

The Great *Wanassa* Wears a Mural Crown: An Iconographic Analysis of a Paphian Coin

Jordan Johansen

Coins were significant vehicles for state-making and iconographic representation in the ancient world. This project interprets the mural crown iconography of one rare late-4th century BCE coin type issued by King Nikokles I in the independent Cypriot kingdom of Paphos. This coin shows a beautifully adorned female figure wearing two distinct headdress types: a *polos*, usually associated with fertility, and a mural crown, representing city walls and often associated with Tyche, the Greek goddess of fortune.

The identification of mural crowns with Tyche is only appropriate for the period spanning the early-3rd c. BCE (after the creation of the famous sculpture, the *Tyche of Antioch*) to Late Antiquity. This coin, however, is from an earlier, politically tense period between the death of Alexander the Great and the Ptolemaic acquisition of Cyprus. Understanding the history and culture of mural crowning practices is crucial for a successful reading of this coin's iconography. This will elucidate the purpose and function of the coin not apparent on strictly numismatic grounds.

While scholarship specifically on mural crowns is scant, I have identified four general trends in handling extant mural crowns in art historical, numismatic, literary, and museum scholarship concerning the Near East, Greece, and Rome. From these approaches, I suggest that the mural crown is a symbolic representation of the civic deity for Paphos and heavily associated with Mother Goddess fertility worship. Since Paphos, the issuing city, is the mythological birthplace and cult center of the great *Wanassa*, the Cypriot Mother Goddess (called Aphrodite by the Greeks), and King Nikokles I, the issuing king, was her head priest, I suggest that the coin represents not Tyche but the great *Wanassa* of Cyprus acting as a conservative and archaizing element in this politically tense period.

Word Count: 289