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CYPRIOT ARCHAEOLOGY, MODERN NUMISMATICS
AND SOCIAL ENGINEERING:
THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE BRITISH COINAGE OF CYPRUS*

Miltiades Hatzopoulos

ABSTRACT: This article examines the use of numismatic iconography by the British colonial administration of Cyprus in order, initially, to legitimise its possession of the island and, subsequently, to promote an Eteocypriot, an “authentic Cypriot”, identity as counter-poison against Greek nationalism. In this endeavour of social engineering, archaeological items and other symbols from Cyprus’ past played a prominent part. The outbreak of the Cypriot guerrilla war for union with Greece in 1955 highlighted the bankruptcy of this operation. Nevertheless, British efforts to evade Cyprus’ overwhelmingly Greek past – and present – continued unabated, even after the formal recognition of the island’s independence.

Britain acquired Cyprus at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. The Ottoman Empire had just lost a disastrous war with Russia and in order to secure the support of the British Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, it signed with Britain a “Convention of Defence and Alliance” and ceded Cyprus to Great Britain “to occupy and administer”, as long as St Petersburg refused to evacuate three Turkish provinces in the Caucasus. Britain levied a heavy tribute from Cyprus, theoretically for the Sultan of Constantinople, but in fact on behalf of the British creditors to whom the Turkish sovereign was indebted.

Stanley Casson described archaeological research in Cyprus as “a strange and sad history”¹ and deplored the first years of British rule as “a long record of destruction by neglect”.² Furthermore, he denounced the archaeological excavations carried out during that period as practically reduced to tomb-robbing.³ In fact, the aim of excavations was to enrich the collections of foreign museums, which until 1905 were authorised to carry away at least one third of

* Many thanks are due to Dr Helen Zapiti, Ephor of the Numismatic Museum of the Cultural Foundation of the Bank of Cyprus, who helped me complete the documentation of the present study by sending me articles that were not available in libraries in Athens, and to my friend and colleague Garth Fowden for his indefectible help in improving my English and his always constructive criticism. He is of course entirely innocent of the views expressed in this paper. I also wish to thank Antigoni Zournatzi for sharing with me her expert knowledge of Cypriot history and archaeology.

¹ Stanley Casson, *Ancient Cyprus: Its Art and Archaeology*, London 1937, p. 9.

² Casson, *Cyprus*, p. 10.

³ Casson, *Cyprus*, p. 11.

the finds,⁴ rather than to increase scientific knowledge. If we except the meritorious exertions of Menelaos Markides and John L. Myres, who were the first to infuse a scientific spirit into the archaeological activities taking place on the island,⁵ it was only in the late 1920s that conditions substantially improved, thanks to the endeavours of the Swedish Cyprus Expedition (1927-31).⁶ A new and progressive Antiquities Law was enacted in 1935, creating a Department of Antiquities regularly funded by the Government of the colony. The appointment of Porphyrios Dikaios as Director of the Cyprus Museum in 1931 and of A. H. S. Megaw as Director of the newly founded Department in 1936 inaugurated a new and fertile era in Cypriot archaeology. Promising excavations were initiated by the French at Vounous and Enkomi and by the Department on several prehistoric sites and, after World War II, at Salamis and Kition. By the beginning of the independence struggle in 1955 a new generation of native scholars had emerged, ready to take over the reins of Cypriot archaeology and bring it, in collaboration with their foreign colleagues and despite the misfortunes of war and foreign occupation, to the remarkable blossoming witnessed in the second half of the twentieth century.⁷

The fundamental, albeit controversial, study of the archaeological policies – or rather of the ideological orientations in the field of archaeology – promoted by the British colonial authorities in Cyprus remains Michael Given's article "Inventing the Eteocypriots: Imperialist Archaeology and the Manipulation of Ethnic Identity", published in volume XI of the *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* in 1998.⁸ In this paper the British archaeologist highlighted the way the colonial authorities in Cyprus used history and archaeology in order to counter the Greek national movement. Whatever objections one may formulate against Given's thesis, to wit that the survival of a distinct, autochthonous, prehellenic population in Amathous until the Hellenistic period is unsubstantiated,⁹ they do not affect his detailed and perceptive

⁴ Cf. Magda Ohnefalsch-Richter, *Griechische Sitten und Gebräuche auf Cypern*, Berlin 1913, p. 316.

⁵ Myres too deplored the archaeological activities of that period as "a mischievous pastime". Cf. P. Åström, *A Century of International Cyprological Research*, Nicosia 2000, p. 8.

⁶ Casson, *Cyprus*, pp. 13-17; Åström, *Century*, pp. 12-13.

⁷ Cf. V. Karageorghis, "The Cyprus Department of Antiquities, 1935-1985", *Archaeology in Cyprus 1960-1985*, Nicosia 1985, pp. 1-10.

⁸ pp. 3-29. Cf. *id.*, "Star of the Parthenon Mélange: Education and Representation in Colonial Cyprus", *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 7 (1997), pp. 97-120.

⁹ Cf. a whole series of responses in the same volume, pp. 112-128, and, particularly, Th.

analysis of the problem that the Greek past and the mounting national liberation movement in Cyprus posed to the British authorities and of the latter's attempt to manipulate texts and monuments in order to confront it. The author mentioned among other items, but without further elaboration, the reproduction of archaeological monuments on "postage stamps, coins, postcards, tourist posters and official publications", all symbolical works of art laden with ideological significance.¹⁰ In the present study I will attempt to highlight the role of coinage in this peculiar *Kulturkampf* waged by the British authorities and to investigate whether the periodisation of the discourse manipulating Cypriot archaeology posited by Given is supported by the choice of the iconography of the colonial coinage.

Given distinguished three phases in colonial archaeological policy in Cyprus: the Orientalist (1878-c.1900), the Philhellenic (c.1900-c.1930) and the "Authentic Cypriot" (c.1930-1960). The dates are given with the caveat that they are to a certain extent arbitrary: they present a considerable overlap, as there is an inevitable lapse of time separating the date of the discourse of the professional archaeologist, who shapes the ideology, from that of its actual exploitation by the colonial officer operating in Cyprus, and furthermore from that of its adoption as a hermeneutic instrument for the understanding of the "nature" of the local population by the visiting travel writer.¹¹

The first period was dominated by the views found in the popular works of Luigi Palma di Cesnola and Robert Hamilton Lang, who stressed the Phoenician origin of the population and of the ancient civilisation of Cyprus and the survival of Oriental characteristics down to the 1870s.¹²

During the second period, there was a progressive improvement in the educational level of the Cypriots. Their reclamation of their Greek heritage, combined with the growing realisation in scholarly circles of the secondary significance of the Phoenicians in Cyprus, led the colonial authorities to acknowledge the primeval Greek character of the island, which can be traced in the successive editions of the semi-official *Handbook of Cyprus*.¹³

Petit, "Eteocypriot Myth and Amathusian Reality", *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 12 (1999), pp. 108-120.

¹⁰ Given, "Eteocypriots", p. 7.

¹¹ Given, "Eteocypriots", p. 10.

¹² L. Palma di Cesnola, *Cyprus: Its Ancient Cities, Tombs and Temples*, London 1877; R. H. Lang, *Cyprus: Its History, its Present Resources, and Future Prospects*, London 1878.

¹³ This book was initially published under the title *A Handbook of Cyprus* by J. T. Hutchinson and C. D. Cobham in London and was reprinted six times between 1901 and 1909. In 1913 a new, improved edition was produced by H. C. Lukach and D. J. Jardine

The refusal of Great Britain to admit the political consequences of her acknowledgement of Cyprus' Hellenic past – but also of the overwhelmingly Greek present – led to the exacerbation of the Enosis movement with its tragic conclusion in the 1931 rebellion and to the imposition of the harsh and oppressive measures that lasted until the termination of colonial rule.¹⁴ Although the explosion of anti-British feelings had highlighted the danger resulting from the theoretical admission of the Hellenic character of Cyprus, a simple return to the Orientalist ideology of the previous period could not be seriously considered after the ruin of the scientific foundations on which it had been based. Instead, the authorities preferred to promote the theory, on the one hand, of the mixed character both of the population and of the civilisation of the island and, on the other, of the existence of an authentically autochthonous population and civilisation, which from prehistory to modern times outlived all foreign dominations and colonisations, including the Greek ones.

Since 1928 it had already been deemed necessary at the highest level to promote "Cypriot patriotism" as the most effective counter-poison against Greek nationalism.¹⁵ The effect of this new policy was visible in the new, 1930 version of *The Handbook of Cyprus* edited by the governor himself, R. H. A. Storrs, along with the Assistant Secretary to the Government, B. J. O'Brien, which systematically underplays the Greek element's contribution to the history of Cyprus. The necessary scientific underpinning for the new ideological construct of a diachronic indigenous and authentic Cypriot population and culture was provided by the archaeological work of Einar Gjersted, Director of the Swedish Cyprus Expedition (1927-31), who extolled the *urcyprische* elements of Cypriot civilisation and deplored their adulteration as a result of Hellenic propaganda promoted by King Evagoras I.¹⁶

under the slightly different title *The Handbook of Cyprus*, and this second edition was reprinted in 1920. A third edition under the same title prepared by R. Storrs and B. J. O'Brien was first published in 1930 and was reprinted in 1935.

¹⁴ Cf. F. Crouzet, *Le conflit de Chypre*, Bruxelles 1973, pp. 124-135, and, particularly, G. S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs*, Nicosia 1985, pp. 695-708.

¹⁵ Minute of Leo Amery, Secretary of State to the Colonies, to Sir Ronald Storrs, Governor of the Island from 1926 to 1932, Georghallides, *Storrs*, pp. 73-74; Given, "Eteocypriots", p. 13.

¹⁶ Cf. E. Gjersted, *Ages and Days: Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology: Pocket-book 12*, Göteborg 1980; updated edition in English of the Swedish edition *Sekler och Dagar*, first published in Stockholm in 1933, pp. 142-143: "The sad result for Cypriot culture was merely that the political agitation and cultural propaganda made the Cypriots think that

The main British apologists of the colonial regime, Storrs¹⁷ and the author of the monumental history of Cyprus, G. F. Hill,¹⁸ hastened to embrace and to reproduce Gjersted's new ideological construct. Hill has the dubious honour of having transposed the term "Eteocypriot" – coined on the model of "Eteocretan" (= "authentic Cretan") attested in Homer – from historical linguistics, for which it had been coined by J. Friedrich in 1932 to characterise non-Greek texts written in the Cypriot Greek syllabary,¹⁹ to the field of history and archaeology.²⁰ Given argued against the use of the term "Eteocypriot" even for the language of the texts which are written in the Cypriot Greek syllabary but cannot be interpreted as Greek.

This brief presentation of Given's views on the manipulation of the monuments of Cypriot history by the colonial authorities for the consolidation of British rule on Cyprus provides a tentative framework for the examination of the symbols used on the coinage of the island during the colonial period.

The fundamental work on the modern coinage of Cyprus, *Modern Coins and Notes of Cyprus* by Major F. Pridmore, which was published by the Central Bank of Cyprus, describes in detail the chaotic situation faced by the British on their arrival on Cyprus.²¹ At that time the Turkish golden lira was theoretically subdivided into 100 silver piastres, which in turn were subdivided into 40 copper paras each. In fact, besides the silver piastres, a variety of devalued coins were in circulation: two sorts of silver-plated piastres, copper piastres and paper money. The colonial government decided to put an end to this disorder and in 1878 introduced the use of British gold and silver currency; in 1879 they issued as the new official coinage of the island the copper piastre of Cyprus, equivalent to the Turkish copper piastre, which at that period had sunk to $1/160$ of the Turkish golden lira, and its fractions of $1/2$ and $1/4$ piastre. The new rate was fixed at 180 Cyprus piastres to the British pound.

they were Greeks and not Cypriots. In this way they lost their sense of nationality and their feeling for the distinctive character of their culture and they strove to imitate Greek art instead of preserving their own".

¹⁷ R. Storrs, *Orientations*, London 1945, p. 470.

¹⁸ G. F. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, Vol. I, Cambridge 1940, p. 220.

¹⁹ J. Friedrich, *Kleinasiatische Sprachdenkmäler. Kleine Texte für Vorlesungen und Übungen*, Berlin 1932, p. 49.

²⁰ G. F. Hill, "Amathus", *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves* 5. *Mélanges Emile Boisacq* (1937), p. 489; cf. *id.*, *History*, Vol. I, pp. 53-54 and 101.

²¹ Major F. Pridmore, *Modern Coins and Notes of Cyprus*, Nicosia, no date, pp. 12-21; cf. the collectors' guide T. J. Fitikides, *The Coins of Cyprus*, Athens 1996.

The new copper coins, which were struck (1879-1901) in great quantities in England during the reign of Queen Victoria, were the work of the Chief Engraver of the Royal Mint in London, L. C. Wyon. The obverse figures the head of Victoria wearing a coronet ornamented with oak leaves and scrolls and carries the legend VICTORIA QUEEN and the date; the reverse carries the numbers 1, $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{4}$ respectively, within a beaded circle, and the legends CYPRUS and, according to the value of the coin, ONE PIASTRE, HALF PIASTRE or QUARTER PIASTRE.

Fig. 1-2: Obverse and reverse of Queen Victoria's 1 piastre copper coin (1885).



The first British coinage of Cyprus is above all remarkable for the use of the English language and the simplicity of the royal title of Victoria. On contemporary coins of Great Britain, but also of most overseas dependencies,²² the title is expressed in Latin and comprises, besides the title of *regina*, all or some of the following items in more or less abbreviated forms: the specification *Dei gratia*, the geographical definition *omnium Brittaniarum*, and the additional titles *fidei defensor* and *Indiae imperatrix*.

Even more interesting than the elements present are those which are missing. To begin with, it is noteworthy that only copper coins were struck and that the requirements for gold and silver coinage were covered by British gold and silver and particularly by sixpences imported in great quantities. Moreover, on the new copper coins, besides the legend CYPRUS, no other element, not even the slightest symbol evokes the Mediterranean island. The reverse has as its only decoration a geometric and perfectly aniconic circle. The land and its inhabitants – if we except the word CYPRUS – are absent from the text as well as from the iconography. Even the currency unit bears a “Western” name which was used neither by the Greek majority of the population, who called it γρόσ-σι, nor by the Turkish minority, who retained the name *kurush*.²³

How should one interpret this remarkable “minimalism” of the British authorities? The first colonial coinage gives the impression of a temporary

²² A notable exception is the contemporary colonial coinage of India, which carries only the simple legend in English VICTORIA EMPRESS.

²³ Pridmore, *Coins*, pp. 99-101.

measure without roots or perspectives, a measure which makes no investment in the future but merely limits itself to a summary statement of the sovereignty of the British queen, and is addressed more to the English-speaking British personnel of Cyprus than to the local population.²⁴ The explanation for this hesitant attitude is perhaps to be sought in the peculiar status of the island, which from the legal point of view remained an integral part of the Ottoman Empire simply “occupied and administered” by Britain. It cannot be excluded that if the currency system – if sheer chaos deserves that name – which the British had inherited from the Ottomans in Cyprus had not been so unmanageable, the colonial authorities would never have bothered to strike their own coinage.

The minting of silver in 1901, the last year of Victoria’s reign, constitutes a turning point in the colonial coinage of Cyprus. A series of four coins was produced, with values of 3, 4½, 9 and 18 piastres. This apparently bizarre choice of denominations was due to the desire to establish simple equivalences between British and Cypriot colonial coinage.

These silver coins were also minted in England and were the work of the Chief Engraver of the Royal Mint, George William de Saulles. They had the size, weight and fineness (0.925) of British silver coins of 4 pence (although the minting – but not the circulation – of these coins had been discontinued in Britain), 6 pence, 1 shilling and 2 shillings (florin). The obverse figures the crowned and veiled bust of Victoria, and the simple legend in English was replaced by the complete titles of the sovereign in Latin: VICTORIA. DEI. GRA. BRITT. REG. FID. DEF. IND. IMP. The reverse of the 3 piastre coin, continuing the tradition of the copper coinage, presents within a beaded circle the number 3, above it the British crown and on either side of that number, in smaller size, the numbers 19 and 01 forming the date. Outside the circle the word CYPRUS appears above the crown and the word PIASTRES below the number 3.

Fig. 3-4: Obverse and reverse of Queen Victoria’s 3 piastre silver coin (1901).



The coins of 4½, 9 and 18 piastres present the same obverse but a quite different reverse: within a beaded circle a shield decorated with a lion rampant and above it a scroll carrying the inscription CYPRUS crowned by the British crown, and on either side of the shield the date as on the 3 piastre coin. Outside the circle and

²⁴ Elsewhere, as, for instance, in Hong Kong or South Africa, and later India, local languages were used on the reverse, something which was never done in Cyprus.

below the shield the indication of the coin's value was engraved: FOUR & A HALF, NINE and EIGHTEEN PIASTRES respectively.

The death of Queen Victoria and the accession of Edward VII in 1901, and subsequently the death of

that king and the accession of George V in 1910 consolidated the Cypriot coinage's new orientation. The reverse of the copper coinage, with the exception of the date, remains the same, but on the obverse the crowned bust of the king with coronation regalia is introduced, as well as the developed titles in Latin, EDWARDVS VII REX IMPERATOR and GEORGIVS V REX IMPERATOR, respectively. The obverse of the coins of Edward VII was again the work of de Saulles, while Edgar

Bertram MacKennal was responsible for those of George V. The reverse of the silver coinage, which, like the copper one, was minted to the same standard, also remained identical, with the exception of the date. However, the issuing of 3 piastre coins was discontinued, and no 4½ piastre coins with the effigy of Edward VII were minted during this king's brief reign. The obverses figure the same busts as the respective copper ones and the legends EDWARDVS VII DEI GRATIA REX IMPERATOR and GEORGIVS V DEI GRA: REX ET IND: IMP:

Pridmore left without comment: 1) the replacement of the simple coronet by the royal crown on the coins of Victoria and the introduction of the majestic coronation regalia on those of Edward VII and George V, at a time when contemporary British coins simply figure the uncovered head of the sovereign;²⁵ 2) the substitution of the simple royal title in English by the



Fig. 5-6: Obverse and reverse of Queen Victoria's 18 piastre silver coin (1901).



Fig. 7-8: Obverse and reverse of King George V's 1 piastre copper coin (1927).

²⁵ The late British issues of Victoria also presented the crowned bust of the queen on the



Fig. 9: Modern British coat of arms.

Fig. 10: Reverse of silver gross of King Henry II of Cyprus (1285-1324). Courtesy of the Museum of the History of Cypriot Coinage.

Fig. 11: Lusignan coats of arms. Lapidary Museum, occupied Nicosia.

citation of the integral royal titles of the British monarchs in Latin;²⁶ and, 3) the appearance of the newfangled arms with the lion rampant. It is true that the arms of Great Britain present on the upper right quarter a lion rampant, the traditional badge of Scotland. But the Scottish lion is always inscribed in a characteristic frame (orle), which is absent from the Cyprus silver coinage of the British monarchs. Obviously de Saulles owed his inspiration for the reverse of

obverse. The crowned bust of the king on the obverse constitutes the rule on the colonial coinage of Edward VII and George V.

²⁶ The criteria of the choice between Latin and English in the colonial issues of that period are not evident. While, for instance, on those of Canada, South Africa and Australia Latin is used, on those of New Zealand, India or Hong Kong the royal titles are in English.

the Cypriot silver issues to another source. As M. L. Santamas has rightly pointed out,²⁷ the lion rampant is the coat of arms of the Lusignan kings who reigned in Cyprus between 1191 and 1489. Indeed, this coat of arms is displayed on the medieval coinage and buildings of the island; these were magnificently illustrated by Camille Enlart two years before the minting of the 1901 coins,²⁸ either alone or combined with the blazon of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, which devolved to this Poitevin dynasty in 1192.

What is the message intended by the new, post-1901, colonial coinage? The rule of the British kings is fully established with all the majesty of the coronation regalia and the pompous titles in Latin. Long before the formal annexation of Cyprus in November 1914 and the attribution to it of the status of crown colony in March 1925, the British, using the language of the symbols, made a clear statement that they had come to stay and sought the legitimisation of their presence not in the Cyprus Convention, the 1878 defence agreement between Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire, but in the Western past of the island, acting in the same way as, a few years later, the Italian colonialists in the Dodecanese would.²⁹ The coat of arms of the Lusignans which decorated the medieval monuments of Cyprus was there to remind all concerned that “the great monuments of the colony’s past were European, not local; this proved that then as now the population needed Europeans to govern them; and these European monuments required European guardianship”.³⁰

In 1928, at the very time when the Colonial Secretary instructed the Governor of Cyprus to seek a foil to the Greek nationalism of the Cypriots, a new silver coin of 45 piastres, the biggest of the colonial coins of Cyprus, equivalent to a crown (5 shillings), was minted to commemorate the first 50 years of British occupation. The obverse is the same as on the other silver coins of George V, but the reverse, the work of Kruger Gray, displays two lions passant guardant and carries clockwise the inscription +1878+Cyprus +1928+FORTYFIVE PIASTRES.

²⁷ M. L. Santamas, “Designs on the Reverse of Cyprus Coins”, *Numismatic Report. Cyprus Numismatic Society* (1972), p. 40.

²⁸ C. Enlart, *L’art gothique et la Renaissance à Chypre*, Paris 1899.

²⁹ The coinage of the other British overseas dependencies (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, etc.) had already from that period adopted motifs from the natural life of the corresponding regions or from the history of their inhabitants.

³⁰ Given, “Eteocypriots”, p. 4, alluding to the classic work of Camille Enlart. Was it considered relevant that the Lusignans were vassals to the kings of England at the time of the foundation of the Latin Kingdom of Cyprus?



Fig. 12-13: Obverse and reverse of King George V's commemorative 45 piastre silver coin (1928).

In 1926 the minting of copper $\frac{1}{4}$ piastre coins was discontinued, and after 1931 the copper coins of 1 and of $\frac{1}{2}$ a piastre met the same fate. Instead, in 1934 cupro-nickel coins of 1 and of $\frac{1}{2}$ a piastre were struck, with a scalloped shape and a smaller diameter, with the same obverse; the



Fig. 14-15: Obverse and reverse of King George V's 1 piastre cupro-nickel coin (1934).

reverse figures in its centre the corresponding value of the coin (1 or $\frac{1}{2}$ piastre) and clockwise the legend CYPRVS ONE PIASTRE 1934 or CYPRVS HALF PIASTRE 1934.³¹

After the abdication of Edward VIII and the accession of George VI in 1936, a new series of silver coins of 18, 9 and $4\frac{1}{2}$ piastres was issued in 1938, as well as cupro-nickel coins of 1 and of $\frac{1}{2}$ a piastre. The silver coins have the same reverse as the commemorative coin of 45 piastres with the indication of the value in full text: + CYPRUS + EIGHTEEN PIASTRES*1938 (or 1940), +CYPRUS+NINE PIASTRES* 1938 (or 1940), and +CYPRUS+ FOUR AND A HALF PIASTRES* 1938, and on the obverse, designed by Percy Metcalfe, the crowned head of



Fig. 16-17: Obverse and reverse of King George VI's 18 piastre silver coin (1938).

³¹ Pridmore, *Coins*, p. 105.

the new king in the centre and clockwise the legend GEORGIVS VI DEI GRA. REX ET IND. IMP. The cupro-nickel issues have the same head on the obverse with the legend GEORGIVS VI REX IMPERATOR and the same reverse as the corresponding issues of George V. After 1942 the cupro-nickel coins of 1 and of 1/2 a piastre were replaced by copper ones. The reverse remained the same, but after the independence of India in 1947 the legend of the obverse was modified in the 1949 issue to GEORGIVS SEXTVS DEI GRATIA REX. At the same time, the progressive devaluation of the pound sterling, and consequently of the Cyprus pound, lead to the discontinuation of the minting of the silver 18, 9 and 4½ piastre pieces and their replacement by cupro-nickel issues of 2 Cyprus shillings of a slightly smaller diameter than the 18 piastres coins, and of 1 Cyprus shilling coins having the same diameter as the 9 piastre ones. The obverse remained the same, but after the loss of India the 1949 issues carry the legend GEORGIVS SEXTVS DEI GRATIA REX, just like the copper fractional coins.³²

The fundamental change in Cyprus coinage during this period is the replacement, first on the commemorative issue of George V and subsequently in all the silver (and from 1947 on the cupro-nickel) issues of George VI, of the lion rampant of



Fig. 18: Coat of arms of William, Duke of Normandy and first Plantagenet king of England.

the Lusignans by the two lions passant guardant. Pridmore simply stated that the new blazon was adopted from “the badge of the Governor”.³³ This information begs the question of the source of inspiration of the badge. The British coat of arms does present lions passant guardant on the upper left and lower right quarters. But in both cases *three* lions are figured. Two lions are the badge of the coat of arms of Normandy, of which the three lions of the British coat of arms are a later development.

What is the connection between Normandy and Cyprus? The first Plantagenet kings of England, as dukes of Normandy, had the two lions on their coat of arms. There is no doubt, therefore, that the badge of the British Governor of Cyprus refers to these English kings, and more specifically to Richard the Lionheart, who in 1191 conquered the island from the rebel

³² Pridmore, *Coins*, pp. 110-113.

³³ Pridmore, *Coins*, p. 105; cf. 110. This badge had been adopted in 1914, after the annexation of Cyprus by Great Britain (see next note).

Byzantine governor Isaakios Komnenos.³⁴ The ideological message is clear. The commemorative 45 piastre coin of 1928, and afterwards the other silver coins declare that Britain, by assuming the government of Cyprus in 1878, was simply coming back to her own; she was not conquering but recovering a land that she owned as “won by the spear”, even though Richard had sold the island to the Lusignans. The family of these English vassals was extinct, while Richard’s descendants – albeit indirect – still reigned in Britain.³⁵

In 1955 the complicated monetary system of Cyprus was simplified and decimalised. The pound was henceforth divided into 1000 mils, and the following coins were minted: cupro-nickel coins of 100, 50 and 25 mils, which corresponded to 18 piastres or 2 shillings, 9 piastres or 1 shilling, and 4½



Fig. 19-20: Obverse and reverse of Queen Elizabeth II's 100 mil cupro-nickel coin (1955).

piastres of the previous system, and copper coins of 5 and 3 mils, without an exact correspondence to the older system.³⁶

The obverse, common to all the issues, was the work of Cecil Thomas and carries on its centre the crowned bust of Elizabeth II, and clockwise the legend QUEEN ELIZABETH THE SECOND. The reverses, different for each denomination, were designed by W. M. Gardner.

³⁴ Cf. Santamas, “Designs”, pp. 40-41.

³⁵ The celebrations of the 50th anniversary of British rule in Cyprus became a primary concern of Governor Storrs, to whom the initiative to issue a series of commemorative postage stamps and the minting of the 45 piastre coin was due. It is noteworthy that the King himself approved the iconography of the stamps (Storrs, *Orientations*, p. 488; Georghallides, *Storrs*, pp. 77-79). It should, however, be stressed that the iconography of the commemorative stamps and, more generally, of the colonial stamps of Cyprus presents a real variety and is relatively balanced. Already in 1928, besides the King’s portrait, they figured monuments of all periods of Cypriot history, including classical Greek antiquity (for instance, a coin of Amathus, the portrait of Zeno, and, later, antiquities of Salamis, the theatre of Soloi, etc.). It is possible that the British governor, whose complex personality would require lengthier treatment, if full justice were to be done to his works and days in Cyprus, had a freer hand in the field of philately than of numismatics. His conduct in Jerusalem manifested a particular sensitivity to identity issues in multireligious and multicultural societies. The motifs of the postage stamps, which henceforth followed the iconographic tradition initiated by Storrs, deserve a separate treatment, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

³⁶ Pridmore, *Coins*, pp. 114-116.

The 100 mils reverse figures “a sailing ship... that represents the island’s trade”.³⁷ The number 100 is engraved on the sail, and clockwise the legend reads GOVERNMENT OF CYPRUS+ONE HUNDRED MILS+(date: 1955 or 1957)+.



Fig. 21: Reverse of Queen Elizabeth II's 50 mil cupro-nickel coin (1955).



Fig. 22: Reverse of Queen Elizabeth II's 25 mil cupro-nickel coin (1995).

The 50 mils reverse displays “a ‘symbolic tree’... that represents forest wealth.”³⁸ The two digits of the number 50 are on either side of the trunk of the tree and clockwise one can read the legend GOVERNMENT OF CYPRUS+FIFTY MILS+1955+.



Fig. 23: Reverse of Queen Elizabeth II's 5 mil copper coin (1955).



Fig. 24: Reverse of Queen Elizabeth II's 3 mil copper coin (1995).

The 25 mils reverse figures “a stylised bull’s head... that represents agriculture”.³⁹ A branch of a plant was added on the left of the head and the number 25 below it. Clockwise the legend reads GOVERNMENT OF CYPRUS+TWENTY FIVE MILS+1955+.

The reverse of the copper coin of 5 mils represents “an ingot bearer... and represents the mineral wealth and mining industry of Cyprus”.⁴⁰ The number 5 is engraved below the figure and clockwise the legend says GOVERNMENT OF CYPRUS+FIVE MILS+(date: 1955 or 1956)+.

On the copper coin of 3 mils the reverse has “a fish... and represents the sea surrounding the island”.⁴¹ The number 3 is displayed above the fish and clockwise is the legend GOVERNMENT OF CYPRUS+THREE MILS+1955+.

The coinage of the young Queen Elizabeth, who succeeded her father George VI in 1952, is from many points of view remarkable. Its novelty does

³⁷ Pridmore, *Coins*, p. 114.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Pridmore, *Coins*, p. 116.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*



not consist only in the adoption of the decimal system in the colony, which prefigured its introduction

Fig. 25: A bronze panel found at Kourion figuring an ingot bearer in the British Museum.

Fig. 26: A design of a bird catching a fish on an Iron-Age jug in the Cyprus Museum.

in Britain, but also in the use of the simplified royal title in English, instead of the pompous royal style in Latin, and above all in the replacement of the symbols which legitimised Western rule in Cyprus with reference to the



Fig. 27: A silver stater found at Soli. Courtesy of the Museum of the History of Cypriot Coinage.



Fig. 28: Obverse of Lebanon's 10 piastre bronze coin (1955).



Fig. 29: Obverse of Israel's 100 mil cupro-nickel coin (1949).

Lusignans or to the Plantagenets⁴² by an iconography evoking the past of the inhabitants of the island. Even the expression "Government of Cyprus" instead of the simple "Cyprus" might suggest that the colonial government somehow belonged to Cyprus. Nevertheless, the choice of the above subjects is neither random nor neutral. Although all find their inspiration in antiquity, practically none of them recalls its Greek character. Three out of five (50, 5 and 3 mil coins) figure items from the Bronze Age or the first period of the Iron Age: according to Pridmore, a not otherwise specified "Mycenaean ivory found at Enkomi" (50 mils),⁴³ "a bronze panel found at Curium" (5 mils)⁴⁴ and "a design of an iron-age vase in the Cyprus Museum" (3 mils).⁴⁵ Only a trained archaeologist might recognise in them

⁴² The lions passant guardant nevertheless remained on the banknotes which were issued during the same period.

⁴³ Pridmore, *Coinage*, p. 114.

⁴⁴ Pridmore, *Coinage*, p. 116.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

some affinity with the Greek world. Even the subjects on the 100 and 25 mil coins with figures from a less distant past, respectively an otherwise unidentified “painting on a jug found in Cyprus” and “a Greek coin found at Soli”,⁴⁶ have no special connection with classical antiquity.⁴⁷ It may be implicitly admitted that Cyprus is something more than her British rulers symbolised by the crowned bust of Elizabeth II on the obverse,⁴⁸ but that Cypriots are not Greek (or Turkish for that matter), but Levantines, descendants of some particular but unidentified people of the Near East.

Do the phenomena which Given observed in the archaeological policy of the British authorities find an echo in the colonial coinage of Cyprus?

Given’s first archaeological period (1878-c.1900) coincides with the first numismatic period (1878-1901) that I have defined. However, the corresponding coinage betrays no traces of Orientalist tendencies, but only a certain hesitancy.

The second numismatic period (1901-28), which again roughly coincides with the British scholar’s second archaeological period (c.1900-c.1930), is not characterised by any illustration of the Greek past of the island, but by the mobilisation of its Western medieval history, which, as late as 1931, was apparently deemed capable of exorcising the threat of the Enosis movement by providing arguments legitimising British rule in Cyprus. Given indeed remarked that “as the Greek demonstrators were marching on Government House on 21 October 1931, the Governor Sir Ronald Storrs was inscribing a copy of Camille Enlart’s *L’art gothique et la Renaissance à Chypre* (1899) as a present for his Private Secretary Rupert Gunnis”.⁴⁹

The third numismatic period (1928-60), which again coincides with Given’s third archaeological period (c.1930-1960), is characterised by strong British reaction to the mounting Enosis movement. Two successive phases can be distinguished. During the first, which finds its expression in the late coinage of George V and that of George VI, the British authorities seemed to react negatively by stressing their imperial pretensions and by claiming rights of indefinite sovereignty emanating from the conquest of the island by their

⁴⁶ Pridmore, *Coins*, p. 114.

⁴⁷ The ancient sailing ship appears also on the contemporary numismatic series of Lebanon, while the “symbolic tree” figures on the obverse of the roughly contemporary 100 mil coin of Israel.

⁴⁸ On the contemporary British issues, as well as on the issues of the self-governing members of the British Commonwealth (Canada, Australia, South Africa), the Queen wears a simple coronet. The crowned bust remains characteristic of the genuinely colonial coinage.

⁴⁹ Given, “Eteocypriots”, p. 4, with reference to Storrs, *Orientations*, p. 507.

legendary king, Richard I. During the second phase, however, which is reflected in the coinage of Elizabeth II, a clear effort was made towards a more positive reaction. Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary, wrote in a 1946 secret memo “our whole policy towards Cyprus will have to be reviewed, for we have starved the Cypriots, treated them very badly, and must mend our ways”.⁵⁰ This new policy would be implemented through the projection of a more accessible, more “popular” image of royal power and through a rapprochement with the local population, provided though that the latter was willing to disclaim its Greek character and to don its “authentic Cypriot” identity.

The above observations do not invalidate the caveat submitted by Given. On the contrary, they confirm the overlap and “time lag” which he perceived between the “production” of ideological discourse by historians and archaeologists and its exploitation by the colonial authorities, who seem to lag behind by one phase and only at the very end catch up with the ideological developments. But the attempt to befriend the Cypriot population hesitantly implemented at the end of the 1940s and based, moreover, on the exclusion of self-definition and self-determination, was insufficient, tragically belated and far from realistic. In the early hours of the first of April 1955, four months before the circulation of the new – and last – numismatic issue of colonial Cyprus, the armed struggle of EOKA had begun, initiating half a century of violence.

Even after the forced renunciation of British sovereignty and the recognition of Cypriot independence, measures were taken in order to foil the Greek-Cypriots’ suggestion that the new coinage of the Republic of Cyprus might include motifs from the specifically Greek past of the island, such as figures of Aphrodite and Dionysos or a ram and a bull from ancient coins of Salamis and Paphos. Finally, all human figures were excluded, and only plants or animals were deemed acceptable (a mouflon for the 100 mil coin, a bunch of

grapes for the 50 mil, a cedar cone for the 25 mil, the same ancient sailing ship for the 5 mil coin and two ears of corn



Fig. 30-31: Obverse and reverse of the Republic of Cyprus 100 mil cupro-nickel coin (1982).

⁵⁰ British Foreign Secretary’s memo on the future of the Italian colonies, 13 March 1946, cited by Brendan O’Malley and Ian Craig, *The Cyprus Conspiracy*, London and New York 1999, p. 9.

for the 1 mil coin).⁵¹ Only on the new coinage, minted in 1983 after the introduction of the new cents denomination in replacement of mils, does a theme clearly evoking the Greek past of the island make its first appearance. The reverse of the elegant 50 cent coin carries a reproduction of the reverse of a silver issue of the ancient kingdom of Marion figuring the abduction of Europa and bearing in syllabic script the Greek legend βασι(λῆ)FO_ς ΤιμοχάριFO_ς.



Fig. 32: Reverse of the Republic of Cyprus 50 mil cupro-nickel coin (1982).

Fig. 33: Reverse of the Republic of Cyprus 25 mil cupro-nickel coin (1982).

The lessons from this failed attempt to create an “authentic Cypriot”, one might say an Eteo-

cypriot, conscience in Cyprus retain all their actuality 50 years later. It would indeed be vain to seek the solution to the political problems of the island through the erasure of the cultural identity of the communities forming its population.



Fig. 34: Reverse of the Republic of Cyprus 5 mil copper coin (1982).



Such operations of social engineering by the method of lobotomy are doomed to failure

Fig. 35-36: Obverse and reverse of the Republic of Cyprus 50 cent cupro-nickel coin (2004).

or, worse, to disaster. Their symbols are swept away by the winds of History with the same swiftness that returned to nothingness the flags invented by the United States for Iraq or by the Annan plan for Cyprus. Harmonious coexistence cannot be founded

on the forced modification or circumvention of cultural identities by an imperial power, but only through the painful realisation by the interested communities themselves of the vital need for mutual acceptance and respect.⁵²



Fig. 37: Reverse of a silver stater of Marion.

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⁵¹ Cf. Pridmore, *Coins*, pp. 66-67.

⁵² Cf. P. M. Kitromilides, “The Dialectic of Intolerance: Ideological Dimensions of Ethnic Conflicts”, *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 6, 4 (Winter 1979), pp. 5-30 [= *id., Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1994, Study XII].