

The Role of Banknotes in Promoting National Identity and Culture

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Abstract

Every coin or banknote reflects a piece of history. Coins, whether metal or paper, testify to everything that has happened by using different symbols including events or characters of historical interest. They play a key role in the political, diplomatic, economic and artistic spheres. The portrait of women on coins and banknotes has been a common practice for centuries. This paper aims to present the image of woman on the Albanian coins and banknotes during different periods of history and to see between the lines her role in the development of the society. The presence of the image of the woman on the coin or banknotes symbolizes her important and powerful role in society as well as the man.

Keywords: *image, woman, coin, banknotes, symbol, society, history, country.*

Introduction

Every coin or banknote relays a piece of history. The history of our national currency starts with the creation of the National Bank of Albania, which was established on 2 September 1925. The Bank was created upon the signing of the convention between an Italian financial group led by Mario Alberti and the government of Ahmet Zogu. The convention defined that the bank, apart from lending, had the exclusive right to issue legal tender banknotes, gold and other metal coins for payments in Albania. This may be called the first currency issuing national institution, but our history shows that the coins had first been struck since IV century B.C., in the Illyrian cities of Dyrrachium (Durrës) and Apollonia (Pojan near Fier).

Banknotes as a part of national identity

The banknotes of a country are part of its national identity. That is why The Bank of Albania, as the

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only issuer of the Albanian banknotes and coins, has chosen to pursue the concept of reflecting historical periods through the portraits of prominent personalities. It pays particular attention to the design symbols used on the coins and banknotes because the currency is considered as an element of prestige and the greatness of a nation is measured by the quality of the coins and banknotes it issues. When a new banknote or coin is issued, special attention is paid to the design symbols used on it. The motto followed by the Bank of Albania has been that the banknotes reflect historic periods through the portraits of illustrious personalities that represent them.

The banknote series, until 2019, consisted of the five denominations, each of them representing a specific historic period represented by a male personality.

The Albanian 2000 Leke banknote is designed with the portrait of the Illyrian King Gent and represents the Illyrian period of Albania. The 5000 Leke banknote represents the Scanderbeg's period of Albania by designing the portrait of our National hero, Scanderbeg. The 10000 Leke banknote represents the Middle Ages through the portrait of Pjeter Bogdani. The 200 Leke banknote represents the National Awakening through the portrait of Naim Frasheri and the 500 Leke banknote represents the Independence period through the portrait of Ismail Qemali.

The image of a female portrait is designed in the 100 leke coin in circulation. It is the portrait of the queen Teuta, the only woman on a coin who represents Illyrian period. On the reverse part of the coin we can see Queen Teuta holding a shield and a spear in her hands. The image of Queen Teuta on the Albanian coin was very important because it was the first time that Bank of Albania, since its foundation, used the portrait of the woman on the coin as a symbol of history. She represents the image of a strong and intelligent woman who reigned in the most glorious period of the Illyrian state. Her image on the coin sends the message that women may aspire for an important and powerful role in society as well as men.

Woman image on the banknotes during the communist period



During the period of the Communism the heroes, who served as “models” to be appreciated and followed by the whole society, were embodied in the figure of the worker of industry or metallurgy, the distinguished cooperative with wheat ears in hand, the revolutionary youth who did voluntary work in the fields or factories, women with wings and male physique, working on a lathe or driving a tractor, etc. This model was also presented in the design used in banknotes and coins in Albania.

In the period 1950-1980, in the Albanian banknotes there is an orientation towards the symbols that have to do with “building socialism”, “modernization of socialist agriculture”, “heroes of socialist labor”, “magnificent works of five-year plans”, “self-reliance”, “defense of the homeland”, “all military people”, “emancipation of Albanian women and girls”, “fight against bureaucracy”, “close revolutionary alliance between the working class, the working peasantry, cadres and intellectuals, “Sickle, hammer, pickaxe and rifle” as symbols of construction and protection of the new socialist society. The designers of the coins and banknotes, during this time tried to use symbols which could reflect the development of the socialist economy. For example, on one of the 500 Leke banknote we can see the portrait of a woman working in the wheat fields. The woman is holding a sheaf of wheat as a symbol of the successful farmer. She represents the cooperativist woman who seems happy and full of energy. She is not slim but healthy with a robust body with a happy smile on her face. Her wellbeing and fertility is portrayed in the fertility of the land she has worked. Her arms are holding sheaves of wheat, as a symbol of prosperity

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During the communist period in Albania, the demagogy of the system was that the woman should enjoy equal rights with man in work, pay, holiday, social security, education, in all social and political activity, as well as in the family. The Communist Party depicted itself as the liberator of Albanian women and tried to mythologize the image of Illyrian women, who were portrayed as strong and active participants in ancient Albanian society. This idealized version of Albanian women should as a symbol for the Party's vision of modern revolutionary women. This ideology was also reflected the design of the coins and banknotes of that period. Let us have a look on some of the banknotes of that period: On the 1 Lek banknote we can see a village couple where the woman is holding sheaves of wheat, this design represents the emancipated farmer woman.



On the 3 Lek banknote we can see the portrait of a woman holding a basket full of grapes. On the 25 Lek banknote we can see the portrait of a woman holding sheaves of wheat. The characteristic of the

design of the banknotes is that it mainly presents the portrait of a farm woman as a very active, healthy and full of energy woman. By portraying the Albanian woman as a on the banknotes the communist leadership wanted to reflect the ideology of the initiatives for the emancipation of woman. The image of the banknotes of that period represented the portrait of a woman who could do everything fighting against the old mentality.



On one side of the 10 Lek banknote we can see a woman working on a loom. On the other side of it we can see a group of people in front of the Palace of Culture in traditional costumes, some of them are women. We can, also, see three people in formal costumes, one of them is a woman. The aim of this design is to represent woman as an active part of the cultural and intellectual life of society. It is the first time that the woman appears as an intellectual figure.



The Communist regime drew a direct line from the ancient figures to the women who fought alongside men in the resistance against fascism and in the building of socialism. War and labor,

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therefore, became the pathways to women's emancipation in the communist narrative. On the 50 Lek banknote we can see a group of partisans marching triumphally in the city. We can see not only boys but also girls. The partisan woman is the central figure. At the first glance, she can be noticed dressed in a military uniform to reflect her importance in the fight for the defense of the country.

The Party's anti-religious campaign was thus not only about attacking religious beliefs but also about reasserting the Party's control over societal norms, particularly in the family sphere. By portraying Albanian women as primary victims of religious oppression, the regime justified its radical policies aimed at transforming family structures and education, positioning the state as the new moral authority.

Woman image on the banknotes after 90s.

In 1990 a new banknote was produced, the 500 Lek banknote. The new banknote issued in 1991, 1992, 1993 till 1997 was designed with the picture of a woman who holds a sunflower in her hands.



The banknotes present not only the identity of a nation but they can also reflect historic periods through the portrait of personalities that represent them. So, for example, until 2019, the banknote series consisted of five denominations, each of them representing a certain historic period.

The 2000 Leke banknote presents the portrait of King Gent, so it represents the Illyrian period of Albania.

The 5000 Leke banknote is designed with the portrait of our national hero, Scanderbeg representing the historic period of Scanderbeg.

The 1000 Leke banknote represents the Middle Age period of history by using as a symbol the portrait of Pjeter Bogdani.

The National Awakening period of history is represented in the 200 Leke banknote through the portrait of Naim Frashëri. The Independence period of time is represented in the 500 Leke banknote through the portrait of Ismail Qemali. Meanwhile the portrait of the Illyrian queen Teuta is used as a symbol to represent the Illyrian period of the history. The Illyrian Queen Teuta is one of the most emblematic figures of Antiquity who symbolizes the powerful Illyrian woman who aspirates for a strong position in the society.

Conclusions

The history of the Albanian currency begins at a time with the establishment of the National Bank of Albania, constituted on September 2, 1925. Albanian banknotes were dominated mainly by the male portraits of prominent personalities of our history, such as Ismail Qemali, Fan Noli, Naim Frashëri, King Gent, Pjetër Bogdan etc. The portrait of woman on Albanian coins and banknotes represents different strata of the society. Sometimes she is a queen, she is a symbol of health, fertility, sacrifice and wisdom. She is a devoted mother, wife, sister, a farmer, a worker, a soldier. She is also featured as fragile, timid, beautiful full of elegance, a creature that gives love unconditionally.

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