

**Epigraphy, Numismatics,  
Prosopography and History of  
Ancient Cyprus.  
Papers in Honour of  
Ino Nicolaou**

edited by

**Demetrios Michaelides**



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# Menelaos, King of Salamis

Evangelina Markou

## Introduction

If the literary sources did not exist and we only had to rely on coins, we would be convinced that Menelaos was a legitimate descendant of the local dynasty of Salaminian kings. On the other hand, if we possessed only the literary sources and no coins survived, we would never imagine that Menelaos, who was appointed by his brother as *strategos* of Cyprus, also reigned at Salamis. Starting from these observations, this paper will examine the role that Menelaos, brother of Ptolemy I, played in Cyprus during the last two decades of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, by combining studies of the ancient literary sources (Hadjioannou 1971; Chavane & Yon 1978) and the coinage he minted at Salamis.

## The literary testimonies

Following Alexander's death in 323, the kings of Cyprus appear in the literary sources actively forming alliances with his Successors, who were interested in conquering the island to ensure the control of the surrounding areas.

We learn from Arrian (*Successors, Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, Arrianos (156), fr. 10, 6) that, in the year 321, Nikokreon of Salamis, Pasikrates of Soloi, Nikokles of Paphos and Androkles of Amathous, having concluded an alliance with Ptolemy I, attacked Marion, apparently occupied by Perdikkas. At this point Cyprus does not appear securely incorporated into any areas of the Successors' power, as the following events clearly demonstrate. According to Diodorus (XIX, 55. 3–5), in 315, Antigonos, after ejecting Seleukos from the satrapy of Babylonia, began to challenge Ptolemy's possession of Syria (XIX, 57. 1); in his search for support, Antigonos dispatched a certain Agesilaos to Cyprus (XIX, 57. 4). Later in his *Bibliothēke*, Diodorus mentions Agesilaos reporting to Antigonos that, while Nikokreon and the most powerful of the other kings of the island were allied to Ptolemy, he managed to conclude alliances with Pumayaton of Kition, Praxippos of Lapethos, Stasioikos of Marion and the king of Kerynia (XIX, 59. 1).

Diodorus (XIX, 62. 2–6) records that in 316/5 Ptolemy sent important military forces to Cyprus in order to subdue the kingdoms allied to Antigonos. Having already dispatched 3000 men (XIX, 62. 3), he reinforced them with an army of 10,000 soldiers under the command of the Athenian Myrmidon and a fleet of 100 ships under the command of Polykleitos. He also sent his brother Menelaos as *strategos* in command

of the entire expedition (XIX, 62. 4).

After the division of the forces for the Peloponnesos and Caria, the war against those who still resisted was continued in Cyprus by Seleukos and his fleet, 50 Athenian ships, Menelaos, Nikokreon, the king of Salamis, and their allies (XIX, 62. 5). Diodorus informs us on the outcome: Keryneia and Lapithos were reduced by siege, Stasioikos of Marion was won over, the king of Amathous was forced to give hostages, and Kition was placed under siege (XIX, 62. 6).

Although Menelaos appears in the sources as the only official representative of Ptolemy in Cyprus, the importance for Ptolemy of acquiring control of the entire island was clearly demonstrated when he arrived in person in 312, with a mission to take charge of the situation and to punish the kings who were opposed to him (XIX, 79. 4). He started by killing Pumayaton because (according to Diodorus) he was detected in secret negotiations with Antigonos. He then arrested Praxippos of Lapethos and the king of Kerynia, razed the city of Marion and transferred its population to (Nea) Paphos, after capturing and most probably putting to death its king, Stasioikos (XIX, 79. 4). After that, Ptolemy handed over to Nikokreon of Salamis the territories and the revenues of the dethroned kings and appointed him *strategos* (XIX, 79. 5).

Diodorus makes no mention at this point of the role of Menelaos, who had received the position of *strategos* by the same authority some years earlier. Nevertheless, Menelaos reappears as *strategos* in 310/9, in the passage where Diodorus describes how Ptolemy, having been informed that Nikokles of Paphos had made an alliance with Antigonos, sent two agents to Cyprus to put him to death. These agents obtained troops from Menelaos, the *strategos*, surrounded Nikokles' palace and obliged him to commit suicide (XX, 21. 1). As for Nikokreon, king of Salamis, he appears to have died a year earlier, in 311/0, according to the Parian Marble that mentions his death together with the conquest of the island by Ptolemy ἀφ' οὗ [N]ικοκρέων ἐτελεύτησεν καὶ Πτολεμαῖος κυριεύει τῆς νήσου, ἔτη ΔΔΔΔΠΙΙ, ἄ[ρχ]οντος Ἀθ[ήνη]σ[ιν] Σι[μωνί]δου (Jacoby 1980: 22–23, § 17).

According to modern scholars, Diodorus and Polyaeus have mixed up the names of kings Nikokles and Nikokreon. Their stories refer to the tragic end of the royal family of Salamis and the imposed suicide has to be attributed to Nikokreon. Hill (1940: 161 and n. 1) suggested that the attribution of the event to Salamis is confirmed by an anecdote in Machon, cited by Athenaeus (VIII, 349e), where Axiothea, the wife of Nikokles in Diodorus' passage, appears as the wife of Nikokreon – an interpretation that has led to several discussions (Gesche 1974: 103–125; Michaelidou-Nicolaou 1976: 15–24). It has also been proposed that the rupture between the kings of Salamis and Ptolemy probably derived from the fact that Nikokreon had been appointed *strategos* of Cyprus (Hill 1940: 160), although not before 310 (Chavane & Yon 1978: 304, n. 2), a title that he must have had to share with Menelaos (Bagnall 1976: 41). The sharing of such a powerful title would have caused a conflict between the two men that led to the death of Nikokreon.

The truth is that we do not possess any literary indications that could justify the hypothesis of a conflict between Menelaos and Nikokreon. The fact that Diodorus (XIX, 62. 4) mentions Menelaos in the position of *strategos* in 316/5 does not prove that this was an administrative authority of the kind that is attested from mid-Hellenistic times onwards; rather, it was probably a military and provisional authority. As has been suggested, the term '*strategos*' in Diodorus simply signifies the military commander or the general, and this title was not an administrative title linked to a region, but a title to designate a person (Bagnall 1976: 42). This hypothesis is supported by the fact that in 312, according to Diodorus (XIX, 79. 4), Ptolemy did not depend on Menelaos or

Nikokreon, but arrived in Cyprus in person in order to punish the kings that remained disloyal to him.

Some years later, during the fights of Antigonos and Demetrios against Ptolemy for the control of the island, Menelaos was still active in Cyprus. During the siege of Salamis by Demetrios, and the naval battle of Salamis in 306, Menelaos is again mentioned in Diodorus (XX, 47. 3; 52. 5) and Polyaeus (*Strategemata* IV, 7. 7) as *strategos*. He even appears in Pausanias as the satrap of Ptolemy (Pausanias I: 6. 6). After Demetrios' victory and the retreat of Ptolemy to Egypt, Menelaos was surrendered and sent back to Ptolemy. No mention of him is made in the sources after that.

From the ancient sources we acquire the following information, as assembled in Table 1:

- Menelaos is mentioned only as *strategos*.
- Nikokreon appears as king of Salamis, then as *strategos* of Cyprus.
- After Nikokreon's disappearance from the political scene Menelaos re-emerges as *strategos*, a title linked to his name down to the victory of Demetrios at Salamis in 306.

Author	Passage	Greek Text	Date
Diodorus	XIX, 62. 4	...τῶν δὲ πάντων <b>στρατηγὸν Μενέλαον</b> τὸν ἀδελφόν.	316/5
Diodorus	XIX, 79. 5	... (Πτολεμαῖος) κατέστησε <b>στρατηγὸν Νικοκρέοντα</b> ...	312
Diodorus	XX, 21. 1	... <b>Μενελάου τοῦ στρατηγοῦ</b> ...	310/9
Diodorus	XX, 47. 3	ὁ δὲ τεταγμένος ὑπὸ Πτολεμαίου τῆς νήσου <b>στρατηγὸς Μενέλαος</b> ...	306
Diodorus	XX, 52. 5	'... <b>Μενέλαος, ὁ ἐν τῇ Σαλαμῖνι στρατηγὸς</b>	306
Polyaeus	<i>Strategemata</i> IV, 7. 7	'...Πτολεμαίου <b>στρατηγὸς Μενέλεως</b> '	306
Pausanias	I, 6. 6	' <b>Μενέλαον σατράπιν</b> Πτολεμαίου'	306

Table 1. The title 'strategos' applied to Nikokreon and Menelaos

But how did it come about that a *strategos*, and a member of the family of Ptolemy, with no direct link to Cyprus, issued gold coins following the local pattern as regards iconography and weight standards?

## The coinage

The coins in the name of Menelaos (Markou 2011: 129, nos 446–449, pl. XXV) copy exactly the types of gold coins issued by the kings of Salamis, Pnytagoras (Markou 2011: 126–128, nos 413–438, pls XXIII–XXIV; Babelon 1910: cols 725–726, nos 1184–1185, pl. CXXVIII, 25–27; Hill 1904: c–cx, 62, no. 76, pl. XII, 11) and Nikokreon (Markou 2011: 128, nos 439–445, pl. XXV; Babelon 1910: cols 727–728, no. 1188, pl. CXXIX, 10; Hill 1904: cxiii, no. 1, pl. XXIV, 21). On the obverse is shown the bust of Aphrodite wearing a turreted crown, long earrings and a pearl necklace. The reverse bears the bust of a male figure wearing a crown formed out of four semi-circular plates, a big circular earring and a torque (for the attribution of the male figure on the reverse of



the gold coinage of the last kings of Salamis, see Markou 2006: 135-151).

The legends inscribed on these coins are revelatory. On the gold staters issued by Nikokreon, we read on the obverse the Greek letters NI, the first two letters composing his name, and on the reverse, the Greek letters BA, the first two letters of 'ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ', of the king, indicating his royal function (**Fig. 1**). On the coins issued by Menelaos, we read on the obverse either the first three letters of his name M E N or the first letter M of his name in the Greek alphabet. On the reverse we see the first sign of the royal title in Cypriot-syllabic script: *pa* for *pa si le wo se*, which should be translated 'of the king'. (**Fig. 2**)



x 1.5

Figure 1. Nikokreon, gold stater, Paris, Cabinet des Médailles. Babelon 1910: no. 1188, pl. CXXIX, 10



x 2

Figure 2. Menelaos, third of a gold stater. Paris, Cabinet de Médailles. Babelon 1910: no. 1191, pl. CXXIX, 14

The gold coins issued by Menelaos are rare. The small number of surviving coins can be attached to two different denominations. The heavier issues are thirds of a gold stater, while the lightest issues are twelfths of a stater. The die axis for all the known examples is fixed at 12 hours, an observation that affirms the late dating of these issues (Markou 2011: 186).

The study of the coinage leaves absolutely no doubt that Menelaos minted coins at Salamis. The place of issue is certain, because the coins bear the same iconographic types as those on the gold coinage of Salamis issued by Pnytagoras and adopted by Nikokreon. There is also no doubt about the issuing authority: Menelaos' name is represented either by the first three letters, on the thirds of a stater, or by the first letter, on the twelfths of a stater, in the Greek alphabet. His royal function is likewise clearly indicated on the reverse of his coins by the sign *pa* in Cypriot-syllabic script.

It is interesting to observe the use of the local script on these coins, especially since the kings of Salamis omit it from their coin legends, especially those appearing on their heavier gold issues. Menelaos includes both scripts on both his denominations: the Greek alphabet for his name on the obverse, and the Cypriot-syllabic script for the royal function on the reverse.

But why did Menelaos adopt the iconography and the weight standard of the last kings of Salamis for his gold coinage, as well as the local Cypriot-syllabic script? And when did that happen?

## The dating of the Menelaos coinage

If we consider the organisation of the kingship in Cyprus (cf. Antoniadis 1981; Zournatzi 1996; Cambiano 1999), as we know it through scarce literary sources, and material finds such as inscriptions and coins, it is impossible that two kings ever ruled simultaneously in the same kingdom. This means that the gold coins in the name of Menelaos can only have been issued after the death of Nikokreon, for a reason that is clearly indicated on the coinage itself.

The very fact that Menelaos is appropriating the royal title and is reproducing the iconography of the last Salaminian kings on gold coinage bearing his name clearly proves that after the death of Nikokreon, Menelaos became not only *strategos*, as the literary sources attest, but also king of Salamis. Furthermore, the new king had based his coinage on that of the local royal dynasty in order to express his power and officially declare his new status (Markou 2011: 294–295).

This coinage is therefore to be dated after the death of Nikokreon in 311–310, a date that constitutes the *terminus post quem* for these issues, while the *terminus ante quem* is the year 306, the date of the defeat of Ptolemy and Menelaos in Salamis by the forces of Demetrios (Diodorus XX, 47–52; Plutarch, *Lives: Demetrios*, 15–16). In my opinion the coinage of Menelaos echoes the general trend for legitimation of power of Alexander's successors at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, that concluded in the proclamation of the royal title by Demetrios and his father in 306 (Plutarch, *Lives: Demetrios*, XVII, 2–XVIII, 1) and by the other Successors in the years to follow.

But since we know only of gold staters of Nikokreon, while Menelaos issued fractions of a gold stater such as thirds and twelfths, modern scholars proposed that the two coinages were complementary (Helly 1970: 258). This would suggest that these circulated together and that together they covered monetary needs during a certain period. Although this is probable, since the coinages of Nikokreon and Menelaos are both attached to the same weight standard, bear the same iconography and are clearly differentiated by their legends, one could also be sceptical as to whether Menelaos, as the new king of Salamis, did not remove from circulation Nikokreon's coinage, a coinage which was no longer legal tender.

## Conclusion

Menelaos, the brother of Ptolemy, *strategos* of the entire island after the death of Nikokreon, adopted not only the weight standard but also the iconography and the formulae of the legends of the last kings of Salamis in order to issue coins in his own name. These coins attest something that is never mentioned in the literary sources, since they only refer to Menelaos as *strategos* of the island or as *strategos* of Salamis, but never as king. They clearly testify that he appropriated the royal title as well, an act that has to be dated after the death of Nikokreon. The replication of the Salaminian iconography and the use of the Cypriot-syllabic script for the royal title prove that this coinage was also used as a means of political propaganda: it would point out to the people of the kingdom of Salamis (which by that time had incorporated, according to Diodorus, the territories and the revenues of the dethroned kings), that the new ruler, though not a legal descendant of the royal family, respected and preserved the local traditions, as did the previous kings. These coins would indicate to their new recipients the new order of things in Cyprus. In that way, Ptolemy, though he

abolished, captured or eliminated most of the Cypriot kingdoms and royal dynasties, by the intermediary of his brother and loyal representative on the island, Menelaos, seems to have embraced local traditions for a very specific reason. This is reflected through the medium of coinage which, bearing Menelaos 'signature', clearly indicates that the Ptolemaic domination in Cyprus was principally based upon the local gold coinage, a royal coinage that had also been tried out right before the adoption of the royal title at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

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