The politics of currency and the use of images of the past in the formation of the Cypriot national identity

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This paper examines the politics of currency and the use of certain icons contributing to the formation of the Cypriot national identity. This investigation takes under consideration the coins and banknotes issued after the independence of the island until the present day. The island's rich history is one of the most popular sources for imagery on the coins and banknotes. Therefore, this article focuses on the use of images of the past in the creation of the Cypriot identity. The focus on icons from various periods of time seems to be shifting according to the current political events and ideologies promoted by the state. Through the adoption of the euro these ideologies are communicated in both local and European level.

Introduction and Historical Background

When Cyprus gained its independence, after centuries of foreign sovereignty, Cypriots began a "quest" to determine their national identity. The selection of specific icons to be depicted on their coins and banknotes encapsulates these efforts. The icons chosen for each issue of currency shifted according to the political changes and ideologies of the state. Thus, a reference to the political background of Cyprus during the period under study is necessary.

Briefly, during the period of 1955-1959, Cypriots led by the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters struggled for national liberation against the British, under whose administration the island had been since 1878. Their goals were to remove the British troops and unite the island with Greece. From hereafter, the idea of uniting the island with Greece will be referred to as enosis. The conflict ended in 1959 with all parties involved (Great Britain, Greece and Turkey) coming into an agreement, known as the "Zurich and London Agreement." Through this agreement the constitution of Cyprus was established and treaties of alliance and guarantee were signed. Finally, Cyprus gained its independence on 16 August 1960 when Archbishop Makarios was elected the first president of Cyprus, representing the Greek-Cypriots, and Kutchuk the Vice-President, representing the Turkish-Cypriots.2

In 1963, inter-communal violence broke out between the Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, lasting for 11 years. On 15 July 1974, the Greek military junta carried out a coup d'état aiming to unite the island with Greece. Five days later, Turkish troops invaded Cyprus in response to the coup. This invasion resulted in the occupation by the Turkish troops of around 37.5% of the island's territory and the ousting of approximately 142,000 Greek-Cypriots from their ancestral homes.³ Thus, problems of absorption, re-housing and perhaps eventual resettlement had to be faced. In a series of Emergency Action Plans (1975-

1986) the government managed to successfully rebuild the shattered economy. Finally, on 1 May 2004, Cyprus became a full member of the European Union.⁴ Four years later, it entered the Eurozone.

The currency of 1960-1974

One year after the island's independence, the government issued a new set of banknotes while two years later, in 1963, the Royal Mint in London issued a new set of coins on behalf of the new born Republic of Cyprus. These series of currency were gradually replaced after the invasion of the Turkish in 1974. The Royal Mint not only issued the new series of coins but their design was also assigned to a British artist, William M. Gardner.⁵ It seems that the "co-operation" between Great Britain and its former colony was still alive. Even after the recognition of the Cypriot independence, measures were taken by the British in order to foil the Greek-Cypriots' suggestion that the new currency might include motifs from the specifically Greek past of the island. Since 1930 the British had adopted a policy, as a reaction to the mounting enosis movement, which promoted the creation of a new Cypriot identity that was neither Greek nor Turkish.6 Therefore, only symbols representing the flora and fauna, folk life and regions and landscapes of the island were deemed acceptable for the new sets of coins and banknotes.⁷ These motifs were probably chosen because of their abstract character but also because they were related to a clearly Cypriot identity. The only reference to the past of Cyprus on the coins is made through the ancient sailing ship which was inspired from the painting of an ancient jug. This was depicted on the 5-mils coin.8 This representation, however, does not provide any evidence for the period in which the ship is dated.

On the banknotes, the only clear reference to the past of Cyprus is seen on the reverse side of the one-pound note. It presents the Ottoman aqueduct built by Bekir Pasha near Larnaca and one of the colonnades of the Roman palaestra (reconstructed from the Hellenistic



Figure 1: The reverse side of the one-pound note of the 1961 series decorated with the Ottoman aqueduct; opposite, the colonnades of the Roman palaestra in Salamis (photo: C. Alexandrou).

palaestra) of the gymnasium at Salamis⁹ (fig. 1). These buildings are presented opposite to each other. Even though the palaestra dates to the Roman period, its architecture derives from the Greek models and it could have served as a subconscious connotation of a Greek past. The placement of the two monuments together on the banknote may have served as symbols of the co-existence of the two communities of Cyprus, the Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots. They are also monuments that confirm their roots on the island. These icons may have been a message to both sides since their relationships had been tense since 1955 and became worse in 1963 when there was an outbreak of inter-communal violence.

The currency of 1977-1997

As mentioned above, the next series of coins and banknotes were issued after the invasion and occupation of almost half of the island by the Turkish, which also characterizes Cyprus' present state. For more than a decade, Cyprus fought to overcome the results of this dramatic event. In 1983, the Turkish-Cypriots declared the northern part of the island as independent which was rejected by the United Nations Security Council. This move is now only recognized by Turkey and condemned by the rest of the international community. In the meantime, negotiations for a peaceful solution between the two sides have started and are still in progress.

During this period, and more precisely, between the years of 1977-1979 the previous issue of banknotes was gradually replaced while in 1992 the 20-pound note was introduced. Modifications on the icons depicted on the majority of the banknotes occurred in 1997. The new coins were issued later, in 1983 with minor changes occurring on the 20-cent coin in 1989 and the introduction of the 50-cent coin in 1991.¹¹

Starting from the coins, Clara Zacharaki-Georghiou was selected by the Central Bank of Cyprus to design the 1983 issue.¹² Although she was born in Greece, she lived most of her adult life in Cyprus.¹³ The 20-cent coin of 1989 and 50-cent coin of 1991 were designed by two Cypriots; Theodoulos Theodoulou and Antis Ioannides, respectively.¹⁴ Although the denominations, inscriptions, form, material and other characteristics are determined by the Central Bank of Cyprus and approved by the Council of Ministers, collaboration with the artists was expected in terms of the choice of the icons. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that the themes decorating the coins would have had different sources of inspiration from those issued in the 1960s.

Indeed, in contrast to the previous series of coins, the artists were mostly inspired by the ancient past of the island and more precisely from the Late Bronze Age, Archaic and Classical periods. Two heraldically arranged goats depicted on a Late Bronze Age ceramic bowl are seen on the two-cent coin while a bull illustrated on a Late Bronze Age silver bowl from Enkomi¹⁵ is depicted on the fivecent piece. In addition, a bird perched on a branch illustrated on a Cypro-Archaic jug is depicted on the one-cent coin while a portrait of Zenon of Kition, founder of the Stoic Philosophy, is seen on the 20-cent coin of the 1989 issue. 16 Moreover, the 50-cent piece bears a composition based on a fourth century B.C.E. Cypriot coin of the kingdom of Marion depicting the abduction of Europa by Zeus transformed as a bull. Both coins have the inscription "King Timocharis" in Cypro-Syllabic script.¹⁷

Regarding the banknotes of the 1977-1979 issue, again the majority of the themes are inspired from the island's history, and more precisely, from the Archaic to Roman periods. A nymph from the Hellenistic pavement of the House of Dionysus in Nea Paphos¹⁸ (fig. 2), a limestone portrait head from Arsos¹⁹ (fig. 3) and an athlete's head of the Archaic period (fig. 4) were represented on the obverse sides of the 1, 5 and 10-pound notes, respectively. The Bellapais Abbey of the Medieval period and the Roman theatre of Salamis²⁰ (fig. 5) decorated the reverse sides of the 1 and 5-pound notes. In 1992, the 20-pound note was introduced which had in its obverse side a first century sculpture of Aphrodite from Soli²¹ along with a bird depicted on an Archaic jug (fig. 6). Its reverse side was decorated with a composition of the Kyrenia ship of the fourth century B.C.E.,²² the birthplace of Aphrodite, Petra tou Romiou and two amphorae²³ (fig. 7).

In 1997 changes occurred in the character of the themes decorating a number of the banknotes of the previous issue. The themes related to the Cypriot past are now balanced by themes inspired by the folk life, flora and fauna and the various regions of the island. The nymph from the mosaic pavement depicted on the one-pound note was replaced by an icon of a Cypriot girl dressed in the traditional costume, while the Bellapais Abbey was replaced by a representation of the village Kato Drys. The limestone portrait of Arsos on the obverse side of the five-pound note was replaced by the limestone head of a young man dating to the fifth century B.C.E. found in the area of Potamia village. The Salamis theatre on the reverse side of the five-pound piece was replaced by the Greek-Orthodox church and a Turkish mosque from the village of Peristerona. Moreover, the Archaic athlete's head on the obverse side of the 10-pound note was replaced by the marble head of Artemis of the Roman period found in Paphos. It is significant to note that apart from these modifications, the rest of the symbols and icons on the 1997 banknotes remained the same as in the previous issue.²⁴



Figure 2: The obverse side of the one-pound note of the 1979 series decorated with the nymph from a mosaic from the House of Dionysus in Nea Paphos (photo: C. Alexandrou).



Figure 3: The obverse side of the five-pound note of the 1979 series decorated with a limestone portrait head from Arsos (photo: C. Alexandrou).



Figure 4: The obverse side of the 10-pound note of the 1977 series decorated with an athlete's head of the Archaic period (photo: C. Alexandrou).

The replacement of some designs deserves further discussion. Arsos, Bellapais and Salamis represented by monuments or objects of material culture were replaced by equivalent figures illustrating the villages of Potamia, Kato Drys and Peristerona; the former are located in the occupied part of the island while the latter in the government-



Figure 5: The reverse side of the five-pound note of the 1979 series decorated with the Roman theatre of Salamis (photo: C. Alexandrou).



Figure 6: The obverse side of the 20-pound note of the 1992 series decorated with a first century sculpture of Aphrodite from Soli (photo: C. Alexandrou).



Figure 7: The reverse side of the 20-pound note of the 1992 series decorated with the Kyrenia ship, two amphorae and Petra tou Romiou in the background (photo: C. Alexandrou).

controlled Cyprus. Although the occupied regions were replaced, there are some indirect references to the northern part. For example, Potamia and Peristerona villages are located close to the Green Line which separates the government-controlled Cyprus from the area under the Turkish occupation. In addition, the monuments chosen to serve as indices for the Peristerona village are a Greek-Orthodox church and a Turkish mosque; this might

have also served as a reference to the Turkish element on the island or even to a period when Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriots were living peacefully together. In conclusion, it seems that the reference to the occupied part of Cyprus on the 1997 banknotes is more indirect than on the previous issue. This might have come as a result of the passage of approximately two decades and/or the beginning of the negotiations for a peaceful solution between the two sides.

The promotion of the Greek past through currency

As Child argued "well-designed postage stamps are a natural semiotic vehicle for circulating symbols and icons of national identity and unity. Because they are so ubiquitous, they are seen and handled by the general population, along with money, more than any other instrument of government." Consequently, matters of identity can be reflected but also promoted through currency.

This examination has shown that particular attention was given to the promotion of certain periods of the ancient past of the island; especially, through the coins and banknotes issued during and after the 1970s. Discussions of the politics of the past in different societies have increased over the last years. ²⁶ Interest has focused on the uses/abuses of the past in constructing national identity. Most of these studies have illustrated a feature common in most societies, that is, the use of the past to legitimize a community's existence which is also perceived as a vital element for the political integration of a country. ²⁷

It seems that once nations dominated by colonial powers for many years gain their independence, they look for their roots in their ancient past.²⁸ As this investigation has shown, Cypriots focused mostly on the Archaic to Roman periods and less on the prehistory or other periods of the island's history. During the Archaic to Roman periods, Cyprus underwent a process of Hellenization that affected all

aspects of the society. It is significant to note that when the prehistory of the island is represented, objects from specifically the Late Bronze Age are used which was widely considered to have been the period of the first colonization of the island by the Greeks.²⁹ In fact, the Late Bronze Age icons represented on the 1983 issue of coins are considered as Aegean in derivation.³⁰

The focalization on specifically the Greek past of the island constitutes an attempt to promote and foreground their Greek identity, origins and roots. Even the use of their Roman past could promote the same idea since in terms of the material culture they are considered by people to be the inheritors of the Greek civilization. As Gounaris has stated, "nationalism can be traced in the search for golden ages and landscapes to evoke the much needed feelings of community and pride." The fact that Cypriots were part of this great civilization creates feelings of pride and strengthens their bonds.

Another possible reason for promoting their Greek past and roots could have been their representation as quintessentially European since modern Greeks are considered the cultural descendants of the people who set the foundations for European civilization.³² By presenting themselves as part of this past, Cypriots are automatically considered descendants of the founders of European civilization and, therefore, also claim their rightful place among the other European countries

The projection of the Cypriot national identity in Europe

The acceptance of Cyprus in the European Union in 2004 was followed by the adoption of the euro in 2008. While the euro banknotes and the reverse side of the coins are identical for all the participating countries; the obverse side of the latter bears symbols selected by each state. The designs chosen for the Cypriot euro coins were the decision of the Central Bank of Cyprus; they initiated a competition where

guidelines were given to the artists who were interested in participating. These guidelines contained the three themes that are now depicted on the coins. The three depictions reflect the special character of Cyprus in the sphere of culture, nature and sea.³³

The small denominations one, two, and five cents, carry the moufflon, one of the most characteristic species of Cyprus. The middle denominations 10, 20 and 50 cents illustrate the fourth century B.C.E ship of Kyrenia. The shipwreck was found close to the coast of Kyrenia located on the north of the island and it was of Greek origin.34 This icon was chosen because it projects the importance of Cyprus in ancient trade and its relations with the Aegean and the sea; it also expresses the importance of the sea and shipping in the history of Cyprus. The relations with the Aegean are stressed specifically in the publication of the guidelines which shows the government's efforts to promote the island's connection with Greece since antiquity.

The high denominations one and two euro carry the so-called "Pomos idol," a cross-shaped picrolite figurine³⁵ (fig. 8). It dates back to the Chalcolithic period and it is considered a characteristic sample of the prehistoric art of Cyprus.³⁶ Contrary to the symbols used on earlier issues, the choice of this topic derives from the prehistory of Cyprus. It not only represents the long history of the island but, more importantly, promotes a clear, Cypriot identity.



Figure 8: The obverse side of the two-euro coin decorated with the so-called "Pomos idol" (photo: C. Alexandrou).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the first coins and banknotes of the independent Cyprus were devoid of any depictions connected with the Greek past as a result of the measures taken by the British. It is reasonable, though, to conclude that this policy was pursued also by the state since any connection with Greece could have constituted a reference to the idea of enosis which was still alive even after independence. The British, through their "divide and conquer" policy, turned the Turkish-Cypriots against the Greek-Cypriots and against the idea of the enosis with Greece during the fight for liberation. This policy resulted in the creation of tension between the two communities which was still obvious after independence and became worse after 1963. Thus, any imagery that could be perceived as alluding to enosis could have aggravated their relations even more.

After the invasion of the Turkish troops, the majority of the coins and banknotes issued were decorated by themes deriving from the Greek past of Cyprus. The promotion of the material culture deriving from these periods is of particular interest in terms of the formation of the national identity; not only because the consciousness of sharing a common past contributes to the country's political integration but because there is an attempt to prove and emphasize their "Greekness". It is possible that one of the aims of this attempt was to overcome the confusion of identity which must have prevailed in Cypriot society after the coup and invasion. Their connection with a glorious past would have also created feelings of pride which would have brought people together; that was much needed in order to overcome the results of the invasion and work together for the island's development. The connection with classical antiquity, which was characterized as a period of victories for the Greek nation over great powers, would have given them the strength to keep fighting.

Finally, the selection of the cross-shaped figurine deriving from Chalcolithic Cyprus to be represented on the euro coins was rather interesting since it had no connotations with the Greek past of the island, but rather constituted a characteristic example of Cypriot art. One could say that through the euro coins, Cyprus was promoting a clearly Cypriot identity. An indirect reference, however, on the relations between Greece and Cyprus is made through the depiction of the Kyrenia ship. This paper has shown that from a period when no icons of the past were used on the currency of Cyprus, we moved to a period where its Greek past was overrepresented, passing to a period where these themes were balanced by icons representing a clearly Cypriot identity; all influenced by the current political events.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Icons are identified as any graphic pictorial representation such as a picture, a design or a photograph (Child 2005, 114).
- 2 Panteli 2005, 182-210.
- 3 Panteli 2005, 264-9.
- 4 Panteli 2005, 268-9.
- 5 Hatzopoulos 2005, 197.
- 6 Given 1998, 4; Hatzopoulos 2005, 200-1.
- 7 Hatzopoulos 2005, 201; Pridmore 1974, 66-7;
- Michaelidou and Zapiti 2008, 233-4.
- 8 Pridmore 1974, 66-7; Michaelidou and Zapiti 2008, 233.
- 9 Karageorghis 1969, Pl. 108.
- 10 Panteli 1984, 407-8.
- 11 Michaelidou and Zapiti 2008, 230-1.
- 12 Fitikides 1996, 123-9; Michaelidou and Zapiti 2008, 235-7.
- 13 Hadjiadamos in her online article (2010, 27 February,http://www.beachnewsonline.com/artists/clara-zacharaki-georgiou/) interviews the artist Clara Zacharaki-Georghiou.
- 14 Fitikides 1996, 130-1, 141-2; Michaelidou and Zapiti 2008, 238.
- 15 Schaeffer 1952, 381-9.
- 16 See Michaelidou and Zapiti (2008, 236-8) for the icons represented on the 1, 2, 5 and 20-cent coin. 17 See Michaelidou and Zapiti (2008, 86) for the ancient coin; Michaelidou and Zapiti (2008, 231,
- 238) for the modern coin. 18 Kondoleon 1995, fig. 111.
- 19 Gjerstad et al. 1937, Pl. CXCIV.
- 20 Karageorgis 1969, Pl. 109.
- 21 Westholm 1936, Pl. XXXII.
- 22 Nicolaou 1968, 76; Nicolaou 1969, 398.
- 23 The Central Bank of Cyprus (2007-2013, http://www.centralbank.gov.cy/fromPoundtoEuro/euro.html) illustrates the icons represented on the obverse and reverse sides of the 1, 5, 10 and 20-pound notes of the 1977-1992 series.
- 24 The Central Bank of Cyprus (2007-2013, http://www.centralbank.gov.cy/fromPoundtoEuro/euro.html) illustrates the icons represented on the obverse and reverse sides of the 1, 5, 10 and 20-pound notes of the 1997 series.
- 25 Child 2005, 119.
- 26 Daniel 1963, 122-3; Clark 1964, 251-64.
- 27 Hamilakis and Yalouri 1996, 118; Gounaris 2003,
- 70; Anderson 2006, 68-9, 72, 80.
- 28 Child 2005, 121.
- 29 See Voskos and Knapp (2008) and Iacovou (2013) for a review and references on this subject.
- 30 Karageorghis 1982, 80.
- 31 Gounaris 2003, 78.
- 32 Mackridge 2008, 297.

- 33 The Central Bank of Cyprus (2005, 14 September http://www.centralbank.gov.cy/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=8592) publishes a revised announcement for the competition for the selection of the design of the national sides of the euro coins.
- 34 Nicolaou 1969, 398.
- 35 Vagnetti 1991, 141.
- 36 The European Central Bank (2009-2014, http://www.ecb.int/euro/intro/html/index) illustrates the icons used on the Cypriot euro coins.

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