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## Striking stories: a political geography of euro coinage

Pauliina Raento<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Anna Hämäläinen<sup>b</sup>,  
Hanna Ikonen<sup>b</sup>, Nella Mikkonen<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Department of Geography, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA*

<sup>b</sup>*Department of Geography, University of Helsinki, Finland*

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### Abstract

Money is a powerful ideological messenger because of its omnipresence in everyday landscapes. Recent research on banknotes shows that images printed on money support the production and maintenance of national narratives, thus helping to legitimize power structures in the finest tradition of “banal nationalism.” We expand this scope by examining the carefully balanced coexistence of supranational cartography and national imagery on 120 euro coins. Our empirical study demonstrates the significance of metal money as a multi-faceted tool of political identity projects within the European Union. The study shows how recent contributions to visual methodologies are useful in the interpretation of monetary iconography. The findings are applicable to postage stamps and street names, the messages of which are similarly controlled by political elites.

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We handle money daily as a natural part of our environment. The imagery on this tool of exchange makes it an ideological messenger, but the images often slip by unnoticed despite their strong cultural and political symbolism. Those interested in the imagery of money have typically been collectors or historians who approach coins as sources of information in the absence of written records (Howgego, 1995; Reid, 1984, pp. 223–226; see, e.g., *The Numismatist*).

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\* Corresponding author. Department of Geography, University of Minnesota, 414 Social Sciences Building, 267 – 19th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA.

*E-mail address:* [raento@umn.edu](mailto:raento@umn.edu) (P. Raento).

Innovative scholars have recently examined the visual richness of money from the perspectives of place- and time-specific identity and symbolism, thus expanding the traditional approaches to money (Cunnally, 1999; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Helleiner, 1999b; Hewitt, 1995a, 1995b; Pointon, 1998; Unwin & Hewitt, 2001). As a product of the state, money creates a link between the state's political identity project and its citizens. The imagery of money supports the production and maintenance of a national narrative, written by the national elite. Images of national leaders, famous monuments, and other familiar icons printed or minted on money efficiently promote a sense of collectiveness, as money is present everywhere all the time. As contributions to a state's official iconography, bank notes and coins thus become prime tools for building an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983) in the finest tradition of what Billig (1995) calls "banal nationalism"—the mundane promotion of national iconography and identity in the everyday landscape of ordinary citizens. Money also builds the state's boundaries and a territorial sense of 'us', because the validity of a currency ends at the border, where the territory of another currency begins. Money is obviously an important tool in the legitimization and maintenance of power structures, and it is no accident that a country's currency has long been considered a prominent symbol of its sovereignty (see Helleiner, 1999). As Lefebvre (1991, p. 54) puts it, "A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space." Similar observations apply to postage stamps, which are likewise products of the state and have a strong propaganda value as they carry a rich imagery of a nation's achievements and memorable events (Brunn, 2000, 2002; Raento & Brunn, submitted for publication; Reid, 1972, 1984, 1993). Yet another elite narrative imprinted in local everyday space appears on place names, for example in colonial landscapes and the streets of major urban centers (Alderman, 2000, 2002, 2003; Azaryahu, 1996, 1997; Herman, 1999; Myers, 1996; Rydjord, 1986; Withers, 2000; Yeoh, 1996). Money, stamps, and place names are thus a significant, yet lamentably marginal part of the research on political iconography.

The messages of money, stamps, and place names are taken for granted exactly because of their omnipresence (Pointon, 1998, p. 229; see also Standish, 2000, p. 7). Most traveling Westerners know that there is a president and an important building on the U.S. 20-dollar bill, but naming them is trickier.<sup>1</sup> This mundane way in which these kinds of images serve to "flag the nation" on a country's currency may not attract attention, but quietly guarantees that the residents of that country do not forget who they are (supposed to be) and where they (are supposed to) belong. This way does not match the common perceptions of what promotion of a political identity is about—instead of emotionally charged ceremonies and special commemorative events, this nationalism infiltrates the everyday in a manner which makes it look 'normal' (Billig, 1995, pp. 93–127). For the same reason, academic research has largely ignored these visual and textual messages. It is now recognized, however, that all everyday landscapes and practices of meaning are worth examining, for they form

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<sup>1</sup> President Andrew Jackson (1829–1837) and the White House.

the core of our immediate life experience and define ‘us’ as a distinct group. Even the most banal forms of nationalism clearly have the potential to become foci of heated identity battles if a perceived sense of threat emerges. Political-geographic research into the naming of places already shows how the symbolism of efforts to forge identities can feed resistance and conflicts (Berg & Kearns, 1996; Cohen & Kliot, 1992; Raento & Watson, 2000, pp. 724–729; Zelinsky, 1983). Some (rather descriptive) accounts of contested “philatelic cartography” are available as well (Stamp, 1966; see Davis, 1985; Kingsbury, 1964), but more critical work is needed on money and postage stamps.

The increasing social-scientific interest in the study of visual data supports the study of money from this perspective (Banks, 2001; Goin, 2001; Lutz & Collins, 1993; Rose, 1996, 2001; Schwartz & Ryan, 2003; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001; van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001). The innovative work on cartography and landscape interpretation in the 1980s and 1990s already confirmed that a variety of visual data can be approached as multilayered, socially constructed texts, and new supportive research is becoming available (Daniels & Cosgrove, 1988; Duncan & Duncan, 1988; Harley, 1988, 1992; Henrikson, 1994; Kosonen, 1999; Monmonier, 1991; Pickles, 1992; Wood, 1992; Zeigler, 2002). This context-sensitive approach is applicable to political icons which become legible through their cultural, political, social, temporal, and other relevant settings. These icons’ relationship with identity and space draws interpretative support from the concepts of scale and territoriality (see Herb, 1999; Kaplan, 1999).

The multidisciplinary nature of iconographic study and the growing interest in visual methodology make money (and other tools of everyday identity politics) an attractive and important research topic. The recent transformation of our own environment has further motivated us to study this topic: Finland joined the European Union (EU) in 1995, the European Monetary Union (EMU) in 1998 and replaced its markka with the supranational euro in 2002, thus joining “the biggest monetary changeover in history” (Background to the euro, 2003). In the public debate before the transition, the markka’s symbolic significance for the independence of Finland was underscored—it had served the defense of Finnish identity and rights since its introduction in 1865, when Finland was an autonomous part of the Russian Empire (until 1917) (Klinge, 1981; for the imagery, see Talvio, 1995, 2003; Themes, 2004). In this debate, the euro was portrayed as a threat to Finnishness. It was feared that the transition would inevitably lead to the erosion of Finnish identity and that ‘European’ markers would eventually replace national symbols. This perceived incompatibility of scales convinced many that the technical quality of the euro was inferior to that of the markka and that such practical problems as the usage of parking meters could not be overcome (HS, 5 January 2002a, 2002b). The “Farewell to the Finnish Mark” exhibition at the National Museum in Helsinki in 2001 was a retrospective of the markka’s history and evolving designs (see Talvio, 2003). The exhibition was extremely popular, further demonstrating the contribution of money to national identity and to the delivery of symbolic messages regarding this identity. The transition to euro also provoked a keen interest in (coin) collecting in Finland and other euro countries (HS, 6 April 2003).

The simultaneous reference to two scales makes the euro a particularly interesting currency, and much of what Billig (1995) says about the mundane promotion of a national identity can be applied to the supranational level. On the one hand, the currency is a strongly political symbol of the EMU and the EU efforts to build “a common European home.” Euro bills and coins are the most concrete link to the EU for its citizens, because they *all* deal with the same money daily—its presence is much more widespread and frequent than that of EU passports, its flag, anthem, or other EU symbols (see [www.europa.eu.int/abc/](http://www.europa.eu.int/abc/)). It should be noted that perhaps the most personal of these symbolic items, the EU passport, also met with some initial resistance in Finland, because people objected to replacing the national blue passport with its supranational maroon counterpart. Subsequently, detachable blue covers with the old Finnish passport’s cover design appeared in some travel item stores. These examples show how the project to forge a supranational identity is made visible in multiple ways in the everyday lives of ordinary Europeans, who sometimes symbolically visualize their resistance to these changes. On the other hand, the national sides of euro coins confirm that this promotion of a supranational identity involves, and depends on, independent states. The success of the new measures likewise depends on their acceptance by citizens in individual countries.

Those few scholars who have commented on the symbolism of the euro focus on the maps and on the imaginary gates and bridges on the banknotes, assessing their symbolism as connecting, inviting, and controlling structures (Moisio, 2002, pp. 247–254; Pointon, 1998, p. 252; Pollard & Sidaway, 2002). More stories, however, are found on the coins, whose imagery reflects both supranational and national identity projects. One could even claim that coins are generally more efficient messengers than banknotes, because they reach a broader audience—even the most marginalized citizens and small children handle coins.

Our examination of euro coins seeks to demonstrate the value of metal money in political-geographic research of monetary iconography. Our principal goal is to respond to the call by Unwin and Hewitt (2001, pp. 1006–1007) and Zeigler (2002, p. 685) to develop new analyses and methods for a comparative study of the imagery on money and similar data. In our empirical approach we provide an overview of the euro coin imagery by asking basic methodical questions about this imagery. Our bibliography intends to bring together useful sources in support of future research. A discussion on the dimensions of European identity politics and iconographic or semiotic research in geography is excluded from this study (for recent contributions to the debate on European identities, see Agnew, 2001; Barnett, 2001; Graham, 1998b; Kaplan & Häkli, 2002; Mikkeli, 1998; Murphy, 1999; Paasi, 2001, especially p. 17; Prevelakis & van der Wusten, 2000).

### Notes on data and method

The euro has been the official currency of the European Union and a tool of bank transfers since 1999 and the beginning of the EMU’s third phase. This process has a long history—the idea of a common currency in Europe is by no means new

(Buiter, Corsetti, & Pesenti, 1998, pp. 19–37; Pinder, 1995; Verdun, 2002). The new currency entered everyday life in the EU on 1 January 2002, when 50 billion coins and 14.5 billion banknotes were put into circulation (Euro banknotes and coins, 2003). Each euro country has eight coins. Their values are 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents and 1 and 2 euros. The 12 euro countries are Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain. Monaco, San Marino, and the Vatican also issued a small number of their own coins. San Marino's and the Vatican's coins were arranged with a special agreement with Italy, while Monaco made a similar agreement with France. Three EU member countries, Britain, Denmark, and Sweden, opted to stay outside of the euro zone and continue using their national currencies.

All these 120 coins are included in our examination, because each set of eight coins has its own national imagery. It is worth noting, however, that the 5 cent coin is the smallest in circulation in Finland and that the coins of Monaco, San Marino, and the Vatican quickly disappeared into the pockets of collectors. The coins of the 12 euro countries can be seen on the European Central Bank (ECB) website ([www.euro.ecb.int](http://www.euro.ecb.int)), along with detailed technical information, the official description of the images, and information about their design processes. Commercial collector sites contain similar data about the coins of the other three countries (e.g., [www.euroswapper.com](http://www.euroswapper.com)). These websites provided access to those coins we could not reach otherwise. Information on euro coins is also available through the websites of national mints (e.g., [www.austrian-mint.com](http://www.austrian-mint.com) in Austria or [www.rahapaja.fi](http://www.rahapaja.fi) in Finland), which helped to produce the supranational coins (see Euro banknotes and coins, 2003).

The “common side” of the euro coins is the same in each country. The common theme is cartography. We examined the maps on euro coins by asking basic questions of critical cartographic analysis, focusing on the projections, boundaries, and relative centers and peripheries depicted on these maps (Harley, 1988, 1992; Kosonen, 1999; Monmonier, 1991; Pickles, 1992; Wood, 1992; Zeigler, 2002). The “country-specific” sides—and, in some cases, the edges of the coins—portray national themes selected in individual countries. In the examination of these images we used a basic iconographical analysis, drawing support from content analysis, discourse analysis, and semiotics (Barthes, 1973; Bell, 2001; Daniels & Cosgrove, 1988; Lutz & Collins, 1993; Rose, 2001, pp. 54–99, 135–163; van Leeuwen, 2001; Weightman, 1988). We first described each image and then placed it into a broad category on the basis of its primary theme. Six primary categories emerged: (1) human figures; (2) cultural patrimony; (3) state heraldry; (4) artifacts; (5) nature; and (6) texts. Questions such as “Is the portrayed human figure a real, identifiable person?” then led to more detailed subgroups, addressing the gender and profession of the depicted individuals. “Cultural patrimony” consists of architecture, arts, and literature. The categories are partly overlapping, because one image may reflect multiple themes. For example, we placed a coin depicting an artist both in the “identifiable individuals” and “cultural patrimony” categories. The recognition of primary themes was fairly simple, because coins (unlike banknotes) have little space for multiple narratives.

The images and their symbolism have no meaning without contextualization (Unwin & Hewitt, 2001, p. 1011). Our main goal was to interpret the euro coin imagery as socially constructed and temporally bound political-geographic texts. The EU's project of a common currency makes most sense when connected to the historical evolution of economic and political integration in Europe—the promotion of a supranational identity seeks to legitimize the EU. The symbolic representations of each state are embedded in its nation-building project and in each nation's historical, economic, political, and cultural characteristics. The most laborious part of our task was to place the imagery in its context and unveil its meanings. The background work was greatly facilitated by the Internet, which offers a quick access to a variety of reference sources (for a rich body of numismatic sources online, see [www.money.org/othersites](http://www.money.org/othersites)). To avoid problems regarding the reliability of source material, we favored official sites of recognized organizations and publications, but critically assessed each source's status in European integration. We assumed, for example, that the information regarding euro coins on the ECB website is correct, but written in favor of the integration process. The official versions of the story clearly point to the political nature of the common currency (see Hall, 1981).

### Cartography on the common sides

Three versions of the EU map (Fig. 1), all designed by Luc Luycx of the Royal Belgian Mint, are portrayed on the common side of the euro coins (*Euro banknotes and coins*, 2003). Twelve stars (of the EU flag) surround each map and are linked together by six parallel lines. A large number and an attached text dominate the common side, together indicating the value of the coin. The currency's symbol €, designed to serve as “a highly recognizable symbol of Europe” and to “indicate the stability of the euro” (*Euro banknotes and coins*, 2003), is not included in the coins' design.

On the 1 euro and 2 euro coins, the map depicts “a unified Europe without frontiers.” The 10, 20, and 50 cent coins depict “Europe as a group of individual nations,” the 1, 2, and 5 cent coins describe “Europe's place in the world” (*Euro banknotes and coins*, 2003). According to this official description, the map trio



Fig. 1. Three cartographic perspectives on the European Union as depicted on the common sides of euro coins.

portrays ‘Europe’ as a natural, unified, and harmonious entity whose member countries enjoy an independent and equal status. In the wording, ‘European Union’ and ‘Europe’ are used synonymously. The EU’s internal boundaries are underplayed, but the entity is clearly differentiated from areas outside the EU’s carefully guarded external boundary (cf. Mo시오, 2002).

Maps are very important in the promotion of a sense of ‘our space’ and in molding public opinion. Giving cartographic shape to a (aspired) national entity has been a common way to make it visible and support identification with this territory (Daniels, 1998; Harley, 1988, 1992; Pickles, 1992). This persuasive power of cartography has been recognized in a similar way in the supranational promotion of a European identity—not surprisingly, maps are among those few EU symbols that are systematically repeated in a plethora of EU-themed merchandise and events (cf. Kosonen, 1999, p. 91). These maps are typical representatives of what Zeigler (2002) in his inspection of eastern European “cartography of independence” calls “persuasive maps,” maps that “communicate in whispers” instead of the “shouts” characteristic of propaganda maps (Zeigler, 2002, p. 672). The whispers put forward by the common cartographic imagery on both euro coins and banknotes are designed to work in support of the new supranational citizenship education in Europe. To assess how the cartographic imagery on euro coins portrays the world, we asked the following questions:

- Where are the boundaries of the portrayed entity?
- How are the entity’s parts related to the whole and to one another?
- What cartographic tools and details support the delivery of the message?
- What is behind these cartographic choices?
- What is the message of the image?
- To whom is the message directed?

In each of the three maps, ‘Europe’ is synonymous to the EU’s composition at the beginning of 2002. The portrayal of the Nordic countries is thus incomplete: Finland and Sweden are on these maps, but Norway, which has repeatedly chosen not to join the EU, is not. The maps’ projection nevertheless overemphasizes the size of the northernmost areas, as is customary in a eurocentric cartographic worldview. The coins thus differ from the banknotes, which include Norway and Iceland and larger areas in the east (Mo시오, 2002, p. 251; Pointon, 1998, p. 252). That Iceland is not included could be explained by lack of available space on the smallest coins, but Norway’s exclusion appears to have other than practical reasons.

In the most important part of the map—in the center—we find France, one of the EU superpowers (cf. Zeigler, 2002, pp. 681–682). Its location underscores the prominence of France and its largest neighbors in European integration. On top of France on the 1 and 2 euro coins is a large letter E. A cynically creative mind recalling the troubles of European integration in the 1950s and 1960s could give it a status-enhancing meaning: “E as in ‘Europe’ itself!” A more probable reason is likely to be pragmatic (yet political): on this map, where the member countries are depicted as one entity, the sizeable E covers a hole—that is Switzerland, which remains outside of the EU in accordance with its strict non-alignment policy.

Finland and Sweden appear as peripheral in the north, because Lapland and Finland's easternmost areas are 'marginalized' by their placement on the outer ring of the bi-metal coins.

The unified map on the two most valuable coins looks to the future, expecting that the EU and the EMU member lists will be identical one day. The three EU countries which continue the usage of their national currencies (Britain, Denmark, and Sweden) are included in the map. This can be read as one way to enhance the EU's sometimes shaky sense of togetherness—it is possible that the exclusion of these countries would have fueled their resistance to the euro, complicated national relationships within the EU, and conveyed an image of disagreement to the outside. The erasure of internal boundaries within the EU area promotes an image of a unified entity behind one cause, matching the spirit of the Schengen Treaty (1995; see [www.europa.eu.int](http://www.europa.eu.int)). This message portrayed on a common currency promotes the EU as a harmonious territorial whole and as a target of identification for the member countries' citizens.

Balancing the message of unity, the map on 10, 20, and 50 cent coins represents the 15 EU countries as separate entities, highlighting their physical shape. Almost as a concession to those suspicious of the goals of integration, each country appears here as an independent state with clearly marked external boundaries and unquestioned sovereignty. This version, however, is secondary to the ideals of unity, as the unified map decorates the two most valuable coins. This hierarchy is not explicit, however—in fact, the official descriptions carefully avoid using the numismatic, hierarchical terms "obverse" and "reverse" for the two sides of the euro coins, calling them "common" and "country-specific" sides instead.

The least valuable three coins zoom out of the EU context and place the EU in a larger geographical context. A globe gives this 'Europe' a location and positions it with other entities by showing selected latitudes and longitudes and depicting the shape of the continents. The perspective is eurocentric, following the conventions of European cartography and history writing. The EU part of Europe occupies the center of the image, slightly westward from the middle. The northern hemisphere is emphasized, including the Arctic regions, Africa north of the equator, and roughly one half of Eurasia toward the east. The focus covers both the territorial roots of Europe's early cultural, economic, and philosophical heritage—much of what today is considered to be 'European' was initially imported from these areas—and Europe's shifting political cores from the Mediterranean emphasis of the classical period toward central and northern Europe by the late Middle Ages (Jordan-Bychkov & Bychkova Jordan, 2002, pp. 233–240; Mead, 1998; Mikkeli, 1998, pp. 7–39).

The EU stands out slightly darker and higher than its environment, separating it from the rest of Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Russia. The EU's external boundary is again clear, perhaps sending a message of inclusion and exclusion—a common European identity has traditionally been defined against the Other, especially in the east (Mikkeli, 1998, pp. 157–193). For those who criticized the 1995 Schengen Treaty for creating "Fortress Europe," this external boundary appears to be strongly exclusive and selective. The image seems to accept the idea of Europe ending somewhere in the Ural Mountains, which despite its popularity is only one



interpretation regarding Europe's undetermined eastern boundary (see Jordan-Bychkov & Bychkova Jordan, 2002, pp. 1–28; Shaw, 1998). The EU definition of Europe's eastern boundary remains contradictory in relation to the euro, when this image is compared to the cartography on the banknotes, where only the westernmost part of Russia is depicted, and on the official euro website, where the euro countries are portrayed on a map that excludes Russia from Europe altogether ([Background to the euro](#), 2003). On the euro coin map, the rest of the world is included in the idea of a globe, acknowledging the EU's status as a global player.

In this light, the euro coins' common side seeks to unite the EU member countries under the umbrella of one 'European' identity in search of shared symbols and meanings. The supranational scale allows this cartography to focus on the common denominators at the supranational and national levels. As recent debates within Europe illustrate, this is a politically charged construction which continues to emphasize western and northern Europe's predominantly Christian, White, and Indo-European majority cultures (see Mikkeli, 1998, pp. 195–209). The power of nation-states in the shaping of Europe's history and relationship with the rest of the world is reflected in this cartography by the need to balance supranational and national interests—the whole is dependent on the good will of its unique parts, despite their shared political, economic, and ideological characteristics. The message is primarily directed at the citizens of these countries and to those countries that wish to enter the EU in the future. The message suggests that the newcomers have nothing to fear, as the whole is constructed on a common ground without interfering in national peculiarities or self-determination. Success in common goals will make Europe stand out economically. The message is heard outside of the euro zone as well, because visitors are likely to examine the novel imagery more carefully (Pointon, 1998; Unwin & Hewitt, 2001, p. 1026). Here the euros strongly resemble postage stamps, which are used to enhance national identities at home and to advertise a nation's achievements and values abroad (Brunn, 2000, pp. 316–317; Reid, 1984, p. 226, 238, 241).

### **Human figures on the national sides of euro coins**

The most common images on money are people. The relationship of money and portraits was close already at the time of Alexander the Great and the Roman Empire (see Kivimäki & Tuomisto, 2000; Williams, 1997). Rulers and other famous individuals are often featured on contemporary money as well, and an individual's portrayal on a national currency further enhances his or her significance on the collective memory of a nation (Billig, 1995; Pointon, 1998, pp. 233–235). Eighty-one percent of the banknotes examined by Unwin and Hewitt (2001, p. 1008) depicted an identifiable person. In our sample of 120 coins, 51% of the images (61 coins) portray a human figure. A little over three quarters of these (47 coins, 39% of the entire sample) are real, identifiable persons. Most of others in this category are allegorical icons of a nation or works of art containing human subjects (Fig. 2).

How are human figures on the examined euro coins divided between the countries? Finnish, German, Irish, and Portuguese coins include no human figures,



Fig. 2. People of different eras and their portrayal on euro coins. Top left: A contemporary monarch, King Albert II of Belgium (all Belgian coins); Eleftherios Venizelos of Greece, a social reformist and diplomat (1864–1936) (50 cents); Raphael's (1483–1520) portrait of the Italian author Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) (EUR 2). Bottom left: The sower (10, 20 and 50 cents) and Marianne (1, 2 and 5 cents), allegorical females on French coins; and Sandro Botticelli's (1445–1510) version of Venus (Italy, 10 cents).

whereas on the coins of Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and the Vatican the image of the head of state is the only theme. Ten of the 15 examined sets include identifiable persons, whereas the human figures on French coins are all allegorical. Human figures are thus a commonly accepted theme in this sample as well.

After determining the basic classification described above, we asked the following questions:

- Who is in the picture?
- What are this person's merits (Why is he or she depicted?)
- In what social or political context can he or she be placed?
- What era does he or she represent?

The identification of the person determines the gender. The selection is predominantly masculine: 39 coins depict a male (64% of all coins depicting a human figure). The male presence is further enhanced by the almost exclusive presence of men behind the included works of art, architecture, and the design of the coins themselves. The allegorical and other human figures are predominantly female. Nine coins out of 14 portray a female, some of whom have a name. Among these are classical Europa and Venus from Greek mythology, and Marianne of the French Revolution. Behind or in the company of these women are often men. The Italian master Sandro Botticelli has given face to Venus, and Zeus, in the form of a bull, has abducted Europa (cf. [Unwin & Hewitt, 2001, pp. 1021–1023](#)). In [Hewitt's \(1995c, p. 156\)](#) words, “given the tendency for women to be marginalized in terms of

economic power, it is ironic that they have so often been chosen to bestow qualities of strength and power on to currency” (see Hewitt, 1995b).

Twenty-eight images are of contemporary monarchs (60% of all coins with identifiable individuals). Beatrix, the Queen of Netherlands, is the only female—and the only theme on Dutch coins. Irrespective of their gender, monarchs are powerful symbols of national unity (Klinge, 1981, pp. 87–95, 281–283). Monarchy represents stability and continuity as a hereditary institution and because a monarch’s rule usually lasts a lifetime. The monarchy is among those few positions that historically have allowed (or required) women to pursue their own political career—women remained otherwise relatively invisible in Europe’s patriarchal societies. In some countries, laws of succession may give preference to male lineage, but also chance has influenced the gender division on ‘royal’ euro coins. An exclusive link between the state and masculinity is found on those nine coins that depict a religious leader. Pope John Paul II represents the present era, and Saint Marino of San Marino the past era. Both represent the Catholic Church, which excludes women from political, administrative, and (to some extent) spiritual leadership. The strong concentration of this imagery, however, draws a clear boundary between the Catholic city state and the rest of the (rather secular) EU.

Contemporary people on euro coins are all monarchs (except the Pope). Emperor Marcus Aurelius on Italy’s 50 cent coin is the only reference to past rulers. When we move from the royalty to the category’s other subgroups, the focus shifts. All other individuals who are depicted on the coins presumably for their political merits were born in the mid-18th century at the earliest and passed away no later than in the 1930s. These four individuals represent republics (Austria and Greece), where the length of political leadership is often unpredictable, depending on electoral results and political trends (cf. Unwin & Hewitt, 2001, p. 1018, pp. 1023–1024). This discussion about political leadership in republics demonstrates the importance of asking the following questions:

- What (or who) is not included in the images (and why)?
- Do the omissions correlate with some particular characteristic or context?

The cultural notables on euro coins span over a longer and older timeline. The representatives of literature and visual arts range from Dante Alighieri (Italy, EUR 2) to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Austria, EUR 1). Over a century is added to the timeline when Austria’s Nobel Peace Prize winner Bertha von Suttner (1843–1914) is added to this category through her secondary merit as an author. Many of the references to culture and art are indirect or dual, which complicates their classification per era. For example, Dante’s (1265–1321) portrait was painted by Raphael, who lived during the Italian Renaissance in the 15th and 16th centuries. Many of the references to individual artists are thus indirect, through their work, and the image on the coin refers to both individual people and works of art. The included authors and artists share a global name recognition which has only strengthened over the centuries. The “personal status” of these individuals has long ago been “translated into public glory” (Hewitt, 1995c, p. 161).



Fig. 3. Thematic pluralism on Spanish euro coins: King Juan Carlos I (EUR 1 and EUR 2), Don Quixote's creator Cervantes (10, 20 and 50 cents), who lived from 1547–1616, and the Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela, a leading Christian pilgrimage destination and a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage monument in Galicia, northwestern Spain (1, 2 and 5 cents).

We approached the internal hierarchy within the national sets through each country's societal setting, asking questions about the images and their respective hierarchical ranking:

- What is the value of the coin depicting person x?
- If the set has more than one theme, is there a hierarchy (that is, how are people placed in relation to other themes)?
- How are the human figures portrayed on the coins?
- What other trends (if any) can be found in the sample?

King Juan Carlos I is portrayed on the two highest denominations of the Spanish coins (Fig. 3). In this hierarchy, the entire kingdom is placed below him, in accordance with the general idea of monarchy. That there are other themes, however, reflects Spain's domestic politics, especially the prolonged conflict between the central government and culturally distinct minority regions. During the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco (1939–1975), the pursuit of “One, Great, and Free Spain” included a tight grip on the state's iconography. Franco's face was everywhere, on both coins and postage stamps. One likely reason for the current variety is the desire to break from the country's dictatorial past. Since Franco's death, Spain has used politically more neutral and culturally more pluralistic symbolism (including regionally themed 25 peseta coins in the 1990s). The other themes on the Spanish euro coins refer to the country's literary heritage, Catholicism, and globally significant architecture (Fig. 3). The pluralization of ‘Spanish’ symbols and the historical emphasis avoids unnecessary tension with those minorities that question the legitimacy of the Spanish state. King Juan Carlos I has successfully represented the unity of this turbulent country and its nascent democracy. The continuous challenge to the King's position and even direct threats against his life by the Basque separatist ETA point to the fragile political balance in Spanish politics.

The allegorical human figures represent the longest timespan in our sample, reaching from the classical Greek mythology to the allegorical women of the French Revolution and concentrating on the cradles of the (presumptive) Western democratic system. Revolutionary Marianne, depicted on the smallest three French

euro coins, is a typical example of a mythical (and imaginary) character, who is strongly present in the collective French memory by representing the nation's glorious past, unity, and common values (cf. Hewitt, 1995c, pp. 158–159; Pointon, 1998, pp. 242–247; Reid, 1984, p. 237). She has been given several faces by famous artists, and she has appeared on several postage stamps issued in France after World War II, as well as on francs (see *The French Marianne issues*, 2002). Marianne was again modified for the 21st century, this time taking on a “young” and “feminine” look. She was connected to a new, supranational scale: her “determined features [...] embody the desire for a sound and lasting Europe” (*Euro banknotes and coins*, 2003). The sower, too, has taken a step toward Europe, if we are to believe the official explanation: the redesigned “modern, timeless graphic represents France, which stays true to itself, whilst integrating into Europe” (*Euro banknotes and coins*, 2003), putting forward a call for dual identity. A sarcastic association with French agriculture in the EU context is difficult to avoid.

The frequent usage of facial representations or busts follows the general style of monetary design (Fig. 2). The emphasis on the upper portion of the body highlights the person's thinking and, most importantly from the perspective of promoting a common European heritage, claims “for a modern nation the position of heir to the Roman Imperium” (Pointon, 1998, p. 233). The choice might be a pragmatic one, too: the space available on coins, together with the limitations of engraving techniques, supports the usage of facial and bust images if the person needs to be identifiable. In the case of coins, identifiable facial features hardly have much importance as a tool against counterfeiting (see the debate about banknotes in Pointon, 1998, pp. 236–237; Unwin & Hewitt, 2001, p. 1014).

Another trend in the sample is the chronological order of representation. The direction is from the past toward the present, and the value of the coin increases toward the present. Contemporary monarchs are thus placed on the most valuable coins or on the entire set. People are usually placed above architecture and nature.

## **Cultural patrimony**

The “cultural patrimony” category consists of architecture, arts, and literature, which appear on 27 coins, or 23% of the entire sample.

Our questions about architecture, our primary focus here, paralleled those asked about human figures. We noted that architecture is more unevenly distributed in the sample than human figures are and the representation of this theme on the 120 coins is smaller. No architecture is depicted in nine sets of coins (Belgium, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, and the Vatican), and in one set (Portugal) the reference is heraldic and not necessarily understood by an average EU citizen who is unlikely to have detailed knowledge of the 12th-century shields of Portugal and its castles. The remaining five sets (Austria, Germany, Italy, San Marino, and Spain) include 17 architectural images (63% of the category, 14% of the entire sample).

One intriguing observation is that the architectural themes are limited to the World War II Axis States or to countries that were under their influence. Charismatic dictatorship and a transition to democracy characterize their 20th-century history. They were all defeated in World War II and are former colonial powers or their parts (or enclaves). Perhaps due to this grim and controversial history, the grandiose architectural contributions of these countries to Europe's common cultural patrimony have earned a prominent role. Of course, this concentration could be accidental, but internationally significant architectonic landmarks in EU Europe are by no means limited to these countries. For some reason, only the former Axis States have chosen to visualize this theme on their euro coins. Their imagery underscores the nations' contemporary unity, historically significant cultural achievements and—especially in the case of Austria—peace.

Architecture seems to enjoy a lower status on euro coins than human figures, because this category is limited to the cent-value denominations. The only exception is San Marino's Public Palace (EUR 2). Architecture thus supports, but does not alone maintain, a nation's greatness. Art and literature serve the same purpose (these two subgroups consist of a total of 10 coins, 37% of the category and 8% of the entire sample). Exceptionally talented individuals and their work in the fields of music, literature, and sculpture also center in three countries, Austria, Italy, and Spain. This theme, too, is politically rather neutral, generally positive, and creates a strong link to a common European (and Western) cultural heritage.

We proceeded in the examination of architecture by identifying, timing, and locating the depicted buildings. We used the following questions:

- What building (or structure) is depicted?
- When was it built and what style does it represent?
- What kinds of trends (if any) are found in the sample?

The temporal and stylistic range of the depicted architecture is broad, from the first-century classical Rome to 19th-century Art Nouveau buildings (the same range applies to arts and literature). The buildings are typically—and not surprisingly—monumental and architecturally exemplary, that is, they are among the most impressive representatives of their style and era in their countries (Fig. 4). As these buildings are world-famous, their significance extends well beyond national boundaries, enhancing the buildings' importance as a source of national pride and



Fig. 4. Examples of architecture on euro coins. From left to right: Brandenburg Gate in Berlin (Germany, 10, 20 and 50 cents); Belvedere Palace in Vienna (Austria, 20 cents); The Roman Colosseum (Italy, 5 cents); Mole Antonelliana, a 19th-century Art Nouveau building in Turin (Italy, 2 cents); and Castel del Monte, a 13th-century fortress near the city of Bari on the shores of the Adriatic (Italy, 1 cent).

individuality. Furthermore, seven coins (41% of architecture) depict a building placed on UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage list (<http://whc.unesco.org/heritage.htm>). As is the case with people, the most recent buildings are depicted on the highest denominations. However, Italy's smallest coins are an exception to this trend (Fig. 4): the Roman Colosseum has been assigned the highest values in the subset, as a reference to classical Rome's contribution to European cultural patrimony.

The following questions helped us to assess a building's significance:

- Who built it?
- Where is it located?

The monumental character of the buildings points to their construction history. Most of them were built at the decree of a monarch, or by institutions (especially the church) or individuals closely related to the head of state. The work was typically given to a famous architect, whose name added to the value of the building.

The role of the state is reflected in the buildings' location, further increasing their symbolic value. Nationally significant monumental buildings are typically found in the centers of political, economic, cultural, and/or religious power. Most of the buildings depicted on euro coins are located in capital cities, the rest are in regional centers or in strategically important places. As historic concentrations of power, European capitals are pompous (inter)national display cases which target their message to both domestic peripheries and abroad. Many of them have been sites of important international developments which have steered Europe's political destinies. Location, together with the other characteristics, makes the depicted buildings typical "propaganda projects," the purpose of which is "to impress foreign [and domestic] visitors" (Hall, 1981, p. 325; cf. Domosh, 1994). These buildings thus support one central purpose of a capital city, which is "to represent and symbolize state power and national unity" (van der Wusten, 2000, p. 339). Location in the city center adds to the message. For example, St. Stephen's Cathedral, Belvedere Palace and the Secession, which are depicted on Austria's 10, 20, and 50 cent coins respectively, are among the most important structures of Old Town Vienna, which is placed in its entirety on UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage list and is visited by millions of tourists each year. The protection of a building always creates a direct link to authorities and the celebrated achievements of a community irrespective of its scale. Austria's capital and its landmarks have been elevated to a globally significant position in this regard.

Time—the age of the building, that is—also adds to its value, although the usage and fates of buildings vary over time. We asked the following questions:

- For what purpose was the structure built and for whom?
- How has it been used over time?
- What purpose does it serve now?

Generally speaking, the original purpose of the buildings depicted on euro coins was to celebrate the might and wealth of its commissioner in addition to serving a practical function (summer residence, church, theater). Owners have come and

gone, but significant episodes in the history of these buildings have strengthened their connection to the state. A prime example is Belvedere Palace in Vienna (Fig. 4), which was built in a central location during the height of Baroque in the 18th century as a lavish summer residence for a general who was related to the monarch. The state became the owner of the building at the end of World War I. In 1955, the document restoring Austria's sovereignty was signed in Belvedere Palace, "making its name synonymous with freedom" (Euro banknotes and coins, 2003). The official description of the image's symbolism suggests that Belvedere gains its national collective meaning through the state's recent history. The building's cultural importance as an expression par excellence of Baroque architecture is secondary to this meaning. Another, even better-known case in point is the Brandenburg Gate, depicted on German 10, 20, and 50 cent coins (cf. Moisiso, 2002, p. 250, see pp. 252–253). The placement of this gate on a coin brings together supranational, national, and local layers of history, as the gate has witnessed victories and defeats of kings, conquerors and tyrants, finally losing its importance as a symbol of a divided country and a divided city and becoming the prime icon of German unification and the end of Europe's Cold War division (van der Wusten, 2000, pp. 340–343, see Branderburg Gate, 2003; The Branderburger Tor, 2003).

Catholic cathedrals emphasize Europe's Christian heritage and the shifting styles of Catholic church architecture, but there are traces of other influences as well. The intersection of influences has often led to conflict, represented in the sample by the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain (Fig. 3). It was destroyed in the medieval wars between the Muslims and the Catholics for control of the Iberian peninsula, and then rebuilt. Italy's 13th-century Castel del Monte near Bari (Fig. 4), in turn, has contained from the beginning the strong scientific symbolism of its era and stylistic references from both Christian and Muslim cultures (<http://whc.unesco.org/heritage.htm>). These examples reflect Christian Europe's historically complex relationship with Islam and "the conflict of values" as one defining constituent of "Europeanism" (Mikkeli, 1998, p. 210). They illustrate the stories struck on euro coins, which are legible through temporally and spatially sensitive contextualization.

### State heraldry on euro coins

The abundant state-related iconography depicted on euro coins creates a particularly powerful link between the national side of the examined coins and the state. The sample is rich in heraldry—seals, coats of arms, and flags appear on 31 coins, or 25% of the sample. These items center on five sets of coins (Finland, Germany, Monaco, Portugal, and San Marino), but the characteristics of these countries offer no common denominator. A frequently used identifier of the state is its name, found on 84 coins (70% of the sample). The state motto is included on five coins (4%). We examine names, mottos, and other inscriptions in a separate segment, because they turned out to be rich sources of data.





Fig. 5. National symbolism, state heraldry, and references to nature overlap on Finnish euro coins. From left to right: cloundberries (EUR 2), swans over a lake landscape (EUR 1), and the state's lion coat of arms (1–50 cents).

Our examination of state heraldry was guided by the following questions:

- What is the historical background of the symbol?
- What are the symbol's territorial references?
- How have the symbol's status and territorial scope changed over time?
- What explains these changes?
- What does the symbol represent?

The often very long history of heraldic symbols represents continuity. In the case of monarchies, this is further underscored by the symbols' connection to the ruling family and its history. Also in the case of young European countries, such as Finland (independent since 1917), state heraldry is hundreds of years old. The lion coat of arms on the Finnish cent coins (Fig. 5) dates back to the 16th century, when the Swedish ruler Johan III became the Grand Duke of Finland. The status of peripheral Finland as a Grand Duchy of Sweden “highlighted Finland as a territorial entity” (Talvio, 1997, p. 5), but, in practice, the coat of arms' significance was minuscule until Finland was ceded to Russia (1809) after a lost war and was given an autonomous status under the Czar. In fact, the “Lion of Finland” did not become a popular symbol until the years of Russification, a period during which Finland's autonomous rights were restricted and Russian cultural influence became stronger in daily life (especially since 1899). In this context, the lion gradually became a popular symbol of political resistance and was placed on flags, nationalistically themed postcards, and even on candy wrappers. Particularly important in this process was a special “Mourning Stamp,” with the red-and-yellow coat of arms on a black bottom, which was designed in 1900 to protest the Russification of Finnish postal services, and the replacement of the lion by Russia's double-headed eagle on Finnish postage stamps (Poutvaara, 1973; Raento & Brunn, submitted for publication). The lion coat of arms later appeared on the first postage stamps of independent Finland, on the official state flag, and on the reverse side of Finnish markka-value coins (Alapuro, 1988; Klinge, 1981; Talvio, 2003).

The Finnish example illustrates the link between heraldic symbols and territory—coats of arms typically refer to a territorial entity or represent a territory through its ruler (see Neubecker & Brooke-Little, 1976, pp. 104–105). Not only the symbol's contemporary meaning as a popular icon but also its details may have

evolved gradually, in relation to external powers and in the context of national awakening. The swords depicted in the Finnish lion coat of arms make a centuries-old reference to the conflict between empires in the Christian west and the Muslim east. On the Finnish euro coins, the lion brings together the nation's territorial foundation, political resistance and nation-building, the formation of an independent state, and the country's historically complex position as a borderland of east and west. A state's heraldic symbol printed or struck on money is thus firmly tied to this entity's territory and boundaries.

Similar interpretations apply to the other state symbols on euro coins. A strong case in point is the republican symbolism of the allegorical females on the French coins, repeated on postage stamps and coins over decades. The Celtic harp of Ireland is likewise a frequently used symbol of the Irish republic, highlighting the nation's cultural and settlement history as constituents of Irish national identity. The harp appeared also on the previous coins of Ireland, but on the supranational euro, this image brings up a stronger reference to the role of Celtic cultures in Europe's early settlement history. The harp is the most frequent image in the "artifacts" category, which contains 12 coins, 10% of the entire sample.

Similarly interesting artifacts are the Greek ships. They make strong references to the evolution of states in both Greek and Western contexts, tracing the history of Greek civilization from the time when trimeres (war vessels from fifth century BC Athens) were used, through the 1820s and the use of corvettes during the Greek War of Independence, until today, the age of the "modern sea-going tanker" (*Euro banknotes and coins*, 2003), one of the few contemporary themes in the examined imagery. Following a central idea behind contemporary integration (Mikkeli, 1998, pp. 109–111), the three vessels suggest that the emphasis of Europe has shifted from political conflict to economic cooperation and war belongs to the past. Accordingly, references to war are historical and secondary, but it is recognized that contemporary welfare and commercial exchange have been achieved through military effort and defense of ideals. Again, the temporal references of the depicted images proceed from the past toward the present, and those associated with the most recent era are placed on the most valuable coin in the subset. All this points to the central role of the past and the memory of shared experiences in the common idea and identity of unified Europe (Graham, 1998a).

## **Representations of nature**

We defined "nature" broadly, including all references to flora and fauna. Our examination of these images was based on questions similar to those used above. The category includes 23 coins, or 19% of the sample. The six sets of coins (Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, and Monaco) predominantly represent republics.

Nature is firmly connected to both national identity and state symbolism. First of all, the theme creates a strong connection to previous national currencies. The longest history of monetary exchange is represented by the Greek 1 euro coin, which

depicts an Athenian 4 drachma coin from the fifth century BC (see Howgego, 1995, Appendices 20 and 21). The Athenian coin elevates a Greek national reference to a supranational level so as to represent common European civilization and society. The owl depicted on the coins stands for wisdom. Indeed, the animals depicted on euro coins carry strong symbolic messages and are linked to European heraldic traditions—“the most common type of European coats of arms centers around heraldic animals or plants” (Klinge, 1981, p. 244). The most frequently depicted animals are the lion (Finland) and the eagle (Germany), noble predators often called ‘royal’ representatives of the ‘animal kingdom’. The eagle was used by both the Romans and Charlemagne as a symbol of power, whereas the lion represented the landed princes. Both beasts have a Christian reference as well: lion, the most common of all heraldic animals, is typically represented in relation to St. Mark, Venice’s patron saint (his lion has wings, however), and the eagle stands for St. John (Neubecker & Brooke-Little, 1976, p. 105, pp. 110–113, 124–129). Many plants, especially trees (France), are understood to be references to life and continuity. Especially the oak (Germany) has a strong symbolic meaning in the contemporary history of several European peoples (see Raento & Watson, 2000). The selection thus draws from those characteristics of individual plants and animals that are perceived as “virtuous” (Klinge, 1981, p. 244). The rat, for example, is absent despite its profound significance to life in Europe.

The most readily recognizable, that is, the most accurately depicted species—Austrian gentian (1 cent), edelweiss (2 cents), alpine primrose (5 cents) and Finland’s swans (EUR 1) and cloudberries (EUR 2) (Fig. 5)—represent countries that are relatively sparsely populated and among the least intensely urbanized members of the EU. Both Austria (98 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>; 65% of population in cities) and Finland (15/67%) (STV, 2001, p. 561) have relatively extensive uninhabited areas, some of them in a natural state. In Finland, descriptions of virgin wilderness came to form the core of Finnish national landscape and national-romanticist art since the mid-19th century, in the context of Finland’s national awakening (Raivo, 2002). Swans are seen to symbolize pure, untouched nature, are considered ‘national birds’, and appeared on markka denominations and on Finnish postage stamps during the 20th century, as did the cloudberry (see Talvio, 2003, p. 150, 173). The importance of nature to Finnish national identity is further confirmed by the observation that nature was the most common theme on Finnish postage stamps in the 20th century, accounting for over one quarter of all issues (Raento & Brunn, submitted for publication). It has been argued that the Finns adopted natural symbols to represent the young nation which lacked a glamorous history and royal iconographies (Klinge, 1993, p. 142; Kolbe, 1999, p. 74). Natural references are widely accepted in Finnish society as positive, uncontroversial symbols of the nation and the state, which draw strength from Finnish mythology and their use in the early phases of nation-building.

According to the official ECB description, Austria wishes to underscore its “duty to the environment and the part Austria is playing in the development of a Community environmental policy” (Euro banknotes and coins, 2003). The images on Finnish and Austrian coins thus have an implicit promotional dimension as well,

complementing that of postage stamps—in both countries clean environment and wilderness landscapes are significant resources for tourism.

The general impression delivered by the coins, however, is that today's European Union is an urban entity, where cityscapes surpass references to nature as constituents of both national identity and a "common European home" (cf. the imaginary bridges and gates on euro banknotes). Excluding the Finnish and Austrian species-specific imagery, the animals and plants on euro coins have been stylized and stand in relationship with people. The horse on the seal of Monaco's ruling family refers to the era of knights, when the horse was the most significant means of land transportation and a noble horse a status item comparable to contemporary luxury vehicles. The French tree of life has been compressed to an octagon, as if in the spirit of enlightened modernist control (Fig. 6).

### Inscriptions on the national sides of euro coins

Inscriptions often accompany visual images on money. This applies to coins as well, despite the limited space available. As noted above, the common sides of euro coins illustrate how text can be used to underscore a visual message. The most important textual element on the examined coins is obviously the name of the currency, *euro*, which creates a solid link to the supranational identity project and is easy to pronounce in all EU languages. The symbol € designed for the currency draws from the temporal and spatial contexts of this ideal. The € sign is based on the letter epsilon in Greek, "harking back to Classical times and the cradle of European civilization" (*Euro banknotes and coins*, 2003). This reference is present everywhere in the euro zone's daily landscape, in coffee shops, on grocery store shelves, and receipts, underscoring the message of money despite the symbol's omission from the coins themselves.

We approached the script on euro coins as its own theme, because the topic turned out to be very broad, yet little examined in recent academic studies on money. We asked the following questions:

- Is text used (excluding the year of issue)?
- If yes, what kind of text is used?
- What language is used?
- Where is the text located on the coin?
- What is the value of the coin?

All 15 sets of coins have some text on their national side (excluding the year of issue). Some kind of text is included in the national design of 102 coins (85% of the sample). There are four types of text. The name of the state or its abbreviation appears on 84 coins of 12 countries (82% of the coins containing text); the value of the coin and the name of the currency on 16 coins (16%); a name referring to a depicted human figure, or its abbreviation on 12 coins of three countries (12%); and the state motto on five coins of four countries (5%). An important marker of a national entity is its name that makes the whole visible—and sometimes contested because of this visibility (e.g., *Berg & Kearns*, 1996; *Cohen & Kliot*, 1992; *Raento &*

Watson, 2000, pp. 724–729). It is also very significant whose language is used on these everyday tools of identity politics. Comparable observations about stamps and language show how changes of language and script mark changes in the issuing state's political ideology and external relations (Reid, 1972, pp. 213–215, 218; 1984).

The Finnish, German, and Portuguese coins offer the most minimalistic approach. Portugal's name appears as part of the country's first royal seal (from 1134), depicted on the three smallest coins. Germany uses only its motto *Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit* on the edge of the most valuable coin. Finland uses the same location for the formally bilingual country's name in Finnish and Swedish (*Suomi Finland*). According to one contributor to the Letters to the Editor of Finland's largest national daily newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS, 6 March 2002), "the designers ignored a very important dimension of the coins—advertisement." He thus perceived the name of the country as the most important element on the coins that would single out his country—in his opinion, this "free advertisement" would have reached "the broadest possible audience." He concluded by lamenting that "the coat of arms, which only we Finns know," does not reach a supranational audience.

The language and the name's location on the coin underscore the importance of naming for national—and, in the case of the *euro*, for supranational—identity. Each country uses its official language(s) on the euro coins (Fig. 6). Luxembourg is thus called *Lëtzebuerg*, Ireland *Eire*, and the Vatican is called *Citta' del Vaticano*. The Greek alphabet further highlights Greece's cultural and linguistic uniqueness. France and Italy are the only countries that abbreviate their name. A country's name is generally a prominent design feature on the national side of euro coins. Finland and Greece are exceptions, as their name is placed on the edge of their 2 euro coins.

The edge of the coin is also the place for the state motto, expressed in the official (majority) language. Germany, the Netherlands (*God zij met ons*), and the Vatican (*Libertas Libertas*) use the edge, whereas France has included its globally influential *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* in the image on its 1 and 2 euro coins. The engraving on the edge also protects the currency against counterfeiting. In the other series, the edges of the most valuable coins are decorated with pairs of stars for this purpose. That these pairs are repeated six times is hardly a coincidence in the EMU context.

Judging by their placement on the examined coins, the state's name and motto are prestigious political instruments. If the name does not appear on all eight coins of the



Fig. 6. Country names, state mottos, national languages, and distinctive script are used on the national sides of euro coins to enhance the visual message. From left to right: EUR 2 of Greece, France, and Luxembourg.

set (as is the case in eight countries), it is placed on the most valuable coin, Portugal being the only exception. The motto, in turn, is without exception placed on either the most valuable coin or the two highest ones (France).

The Greek 2 euro coin carries a particularly strong combination of image and text, emphasizing the power of naming (Fig. 6). The coin repeats a theme in a third-century mosaic, where Zeus, in the form of a bull, has abducted Europa—a mythological character according to which Europe has arguably been named (Mikkeli, 1998, pp. 3–5; see also Hewitt, 1995b, 1995c about women and animals on banknotes). Europa's name is written in the image in Greek letters, and the coin's name and the value of the currency are repeated on the national side. *Hellenic Republic*, written in Greek alphabet, is engraved on the edge. The image is surrounded by 12 stars. The whole portrays Greece as the cradle of European civilization and a culturally unique, historically significant part of the supranational identity project promoted in support of European political and economic integration. In this portrayal the masculine, unproblematic interpretation of the myth of Europa's abduction is elevated over alternative readings, some of which read 'abduction' of a female by an omnipotent male god as a narrative of rape (Unwin, 1998, p. 2).

## Conclusions

"The Finns tolerate the euro," wrote *Helsingin Sanomat* less than a month after the transition (HS, 27 January 2002). The dust has settled and euro has become part of daily routines in the 12 EMU countries (and the three tiny city states which use their currency). Criticism of the designs has died out, practical complications have been solved, and articles published in newspapers outside the economy section focus on euro coins and banknotes as popular collectors' items (e.g., HS, 6 April 2003). Repeated looks into our purses during this research confirmed that the majority of the coins we handle daily carry the Finnish lion coat of arms, swans, and cloudberries. The same local emphasis has been repeated during our travels in other EMU countries. Proximity to other EMU countries seems to influence the mix somewhat, but the circulation of the coins seems to be notably local, and a 'foreign' coin provokes curiosity at the moment of exchange. However, euro coins travel fast—we recall seeing the first Italian euro coins in a coffee shop in Downtown Helsinki on the New Year's Day in 2002, less than 12 hours after the introduction of the new currency (see [www.eurobilltracker.com](http://www.eurobilltracker.com)). On the one hand, euro coins continue the role of national currencies as messengers of state symbolism—frequently repeating themes used on money and postage stamps before the euro era. In one way or another, all national designs on euro coins are related to the state or the nation's achievements and values. On the other hand, the maps on the common side of the euro coins create a continuous link to the supranational ideal of politically and economically integrated, culturally harmonious Europe, thus supporting the political identity project behind the new currency. The national imagery also places each EMU member in a larger context, profiling its contributions and the self-image

it wishes to convey toward outsiders under the umbrella of “a common European home.” Both the differences and the similarities with the other EMU members come to the fore each time other national entities “flag their nations” in the daily landscapes of exchange (Billig, 1995). These observations support Murphy’s (1999) argument that supranational and national identity projects within contemporary Europe are present in the same space and in the same time without excluding one another automatically. The visual narrative on euro coins is thus broader than that on the banknotes.

We have not involved ourselves in the discussion regarding these identity projects, because our principal goal has been to promote the comparative study of money and other tools of “banal nationalism”—or supranationalism—as called for by Unwin and Hewitt (2001) and Zeigler (2002) in their recent contributions to the field. The rich visual imagery on so many currencies and postage stamps, and comparable textual references put forward by the national elites in the naming of streets in major urban centers, remain largely unexplored outside of the rather insular collector circles. The same data can, of course, be approached from several perspectives, and future attention should be paid to national and supranational imageries as historically evolving wholes (Gilbert & Helleiner, 1999a, pp. 3–5; Raento & Brunn, submitted for publication). Each classification is inherently subjective, and the selection of questions guides the interpretations, as our study illustrates. We touched upon such themes as religion, mythology, and historical eras rather superficially, but these, too, merit more attention in the future explorations into the visual and textual messages of political identity projects.

The link between euro coins and the creation of “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983) at the national and supranational levels in Europe is intriguing in its loud mundaneness. This paradox makes euro coins and comparable semiotic tools of identity politics useful, illustrative teaching material which is readily available. We find it somewhat surprising that this aspect is overlooked in the recent research on money, stamps, and street names—in the case of coins, this “pedagogical use” of monetary imagery dates back centuries (Cunnally, 1999, p. 14). We have observed several benefits of money for the teaching of both political geography and visual methodologies. First, our study shows that this kind of imagery serves well a multidimensional assessment of visual material. Data such as money encourages the observation of the everyday mundane, discouraging the tendency to take it for granted and thinking of (supra)nationalism as an exotic and dramatic phenomenon that occurs in distant, peripheral places. Second, unusual, even somewhat ‘odd’ topics provoke curiosity, stimulate conversation, and support the application of the findings to similar data. Money (and postage stamps and street names) offers compact, manageable data for projects and exercises, which, we hope, means a bright future for the political-geographic study of these themes. The usefulness of this data for the teaching of political iconography, territorial identity projects, and the relationship between identity, territory, and boundaries is obvious indeed. We agree with Gilbert and Helleiner (1999b, pp. 1–2) and Unwin and Hewitt (2001, p. 1007) that multidisciplinary, comparative studies and creative usage of a variety of sources should guide further research.

Most importantly, a thought-provoking question emerges regarding the future of Europe's political identity project: "What happens to the euro coin imagery when the enlargement of the EU and the EMU proceeds?" More specifically: "Will there be pressure to modify the cartography on the common sides of the coins?" This possibility has already been taken into account to some extent. The map on the most valuable euro coins anticipates (and wishes) that the older EU countries currently outside the EMU will join the euro zone one day (and their exclusion could have provoked old tensions). But what happens when the ten new EU members adopt the euro, perhaps in 2007? The design and production of the common currency has been expensive. More coins and 80 new images will be needed when ten new countries join the EMU. An enormous amount of energy and money will be spent, which may result in criticism and resistance among the EU citizens who pay for it. It is likely that the new and old euro coins will circulate simultaneously, for practical reasons. There are those who believe that the integration will be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the coexistence of different cartographic visions. Skeptics suggest, however, that the prolonged circulation of outdated cartography may make the new member countries feel secondary in the EU's internal hierarchy, especially if they face difficulties in the early steps of the process—in the context of European cultural politics and identity construction, "aesthetics matter a lot" (Gille, 2004). If this happens, two parallel monetary cartographies may give the depicted boundaries between 'us' and 'them' new, unpredictable meanings in Europe. Two sets of coins have been in circulation in individual European countries when new designs have been introduced (for example in Spain after Franco), but the creation of symbolic unity in the case of EU and EMU enlargement carries the burden of avoiding unnecessary internal tensions between old and new member states—or 'big' and 'lesser' brothers. In any case, it will be interesting to observe what kind of national imagery the post-Socialist countries select for their euro coins and how they convey the newcomers' position in unified Europe. As any political iconographies, the euro coin imagery also continues to evolve when power is transferred from a contemporary head of state to an heir. The most acute situation now seems to be in the Vatican.

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