

**The Iconography of a Nation:  
Materiality and Coin Production in Twentieth-Century Greece**

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Abstract

*The relationship between iconography and currency production in Greece depends on mechanisms of production of state objects. Collective memory is invoked through the issue of coins, as new political regimes emerge. Hence, coins carry not only economic but also sociopolitical values. The publication of coins in the Government Gazette offers a glimpse of the involvement of the state in coin production. The entanglement between people and coins is based on the ability of the latter to exercise social agency and generate relationships of mutual dependence. In this regard, coins constitute a means of naturalization of the Greek national narrative through their materiality, and their iconography conveys a political concern to create trustworthy currency. The persistent selection of classical Greek designs for twentieth-century coins and the conservative iconographic expansion after the 1960s demonstrate the national identification of these designs as agents of social and political interconnections that had acquired the authoritative status to create the necessary trust in the coins themselves.*

### *The Macedonian issue*

Issues of new coins in Greece are published in the official journal that lists all laws passed by each Government, named the Government Gazette. These issues are indicated as ΦΕΚ (FEK, Government Gazette Issue) and include twelve individual volumes each year.<sup>1</sup> In the middle of a diplomatic dispute with the Republic of Macedonia,<sup>2</sup> on 22 February 1992 a Greek 100 drachma coin was issued and published in the FEK 25/58. Article 1 describes the coin's features:

Στην όψη Αξίας απεικονίζεται μακεδονικό διακοσμητικό σύμβολο που παριστάνει «αστέρι» 16 ακτίνων σε κυκλική μορφή, πάνω απ' αυτό σε κυκλική διάταξη οι λέξεις «ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ» και κάτω ο αριθμός «100» και η λέξη «ΔΡΑΧΜΕΣ» . . . Στο δεξιό κάτω μέρος του αστεριού αναγράφεται η λέξη «ΒΕΡΓΙΝΑ» ενώ στο αριστερό το έτος έκδοσης «1990». . . Στην άλλη όψη απεικονίζεται η κεφαλή του Μεγάλου Αλεξάνδρου ως Άμμωνα (από αργυρό τετράδραχμο του Βασιλέως της Θράκης Λυσιμάχου 323–281 Π.Χ) πάνω απ' αυτή και σε κυκλική διάταξη οι λέξεις «ΜΕΓΑΣ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ» ενώ κάτω απ' αυτή σε κυκλική διάταξη οι λέξεις «ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΩΝ».

[On the Reverse is depicted an encircled Macedonian decorative symbol that represents a 16-ray 'star', circular in form; above this in a circular arrangement the words 'HELLENIC REPUBLIC', and below the number '100' and the word 'DRACHMAS'. . . . To the right, below the star, is written the word 'VERGINA', while to the left, the year of issue '1990'. . . . On the obverse is

depicted the head of Alexander the Great as Ammon (from a silver four-drachma coin of the King of Thrace Lysimachus 323–281 BCE), with the words ‘ALEXANDER THE GREAT’ above it in a circular arrangement, while below in a circular arrangement, the words ‘KING OF THE MACEDONIANS’.]

Given that coin iconography follows national agendas and historical circumstances in an effort to create stability, a series of social relations should be examined to explore the national perspective of the depicted icons. The change of the displayed year of issue is associated with non-economic factors, as coin iconography is frequently determined by current historical realities and national claims (Penna 2010), which results in the identification of coins with national emblems. The case of the 100 drachma could be explained with reference to the political shifts in the Balkans during the period. An independence referendum was held on 8 September 1991 in the Republic of Macedonia, which until that moment had been part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and was approved, by 96.4 percent of the votes. Meanwhile, a debate dominated the Greek media and politics over the name, flag, and ostensible territorial claims of the neighboring country. The Republic of Macedonia issued its first coins in 1993. Unsurprisingly, the obverse of the 1, 2, 5, 10, and 50 dinar coins was also adorned with a stylized horizon with a 16-ray star.<sup>3</sup>

Appropriation of the disputed archaeological record by the two states reflects the dynamics of cultural partition. The Greek government’s decision was to lay first claims to the Vergina Sun, the 16-ray star named after findings from the excavation in the small town of Vergina, northern Greece, in 1977, directed by the archaeologist Manolis Andronikos. Greece’s need to protect the Macedonian symbol from appropriation by the

Republic of Macedonia operated as a mechanism of standardization of Greek national iconography in the face of a perceived threat (Roudometof 1996).

At the end of the twentieth century, the Balkan nations invented their own antiquities based upon narratives of continuity (Kotsakis 1998, 52). By contrast, the Greek state had been constructing its national narrative in relation to ethnic continuity over time and space since the early nineteenth century. Greece already enjoyed geographical authority and Western recognition, gradually integrating geographical areas such as Macedonia and Thrace through an ethnogenetic process based on those territories' identification with classical Greece (Papadopoulos 2015).

To examine the sociopolitical character of currency throughout the twentieth century, the present article focuses exclusively on coin production, as Greek banknotes follow distinct historical and social courses, and represent different sets of social dependencies between people and money. The article is divided into three main sections. I begin by discussing the theoretical evaluation of Greek coins' social and geographical qualities. Next, I continue with an analysis of the state's agency in currency production and the role of the FEK in the production of a national iconography. The third and last section is devoted to currency production in Greece and focuses on the social and historical forces that have shaped the issue of new coins. This last section is organized chronologically: it begins with a brief analysis of the issue of nineteenth-century Greek coins, then offers an account of coin production from 1910 until 1967, and concludes with a discussion of the issue of coins from the period of the Greek military Junta until the drachma's replacement by the euro in 2001.

Most of the twentieth-century coins follow national and international trends appropriating icons from the Greco-Roman antiquity, in contrast with the repetitive iconography of the nineteenth century, which mostly includes kings' portraits and royal symbols. Exceptional and commemorative coin issues during the period of the Greek monarchy, such as the 30-drachma representation of the map of Greece in 1963, are also analyzed in terms of their iconography and entanglement with historical realities (Sørensen 2016; Unwin & Hewitt 2001; Gilbert 1998). In considering coins as objects that exercise social agency, this analysis will trace political shifts that have taken place over the history of modern Greece and seek to conceptualize how each new political regime used numismatic iconography to assert authority.

### *Coins and national iconography*

The relation between geographical claims and national iconography is also related to the progress of Greek institutional archaeology. By the first decades of the twentieth century a large part of the national archaeological record had been organized and restored (Malouchou-Tufano 1998). This enabled the use and appropriation of these antiquities as national icons in institutional spaces, resulting in the dissemination of classical culture on social agents, such as public school or mass media, and the familiarization of society with the symbolic identification of the state (Mavrika 2012, 7). Therefore, national symbols from classical antiquity have been regularly used to lay claim to geographical areas and identities, as in the case of the 100-drachma coin. Another example, taken from the same international dispute, is the notorious construction of statues of Alexander the Great both in Skopje and Thessaloniki, or the issue of the first Macedonian flag that depicted

Vergina Sun and led to a one-year Greek economic blockade against the Republic of Macedonia in 1994–1995 (Brown 1994; Duncan 1998). Similarly, antiquities are often interpreted through an ethnic lens to provide a sense of Greek genealogical continuity and the territorial unification of the state. This is the case for the ostensible identification of two caryatids found in the Amphipolis excavation in 2015 with the Acropolis's caryatids that was based on anatomical features,<sup>4</sup> a connection that was supposed to account for the Greek identity of Macedonia, providing the necessary standardization of caryatids as unifying national symbol (Plantzos 2017, 14–19).

These claims to national territories are also implemented through the issue of rival currencies bearing national icons, by different states or institutions (Pointon 1998, 231). Therefore, national coins are meant to naturalize countries' geographical presence and their position in the world through their material qualities. According to Gell's anthropological perspective (1998), authorities exercise their agency over the public by promoting significant decorative motifs. In other words, the relationship between coins and people is generated through coins' visual power and their everyday use in modern transactions. Coins themselves thus become social agents, as they constitute a material implementation of uncontested state power in its attempt to naturalize society's perception of the nation.

Social science approaches to currency production are often limited to analyses of banknote issues and do not always consider the variety of social relations that emerge during their production process (Gilbert and Helleiner 1999; Pointon 1998). However, some recent discussions of money production have adopted theoretical approaches that take into account the social agents responsible for the issue of coins and the relations

between money and people (Helleiner 1999; Penrose 2011; Mavrika 2012). A critical assumption offered by Hymans and Fu (2017) suggests that existing literature has not yet explained the process of currency production in terms of its principal mechanisms of diffusion, namely mimesis and professionalism, which account for the dynamic relationship between politicians and central bank bureaucrats. Mimesis refers to the hesitancy of state agents in renovating the iconographic material of new coin issues, resulting in conserving established iconography. The second mechanism, professionalism, is related to external competition and progressive iconographic evolution in state currency production. Other studies have shed light on the degree of involvement of the state in currency production and its relationship with the society as a dynamic recipient of collective iconography (Penrose 2011; Sørensen 2016). These approaches also explore the pursuit of a contextual iconographic repertoire by the state, that will safeguard legitimacy and earn trust among citizens. Thus, while the iconography of currency is often considered to be closely related to the authorities' concern to produce trustworthy money, these new perspectives tend to look at the social relations that arise from the mechanisms that are involved in currency production.

According to Goethals (1978, 24), what makes iconographic imagery differs from other imagery in that it is ideologically charged because it is perceived as extraordinary: objects as icons embody powerful values and constitute meaningful signifiers, which are meant to be immediately recognizable and to entangle people in their captivating features. National iconography, then, can be interpreted as a means and indicator of national branding, created and propagated to secure a national presence in European modernity (Plantzos 2017; Hymans 2010). Therefore, the importance of national

iconography is manifested through its regular appearance in public spaces that results in the engagement of the national populace with a shared identity. (Brunn 2000).

Accordingly, the state constantly refers to certain national values to retain social stability and unity, as a means of ensuring their survival. However, even though state institutions are responsible for the issue of new Greek coins, the notion of the state as an autonomous mechanism that produces state objects should be examined with caution. In Greece the national imagination is deeply embedded in the reception of antiquity, not only operating as a mere state mechanism, but greatly determining aspects of the lives, minds, and bodies of society as a whole (Hamilakis 2003, 54). As such, national iconography in currency production provides us with another perspective on antiquity within the Greek national imagination, either as adopted by national agents or as imposed by western institutions. More precisely, in the Greek context coins embody a traditional triadic scheme that was first articulated in the nineteenth century and which claims Greek unity that passed from Ancient Greece to the modern state through the continuity of the Byzantine Empire (Liakos 2008, 205–207; Danforth 1984). This understanding of national history was the product of nineteenth-century Greek historiography, and was most famously advanced by Konstantínos Paparrigópoulos in his multi-volume *History of the Greek Nation* published between 1860 and 1874. This narrative contained an affirmation of the Greek ethnic and historical continuity by implementing the triadic scheme as a process of successions occurring over a linear Greek history (Plantzos 2008; Dimaras 2009).

In his book *Banal Nationalism*, Michael Billig (1995) discusses the representation of the state through national values, objects and habits, whose everyday reproduction

generates unquestionable interpretations of national identity. The iconography of national coins is related to their broad use among individuals and circulation regardless of their economic status. (Helleiner 1999, 320). Therefore, repetition can be assumed to be a means of achieving entanglement between coins and humans, regardless of their social class. In this sense, coins become social agents through their constant effects on the national cultural milieu (Gell 1998, 21).

More precisely, coins exercise agency over humans through their iconographic association with the national past. Iconography entangles people with objects in such a way that they create secure financial relations through mutual dependencies (Hodder 2012). To achieve a stable national mechanism, specific iconographic themes should be selected to entangle people in significant national claims. This is associated with the politics of inclusion that determine what should belong to national identity and what should not, and which impose forces of submission to materiality on individuals. (Wengrow 2007, 31–32).

People become engaged with coins and submit to the triviality of everyday transactions, which are based on trust. Through these trivial repetitions, people tend to take coins and their iconography for granted, forming in this way an established national narrative with powerful materiality (Hodder 2012, 101). Another aspect of coins' materiality involves ownership. Greek coins become the intellectual property of Greeks, in the sense that they embody a communal identification with a national past and present. Their materiality is tied to the idol depicted, forming an intellectual relationship between the coin as material object with national identifications and the national populace. Therefore, coins constitute the embodiment of the nation's spatio-temporal identification.

The technologies of embodiment displayed in this case illustrate the reinvention of history as memory and the rehabilitation of memory into the historical record (Plantzos 2012, 149–153) by appropriating traces of classical Greece and introducing them to the national narrative as elements of cultural identity. The everyday circulation of national currency thus results in the naturalization of its iconography through intellectual and political mechanisms. Coins are taken for granted and their authoritative power is consolidated.

### *State agency*

In nation-states such as Greece, where central power controls a large part of social interconnections, we should look mainly to state institutions for agents responsible for coin production and explore those institutions' relationships with other social agents.

The executive authority responsible for the special features of new coins is traditionally reserved for the minister of finance, whose proposal should be ratified by royal or presidential decree. This practice is regulated by FEK 79/1/2824 (20 April 1954) and 203/488 (19 July 1974), which indicate that the proposed coin features should cover aspects such as composition, weight, and dimensions. However, western influences in coin production account for the Greek attempt to reach modernity through the authoritative power of the Greco-Roman iconography that was already adopted by the western world. As most Greek coins were minted in European capitals such as Paris, London and Prague, international involvement in the Greek numismatic aesthetics prevailed, at least until the first half of the twentieth century.

The state's agency can also be observed through the FEK of each coin issue, which contributes to the consolidation of national iconography. A detailed description in the form of an archaeological narration often attends the issue of a new coin. I suggest that these narratives are embedded in the social biography of coins and often indicate their claims to national imagination. Archaeological references usually include chronological information and a detailed description of certain classical artifacts depicted on coins, while historical remarks are usually related to heroic national deeds of the past.

Two examples of FEK's detailed description are those of the 1976 10- and 20-cent coins<sup>5</sup>, which depict a bull and a horse's head respectively and are inspired by coins from the fourth century BCE Magna Graecia. Concretely, the 10-cent coin by a siculopunic silver tetradrachm (320–300 BCE) and the 20-cent coin by a silver stater from Thurium (443–280 BCE). These animal heads are thoroughly described in the FEK as symbols of “robustness,” “agricultural development,” and “exaltation.”<sup>6</sup> It is indicative of the state's self-identification as intellectual owner of the national archaeological record that it often omits to mention which ancient coins have been used as prototypes for modern ones, as in these examples. One of the few cases in which the prototype is mentioned is the FEK for the issue of the 1926 20- and 50-cent and 1- and 2-drachma coins<sup>7</sup>: the ancient Corinthian coins that were used as models are clearly cited in the FEK and give the impression of a formal archaeological report. Problematic is also the FEK's description of the selected font. From the issue of the first Modern Greek national coins in 1828 until 1971, only one currency font style was used, the so-called *archaic font*. In 1971, the font shifted to *byzantine*,<sup>8</sup> which was used until the restoration of the Republic

and the issue of new coins in 1976, as a means to refer to another nationalized past, the Byzantine Empire.

National linguistic changes in the 1970s and 1980s further affected the look of Greek coins. In 1976 the vernacular (that is, demotic) became the country's official language and 1982 saw the introduction of the monotonic accentuation system. Currency was affected by these national linguistic changes, and coins issued from 1982 onwards no longer were labelled «ΔΡΑΧΜΑΙ» (drachmaí, “drachmas” in *katharevousa*) to the demotic «ΔΡΑΧΜΕΣ» (drachmés, “drachmas” in vernacular form).

Another example of national glorification through currency iconography is the reference to the “commemoration of the national anthem” in the FEK of the 1990 20 drachma coin through the depiction of an olive branch and the sea.<sup>9</sup> For the FEK, these two elements reflect the Greek spirit of the landscape of Zakynthos, where the poet Dionisios Solomos was said to have composed the first stanzas of the Greek national anthem. Thus, historical themes are invoked, celebrating the state's brand identity, in order to ensure its legitimation in space and time.

The state's primary agency has established a diachronic power in determining the iconographic elements. In the case of Greece's euro coins, we read in the official webpage of the Bank of Greece (Bank of Greece 2019):

The design of the national side of the Greek coins took place in May 2000, by the Minister of National Economy and the Director of the Bank of Greece, after examining a number of proposals selected by a Special Advisory Commission and the Monetary Policy Council.<sup>10</sup>

In official agreements for coin production with private companies, the state retains the right to approve the selected icon. For instance, the agreement among the Bank of

Greece, the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the Athens 2004 Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games, for the issue of commemorative coins in 2002, required the final approval of the Ministry for the selected iconography, as it retains the exclusive right of issue of commemorative coins in Greece.<sup>11</sup> This legislative power indicates the national value attributed to coins as agents that address people's sociocultural identity. In this way, the state always holds the role of official and intellectual author of the coins issued.

Discussing authorship, Gell (1994, 52) points out that “in cases where technical mastery mediates the relation between the rulers and the ruled, the artist is often effaced in the process and the moral authority, which objects generate accrues entirely to the institution responsible for commissioning the work.” In the Greek case, except for a few examples such as Vasos Falireas and Georgios Jakobides, whose reputation rests on their work in relevant artistic fields, most coin engravers remain practically unknown, and their artistic signature can be traced only in microscopic signs engraved on some coins. In general terms, the state retains the absolute authorship of the coins' creation.

One of these artists, the designer of the Greek euro coins Giorgos Stamatopoulos, spoke in a rare interview to the newspaper *To Βήμα* (“To Vima”) on 13 January 2002 of the political involvement in the selection of coin iconography:

Πρόκειται για αποφάσεις σε επίπεδο υπουργών, σε επίπεδο κυβέρνησης. Στις επιτροπές έγιναν πολλές προτάσεις, για παράδειγμα να απεικονίζονται άλλες προσωπικότητες . . . . Κατ' αρχάς έγινε ο χρονικός διαχωρισμός, δηλαδή αποφασίστηκε να μη συμπεριληφθούν στις απεικονίσεις πολιτικές προσωπικότητες μετά τον Πόλεμο.

[It is about decisions at a ministerial level, at a governmental level. During the committee meetings many proposals were made, such as the depiction of other personalities . . . . Firstly, a chronological separation was decided, not to include political postwar figures.]

These examples establish the Greek state as the exclusive agent responsible for the issue of new coins, reducing the population's involvement only in mere recipients. In some cases, the proposal of new coins is directly assigned to artistic commissions, officially authorized groups of artists and engravers whose work consists of proposing iconographic designs for currency. However, the selection of the final depiction is retained by the state (Brégianni 2011, 306; Penna 2010, 68–69).

#### *National iconography and Ideological References*

Greek coin iconography can be categorized into two main types; the monarchical and the republican or dictatorial. While republics or dictatorships have adopted a variety of iconographic material, during monarchical periods, iconography is almost exclusively restricted to royal elements, which repeatedly adorn coins under different combinations. Following similar international patterns, portraits of kings and royal emblems are the main symbols. The tendency to represent the ancient past usually appears under non-monarchical regimes, when the focus turns to a wider variety of state objects. Reception of the past shifts according to historical realities, with the result that twentieth-century Greece offers a vast range of classical and modern themes depicted on coins.

The selection of coin iconography is based on the quest for national stability and the creation of a successful brand image. Decorative patterns entangle people in things and in the social projects those things entail, generating some form of social dependency. In this way, coins exercise power through the dominant national themes they depict. As such, they provide the tangible consolidation of the idol represented, through their reference to the imposed national narrative.

*King's portrait and coat of arms.* The representation of royal elements implicates limited ideological and iconographic material. National references appear in a repetitive context, as the monarch's figure is the centerpiece of currency iconography. Coins produced under monarchical periods, from the first drachma coins of Otto in 1832 until the reign of King Konstantinos II in 1970, typically followed what is a common historical pattern in international currency iconography (Brégianni 2013, 33–35). The general values presented are the king's symbols. The Greek Coat of Arms is often depicted together with the king's crown and a laurel wreath, while in certain cases the king's portrait and the crown also stand alone. Typically, in an era when photography was still inaccessible to ordinary people, numismatics, through portraits of the king and monarchical symbols, worked as constant reminder of monarchical authority.

A fundamental change in the perception of currency occurred with the first coins issued by King Georgios I in 1869. The phrase “ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΟΣ” (“King of Greece”), engraved around the king's head in the coins issued by King Otto, was replaced by “ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΤΩΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΩΝ” (King of the Greeks). This shift can be attributed to the understanding that popular trust was essential for the stability of the

economic system and to the consequent transfer of focus towards the idea of the nation as a mass of citizens distributed in a concrete geographic space. Thus, the reference to society itself generates a new, direct relationship between people and currency (Townsend-Gault 2001). People become for the first time intellectual associates in the circulation and standardization of the coins. This also echoes the “ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΩΝ” (“King of the Macedonians”) on the obverse of the 1990s 100 drachma coin discussed above, and turns the focus towards the popularization of nationalism and the people’s intellectual ownership.

*The first classical motifs.* In the issue of new coins in 1910–1911 we encounter classical iconography for the first time after the Kapodistrian phoenix. Issued by King Georgios I, the 1 and 2 drachma coins represent his portrait on the obverse and Thetis with Achilles on the reverse. The personification of the nation as a female figure through the depiction of Thetis, the mother of Achilles, and the general synthesis of the coin invoke an international trend, popular at least until the first quarter of the twentieth century. For instance, the French *République*, British Britannia<sup>12</sup>, and Spanish *República* are represented usually on large denomination coins and often appear as seated female figures with flowing clothes and earnest yet reserved expressions (Eustace 2007). Representation of a homogenized Western culture, with reference to Greco-Roman antiquity was introduced and implemented by international security printing companies,<sup>13</sup> through the popularization of globalized aesthetics. These practices gradually produced a conservative aesthetic quality so as to express the strengthening of the state’s authority and national progress (Roubanis 2012, 56–65).

Classical past was appropriated during the reign of King Konstantinos I (1913–1917, 1920–1922) for coin production with national identification. The 1912 5- and 10-cent coins depict an owl on the obverse, while the 20 cent-coin is adorned with Athena Promachos. Not surprisingly, these are two themes traditionally linked with fifth-century BCE Athens, an idealized representation of classical culture in twentieth-century Greek identity. The representation of the statue of Athena Promachos, the tutelary deity of Athens with direct military connotations, fits especially neatly with the historic reality of the time, when Greek territorial claims led to the entry of Greece to the Balkan Wars that began in the same year.

Meanwhile, the social and political schism that was caused by the dispute between the then-Prime Minister, Eleutherios Venizelos, and King Konstantinos over Greek entry into World War I exacerbated the population's lack of internal cohesion. Shortly after the population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923 following the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922, the Greek state was then faced with the challenges of an extended national territory and a new population of refugees from Asia Minor and Thrace. Social and national homogeneity were far from achieved, and minority groups needed to be Hellenized for the sake of national unity. To standardize the state's authority and symbolic power, national symbols acted as emblems of social homogenization.

The proclamation of the Republic of Greece in 1927 marked a nominal end to three years of social division and upheavals. The new government issued a new series of coins with classical themes. Nonetheless, the use of such iconography was not merely a Greek phenomenon, seeing as examples from the rest of Europe, such as the French franc and the Italian lira, also featured designs closely related to those of Greek coins

(Brégianni 2015), such as the 1929 10-, 20- and 100- French francs and the 1919 5-, 10- and 50-centesimi of the Italian lira. Namely, a homogenized European past was invoked through the use of Greco-Roman heritage to provide national authority and prestige. A remnant from the monarchical era can also be found in the representation of portraits of gods and goddesses, in the same way as the King's portrait was depicted in previous years.

Another aspect of the numismatics of this period is the fact that the Greek state turned to themes related to the Greek economy, folk culture, and sources of revenue. Reforms in agricultural legislation against large landowners dominating agricultural production in Thessaly and Macedonia were central to Venizelos's government. Maritime and agricultural production were the dominant modernizing forces of the interwar era, and thus the Greek state chose those milestones of national economy to be depicted on coins, combined with familiar representations of ancient Greek culture. The fusion of ancient Greek iconography with Modern Greek economic production consolidated the Greek national narrative and extended its social authority in an unstable historical moment, enhancing the social awareness of intellectual ownership of national idols.

The standardization of the goddess Athena as national symbol can be observed in coins of the interwar period as well. Already a national identification as the female figure of power and independence, Athena acquired a role similar to the British Britannia discussed above. Thus, her appearance coincided with the standardization of classical past in an era of ethnic self-reflection in Europe. To become social agents that successfully invoke national past, currency iconography required concrete decorative patterns. Brégianni (2011, 262) for instance refers to the Portrait of Athena as "the use of

a symbol, residue of practices of the Greek revolution, which concentrates the ideas of continuity between ancient Greece and the Greek state, but also the characteristics of Hellenism.”<sup>14</sup> Her identification as the holder of intellectual purity and wisdom matches the characteristics of the mother figure, in a quasi-religious fusion of national self-determination (Roubanis 2012, 59). Thus, the motherland can be reconstructed through the depiction of the goddess, who serves as agent of national protection.

Similarly, the 10-drachma coin that bears the portrait of Demeter, the Greek goddess of agriculture and purity, represents the values of an agricultural economy. Although not cited in the FEK,<sup>15</sup> the prototype for this coin was an ancient Greek stater of the Delphic Amphictyony (336–334 BCE). The obverse of this coin derives from another coin from the ancient Greek colony of Metapontum (in the modern-day Italian region of Basilicata) and represents an ear of wheat, a common agricultural symbol. It should not surprise us that the same ancient portrait of Demeter is the logo of the former Agricultural Bank of Greece, founded in 1929 in order to “operate as a specialized financial institution on behalf of the Greek state, to support the development of the country’s agricultural sector.”<sup>16</sup> Identical or similar wheat themes are used in France and Italy around the same period as well. Social agency in this case refers to the way Demeter’s coin was used to transmit national values, through the representation of a historical continuum between the Greek population and agriculture. The case of the coin from Metapontum and the other ancient models from Southern Italy reflects the state’s perception of Greek intellectual heritage as exceeding modern national boundaries, including Greek diaspora artifacts from Magna Graecia.

The 20-drachma coin of the same series not only represents Poseidon and an ancient trireme but is also inspired by an ancient Macedonian tetradrachm of King Antigonus III Doson (229–221 BCE). Maritime heritage has been extensively celebrated in Modern Greek iconography over time, as similar themes can be seen in many subsequent drachma and euro coins. This is associated with the maritime tradition and its economic importance for the Greek state, in addition to the historical and ideological link with the sea traditionally attributed to the Greek people.

By transforming the popular self-identification of the Greek periphery into tangible assets, the Greek state during the interwar period formulated a new aesthetic quality of familial belonging to a national group, for whom the mere national representation of ancient monuments would have less impact (Roubanis 2012, 66–67). Thus, the fusion of antiquity and rural features illustrates a powerful appropriation of national values that familiarize people with the multifaceted brand image of the state. The invocation of the Greek rural population through its reflection on coin iconography is in fact an allusion to the geographical status of the state and to an intellectual defensive mechanism of national sovereignty.

*A pseudo-commemorative coin and its temporality.* Coins as idols represent a certain temporal disruption of the relationship between the people who use them and the temporality of the depicted theme. This metaphysical connection can be observed in the issue of the 5-drachma coin in 1930. According to the FEK, the obverse bears “the representation of the phoenix (bird), taken from a Kapodistrian coin, which is resurrected from the flames and revived by the view of the rays of Holy Spirit. Above the bird’s head

lies a cross and above that a star.”<sup>17</sup> Kapodistrias’s phoenix was issued about 100 years before and although not formally a hundred-year commemorative coin, the 5-drachma coin invokes the temporality of the phoenix, as their designs are identical. The 1930 5-drachma coin is, to my knowledge, the first commemorative coin circulated in Greece – and the very first to celebrate another coin, which was also issued at a kingless regime.

*The 1963 30-drachma coin.* Another aspect of the dynamic interdependence between coins and identity concerns practices of national integration, exercised throughout the twentieth century. These practices emerge within the authoritative justification of national geography, which consolidates borders through national iconography.

The obverse of the 1963 30 drachma coin might be the most representative example of the invocation of national geography, as it depicts a map of Greece. Serving as a commemorative coin with a low mintage to celebrate 100 years of Greek monarchy, its design offers a perfect example of assertion of geographical space as a means of self-defense mechanism of the Greek State against possible external threats. Careful examination of the obverse reveals a geographical pattern: the inscribed geographical names form a kind of defensive circle around the Greek map. These names are inscribed at the edges of the coin, and appear to approach and even transgress the national borders. What is more, although the name of each Greek national unit which borders on another nation-state appears on the coin, the absence of names of areas in Central Greece and the Peloponnese—the first liberated and thus stabilized and recognized Greek territories—is notable. The coin functions as an agent of standardization of the nation’s borders, an

official appropriation of space, in the same way as the appropriation of time in the year of issue of the 1992 100 drachma coin.

*Military Junta and Μεταπολίτευση.* The currency production during the Greek Military Junta (1967–1974) is indicative of the symbolic importance given to numismatic representation under authoritarian regimes. The political value of the Junta coins and the process of their banalization became apparent in the depiction of the date of upheaval “21 April 1967” and an armed soldier on many coins.

The phoenix is co-opted by the Junta and becomes its most notorious symbol, while Christian iconography was shaped to fit ideologically with the Junta’s iconographic banality. The phoenix, adorned with dictatorial symbols, displays the Junta’s attempt to present itself as a representative of an ancient glory, since the appropriation of the symbolic power of the phoenix is inscribed in the collective memory of the Greek population (Connerton 1989, 87). Specifically, the appropriation of the phoenix by the Junta serves as a justification for the political shift through a past symbol. The reinvention of such symbols creates new memories “consecrating the histories they relate into viable elements of cultural identity” (Plantzos 2012, 149). At the same time, other symbols such as Athena, the owl, and decorative patterns with reference to classical tradition constitute the national landmarks of the dictatorship, in an attempt to invent a multi-temporal national past that would legitimize authoritarianism. On these coins reference to the past is provided not only through the invocation of Greco-Roman iconography, but also through allusion to that iconography’s historical usage in Greek modernity.

The example of the Junta reveals the limited national space available for the iconography of new coins and its militaristic orientation (Hymans and Fu, 2017). The type of constraint experienced is discussed extensively by Hodder (2012, 52), who refers to it as a dependence that locks things into complex relationships with other temporalities. The constraints placed on the public are relevant to other social facets experienced during a dictatorial regime, such as militarization and censorship. Coins issued under authoritative regimes are ideologically restricted in terms of flexibility in their iconographic material, owing to the regime's need to legitimize its authority through specific features. Thus, the public is exposed to symbols that fit in the regime's main narrative and justification.

After the restoration of democracy in 1974, the symbols of the Junta could not be deployed anymore and the production of a new series of coins was decreed. The concept of «Ελληνικότητα» (Ellinikótita, Hellenicity) is experienced from the 1960s comprised of a double meaning of identity, the Western-classical and Romaic-Christian (Leontis 1995), and is perceived as inseparable milestone in the Greek politics of the time. Its significance here lies on its ability to introduce new iconographic elements to the, until that time, impermeable classical material. I would then suggest attributing the major shift of the patterns used to depict coins from the 1960s on the attempt to combine these two perceptions of «Ελληνικότητα». This ideological shift in the depiction of «Ελληνικότητα» is more clearly seen from 1976 on. For instance, for the first time, heroes of the Greek War of Independence are depicted on coins, claiming the historical legacy of national continuity within the Greek state. Portraits of the national heroes Botsaris, Kanaris, and Karaiskakis are found on the smaller denomination coins (50

cents, 1 and 2 drachmas respectively), while ancient themes are celebrated on the higher denomination coins. The denomination of each coin should not be considered accidental, considering the special value given to the classical tradition.

Coins issued from 1976 to 1986 in fact maintain an ideological dependence on Greek antiquity, as their obverse sides show male portraits of ancient Greek figures such as Aristotle, Democritus, and Pericles. These particular figures serve as ideological safeguards to protect the new republican regime, as they are all connected with ancient Greek science and democratic politics. They are used to erase any remaining traces of the military ideology of the Junta. Surprisingly, the first non-divine female figures appear in coins for the first time only in 1988, to replace the previously mentioned 1 and 2 drachma coins. Until that moment, male figures dominated Greek coin iconography, except for Athena, Demeter and Thetis. These coins depict two famous heroines from the Greek Revolution, Laskarina Boumpoulina and Manto Mavrogenous, although they resemble warlike portraits of males, re-inscribing patriarchal motifs of the Greek iconography.

Coin iconography from 1976 onwards represented an amalgam of ancient and modern Greek figures and emblems, a fusion of traditions and identities relevant to the national geography that the new democratic state desired to evoke. Gounaris (2003, 80) highlights that national touchstones were multiplied to such an extent that “they have already created some bewilderment for new generations.” During the «Μεταπολίτευση» (“Metapolítefsi,” the transitional period following the fall of the Junta of 1967–74), coins performed a double symbolic function, interweaving ancient motifs and themes of the Greek War of Independence. Unwin and Hewitt (2001) describe the same tendency in 10 post-Communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe after their entry to EU the last

quarter of the twentieth century, where attempts were made to combine various ideological movements. Again, coins function as emblems of a multi-temporal representation of the nation, seeking to confirm the prestige of Greek continuity.

### *Conclusions*

In this article I have sought to demonstrate how national iconography has been embodied in the coin production of the past century in Greece. In particular, I have emphasized the importance of social agency in the cultural biography of coins during the twentieth century. The empirical analysis of a large number of coins has offered the opportunity to survey the relationship between iconography, national geography, and coin production. My analysis has examined transitional periods and followed a chronological sequence. It has attempted to present patterns that were used as reflections of the political situation, both national and international. From this analysis, three main conclusions arise.

Firstly, the legal aspect of coin production is as dynamic as the political and economic. Coins require a formal justification, which provides them with the necessary authority to be circulated and trusted. This official status is often more elaborate than would be expected. Historical and archaeological references adorn the FEKs and serve as the state's perception of itself.

The second conclusion concerns temporality. The reuse of certain symbols under the rule of different regimes reflects their changing reception through time. This reappropriation of classical symbols provides them with a social biography rich in adversarial political connotations. The periodical reuse of past iconography changes the

perception of symbols as national objects and marks their position as *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1989). Furthermore, national iconography—and in particular classical iconography—has undergone a process of standardization and popularization through its depiction in Modern Greek coins. After the establishment of new regimes, new coins demonstrate the symbolic justification of that regime’s ideology and the state’s concern to exercise a powerful agency that will reaffirm the national identity. Therefore, cultural politics and currency production are inextricably interwoven and form new perceptions of currency iconography.

The example of the 100-drachma coin with which I began shows us that the relevant coin issues are directly linked with the political incidents of a particular period. Coins do not only exercise their agency upon the people who use them, but also justify national identity in relation to the material culture that belongs to it. The materiality of coins operates as the legitimation of the state’s ownership over geographical and temporal entities, while their everyday circulation ratifies and naturalizes these claims. These temporal and geographic legitimations not only shape collective narratives, but also serve as social boundaries against other national or international groups. Thus, political interests and international relations often dictate which national iconographic material should be used to safeguard national stability.

Finally, one of the purposes of coins is to serve as a medium of exchange and exchange financial obligation. At the same time, the agent responsible for their circulation should keep them functional by appropriating the right iconographic material to convince the public of a coin’s validity. Therefore, coins become the material representation of the political aspirations of the people who create them. Since the

exclusive agent responsible for their issue is the Greek state, Greek coins embody the national narrative by exercising authoritative agency over the public. The appropriation of certain aspects of the historical and archaeological record, along with the authority exercised by the materiality of coins, result in the formation of strong national iconographic traditions.

The physical nature of coins permits their use among an indefinite number of people who circulate value. In other words, economic value is closely associated with social and metaphysical value. What makes coins valuable in national terms is their capacity to be present in every corner of the state, forming its tangible representation with uncontested authority. They form part of the nation's political geography and encapsulate many of the central aspects of national identity. Therefore, coins represent the materiality of the nation and formulate systems of dependencies between state and society.

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## NOTES

*Acknowledgements.* I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Dimitris Plantzos and Professor Marta González for their valuable and constructive suggestions during the development of this research. Their patient assistance and encouragement have been

greatly beneficial to this article. I am also grateful to the Journal’s editors and the anonymous referees for their essential comments and remarks.

<sup>1</sup> “Government Gazette Issue” is a literal translation of «Φύλλο της Εφημερίδας της Κυβερνήσεως» (ΦΕΚ), Therefore “FEK” is a transliteration of «ΦΕΚ».

<sup>2</sup> Officially renamed Republic of North Macedonia on 12 February 2019.

<sup>3</sup> The coins issued by the Republic of Macedonia from 1993 on can be found here: <http://www.nbrm.mk/?ItemID=1B8768ACE0FF3D48AB35EDF312190262>. Accessed 3 January 2018.

<sup>4</sup> The anatomic disorder that is visible on the statues’ feet has been interpreted by the dominant national narrative as source of national pride, ostensibly proving purity of Greek population. Acropolis’s caryatids’ similar anatomic feature confirmed, for many, the Greek identity of Macedonia (Plantzos 2017, 16–17)

<sup>5</sup> FEK 151/410 (22 June 1976).

<sup>6</sup> FEK 15/51 (28 January 1976).

<sup>7</sup> FEK 198/9 (15 June 1926).

<sup>8</sup> FEK 281/789 (31 December 1971).

<sup>9</sup> FEK 16/43 (13 February 1990).

<sup>10</sup> Η επιλογή των σχεδίων για την εθνική όψη των ελληνικών κερμάτων έγινε το Μάιο του 2000, από τον Υπουργό Εθνικής Οικονομίας και το Διοικητή της Τράπεζας της Ελλάδος, ύστερα από εξέταση ενός αριθμού προτάσεων που είχαν επιλεγεί από Ειδική Γνωμοδοτική Επιτροπή και από το Συμβούλιο Νομισματικής Πολιτικής.

<http://www.bankofgreece.gr/Pages/el/Euro/Notes-coins/Coins/default.aspx>. Accessed 3 January 2018.

<sup>11</sup> FEK 3114 (19 February 2003).

<sup>12</sup> The depiction of Britannia can be found on the British 50 pence coin until 2008 and commemorative coins to date.

<sup>13</sup> Security printing is the field of the printing industry that deals with the production of items such as banknotes, passports, and identity cards.

<sup>14</sup> «Χρήση ενός συμβόλου, κατάλοιπου των πρακτικών της Ελληνικής Επανάστασης, που συμπυκνώνει τις ιδέες για την συνέχεια μεταξύ του αρχαιοελληνικού κόσμου και του Ελληνικού Κράτους, αλλά και για τα χαρακτηριστικά του ελληνισμού.»

<sup>15</sup> FEK 279/6 (11 August 1930).

<sup>16</sup><https://web.archive.org/web/20090628092928/http://www.atebank.gr:80/English/Bank/ATEbank+info/Profile.htm>. Accessed 3 January 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Τὴν ἐκ Καποδιστριακοῦ νομίσματος ληφθεῖσαν παράστασιν τοῦ Φοίνικος (πτηνοῦ) ἀναγεννωμένου ἐκ τῶν φλογῶν καὶ ἀναζωογονουμένου ἐπὶ τῇ θεᾷ τῶν ἀκτίνων τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Ὑπεράνω τῆς κεφαλῆς τοῦ πτηνοῦ φέρουσι σταυρὸν καὶ ἄνωθεν τούτου ἀστέρα. FEK 279/6 (11 August 1930).

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