Before his death, Magas of Cyrene betrothed his daughter Berenice to the Egyptian heir, the future Ptolemy III. Magas’s widow Apame, however, offered her daughter to Demetrius the Fair, the son of Demetrius I Poliorcetes. As a result of his insolence, Demetrius was assassinated and Berenice renewed her engagement to the Ptolemaic prince. Historians disagree whether the wedding took place before or after Ptolemy III succeeded to the throne, but for some time between Demetrius’s death and Ptolemy’s accession the Cyrenaeans established an independent republican government. After their marriage, Ptolemy and Berenice were officially proclaimed the children of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II, the Theoi Adelphi (“Sibling Gods”), even though Arsinoe was the mother of neither, and Berenice was not her husband’s sister. Their wedding was celebrated in poetry—such as Callimachus’s Coma Berenices and an anonymous epithalamium.

While the relative chronology of most of these events is not itself particularly controversial, the exact dating remains conjectural in each instance, except the accession of Ptolemy III. We shall see that there are two schools of thought for dating Magas’s death and for Berenice’s marriage to Ptolemy III. This chapter explores the extant sources, including numismatic and epigraphic evidence, to place the events related to the betrothal and eventual marriage of Ptolemy and Berenice on a more secure footing. I also take the opportunity of examining what these events reveal about Berenice. The last part aims to offer an explanation why Ptolemy and Berenice were officially presented as children of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II, as well as what may be inferred from her appearance in Egyptian documents. As such, my purpose is to improve our understanding of early Ptolemaic chronology, genealogy, and queenship.
As we saw in “Magas, Apame, and Berenice II,” there is no secure evidence for the date of Magas’s death. Agatharchides’s statement (ap. Athen. 12.74 [550B]) that he died after having ruled as king (basileusanta) for 50 years in Cyrene is in itself inaccurate. If Magas claimed his independence from Ptolemaic Egypt at all, this must have been sometime in the 270s or 260s BCE when he unsuccessfully marched on Ptolemy II. Pausanias relates (1.6.8) that Ptolemy I installed Magas as governor after a five-year rebellion in Cyrene. He places this rebellion around the period of the Battle of Ipsus (301 BCE), when Ptolemy also regained Coele-Syria (302/1 BCE) and Cyprus (295 BCE), and restored Pyrrhus in Epirus (297 BCE). In other words, when this rebellion began and when Magas recaptured Cyrene for Ptolemy is not at all clear. Historians must then resort to speculations for dating Magas’s death. One train of thought, now mostly rejected, reasons that the Cyrenean rebellion Pausanias referred to must be Ophellas’s Carthaginian adventure (310–308 BCE) and thus arrives at 259/8 BCE for the date of Magas’s death. This date is seemingly confirmed by Porphyry (ap. Euseb. Chron. I: 237), who places the death of Demetrius the Fair in the second year of the 130th Olympiad (=259/8 BCE). Additionally, Justin (Epit. 26.2.8–3.2) records that around the time of Magas’s death, Alexander II of Epirus regained his kingdom, which he lost to Antigonus II Gonatas during the Chremonidean War (ca. 263/2 BCE). Obviously, this calculation of Magas’s death does not square well with Pausanias, as Ophellas’s adventure neither lasted for five years nor can be considered a rebellion. Moreover, Diodorus (whose work survives for the period up to 301 BCE) makes no mention of Magas’s appointment as Ptolemaic governor in Cyrene.

The argument now commonly accepted suggests that after the Battle of Salamis (306 BCE), in which Egypt lost Cyprus to Demetrius I Poliorcetes, the Cyreneans revolted and claimed their independence (ca. 305–300 BCE), which thus offers 250/49 BCE as the date of Magas’s death. While this calculation appears more satisfactory, it explains neither Porphyry’s date for the death of Demetrius the Fair nor the impossibly long period in which Epirus would have been in Antigonid power (viz., ca. 263/2–250/49 BCE). Moreover, as historians have conventionally dated the marriage of Magas and Apame before the First Syrian War (i.e., ca. 276/5 BCE), it is odd to say the least that their only (surviving) child was a mere teenager at her father’s death some 25 years later. In the previous chapter I have proposed to date Magas’s marriage to Apame around the time of the Chremonidean War (ca. 269/8 BCE), giving a birth date of ca. 267/6 BCE for Berenice.