

Κρήδεμνον: Veil, Mural Crown, or Both?

The term *κρήδεμνον* is used twenty-four times in archaic Greek epic poetry to refer to the headgear of royal women and goddesses, city walls, and a wine-stopper; it is commonly associated with female chastity (Nagler 1967). This paper will reexamine each use of the term *κρήδεμνον* and expand on the scope of the word's meaning and application. I argue that the word can signify fertility and female empowerment in addition to chastity by incorporating Near Eastern iconography of mural crowns.

Conventionally, scholars translate *κρήδεμνον* as “veil” with a secondary meaning of “city wall” (Haakh 1959; Nagler 1967; Heubeck, West, Hainsworth 1988; Russo, Fernandez-Galiano, Heubeck 1992; Heubeck and Hoekstra 1990; Janko 1992, etc.). The “veil” meaning corresponds to archaic period female headgear and to certain scenes that must refer to veils, e.g. Penelope covering her face when she meets the suitors in the hall (*Od.* 1.334, 16.416, 18.210, 21.65). The secondary meaning occurs in the plural *κρήδεμνα* with a city in the genitive construction (*Il.* 16.100, *Od.* 13.388, *H.Ven.* 6.2, *H. Cer.* 151). I argue that this is not simply a metaphorical veil but analogous to and influenced by Near Eastern mural crown iconography.

Mural crowns are golden crowns in the shape of turreted city walls worn by city goddesses — often fertility goddesses — and royal women (Hoffner 1969). During the Late Bronze Age and the subsequent Homeric Age, mural crown iconography was used in Asia Minor by neighboring Near Eastern empires, namely the Hittites and the Neo-Assyrians. Metzler (1994) argues that mural crowns symbolize goddesses and the royal women as protectors, nurturers, and generators of a city.

I will combine the iconography and symbolism of Near Eastern mural crowns with the current scholarship of *κρήδεμνον* to provide a more complete understanding of both the term and the diachronic transmission of poetic meaning in archaic Greek epic poetry.

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