandria but also served a fundamental propagandistic function, complementing other artistic and literary expressions of court ideology. The iconography of the coins conveyed a targeted political message, primarily directed at soldiers. The remarkable size and value of these issues, in fact, suggest that they were ceremonial, likely used as gifts or payments for veterans' discharge bonuses or military campaign rewards³⁵. Since most Hellenistic soldiers were of Greek cultural background, these coin emissions – like the artistic and literary productions of the Alexandrian court – adopted a distinctly Greek iconographic portrayal of the queen. The obverse of these coins features a portrait of Berenice II rendered in a manner reminiscent of classical representations of Demeter³⁶. The reverse, meanwhile, typically displays a single cornucopia, a symbol of abundance, sometimes surmounted by a radiate crown or accompanied by two stars or the *pilei* (caps) of the Dioscuri³⁷. The issuance of these coins, which began in the early years of her reign, continued throughout her time as queen³⁸, albeit with variations in intensity and form. As a result, the coinage functioned as a direct and

³⁰ Poll. *Onom.* 9.84-85.

³¹ Cf. Lorber 2018, 162-166, esp. the table on 162; *CPE* 734-748.

³² The only known precedent for coinage issued by a queen bearing the title *basilissa* is that of Amastris, founder of the city bearing her name; see Erçiyas 2003, 1420-1421 and de Callataj 2004. On Amastris, see D'Agostini 2020, esp. 79-82.

³³ On this point, cf. Lorber 2018, 153-154.

³⁴ Skeptical about Berenice II being the actual issuing authority: Brunelle 1976, 32; Cavagna 2006, 279 and n. 26; Lorber 2018, 153-154. Supportive of Berenice II as the issuing authority and dating the coinage to the period of Ptolemy III's absence: Naville 1951, 105; Caccamo Caltabiano 1996, 181-192; Herklotz 2000, 45, 55; Pfrommer 2002, 87; Calabria and Finocchi 2003, 184.

³⁵ Cf. Lorber 2018, 153-154; Sewell-Lasater 2020, esp. 77.

³⁶ See Pantos 1987, 343-352.

³⁷ For a detailed description of the iconography of the coinage featuring Berenice II, see Caccamo Caltabiano 1998; Cavagna 2006 and 2010, 109-110; Lorber 2018, 176-182, with previous bibliography.

³⁸ Cf. Sewell-Lasater 2020.

effective means of communicating messages of dynastic legitimacy, power, and ideological values to the Greek-Macedonian world.

By analyzing the various facets of the complex propagandistic image crafted – or at least endorsed – by Berenice II, primarily through the literary production of the Alexandrian court and her coinage types, and by considering the context in which these representations were most evident, it is possible to outline the queen's role in Ptolemaic foreign relations.

Political Relations with the Greek-Macedonian World

Direct evidence of Berenice II's political interventions is rare, particularly after Ptolemy III's return to Egypt from his Seleucid campaign. This is largely due to the fact that the Euergetae defined their rule through the concept of a unified royal couple, emphasizing both marital fidelity and the joint administration of domestic and foreign affairs. This approach makes it particularly difficult to distinguish any independent diplomatic or political role played by the queen in dealings with other Hellenistic powers. However, the frequent mention of Berenice II alongside her husband in documents from various regions suggests that she was acknowledged as an influential figure in international politics, especially in legitimizing Ptolemaic rule³⁹.

As previously noted, Berenice II actively directed the dissemination of her public image, portraying herself – particularly during her husband's absence – as a fully sovereign ruler, equal to Ptolemy III. Although her political significance does not always emerge explicitly in Greek-Macedonian sources, her role is clearly confirmed within the Egyptian context. For the first time in Ptolemaic history, Berenice II had the name of Horus incorporated into her official titulary during her lifetime, alongside her personal name, an element implying her full participation in royal authority alongside her husband⁴⁰.

Berenice II's importance as queen alongside Ptolemy III is further attested by her depiction in Egyptian temple reliefs, where she appears alongside her husband receiving her official title from local deities. In these representations, she is adorned with all the symbols of royal power: the papyrus scepter, the *ankh*, the crown with two feathers, the horns of the goddess Hathor, and the solar disk⁴¹. Additionally, some demotic inscriptions explicitly refer to her as «female pharaoh, Berenice⁴²», confirming her high status. The greater clarity with which her prominent role emerges in the Egyptian context may be due to the Euergetae's focus on consolidating their legitimacy primarily within Egypt. In contrast, their foreign policy was largely diplomatic and less aggressive militarily. Ptolemy III's halted eastern campaign, the swift Seleucid counteroffensive, the outbreak

³⁹ For illustrative purposes, consider *IC* III, 4 (Itanos, Crete), *SEG* XXXVI 1218 (Xanthos), and *IG* XII 6, 1, 11 (Samos).

⁴⁰ The first part of her Horus name defined her as «Horus-woman, daughter of the king, created by the queen», while the second read «Berenice, the goddess Euergetes, beloved of the gods». Cf. Clayman 2014, 163. For a detailed discussion of Berenice's royal titulary, see von Beckerath 1984; Troy 1986; Minas 2005, 135; Eldamaty 2011, 24-25; Bennett 2001-2011, s.v. 'Berenice II', notes 18, 19, and 20.

⁴¹ See, for example, the gate of the Temple of Khonsu at Karnak. On the depiction of Berenice II on this gate, see Clayman 2014, 162-163. For a general discussion of the monumental gates of Karnak and their symbolic message, see Preys 2015.

⁴² On these documents and their dating, see Pestman 1967, 28 and Quaegebeur 1978, 254-255.

of an internal rebellion, and the strengthening of Antigonid influence in the Aegean in 245 underscored for the ruling couple the need to prioritize domestic stability over external expansion.

Nevertheless, in foreign policy, the Euergetae, continuing the strategy of their predecessors, had to maintain strong relations with mainland Greece and the Aegean, primarily as a counterbalance to the Antigonids⁴³. On one hand, the Ptolemaic rulers needed to continue supporting *poleis* against Antigonid rule; on the other, they had to ensure their position as the preeminent naval power, maintaining a strong political and military presence in the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean. While in Egypt the divinization of the ruling couple served as the primary means of exalting Ptolemaic supremacy, different symbols were required for legitimacy in the Greek-Macedonian world. Berenice II played a key role in the strategic use of these symbols. She helped to sustain and strengthen the ties between certain crucial regions and the Ptolemaic center of power and her official image was adapted to different regions, in line with local contexts and political strategies. A comparison with documentary evidence helps to identify her specific role in strengthening Ptolemaic ties with key areas.

Argolis and Mainland Greece: The Political Implications of Victory in Panhellenic Equestrian Competitions

Participation in chariot races at Panhellenic games had long been an opportunity for victors and their families to gain prestige and symbolize wealth and power. The symbolic importance of such victories is already reflected in the Argead dynasty, where Olympias, the mother of Alexander, is said to have received her name in celebration of Philip II's chariot victory at the Olympic Games⁴⁴. In the Hellenistic era, victories in these competitions took on an additional political dimension, reinforcing the Greek-Macedonian origins of the ruling dynasties and legitimizing them as heirs of Alexander the Great⁴⁵. Following the precedent set by Cynisca of Sparta, women began to claim this traditionally male prerogative, appropriating the political implications associated with equestrian victories⁴⁶. As Posidippus' epigrams attest, Ptolemaic queens took part in Panhellenic equestrian contests, maybe starting as early as Berenice I⁴⁷. Notably, Posidippus – while remaining faithful to his origins in Pella – consistently presents these queens as fully Macedonian: they are always given Macedonian lineage and are linked to Macedonian queens and heroes⁴⁸. Furthermore, their representation with martial attributes clearly evokes their Macedonian heritage. Thus, this tradition served to consolidate the legitimacy of Ptolemaic rule in the Greek world: the equestrian victories of royal women reinforced the symbolic connection between the Ptolemies and Alexander's legacy, affirming the dynasty's Greek-Macedonian origins and its prestige.

⁴³ For an overview of the foreign policy of the Euergetae, see Will 1982², 153-208.

⁴⁴ See Heckel 1981.

⁴⁵ See Pomeroy 1984, 20; Bennett 2005, 93; van Bremen 2007, 348; Clayman 2014, 142.

⁴⁶ On this topic, see Ingersoll 2015.

⁴⁷ Within the *Hippika* section, Posidippus dedicates numerous epigrams to the Panhellenic victories of Ptolemaic queens such as Berenice I, Arsinoe II, Berenice Syra, and possibly Berenice II. The precise identification of the queens mentioned by Posidippus remains a subject of debate.

⁴⁸ On Posidippus and his relationship with the Ptolemies, see the contributions by Fantuzzi, Stephens, and Thompson in Gutzwiller 2005.

Although her identification in Posidippus' epigrams remains debated⁴⁹, it is well-documented that Berenice II achieved multiple victories in Panhellenic chariot races. Callimachus, in his *The Victory of Berenice*, celebrates the triumph of the queen's horses in the four-horse chariot race at the Nemean Games. Additionally, Hyginus, drawing on Callimachus, reports that Berenice II frequently sent her horses to compete at Olympia⁵⁰. By continuing the tradition of Berenice I and Arsinoe II participating in Panhellenic games, Berenice II was particularly suited to strengthening Egypt's ties with the Greek world and reinforcing the leading role of the Ptolemies.

The precise date of Berenice II's participation in the Olympic Games remains uncertain due to the lack of specific references in ancient sources. However, it is possible to estimate the date of the Nemean Games referenced by Callimachus in *The Victory of Berenices*. These games must have taken place after Berenice II's marriage to Ptolemy III in 246, as the poem refers to her as *nympha* and mentions *hednon*, both alluding to a newlywed status. Since the Nemean Games were held in July/August during the second and fourth year of each Olympiad, three possible dates emerge: 245, 243, or 241. Some scholars argue that the use of *nympha* suggests that Berenice II was a young bride at the time, making 245 the most plausible date, as it would be unlikely for Callimachus to delay celebrating the queen's victory for several years⁵¹. Supporting this hypothesis, Posidippus, in epigram 79.1a-b, likely referring to the same Nemean victory, describes Berenice II as *parthenos*, implying that not much time had passed since her wedding⁵².

If this dating is accepted, Berenice II's victory in the Panhellenic games takes on a clear political significance. In 245, as previously discussed, Ptolemy III was forced to abandon his Seleucid campaign due to increasing difficulties and return to Egypt to quell a severe internal rebellion that threatened his recently established rule. Although Ptolemaic propaganda presented his return as a great military success, the situation in Greece remained unstable. The Achaean League, allied with the Ptolemies since the reign of Ptolemy II, was at war with the Aetolian Confederation. The latter was supported by Antigonus Gonatas⁵³. Following his anti-Antigonid father's political line, Ptolemy III intended to renew support for the Achaean League. However, his military engagement in Syria limited the Ptolemaic kingdom to providing only diplomatic assistance to its Greek allies. In 245, as Ptolemy III was required to remain in Alexandria to manage the internal crisis and lacked the military resources for a direct intervention, Berenice II was identified as the most suitable figure to represent the Ptolemaic kingdom in Greece. In fact, the queen's presence in the Hellenic world on the Nemean Games was meant to signal Egypt's continued interest in Greek affairs. In particular, Berenice II's strong Macedonian identity contributed to reaffirming the Ptolemaic commitment to supporting the *poleis* against Antigoniid hegemony, both politically and militarily⁵⁴. In this respect,

⁴⁹ Bastianini, Gallazzi, and Austin (Bastianini, Gallazzi, and Austin 2001, 208) identified the Berenice mentioned in Posidippus' epigrams 78, 79, and 82 AB as Berenice II. *Contra*, Criscuolo 2003, 311-317, 327-331; Thompson 2005, 275-278; and Bennett 2005, who suggested that Posidippus was instead referring to Berenice Syra, sister of Ptolemy III. This hypothesis has gained widespread acceptance in subsequent scholarship. For some objections, cf. Huss 2008; Clayman 2012 and 2014.

⁵⁰ Hyg. *Astr.* 2.24.11-18.

⁵¹ Cf. Fuhrer 1992, 61, n. 207; Durbec 2005, 162. According to Parsons 1977, 8, and Harder 2012, 397, the same term could also mean «wife» in a more general sense.

⁵² On this matter, see Harder 2012, 397. For a dating to 245, cf. Durbec 2005, 162, later followed by Massimilla 2010, 225; *contra* Cameron 1995, 106. For a general discussion on the participation of Berenice II's horses in competitions, see Marinone 1997, 22, esp. n. 28.

⁵³ For an overview of the political and military situation in Greece during these years, see Will 1982², 319-333.

⁵⁴ Cf. Fantuzzi 2005, 251.

her participation in Panhellenic competitions may be seen as part of a longer and conscious Ptolemaic strategy in Greece: already Ptolemy I Soter had exploited equestrian victories and major Panhellenic festivals as a means of enhancing his visibility among Greek elites and of promoting his political claims, using these arenas as effective channels of communication with the Greek *poleis*, most notably through his presidency of the Isthmian Games in 308, where he addressed a panhellenic audience⁵⁵.

In addition to her political role in Egypt during her husband's absence, Berenice II served as a crucial link between Greece and Egypt, reinforcing the Ptolemies' prominent *status* in the Hellenistic world. The Alexandrian court's propaganda strategically emphasized these aspects: due to her Cyrenean origins, Berenice II was immediately associated with Doric identity and, by extension, that of the entire Ptolemaic dynasty⁵⁶. Callimachus emphasized this element in *The Victory of Berenice*. Through the queen's epinician praise, he created a strong bond between Egypt, represented by Alexandria, and the Greek world, especially Argolis. This bond was symbolically expressed through Cyrene, the queen's homeland, which served as a bridge between the two worlds. Callimachus' poem underscores this connection through geographic and genealogical references. The mention of Helen of Sparta and Proteus evokes an ancient Greek presence on Egyptian shores⁵⁷; Berenice II's Nemean victory is linked to Heracles, the progenitor of the Macedonian royal line and, according to Ptolemaic propaganda, an ancestor of the Lagid dynasty⁵⁸. The myth of Danaus, king of Argolis and descendant of Zeus and Io, further reinforces the idea of a common origin between Greeks and Egyptians⁵⁹. Additionally, Danaus' lineage connects him to Cyrene, as he was said to have ruled Libya, while his ancestor Epaphus, born to Zeus and Io in Egypt, further solidifies the historical and mythological ties between the two regions⁶⁰. Another symbolic

⁵⁵ See Howe 2018, 173-176.

⁵⁶ Cyrene was founded by settlers from Thera, a Dorian island with strong political and cultural ties to Sparta. This Dorian foundation contributed to Cyrene's adoption of political, cultural, and religious traditions associated with the Dorian world.

⁵⁷ On this topic, cf. Massimilla 2010, 229; Acosta-Huges and Stephens 2012, 163-164; Kampakoglou 2016, 113. The connection between these two figures and Egypt was already attested in Homer's *Odyssey*, according to which Helen and Menelaus, on their return from Troy, encountered the sea god Proteus on the island of Pharos and asked him for information about their fate (Hom. *Od.* 4.347-570). A further link between these two characters and Egypt was later transmitted, in slightly varying versions, by Stesichorus (*PMGF* 192-193), Herodotus (*Hdt.* 2.112-120), and Euripides (*Eur. Hel.*, *passim*), all of whom relate that only an image of Helen went to Troy, while she herself actually remained in Egypt, entrusted to the protection of Proteus, the king of that land.

⁵⁸ Zeus and Heracles, along with Alexander the Great, had already been identified as ancestors of Ptolemy II by court propaganda, as reflected in Theocritus' *Idyll* 17 (*Theocr. Id.* 17.13-33) and were likewise referenced as such in the Adulis inscription (*OGIS* 54.1-5), dated to the reign of the Euergetae. Through this genealogy, the Lagids sought to emphasize – particularly through the figure of Heracles – their full affiliation with the Macedonian royal house, presenting themselves as the legitimate successors of Philip II and Alexander the Great. Heracles, in fact, was already regarded by Herodotus (*Hdt.* 8.137-138) as the mythical ancestor of the Macedonian dynasty founded by the Temenid Perdiccas of Argos, and the demigod was also included in the Ptolemaic genealogy developed in the 2nd century by Satyrus of Alexandria (*BNJ* 631).

⁵⁹ Io, transformed into a heifer by the jealous Hera, arrived in Egypt, where, with Zeus' help, she regained her human form and gave birth to Epaphus, the future king of Egypt. Callimachus must have attributed particular importance to Io, as the *Suda* entry dedicated to him lists a work titled *The Arrival of Io* among his writings. Notably, Callimachus also establishes a connection between Io and Egypt in *Epigr.* 57.1 Pf., where the heroine is identified with Isis. Another notable parallel between the figure of Danaus and the Lagid rulers lies in the fact that both established their sovereignty over a land different from their place of origin by replacing the previous native rulers. Just as, according to myth, Danaus supplanted Pelasgus as ruler of Argos, so too did the Ptolemies succeed the Persian rulers in Egypt.

⁶⁰ Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.1.3.

connection between Greece and Egypt emerges in the juxtaposition of the cult of Dionysus with that of the Apis bull and Osiris-Apis⁶¹. The Euergetae incorporated Dionysus into their dynastic genealogy, using his link to Macedonian tradition to reinforce their legitimacy among the Greek population of their empire⁶². Furthermore, in the Argive cult of Dionysus *Pseudanor* – known and maintained by the Ptolemies⁶³ – female followers called *Mimallones* played a central role⁶⁴. According to the Macedonian Polyaeus⁶⁵, these women, armed with *thyrsos*, rescued Argaeus during an attack by the Illyrian Taulanti. Through her Nemean victory, Berenice II could be seamlessly integrated into this symbolic framework, aligning with the Macedonian tradition that associated women with both war and equestrian excellence⁶⁶.

Through this careful selection and arrangement of content, Callimachus, in celebrating Berenice II's chariot victory at the Nemean Games, forged an indissoluble link between Greece and the Ptolemaic dynasty, mediated by the queen. This connection was expressed both through kinship (Danaos and Io) and through historical and cultural interaction (Helen and Proteus)⁶⁷. The effectiveness of Berenice II's image in this context was further enhanced by certain biographical elements that emphasized her warlike character in connection with her homeland. Cyrenaica had a long-standing royal and aristocratic tradition of equestrian excellence, particularly in chariot racing, as attested by Pindar in his *Pythian Odes*⁶⁸, where he celebrates equestrian victories won in Panhellenic games by two Cyreneans, King Arcesilaos IV and the athlete Telesikrates. He also describes Cyrene as *euhippos* (rich in horses), *dioxippos* (swift in chariots), and *euarmatos* (skilled in chariot warfare)⁶⁹. Berenice II's dedication to equestrian sports seems further confirmed by Hyginus, who recounts the following anecdote:

Alii dicunt hoc amplius Ptolomaeum Berenices patrem, multitudine hostium perterritum, fuga salutem petisse; filiam autem saepe consuetam insiluisse in equum et reliquam copiam exercitus constituuisse et complures hostium interfecisse, reliquos in fugam coniecisse.

Others add that once Ptolemy, Berenice's father, in panic at the number of the enemy, had sought safety in flight, but his daughter, an accomplished horsewoman, leaped on

⁶¹ The reference to Dionysus is established through the explicit mention of the Apis bull of Memphis and the epithet βουγενής attributed to Danaos. This same epithet, according to Plutarch (Plut. Mor. 364F = *De Iside et Osiride* 35), was used by the Argives to venerate Dionysus, who, in this form, was identified in the Lagid tradition with Osiris-Apis. On this topic, see Casadio 1994, 231.

⁶² The opening of the Adulis inscription (OGIS 54) mentions Dionysus as an ancestor of the Ptolemies: βασιλεὺς μέγας Πτολεμαῖος (...) ἀπόγονος (...) τὰ δὲ ἀπὸ μητρὸς Διονύσου τοῦ Διός...

⁶³ Numerous references to Dionysus can be found in the grand procession organized by Ptolemy II in Alexandria for the *Ptolemaia* festival, according to the description by Callixenus as reported in Athen. 5.202a-b. Meanwhile, the *Mimallones* appear alongside other Bacchantes in the opening part of the Dionysian section in Athen. 5.198e.

⁶⁴ Et. Mag. s.v. 'Mimallones'; Suda s.v. 'Mimallones'; Schol. ad Lycophr. 1237; Polyaeus. 4.1.

⁶⁵ Polyaeus. 4.1.

⁶⁶ Cf. Caneva 2013b, 170-171; Angiò 2018, 11-12. On the connection between women and war, see Carney 2000; Mirón Pérez 2000; Pillonel 2008; Caneva 2012.

⁶⁷ See Stephens 2005.

⁶⁸ Pind. *Pyth.* 4, 5, 9. On this matter, cf. D'Alessio 2001, 447, n. 2; Massimilla 2010, 226.

⁶⁹ Respectively, Pind. *Pyth.* 4.2; 9.4 and 4.7.

a horse, organized the remaining troops, killed many of the enemy, and put the rest to flight.⁷⁰

This testimony, like others about Berenice II in Hyginus' work, likely derives from a lost elegiac fragment of Callimachus (388 Pf.), which mentions Magas, the queen's father, and includes the term *poluplōkos*, clearly associated with military contexts⁷¹. Berenice II's interest in equestrian arts likely held political significance on two distinct fronts. On the one hand, it served as an additional element legitimizing Ptolemaic rule over Cyrenaica, aligning with the policies of her father, Magas. Following local traditions, Magas had engraved the image of a horse-drawn chariot on some of the most valuable coins⁷², reinforcing the region's equestrian heritage. On the other hand, through her Cyrenaic origins, the queen reaffirmed a personal connection with Greece. According to Herodotus, it was a tribe from Cyrene that introduced the Greeks to the use of the four-horse chariot⁷³, while another Cyrenean tribe was renowned for allowing women to drive chariots into battle. This established a model of equestrian excellence in which Berenice could seamlessly integrate herself.

Furthermore, it is plausible that by so resolutely embracing Cyrene's equestrian traditions, Berenice II also adopted the political connotations associated with horsemanship in the Greek world. Xenophon, for instance, linked equestrian pursuits to the practice of *sophrosyne*, a virtue traditionally connected to citizenship and the legitimacy of governance⁷⁴. Similarly, Plato regarded horsemanship as an essential component of moral education, applicable to both men and women⁷⁵. The Ptolemaic queen would not have been unaware of these associations: Berenice II was raised at the Cyrenean court, an environment deeply influenced by Platonic thought, where *sophrosyne* played a central role in philosophical education⁷⁶. Later, she had access to the Library of Alexandria, where she engaged with the foremost Greek intellectuals of her time. In the Hellenistic period, with the increasing prominence of women in positions of power, Berenice II's participation in Panhellenic equestrian competitions was not merely a symbol of prestige. Rather, it functioned as a means of asserting her political authority within the Greek world, actively contributing to the legitimacy of the entire Ptolemaic dynasty.

Although Hyginus derives biographical elements about Berenice II from poetic compositions, Callimachus, as a contemporary source, provides information that, despite being exaggerated for celebratory purposes, must have reflected well-known aspects of the queen's life⁷⁷. A particularly significant fact is that after Berenice II's death, her son, Ptolemy IV, established an official cult in her honor, appointing dedicated priestesses known as *athlophorai*, or «prize-bearers»⁷⁸. This designation appears to explicitly allude to Berenice II's Panhellenic victories, making them a defining feature of her cultural legacy. The reference to her equestrian triumphs not only evoked her Cyrenean heritage but also reinforced the legitimacy of Ptolemaic rule, the Lagids' ties to Greece, and arguably her own personal political virtue.

⁷⁰ Hyg. *Astr.* 2.24.17-18.

⁷¹ On Hyginus' sources, cf. Pfeiffer 1949-1953, I, 320-322; Marinone 1997, 23, n. 28; Stephens 2005, 241-242.

⁷² These are gold staters minted between 277 and 261; cf. Naville 1951, 84.

⁷³ Hdt. 4.172-174. On this matter, see Pomeroy 1984, 23, 43; Clayman 2014, 16-17, 154, 157.

⁷⁴ Xen. *On Horsemanship* 6.15; 8.1, 9; 9.2-9; 10.1, 8, 10, 12, 14.

⁷⁵ Among the various passages on this topic found in different Platonic works, notable references include Plat. *Leg.* 7.794c-d, 804c, 813e; 8.834d; *Lach.* 182a and *Resp.* 5.452b-c, 467d.

⁷⁶ On the Cyrenaic school, see Tsouna-McKirahan 1998.

⁷⁷ On the reliability of this passage in Hyginus, cf. Parsons 1977, 45; Marinone 1997, 22-23, n. 28 and Fantuzzi 2005, 264.

⁷⁸ Cf. Ijsewijn 1961; Pestman 1967, 132-163; Minas 2000, 81-171.

The Aegean Islands: Euergetism, Maritime Protection, and the Patronage of Women and the Family

The Aegean basin was the geographic core of the Hellenistic kingdoms and had always been considered a strategic area by the Ptolemies, who sought to assert their influence at the expense of the Antigonids. From the foundation of the dynasty, Ptolemy I and Ptolemy II invested heavily in foreign policy to establish Egypt as the dominant thalassocracy. They strengthened ties with the Aegean islands primarily through the introduction of religious festivals and the erection of cult statues. Ptolemy II, following his father's footsteps, intensified this strategy by extensively promoting the cult of Arsinoe II, often in association with Aphrodite. The cult of Arsinoe II, frequently linked to that of the *Theoi Adelphoi* and the broader Ptolemaic dynasty, was widely attested in several islands, including Cyprus, Delos, Thera, Amorgos, Ios, Lesbos, Paros, and Cos⁷⁹. The association with Aphrodite, a deity linked to safe navigation and the sailors' protection, allowed Arsinoe II to assume similar characteristics, consolidating her role as a divine figure connected to maritime protection and reinforcing Ptolemy II's naval policy throughout the eastern Mediterranean⁸⁰. The pervasive and effective association between the Ptolemaic queen and Aegean policy is evident in the posthumous reference to Arsinoe II in the *Decree of Chremonides*, where she is mentioned as an inspirer of Ptolemy II's Greek policy alongside his predecessors⁸¹. Her influence persisted during the reign of the Euergetae, as various cities continued to be founded in her name, and her cults remained widespread, contributing to the kingdom's cohesion. Once Berenice II and Ptolemy III ascended the throne, they capitalized on the ideological significance of Arsinoe II and its political implications. Berenice II appropriated the posthumous attributes of Arsinoe II, elevating her to the status of her divine 'mother'⁸². Furthermore, in Callimachus' *The Lock of Berenices*, it is Arsinoe II who facilitates the catasterism of the lock of hair dedicated by Berenice at the sanctuary of Arsinoe-Aphrodite at Cape Zephyrion, an act meant to secure her husband's safe return from his eastern military campaign⁸³.

Berenice II thus assumed an ideological role closely connected to the sea, becoming the protector of the Ptolemaic fleet, in association with the cult of Arsinoe II and Aphrodite at Cape Zephyrion. Supporting this connection, Berenice II was venerated under the epithets *Aktia* and *Sozousa*, which were also attributed to Arsinoe II⁸⁴. Her association with Arsinoe II and Aphrodite may have further reinforced her already well-established martial characterization: in Greek tradition, Aphrodite was often depicted with spear and shield, the same attributes that Posidippus ascribes to Arsinoe II in one of his epigrams⁸⁵, highlighting her role in defending the dynasty and supporting Greek *poleis* in Ptolemy II's Aegean policy.

⁷⁹ On the cult of the Ptolemies in the Aegean region, see Grabowski 2014b.

⁸⁰ On the political implications of the cult of Arsinoe II, see esp. Hauben 1983; Caneva 2013a; Grabowski 2014a.

⁸¹ On the interplay between the historical figure of Arsinoe II and the posthumous propagandistic ideology associated with her, cf. primarily Burstein 1982; Criscuolo 1990 and 2003; Hazzard 2000; Müller 2009; Caneva 2013a and 2015.

⁸² Callim. *Aet.* 3, fr. 383 Pf., 2: νύμφα, κα[σιγνή]των ἱερὸν αἶμα θεῶν.

⁸³ See Hauben 2011; Prioux 2011; Harder 2012, 793-885; Caneva 2014, 40-41 and 2023, 90.

⁸⁴ The epithet *Aktia* in reference to Berenice II is attested in *P.Ryl.* IV 585, while *Sozousa* appears in *Zen.* 3.94. The same epithets are associated with Arsinoe II in *P.Enteux.* 26 and *SB V* 7630. See Caneva 2015, 107, 111-112 and 2023, 90, n. 111.

⁸⁵ Posidippus, *Ep.* 36. See Bing 2002/2003, 258-260 and Stephens 2004.

This martial aspect of Berenice II's image was likely instrumental in the spread of her cult across the Aegean. Moreover, it is arguable that Berenice herself played an independently active role in shaping this characterization and, more specifically, in strengthening the kingdom's naval power. Two evidence attest to her recognized and direct connection with these domains. The first is a rare attestation of Berenice II's individual worship in Cyprus: an inscription discovered at Kition, dating to the late third century⁸⁶, records that a *phrouarchos* named Poseidippus, along with the garrison responsible for defending the city's walls, and an *archikynegos* named Boiskos, honored Queen Berenice. This inscription attests to the widespread diffusion of her cult and its association with the military sphere in the Aegean, particularly on one of the most strategically significant islands for the Ptolemaic thalassocracy. The connection between Cyprus and the Ptolemaic dynasty was so crucial that the temple of Arsinoe II, built by the Ptolemaic admiral Callicrates of Samos, was dedicated to Arsinoe-Aphrodite *Cypria*. It is likely that the close ties between the Ptolemaic kingdom and Cyprus played a role in the association of Ptolemaic queens with Aphrodite⁸⁷. The second evidence is P.Ryl. IV 576, which refers to the queen as possessing a fleet of her own. This might have been the Cyrenean fleet from her dowry.

Furthermore, Berenice II projected her ideological role as protector of the seas and the navy through the introduction of Dioscuri symbols – stars, *pilei*, or *pilei* topped with stars – on the coins she issued. The Dioscuri were traditionally venerated as protectors of travelers, especially maritime voyagers, and were also linked to the military sphere, frequently depicted with spears and shields. The cult of the Dioscuri was already present under Arsinoe II⁸⁸, and in Callimachus they are the ones who transport the deceased queen to Olympus⁸⁹. However, Berenice II seems to have emphasized her association with the divine twins to a greater extent, as evidenced by the consistent use of their symbols on her coinage. Stars appear on Berenice II's Attic-standard emissions⁹⁰, while the *pilei* are primarily found on Attic-standard silver series⁹¹, 15-drachm silver pieces⁹², and the double *mnaiēion* of Arsinoe II, minted in Alexandria, likely to commemorate Ptolemy III's return from his eastern campaign⁹³. It is notable that the Dioscuri symbols appear consistently on Berenice II's Attic-standard issues, possibly intended for circulation in Greece or for dual circulation in both Egypt and Greece⁹⁴. Given the dating and historical context, it is plausible that these series were used for military payments, perhaps in exceptional circumstances. By associating herself with the Dioscuri in this manner, Berenice II established another strong personal bond with the military, particularly the fleet⁹⁵. Furthermore, her Cyrenean origins reinforced her connection to the Dioscuri, given

⁸⁶ IG XV 2, 20. On this inscription, cf. Summa 2020.

⁸⁷ Indeed, on a hill near Paphos, also called Cape Zephyrium, there was a temple dedicated to Aphrodite *Akraia*. Cf. Młynarczyk 1990, 118 and Grabowski 2014a, 126, n. 54, who also identifies some possible precedents for similar cultic influences.

⁸⁸ This is a dedication dated to the reign of Ptolemy II, in which the Dioscuri are referred to as *synnaoi theoi* of the king. On this matter, cf. Grabowski 2014a, 126, n. 53, with further bibliography.

⁸⁹ Call. fr. 228 Pf.

⁹⁰ CPE 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 744, 745, 747.

⁹¹ CPE 742, 743, 746, 748.

⁹² CPE 734.

⁹³ CPE 733.

⁹⁴ Cf. Newell 1927, 11-12; Naville 1951, 105; Bagnall 1999; Olivier 2006, 120-123. Scholarship remains divided on this reasoning regarding the reintroduction of the Attic standard. For further hypotheses, cf. Poole 1883, xlvii-xlviii; Svoronos 1904, nos. 962-963, 972-973, 978-982, 986-991; Koch 1923, 100-103; Giesecke 1930, 46-49; Jähne 1974, 508; Hazzard 1995, 5; von Reden 2007, 54, n. 105; Lorber 2018, 166.

⁹⁵ See Kyrieleis 1975, 95.

their shared Doric heritage⁹⁶. It is interesting to note that, while Berenice II was the first Ptolemaic queen to introduce the Dioscuri symbols on her coinage, a precedent exists in a series minted in Cyrene by her father, Magas, possibly as part of an effort to reestablish ties with the Ptolemies⁹⁷. Finally, the imagery of the Dioscuri, especially in Berenice II's earliest coinage from 246-245, aligned perfectly with her symbolic role in securing her husband's return from war, as recounted by Callimachus⁹⁸. This iconography, which also evoked the concept of a deity revealing themselves (*epiphaneia*)⁹⁹, may have ideologically prepared the way for the divine honors bestowed upon the royal couple, which began as early as 243.

Berenice II's association with the martial sphere and, in particular, her role as protector of the Ptolemaic fleet finds further confirmation in her assimilation to *Agathe Tyche*, the deity responsible for ensuring good fortune and safeguarding ships. A mosaic from the ancient city of Thmuis (modern Tell Timai) depicts the queen wearing a headdress shaped like a ship, along with the royal diadem and a mast held like a scepter¹⁰⁰. The ship is adorned with marine creatures, cornucopias, and the stars of the Dioscuri, reinforcing her maritime identity. In the Egyptian context, *Agathe Tyche* was closely associated with Isis and venerated as a bestower of prosperity. It was likely from this fusion that Ptolemy II, after Arsinoe II's death, attributed to her the double cornucopia, a traditional symbol of *Agathe Tyche*¹⁰¹. By aligning herself with *Agathe Tyche*, Berenice II reinforced the image of the Ptolemaic dynasty as both powerful and prosperous, further enhancing its prestige in the Hellenistic world¹⁰².

Thus far, the significance of Berenice II's adoption of the ideological attributes associated with Arsinoe II has been emphasized, in relation to the Aegean and her role as a protector of the sea and a symbol of abundance. However, the Lagid queen also developed a distinct identity of her own, actively promoted through a comprehensive propaganda strategy that made her immediately recognizable in contrast to her predecessor. The most original and widespread element of Berenice II's characterization within the Ptolemaic dynasty is her association with Demeter. The goddess, venerated alongside Kore, held a central role in Cyrene, where a temple dedicated to them stood in the *agora*, and her cult was also attested in Alexandria¹⁰³. The link between Berenice II and Demeter may further derive from the queen's origins, as Cyrenaica was a major exporter of wheat and other cereals. The queen herself owned ships used for grain transport, a fleet that was likely mobilized during the famine that struck Egypt around 245 and 240¹⁰⁴. Callimachus' *Hymn to Demeter* also

⁹⁶ Paus. 3.16.2 and *Suda* s.v. 'Φορμίων', no. 604 Adler report a legendary appearance of the Dioscuri at the house of the Spartan Phormion, to whom they gifted the silphium plant. This legend reinforced the connection between the Laconic origins of the Dioscuri and their cult in Cyrene. See Caccamo Caltabiano 2007, 116.

⁹⁷ The stars of the Dioscuri appear on the reverse of some coin issues of Magas, which do not feature the traditional club type but rather a thunderbolt, an atypical symbol for Cyrene that may instead reference Ptolemaic numismatic iconography. Cf. Caccamo Caltabiano 2007, 117.

⁹⁸ See Lorber 2018, 181, 395.

⁹⁹ Cf. Kyrieleis 1986, 55-72.

¹⁰⁰ The original mosaic is currently preserved at the Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria, along with a copy. For the identification of Berenice II and her assimilation to the nautical figure of *Agathe Tyche*, cf. Daszewski 1985.

¹⁰¹ See Grabowski 2014a, 124, with previous bibliography.

¹⁰² On the association of Berenice II with *Agathe Tyche* and Isis, as attested on various *oinochoai* found in both Egypt and Greece, see Burr Thompson 1973; Caneva 2023, 117-121, with previous bibliography.

¹⁰³ On the sanctuary of Demeter in Cyrene, see White 1993. On the cult of Demeter in Alexandria, see Fraser 1972, 198-201. For a general discussion, see Clayman 2014, 84-85.

¹⁰⁴ On Berenice II's possession of ships for grain transport, see *P.Ryl.* IV 576.

contributed to the dissemination of the Berenice II-Demeter association throughout the Greek world, emphasizing the queen's role as a guarantor of the harvest and abundance – a central theme in her ideological representation. On the one hand, Egypt was the primary grain supplier to Greece; on the other, upon ascending the throne, between 246 and 245, Berenice faced a severe famine that, in her husband's absence, exacerbated internal crises and contributed to the outbreak of a rebellion. A few years later, in 238, the Euergetae couple once again confronted a famine, ultimately resorting to importing grain from abroad at a high price¹⁰⁵.

As previously highlighted, Berenice II employed coinage as one of her principal propaganda tools, directly disseminating her association with Demeter throughout the Greek world. While adopting from Arsinoe II the cornucopia motif on the reverse of her coins, Berenice II made her connection to the goddess unmistakable by incorporating a wheat ear among the fruits¹⁰⁶. Through her assimilation with Demeter, Berenice II became a symbol of abundance, fertility, and, consequently, euergetism within the Greek world. The Ptolemaic rulers themselves sought to integrate this characteristic into their divine cult. Moreover, in Cyrene, as well as in Alexandria, the cult of Demeter *Thesmophoros* is attested, a deity who ensured human well-being precisely through her euergetic nature¹⁰⁷.

The political significance of Berenice II's association with the Dioscuri and Demeter in the Aegean region may find confirmation in a municipal coin issue from the island of Melos. This bronze coin features on the obverse the island's traditional symbol, the pomegranate, while the reverse displays a cornucopia with a wheat ear, encircled by the royal diadem and flanked by the *pilei* of the Dioscuri, topped with stars¹⁰⁸. Beyond representing Melos, the pomegranate on the obverse may also allude to an attribute of Demeter. The choice of symbols on the reverse suggests a direct connection between the island and Berenice II, and the fact that this issue appears to have been short-lived may indicate that the coins were minted for a specific extraordinary occasion¹⁰⁹. While there are no other recorded ties between Melos and the Ptolemaic kingdom under the Euergetae¹¹⁰, this isolated coinage seems to attest to a relationship, albeit temporary, between the island and the Lagid court. Notably, the simultaneous use of the two Dioscuri symbols (*pilei* and stars), which do not appear in Alexandrian coinage, may have been a deliberate choice by the island to highlight Ptolemaic interest in the Aegean. Furthermore, the presence of the Demeter-Berenice II type, rather than that of Ptolemy III, may suggest that the coinage was a tribute to the Ptolemaic queen in recognition of an act of euergetism.

The most explicit testimony to Berenice II's political role in the Aegean is provided by Hyginus, who records the following passage:

Eratosthenes autem dicit et virginibus Lesbiis dotem quam cuique relictam a parente nemo solveret, iussisse reddi, et interea constituisse petitionem.

¹⁰⁵ This information is found in the Canopus' Decree: OGIS 56, 13-19.

¹⁰⁶ On the iconographic elements of Berenice II's assimilation to Demeter, cf. Pantos 1987.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Clayman 2014, 84-85.

¹⁰⁸ CPE B411.

¹⁰⁹ CPE 99.

¹¹⁰ Bagnall (Bagnall 1976) does not report any relationship between Melos and the Ptolemies in the second half of the third century.

Eratosthenes says that she ordered returned to the girls of Lesbos the dowry left to them by their parents, which no one had released, and she established among them right to bring action of recovery.¹¹¹

This episode appears immediately after the mention of Berenice II's dispatch of horses to Olympia and her martial prowess on horseback, which enabled her to save her father, both elements that, as previously noted, may derive from Callimachus. In this passage, Hyginus cites Eratosthenes as his source, one of the principal intellectuals of the Alexandrian court and a contemporary of the events described. Although favorable to the Lagids, Eratosthenes was also well-informed about internal dynastic affairs, lending credibility to his account. Ptolemaic influence in Lesbos may be corroborated by the presence of the Lagids on the island under Ptolemy II and later under Ptolemy IV¹¹², yet Hyginus' passage represents the only attested reference to a relationship between the Euergetae and Lesbos. According to Hyginus, Berenice II personally intervened in legal matters concerning the dowry rights of Lesbos' maidens, suggesting that petitions may have been directly addressed to the queen from the island¹¹³. While available evidence does not allow us to determine whether Berenice II regularly participated in judicial decisions alongside her husband or if this was an isolated case, Hyginus' testimony clearly presents the queen as an authoritative figure capable of issuing binding legal decrees on the matter.

This prerogative may be linked to the central role that Berenice II sought to assume, both in Egypt and abroad, as a devoted wife and a nurturing, fertile mother. The turbulent circumstances surrounding the accession of Ptolemy II and Ptolemy III – marked by the practice of polygamy and the lack of direct heirs for the Philadelphoi – led the Euergetae to emphasize dynastic stability in their propaganda. This stability was primarily ensured by the presence of numerous natural heirs and the strong familial bonds within the royal house. Within this framework, Berenice II's association with Demeter in Greek cultural contexts served a particularly functional role, especially within the cult of the *Thesmophoria*, where the goddess was venerated as the protector of women and the family. In Alexandria, the cult of Demeter was connected to the Eleusinian Mysteries¹¹⁴, while Berenice II's identification with Demeter *Thesmophoros* is confirmed by the introduction of the toponym *Berenikis Thesmophorou*¹¹⁵. Moreover, in Cyrene, the queen's homeland, the cult of Demeter exhibited strong Attic influences¹¹⁶. Assimilated with Demeter, the universally recognized protector of women, children, and the family, Berenice II likely played an active role in legislation concerning these domains. The queen was arguably recognized as having a form of patronage over such matters, given her divine association and this suggest her influence extended directly into legal frameworks affecting the well-being of families. The interaction between Lesbos and the Ptolemaic kingdom may also be part of a broader Lagid political strategy aimed at maintaining good relations with the Aegean islands and Ionia. Recent studies on Callimachus have identified a dense network of references to Sappho in his compositions dedicated to Ptolemaic queens, suggesting possible propagandistic support for the Lagid political agenda¹¹⁷. This symbolic connection may

¹¹¹ Hyg. Astr. 2.24.

¹¹² See Bagnall 1976, 161-162.

¹¹³ Cf. Clayman 2014, 124.

¹¹⁴ See Fraser 1972, 198-201; Skowronek and Tzakzow 1981, 131 and Pantos 1987, 346-347.

¹¹⁵ The epithet is attested in *P.enteux*. 86, r. 2. On this matter, see Tondriau 1948, 22-23, n. 8 and Lorber 2018, 177, n. 321.

¹¹⁶ See Pantos 1987, 346, n. 29.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Brun 1991; Bing 2005, 123-130; Acosta-Hughes 2010, 74-75; Barbantani 2020, 112.

have also extended to Berenice II, whom Callimachus praised as the fourth among the Graces¹¹⁸, just as Sappho, according to an anonymous epigram, was counted among the Muses due to her poetic excellence¹¹⁹.

Athens: Berenice as a Martial Queen in the Image of Athena Parthenos

The available sources suggest that Athens recognized Berenice II's role in supporting her husband's pro-Athenian policy. The friendly relations between Athens and the Ptolemies, attested continuously since the time of Ptolemy I, were always aimed at countering Antigonid influence in the region. Specifically, between 229 and 224/3, Ptolemy III supported Athens in its anti-Antigonid efforts, albeit indirectly¹²⁰. In 229, he may have contributed – possibly by financing Aratus, then an ally of Athens – to the withdrawal of Macedonian troops from the city. By 226, the Antigonid threat led to an alliance between the Ptolemaic kingdom, the Aetolian League, and Athens¹²¹.

From 224/3 onwards, numerous testimonies, including cultic evidence, attest to the close political ties between the Euergetae and Athens, confirming the active role of Ptolemy III and Berenice II in strengthening the city's alliance with Egypt. In 224/3, Athens granted Ptolemy III the title of eponymous hero of the *polis* and instituted a new official festival in his honor, the *Ptolemaia*¹²². In honor of Berenice II, a new *deme* was established, named *Berenikidai*, within which a new tribe, the *Ptolemais*, was founded¹²³. Additionally, a priest dedicated to Ptolemy III and Berenice II is attested in an inscription found on a seat in the *prohedria* within the Theater of Dionysus¹²⁴ and a statue of Ptolemy III was placed in the monument of the Eponymous Heroes, both in Athens and at Delphi¹²⁵. The head of a statue of Berenice II has also been discovered, though its original location remains uncertain¹²⁶. Furthermore, Polybius confirms the city's close ties with Ptolemy III, accusing the *polis* of excessive adulation toward various rulers, particularly the Ptolemaic king¹²⁷.

Although Athens regularly conferred honors upon reigning monarchs – as seen in the cases of Antigonus Monophthalmus, Demetrius Poliorcetes, and Ptolemy III¹²⁸ – after Phila¹²⁹, Berenice II was the first royal woman to receive such distinctions in the city.

The connection between Athens and Berenice II, as a representative of Ptolemaic support for the city, is further suggested by two cameos depicting the queen wearing the helmet of Athena,

¹¹⁸ Call. *Ep.* 51 (= *AP* 5.146).

¹¹⁹ *AP* 9.571.

¹²⁰ On Lagid policy in the Aegean region, cf. Habicht 1992; Grabowski 2012.

¹²¹ An Athenian inscription honoring a *philos* of Ptolemy III dates to this period: *PP* VI 14608. Cf. Hölbl 2001, 52.

¹²² *ISE* I, Athens 30-31.

¹²³ Paus. 1.5.5; 10.10.2; Steph. Byz. s.v. 'Βερενικίδαι'.

¹²⁴ *IG* II² 4676, 5029a. See Kotsidu 2000, 68-69; Palagia 2007, 237-238.

¹²⁵ Paus. 10.10.2. Cf. Palagia 2007, 237.

¹²⁶ See Palagia 2007.

¹²⁷ Polyb. 5.106.1-8.

¹²⁸ See Chaniotis 2003, with previous bibliography.

¹²⁹ This refers to Phila I, wife of Demetrius Poliorcetes. According to the testimony of Athenaeus (254a and 255c), a certain Adimantus of Lampsacus is said to have erected a temple for Phila-Aphrodite in an Athenian deme.

thereby assuming the martial attributes characteristic of Athena *Parthenos*¹³⁰. Alexandrian court propaganda likely contributed to the diffusion of this association in the Greek world: in his *Hymn to Athena*, Callimachus emphasizes the similarities between Berenice II and the goddess, highlighting their shared wisdom and devotion to war and horsemanship. Once again, the emphasis on the queen's martial qualities aligns with the ideological constructs of legitimacy in the Greek context. An additional factor that may have facilitated Berenice II's association with Athena is their shared Cyrenean origin¹³¹. According to tradition, the goddess was born in Cyrene, where her cult had strong martial connotations¹³², an aspect not as prevalent in Alexandria. This connection between the Ptolemaic queen and a distinctly warlike representation of Athena, rooted in Cyrenean tradition, may also be referenced in a fragment of Callimachus, in which the names of Berenice II, her father Magas, and a term related to a spear appear together¹³³. The passage may thus be linked to Hyginus' account, which states that Berenice II saved her father, mistakenly identified as Ptolemy II, by intervening on horseback with a spear in hand¹³⁴.

The Aetolian League: Guaranteeing Dynastic Continuity and Strengthening Ptolemaic Thalassocracy

Starting in the 230s, one of the key pillars of Ptolemaic pro-Greeks policy was a lasting alliance with the Aetolian League, pursued primarily as an anti-Antigonid strategy. In 245, Aetolia and Macedonia were allied against the Achaean League and Alexander, the rebellious nephew of Antigonus Gonatas. However, over the next decade, tensions between the Aetolians and Antigonids escalated¹³⁵. Aetolia found itself encircled by Antigonid-controlled territories, from Epirus to Boeotia, and to defend itself, it aligned its interests with those of the Ptolemaic kingdom. Initially, the Aetolians forged an alliance with the Achaean League, a longstanding ally of the Ptolemies against the Antigonids. Later, when the Achaeans sided with Antigonus Doson, both the Aetolian League and Ptolemaic Egypt sought the support of Sparta, solidifying their opposition to Macedonian expansionism.

The Ptolemaic-Aetolian alliance is explicitly mentioned only in the *Papyrus Hauniensis*¹³⁶, but other indirect sources confirm its significance and continuity throughout the reign of the Euergetae, as well as the prominent role played by Berenice II in this context. Around 238, the Aetolians erected two dynastic monument groups in honor of the Ptolemaic royal family, one at

¹³⁰ The cameos are housed in the *Cabinet des Médailles* of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, inventory numbers 63 (*Bérénice II assimilée à Athéna Parthénos*) and 65 (*Bérénice II assimilée à Athéna*), in Vollenweider 1995, 80-81.

¹³¹ Aesch. *Eum.* 292-293; Hdt. 4.189; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.1308-1311.

¹³² Hdt. 4.180.

¹³³ Fr. 388 Pf.

¹³⁴ Hyg. *Astr.* 2.24.11-18. On Hyginus' sources, see Marinone 1997, 23, n. 28; Stephens 2005, 241-242. On the connection between Hyginus' text and fragment 388 Pf., see Pfeiffer 1949-1953, I, 320-322.

¹³⁵ For a comprehensive overview of the political situation in the Aegean between 250 and 227 and the relevant sources, see Will 1982², 231-233; 315-377. For a specific focus on the Aetolian League's policy within the same chronological framework, see Grainger 1999, 147-243; Scholten 2000, 135-138, on which the summary reconstruction provided in the text is based. For a recent study entirely dedicated to Ptolemaic relations with the Achaean and Aetolian Leagues between 250 and 220, see Grabowski 2012.

¹³⁶ *P.Haun* I 6, 18.

Thermon and another at Delphi¹³⁷. These monuments featured statues of the Ptolemaic family members, placed on bases inscribed with dedicatory epigrams. The better-preserved structure is that of Thermon, where the inscription lists, in order, King Ptolemy III, the crown prince (the future Ptolemy IV), Queen Berenice II, and the other five children: Arsinoe, Berenice, Lysimachus (?)¹³⁸, Alexander, and Magas. The monument was dedicated by the *koinon* of the Aetolians, who justified its erection by citing the valor and euergetism demonstrated by the Ptolemies toward the League and the Greek world¹³⁹. The structure had a clear political function: to celebrate the alliance between Ptolemy III and the Aetolians and, given the prominent placement of the crown prince, to signal the expectation that the partnership would continue into the next generation¹⁴⁰. Beyond reinforcing the dynasty's stability – typical of dynastic monuments – this dedication particularly emphasized the unity of the sovereigns, who were presented as an inseparable pair, and their close bond with their children. Thus, Berenice II perfectly embodied the ideal model of a wife and mother, an image that the Alexandrian court actively promoted to underscore the stability of the Ptolemaic dynasty, particularly in contrast to the dynastic crises affecting other Hellenistic powers. The emphasis on the queen's fertility and her close relationship with her children was a distinctive feature of Euergetae propaganda, marking a departure from earlier royal couples. The polygamy practiced by Ptolemy I and Ptolemy II had led to serious succession disputes, and Arsinoe II had produced no offspring with her brother-husband, Ptolemy II. In contrast, Berenice II and Ptolemy III remained together throughout their lives and had six children in roughly seven years¹⁴¹. For the Aetolians, then, Berenice II, through her fertility and strong marital bond, represented a crucial guarantor of the continuity of the Ptolemaic-Aetolian alliance for future generations.

Further confirmation of the prominence attributed to Berenice II within the Aetolian monument can be found in the inscription on the base that once supported her now-lost statue:

βασιλίισσαν Β[ερ]εν[ίκαν]
 βασιλέως Μάγα
 Μακέταν.

Queen Berenice, daughter of King Magas, the Macedonian.

A significant aspect of this inscription is the characterization of Berenice II – like the other members of her family mentioned – as Macedonian. This detail not only reflects the Ptolemaic strategy of legitimizing their rule within the Greek world but, in the specific context of relations with the Aetolian League, may have also served to strengthen ties with the mercenaries whom Aetolia regularly supplied to the Ptolemaic army. Another particularly intriguing aspect is the Aetolian League's deliberate disregard for Alexandrian propaganda, which presented the Euergetae as the legitimate offspring of the Philadelphoi. The inscription explicitly identifies Magas as Berenice II's father and acknowledges him with the title of *basileus*¹⁴². This suggests that the Aetolians regarded Berenice II as the rightful heir to the Cyrenaican kingdom of Magas, which she

¹³⁷ These correspond to *IG IX, I*² 56, referring to the well-known exedra at Thermon, and *F.Delphes* III 4, 233, which should be corrected according to Kosmetatou 2002. On both monuments, cf. Huss 1975; Hintzen Bohlen 1990 and 1992, 134; Bennett 2002; Criscuolo 2003, 323; Kosmetatou 2004b. On the exedra at Thermon, see also the recent study by Cavalli 2017.

¹³⁸ The inscription is not legible at that point, but the reconstruction proposed in Bennett 2002, 144 is accepted.

¹³⁹ Αἰτωλῶν τὸ κοινὸν ἀρετᾶς ἔνεκεν καὶ εὐεργεσίας τᾶς εἰς τὸ ἔθν[ος] καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους Ἕλληνας.

¹⁴⁰ See Colin 1930, 275-278, nn. 232-234; Hintzen Bohlen 1990, 145-146; Kosmetatou 2004b, 240.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Bennett 2002. On the importance attributed by the Euergetae couple to their children within dynastic propaganda, see Kosmetatou 2004a, 33 and 2004b; Clayman 2014, 163-164.

¹⁴² See Clayman 2014, 139.

brought as her dowry to Ptolemy III. Such recognition not only enhanced the queen's prestige but may also indicate an Aetolian interest in emphasizing ties with Cyrenaica, underscoring the region's strategic and political importance in relations with the Ptolemies.

Another testament to Berenice II's significance to the Aetolian League is the presence of her portrait on several seals discovered in Aetolia, specifically at Kallipolis¹⁴³. The archive at Kallipolis has yielded seals depicting Ptolemaic rulers from the very founder of the dynasty, but the most numerous belong to Ptolemy III, demonstrating that while Ptolemaic-Aetolian relations had existed since the dynasty's inception, they intensified under the Euergetae. Royal portraits on signet rings were symbols of authority and were used for official correspondence¹⁴⁴.

Among all the Ptolemaic seals found at Kallipolis, no fewer than eleven bear the portrait of Berenice II, depicted with the attributes of Demeter – veil, wheat ears, and cornucopia – exactly as she appears on her coinage. This is, to date, the first known instance of a queen being represented on the seals of the Kallipolis archive, a clear indication of her official recognition in diplomatic relations between the Aetolian League and the Ptolemaic kingdom. The Alexandrian court's choice to depict Berenice II with Demeter's iconography followed the standard official representation of the queen but may have also served to reinforce religious ties between the Aetolian League and the Ptolemaic kingdom. In Aetolia, the cult of Demeter held significant importance, as attested by the presence of *theokoleousai/theokolesasai*, priestesses dedicated to the goddess. These priestesses, through their various functions, including some extending beyond strictly religious duties, exercised considerable influence within the *poleis*¹⁴⁵. Berenice II's association with Demeter on the seals also finds a parallel in her representation within the exedra at Thermon¹⁴⁶: Demeter's best-known attributes – fertility and the protection of family, particularly children – align with the characteristics emphasized in Berenice II's depiction within the Aetolian monument. Further evidence of the Aetolian League's close ties with the entire Ptolemaic royal family, as well as Berenice II's role as a guarantor of dynastic succession and continuity, comes from the discovery of seals at Kallipolis bearing the image of Ptolemy IV as a child. These seals must have circulated alongside those of the Euergetae, underscoring the importance of the dynasty and its stability¹⁴⁷.

Considering the various representations of Berenice II that Ptolemaic propaganda promoted in the Greek world, her image as a protector of the seas and the fleet provides another point of convergence with Aetolian strategic interests. The Aetolians, well known for their acts of piracy, began forging connections with numerous Aegean islands and several coastal sites in Asia Minor during the 250s and 240s¹⁴⁸ and around 227 they signed a treaty with Knossos¹⁴⁹. Crete, a region of strong Ptolemaic influence, served as a strategic naval base – both commercially and militarily – while also providing a valuable source of mercenaries¹⁵⁰. For the Euergetae, an alliance with the

¹⁴³ On these seals, cf. Pantos 1985 and 1987.

¹⁴⁴ See Pantos 1985.

¹⁴⁵ SEG XL 457; BE 358; 286; SEG XLV 285. Cf. Antonetti 1990, 274-276 and 2010, 322-323.

¹⁴⁶ Another point of connection between the depictions on the seals and the Aetolian dynastic monuments is the Macedonian characterization of the dynasty: Ptolemy III is represented on the seals wearing the *kausia*, a typical Macedonian headdress, which has no other known attestations in representations of the Ptolemaic ruler. Cf. Pantos 1985.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Pantos 1985.

¹⁴⁸ See Grabowski 2012, 91.

¹⁴⁹ Polyb. 4.53.8; 4.55.5. Cf. Scholten 2000, 193-196; Grabowski 2012, 94.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Bagnall 1976, 117-122; Beyer-Rothhoff 1993, 219-220; Huss 2001, 360-362.

Aetolians not only provided a crucial military counterweight against Antigonid power in mainland Greece but also ensured greater security for Mediterranean maritime routes, essential for maintaining Ptolemaic thalassocracy. In official Alexandrian propaganda, this domain was closely associated with Berenice II, who was portrayed as its patron, further reinforcing her political and ideological role within the dynasty.

Conclusions

Based on the evidence discussed so far, Berenice II played a significant role in strengthening ties between the Ptolemaic kingdom and the Greek-Macedonian world. She not only publicly clarified the direction of Ptolemaic foreign policy but also fostered loyalty and allegiance to the dynasty. Within the Greek-Macedonian context, the queen embodied the strength and unity of the royal house: while certainly acting in continuity with certain aspects of Arsinoe II's legacy, Berenice II nonetheless constructed a new dynastic model based on family stability and the security of succession. In certain cases, her propagandistic image was so effective and pervasive that it translated into a tangible role in specific political and administrative spheres. The case of the women of Lesbos¹⁵¹, in which she acted as an intermediary between the kingdom and populations within the Ptolemaic sphere of influence, serves as a clear example of this phenomenon.

Her involvement in Ptolemaic international relations was closely linked to the dissemination of an official image, which was adapted according to the kingdom's political needs. As this representation was the product of an artistic and literary construct developed at the Alexandrian court, it is difficult to determine with precision the extent of the queen's personal influence in shaping her own public profile. However, a careful analysis of Berenice II's biography within the broader historical-political context suggests that she may have played an active role in directing court intellectuals and shaping the propaganda they produced and disseminated throughout the Hellenistic world. The images of the queen that were received beyond Egypt proved to be effective tools in enhancing the international political influence of the Ptolemaic dynasty.

The success of Berenice II's figure in the Greek world, both in terms of public perception and political impact, appears to stem from the continuous intertwining of propagandistic elements with historical and biographical aspects of the queen's own life. This connection between personal biography and propagandistic construction rendered the representation of Berenice II both credible and authoritative, reinforcing not only her personal prestige but also the stability and consolidation of the Ptolemaic dynasty's political power, both within and beyond the kingdom's borders.

The analysis of Berenice II's political impact through her public image ultimately sheds light on a crucial aspect of the extraordinary political experimentation of the Hellenistic period. This era, marked by a constant search for balance between tradition and innovation, witnessed a transformation in the very conception of royal femininity starting in the third century¹⁵². Queens such as Berenice II contributed to redefining the political and symbolic role of women within Hellenistic monarchies, opening new perspectives on the legitimization and transmission of power and for the exercise of power, particularly through close relationships with intellectuals and the connection established with the fleet.

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¹⁵¹ See above.

¹⁵² On this topic, see the contributions on the Hellenistic period in Carney and Müller 2020.

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