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**Catherine Brégianni**, *From the Greek Struggle of Independence (1821) to the Forced Exchange of Populations (1922). Representations of the Revolution in the Interwar Period. Ceremonies – Symbols – Emblems*, Athens, Alfeios, coll: History and Historical Theory 1, 2022, in Greek, 232 pp. (in Greek)

The book by C. Brégianni *“From 1821 to 1922. Representations of the Revolution in the Interwar period”* analyses the use of the revolutionary symbols by the interwar First Hellenic Republic in order to describe its ideological principles in contrast to the institution of monarchy and to “standardize” the national identity during the Interwar period. As the author notes in the very first introductory lines: “The renewal of historical science includes the requirement for interdisciplinarity and the consequent richness of historical sources, which have included (already for a long time – apart from primary sources –) the use of indirect sources such as autobiographies, personal correspondence, textual sources in general, but also the multilevel perception of the texts” (p. 15).

According to the study by C. Brégianni remembering and forgetting the Greek Revolution in the interwar years as a State “practice”, is also related to the effects of the internal economic crisis and to the impact of the Great Depression. A symbolic 1821 “archive” was created aimed at describing Greece’s potentiality to overcome economic and social crisis (Introductory remarks & chapter 1). The commemoration of the Revolution’s centenary in 1921 was postponed because of the Asia Minor adventure and the following crisis, and the initiatives taken by the Greek authorities for the celebration of the State’s centenary in 1930 included the very use of the revolution’s symbols (like the phoenix and Athena) by the republican regime up to 1935 (chapter 3).

The book states that the acceleration and the compression of time, its fusion into the moment, or the subtraction of its different dimensions, are intrinsic features of the human perception of “temporality”, but these are also the characteristics of the modern era. However, receiving, understanding and interpreting the past has its own rules and canons. F. Braudel argues that we might think of history at three different levels. In the first level, a history of events is recorded in a short term, and this is what we call micro-history. At a slightly broader time scale lies the history of events following a broader and slower rhythm, that of material life, with economic or intermediate cycles. Beyond this narrative of events, there is also the third dimension, the *longue durée*, which examines the evolution of human activities over the course of centuries. We consider this study as a part of Braudel’s third level, as it incorporates the long run of economic phenomena. From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and especially from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, history experienced a double revolution; on the one hand regarding the documentation and utilization of “non-traditional” historical sources, on the other hand regarding the development of various and different methodological tools. Historical memory, symbols and ceremonies, among others, play a decisive role in these developments, the latter as organic elements of memory formation, as examined in Bregianni’s book through the memory of the Greek Struggle for Independence during the interwar period.

As it can be seen from the phenomena examined in this book, in addition to individual memory, there is also collective memory. There are socio-cultural mechanisms, formal or informal, that create memories that are shared by a community, memories that do not necessarily concern the lived experience of the people who share them (p. 15). So societies “remember”, as do people, even if they remember in a different way.

As it appears from the analysis of the representation of the Greek Revolution in the interwar period included in this study, the memory of

societies is related to the requirements of the present, not to those of the past. The present therefore dictates what a community remembers, not the past. Also, the events to which collective identities are associated do not necessarily correspond to the scientific perception of history.

The way collective memory is implemented takes on institutional forms. The reference to institutions is not limited to the state alone, but can refer to any social, economic and cultural institution, such as family, currency, ceremonies or even sports, trade unions and cooperatives. At this point, we can briefly mention two typical examples, borrowed from the history of social politics. The “handshake” – which is a symbolic representation in various types of 19th century visual evidence<sup>1</sup> – has been a symbol of insurance organizations in many European countries since the 19th century, symbolizing both fraternal and generational solidarity. The Hellenic Agricultural Insurance Organization, the second demographically largest insurance organization of Greece, has the deity Demeter as its symbol.

In relation to the above considerations, during the presentation of the study we will focus mainly on the institutional forms of the representations which are analysed in the book: that is, on the diachronic use of the numismatic representations and on the Revolution’s commemorative celebrations.

In modern times, coins in general are a particularly important source of information about the history of each nation-state. The link of coins with state’s authorities and their function as symbols and message bearers of these authorities resulted in the creation of representative types, sometimes distinguished for their artistic form and characterized as objects of art. As analysed in the book (pp. 109-138), the introduction of a national currency was one of the first administrative measures of Capodistria and reflects the Governor’s effort to establish a state apparatus and a national economic territory. The Phoenix was approved for circulation by a resolution adopted at the meeting of the 4th National Assembly at Argos on July 31, 1829, following a relevant opinion submitted to the Governor by an advisory board called “Panellinion”. The symbolic representation of the coins is the phoenix engraved on the obverse. The words “Hellenic State” and the Greek one “αωκκα”, representing 1821, are also engraved in commemoration of the year of the Greek Revolution. Above the Cross there is a six-pointed star, representing the harmony of the universe and the supreme knowledge. In the act for the introduction of the coin into circulation, the legislative text

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Also C. Brégianni, *Modern Greek Currency. State and ideology from the Revolution to the Interwar Period* (in Greek), Athens, 2011, ch. 1.

describes “the Phoenix regenerating at the sight of the rays of the Holy Spirit and having a Cross on his head”. Therefore, according to Brégianni, the meaning and pagan origins of the symbol are alternated in order to fit into the semiology of Christian religion, while the link itself was also created by the representation of the phoenix in the coinage of the early Byzantine period (pp. 107-109). In Brégianni’s point of view, along with the timeless qualities of symbols which survive in the long term, as accentuated by C. Jung’s theoretical interpretation, *coexist in the specific context of the era that uses them to reflect common convictions or ideological points* (p. 125). In that order of ideas, it seems that the selection of the representation of the Phoenix by Capodistria can be associated with the Filiki Eteria, or the Society of Friends, in the immediately preceding period. The author further expands her working hypotheses, linking the monetary representation to the liberal origins of the Greek State. The Phoenix was a well-known tectonic symbol; even as a mimic tactic, the European secret societies of the revolutionary first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were associated with freemasonry, which in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was closely associated with liberalism.

Furthermore, the liberal perspective of the Greek revolutionaries regarding the creation of modern institutions is also found in the fields of social care and social charity, in a state structure under formation and trial. For the pre-revolutionary years, a case in point is that of Rigas Velestinlis who in his work “New Political Constitution of the Inhabitants of Rumeli, Asia Minor, the Islands of the Aegean, and the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, in favour of the laws – freedom, equality, fraternity – and of the Homeland”, envisioned a state which would operate and intervene in the economy for the benefit of the disadvantaged<sup>2</sup>. During the revolutionary period, a turning point was the introduction by the interim government of the Law 49 of October 5, 1825, “regarding hospitals”<sup>3</sup>. The law recognized the obligation of the administration to establish hospitals and to ensure their sustainability. A radical point in the new law was the introduction of a levy 0.5% on the salaries of appointed employees, in favour of hospitals. This arrangement “inaugurates” a modern liberal way of funding health care in revolutionary Greece, which was established in most European countries from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the main

<sup>2</sup> P. Kitromilides, *Rigas Velestinlis. All that has been saved* (in Greek), Athens, 2000, pp. 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> K. Doukakis, “Searching for the foundations of the Greek social protection system. Aspects of social welfare in Revolutionary Greece”, (in Greek), *Social Security Law*, vol. 3, 2021, *passim*.

pillar of health care financing through insurance funds<sup>4</sup>.

The liberal origins of the modern Greek state traced by the author at the level of ideological symbols are therefore also reflected in the establishment of social welfare measures. Returning to the phoenix, it should be noted that in addition to highlighting the semiotic importance of the phoenix as a symbol of renaissance, liberalism and rationality, Brégianni's study also delves into its monetary function during the 19<sup>th</sup> century – a complex period in terms of global monetary conditions – and its connection with the Spanish *colón* (*real*)<sup>5</sup>. The case of the monetary system of the Ionian State's, being a protectorate of the British Empire, and its monetary policy are also examined (chapter 2). The book, among other research topics, refers to the interwar commemorative ceremonies related to the interwar celebrations of the Greek Revolution taking place in the Ionian Islands and Navarino; according to Brégianni's analysis, these commemorations highlight the connection made in the public sphere between the past and the requirements of the present in the context of the political issues of the interwar period. A typical example is the reference to the celebration of the centenary of Ugo Foscolo's death, taking place in Zakynthos. Brégianni's penetrating perspective puts a local event in the framework of the general geopolitical developments and rearrangements of the interwar era, as documented by the relevant memoranda of the British diplomats, which put some light in the changes of the Greek diplomacy by incorporating in their reports to FO the geopolitical aspects of these ceremonies.

Furthermore, in the author's view, during the interwar era the commemoration of the fighters of the Revolution, Theodoros Kolokotronis, Markos Botsaris with the performance of the homonymous opera, and Georgios Karaiskakis with the celebration of the centenary of his death, played a major role in the formation of collective memory by the dominant ideological mechanisms.

In our times, more information about the past is circulating, with an ever-increasing acceleration, especially in the era of digitization of

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<sup>4</sup> M. Cutler, R. Johnson, "The birth and growth of the social insurance states: Explaining old age and medical insurance across countries", *Public choice*, vol. 120, 2004, pp. 94-95.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed analysis of the monetary conditions of the period and the introduction of the phoenix, cf. C. Brégianni, "Currency as an Imprint of the Nation-State: Monetary Conditions in the Ottoman Empire at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century and the Transition from Ottoman Currencies to the Phoenix of the Hellenic State (1828)", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 41 no. 2, 2023, p. 213-236. Project MUSE, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mgs.2023.a908558>.

primary and archival sources. As a result, it is more difficult and above all more demanding for an historian, regardless of his/her scientific background, to create coherent narratives and sequences. Therefore, the fragmentation of history, both methodological and epistemological, threatens to dominate. Brégianni's study does not belong to these cases. On the contrary, through the methodological study of symbols and commemorative ceremonies, in their existence in the "longue durée" and historical context, it highlights the discontinuities in terms of the institutional organization of the Greek state, in the study of which the ambiguity of the symbols plays an important role. At the same time, it highlights cases where the institutions of the modern Greek state are preserved over time, in the long term, regardless of whether their characteristics are altered, worn out, reconstituted, or adapted to the circumstances.

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