The Drachma Sign. Document N1946 “Addition of the drachma sign to the UCS” was prepared by me on behalf of ELOT.

That glyph consisted of a small Greek rho and a character encoded in Wingdings at U+F0D0, named internally “leafccwne”, which I interpret as “leaf counter-clockwise north-east”. The image I had from ELOT is given on the left, the Wingdings character in the centre, and the glyph currently used in the code charts.

There is no evidence at all that the glyph currently used in the code charts has ever been used in Greece for any purpose. Had it been, ELOT would probably not have given me a glyph using a dingbat. Nick
Nicholas wrote about this, noting that Greek price-tags had made uses of a Drachma sign (see www.tlg.uci.edu/~opoudjis/unicode/ligatures.html). He suggested that the glyph be changed: “if we're going to have the codepoint, the price tag ligature has the advantage of having existed within living memory.”

To my memory, the symbol for the now defunct drachma has never been anything but the abbreviation ₯ or ₯χ. It is of course already possible to represent the abbreviation ₯χ in Unicode using existing Unicode codepoints. In that regard, the drachma sign is unlike the other 17 currency signs in Unicode 4.0—although some glyph realizations of ₯ for Franc Sign, ₯ for Peso Sign, and ₯ for Won Sign, are also squashed up abbreviations, and others can be realized readily with overstrike glyphs. Even if the cursive form of the glyph was current in the 19th century, it could still be composed straightforwardly with a simple font switch. So one might wonder why the codepoint was adopted.

The answer is that this was an ELOT idea, and when ELOT wants something, Unicode is obliged to comply. This is the sum total of the justification given:

The creation of the EURO SIGN has reestablished the creation of a unique DRACHMA SIGN for use in banking, administration, and for general purposes in Greece and countries trading with Greece both inside and outside the European Union, especially during the transitional period when both the drachma and the euro are in use.

And when asked whether the characters already exist:

The glyph looks like script capital DELTA and small RHO but the symbol is intended for unitary use in collocation with the EURO SIGN.

Allow me to paraphrase this uncharitably. For over 150 years, the drachma is written as an abbreviation, with a delta and a rho and usually a chi. Two years before the drachma ceases to exist, ELOT decides that if the Euro gets to have a single glyph, so should the drachma—even though that single glyph is a delta followed by a rho, and it has a graphical form that has not been seen for at least 50 years, and possibly ever. Why it is so pressing that the drachma has a single glyph now that it would be shown next to € is never made clear. National pride? DM remained good enough for the Germans. So why? Surely that’s an issue for spreadsheet implementers, not Unicode. Visual display? The two character symbol doesn’t solve the problem of labels now having two prices on them instead of one. And the whole shebang gets adopted into Unicode, where it will reside as a codepoint for centuries, in September 1999—15 months before the drachma is abolished, and the rationale for the existence of the codepoint (cooccurrence with the Euro) ceases to apply.

Rightly.

To be fair, as Alexandros Diamantakis reminds me, some price tags did print delta-rho in a single space, which might be counted as a ligature—with the delta either above or to the top left of the rho:

Of course, this is still a ligature and not a single character; but if we're going to have the codepoint, the price tag ligature has the advantage of having existed within living memory.

This character was proposed by ELOT in January 1999, and adopted in Unicode 3.0.

I recommend that the chart glyph be changed from ₯ to: