Visual translations of ancient heritage – re-contextualising ancient European script through contemporary visual communication methods and media

LEVICK-PARKIN, Melanie <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3925-9792>, FLOUDA, Georgia and WOOD, Jonathan

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Welcome
Visual Translations of Ancient Heritage

Re-contextualising ancient European script through contemporary visual communication methods and media.
Dr. Georgia Flouda
Heraklion Archaeological Museum
Fellow, Centre for Hellenic Studies
Harvard University

Melanie Levick-Parkin
Senior Lecturer in
Visual Communication

Jonathan Wood
Senior Lecturer in
Motion and Multimedia Design

ARDC Art & Design Research Centre
Sheffield Institute of Arts
Sheffield Hallam University
The Purpose
of this practice led research project was to apply a design anthropology approach to the visual re-contextualisation of ancient European script, using contemporary visual communication practices and media strategies in order to explore opportunities for creative engagement with archaeological knowledge.
Practice-led / Design thinking methodology

**Discovery - Design - Test - Implement**

repeat process

iterative process
Archaeology

can grant us access to our history by allowing us encounters with remnants of the past, but how these remnants are translated for us, read by us and what we believe that they tell us is intimately tied up with the context of our own contemporary culture.

What role can contemporary visual communication practices play in communicating archaeological knowledge to young audiences by overcoming potential aesthetic or media based barriers.
Figure 2. Layers of brand-driven design. The layers correspond with the way the user comes into contact with and experiences designed brand touchpoints. These layers are helpful in the use of design as a strategic resource because design plays a specific role for each one.
Under the guidance of a specialist Archaeologist advisor and two Design researchers, a team of visual communication designers used their individual creative practices to visually re-contextualise the oldest deciphered and un-deciphered European scripts of Linear A and Linear B, with the goal of engaging a young audience.
The Aim

was to explore how visual communication can facilitate archaeological heritage experiences that explore a multi-layered narrative through co-creative and democratised strategies of engagement.
Archaeological Artifact
Visual Communication
Visual Communication
There is obvious affinity between contemporary visual communication design and ancient script because they are based on the same principle of the encoding of meaning to be decoded by the receiver.
Like visual design, ancient script deals with visual presentation of meaning and is directly relevant in relation to Frutiger’s interest in archetypes and Neurath’s Isotype collection.
Speech Fixing

1. Two ways of script development

Pictorial signs were certainly the earliest form of all scripts and have come most commonly through a natural course of conventionalization. In the study of the influences and the relative influence of languages, two main categories can be identified:

- Development of Chinese characters
- "Alphabetic" scripts

The "Alphabetic" scripts include all those scripts whose original signs have been changed over the centuries into purely phonetic signs. Their development seems to proceed in steps of increase in sophistication. This step-by-step progression is seen in the early alphabets, where, for example, the first letters of the Latin alphabet, the letters of which are often depicted in some early forms, are similar to letters in the alphabet. As the script develops, the pictorials are given names. The names are often used in place of theBASE OF CHINESE CHARACTERS.

2. A common origin?

Those who study the history of the numerous artistic traditions of civilization search in vain for a common origin of sign formation. Many attempts have been made to discover affinities and associations between the primitive scripts of different peoples and regions, but it has never been possible to establish one that is incontrovertible and incontestable. Such a common origin has never been found.

Several of these schemes are not entirely satisfactory. One of them is the "prophetic" script, which in the Punic alphabet is represented by a single character, a symbol of the stars, as a "guide" in the sense that it is a guide to the stars. This is illustrated by the following character: a "prophetic" sign is a symbol of the stars, as a "guide" in the sense that it is a guide to the stars. This is illustrated by the following character: a "prophetic" sign is a symbol of the stars, as a "guide" in the sense that it is a guide to the stars.

3. Inherited archetypes?

The idea that certain signs are inherited deep in our consciousness from a distant, as inherited "archetypes" is a common symbolic interpretation that should also be mentioned here. Does a thing have a mental picture of itself? Before it can be seen for the first time, or does it have some way of expressing itself before it has been seen? This gives rise to a fundamental question which goes far beyond the scope of this inquiry. Whether a natural or human action can be inherited or whether some first be experienced in order to naturalize itself as a memory.

The combined illustration of the "archetypal" signs provide some insights into the basic principles of these graphic scripts.
The Brief

In order to frame and focus the visual investigation and testing, the primary target audience is defined as a ‘young target audience’. This means that the aesthetic vernacular of that audience needs to be taken into consideration.

Deliverables

A range of visual communication strategies with a variety of visual outcomes
Observation of Linear B Session

- MA Archaeology University of Sheffield
- Professor John Bennet
- Basement Lab
In the middle of the room is a large table covered in a blue plastic cloth. Set on the floor of every shelf, are a wooden board, 2 pens, some implements and two sheets of printed notes. There are more implements on the wall, who at some point made a place on the table. After getting to one of these objects, they decided to eat them. The sheets have a lot of words and numbers, written in a variety of fonts and colors. A black book marked in different colors and symbols is stored on the shelf.
As it is a basement room the ceiling is quite low, with some exposed pipes and loft ceiling. There are weak surfaces on both sides of the room, one is completely covered in venetian blinds and some big glass vases on the floor; the other one is fully clear and has a sink in the middle, with a sign asking for details.

There's a big grey ceramic unit at the far end of the room, which also houses a glass display case and some shelves on the wall. The front of the room has a whitewashed and protruding wooden table.

There are more shelves on both sides, containing old vases with different clay trimmed surfaces, some easily recognizable as beautiful copies of ancient objects, others not so much, 

The small, delicate, and decorative painted jar was used to contain and store the very dusty. 

The ICA Antiquities section is home to a large number of tablets. In the middle of the table is a big slab of clay and examples of cuneiform tablets produced by John Romani in previous years. These examples have a variety of shapes, some oblong, some more tablet-shaped, and all are full of cuneiform inscriptions. The tablets have all been fired and their carbon copies from the light brown of some fired clay to the irregular dark brown. Bricks of clay fired in an oven for an experiment, to consider the accidental firing of the original.
One of the instruments is a thin-wire length coded to a piece of cylinder-shaped wood with a notch. These codes were coded to one of the end.
The students busy themselves, discovering what cylinder best to use to spell their names in Linear B and John highlights a few of the peculiarities of the script, such as the omission of two syllables and the order in which information was communicated, in relation to numbers.

The students try out the different writing implements and in conversation amongst them they are finding the manner of them. Some prefer the limestone tools and think it more friendly through the clay whilst others prefer using the bone implement as they find it more sustainable.

After having completed this first task the students move onto making a slightly longer tablet on which to record everything’s name, etc. This seems quite baffling for Linear B as so many of the original tablets were lists of things. Coughs, asthma, people—lots of everyday items—modern, who paid what to whom, who owed and who possessed.
I hereby give permission for my child to participate in and contribute to the ADRC Visual Translations research project 2nd May 2015

Childs name:

Parent/Carer:

Signature:
3 Part Brief

- Working with the script in ink
- Ideas generation for contemporary meaning
- Generating of new symbols in vinyl and perspex
Georgia’s Visit

- Prior recruitment of 6 Graphic Design students as researcher assistants
- 4 Male 2 Female students, level 5 and level 6
- Initial briefing by Georgia followed by workshop
- Tutorials Georgia and Design Researchers
- Presentation of initial ideas at the end of day 2
Ideas for Material

- Games based on Linear A and B
- Illustrated Story Book
- Graphic Design Artifacts
Ideas for Material

- Games based on Linear A and B
- Illustrated Story Book
- Graphic Design Artifacts
General Discussions about materiality

- Be honest about materials
- No faking of stuff
- Whenever possible seek some contextual authenticity in material and colour
- Whenever possible seek some contextual authenticity in shape and form
- Anything goes if you want to try something out
Proto-type 1

Board Game based on Phaestos Disc
Move forwards 1 space

Did you Know:
The Phaistos Disk was discovered in 1908.
Proto-type 2

Graphic Typology of Script
Despite such a non-descriptive name, Linear B has proven to be the oldest surviving record of the Greek dialect known as Mycenaean, named after the great site of Mycenae where the legendary Agamemnon ruled. This script's usage spanned the late period between approximately 1400 BCE and 1200 BCE, and geographically covered the island of Crete, as well as the southern part of the Greek mainland.
Proto-type 4

Cooking based artifacts and embroidery
Proto-type 5

Children’s book illustrations
You can put the wool over there.

Scribe

Business man training.

Egyptian
Proto-type 6

Linear B Logograph Stamp Set
Research and Idea Development

The phaistos disc is an artifact from the Minoan period. It is made from fired clay and contains symbols on both sides. These symbols are untranslated and are believed to be created by using stamps. The idea behind this project was to re-contextualise these stamps into an engaging activity for children.

Therefore, a stamp set and accompanying activity book were to be created. Below are some initial images from research into stamp sets.

Vector Symbols

Above is a drawing of the symbols of the disc as these symbols were going to be the basis of the stamps they need to be recreated as vectors. Below are the vectorised symbols.
Various sizes of stamp templates were created on the laser cutter to assess what the size of the stamps should be.

This shows 4 examples at 60 mm and one at 100mm. Following this it was decided that 30 mm would be the final size of the stamps as this would mean the overall packaging size would be reduced.

Olive trees are native to Crete so it was decided that using Olive wood would be contextually sympathetic. Thus by laying scale representations of the stamps you can see how the stamps fit.

26 mm squares were laser etched into the wooden board to create a template for cutting out the stamp handles. As the wood was so thick and highly durable a bandsaw would be used to cut the board.

Using the bandsaw these stamp handles were cut out as prototypes. Here the board can be seen ready to be cut on the machine.

After cutting the 30 mm block a template was created to quality check the cutting. This shows the block is the correct size. The stamp symbol was also etched on top of the block as test.

This is a miniature box to hold the three sample stamps. This also allowed us to see how the disposition between wood and perspex would work.

The blue perspex contrasts well against the plywood. Blue is also symbolic of the water surrounding the island of Crete.

Examples of symbols etched into the Lino material, the lighter areas will be the part of the stamp that takes the ink and transfers it to the page.
Proto-type 7

‘Cryptic Crush’
Linear B Syllabic app based on Candy Crush principle
LINEAR-B
CRYPTIC CRUSH

PLAY
RULES
LEADERBOARD

SHUFFLE
SCORE
MOVES LEFT:

LEADERBOARD

RULES

4 MINOAN SYMBOLS HAVE BEEN CRUSHED AND NEED TO BE MATCHED TOGETHER WITHIN 5 MOVES.
MATCH 3 SYMBOLS IN A ROW TO GAIN 2 POINTS.
MATCH 4 SYMBOLS IN A ROW TO GAIN 9 POINTS.
STUCK? TAP SHUFFLE TO REARRANGE THE GEMS AT THE COST OF 2 MOVES.
SCORE AS MANY POINTS AS POSSIBLE TO BECOME THE MINOAN MASTER!
Proto-type 8

‘Minory’
Linear B Logograph game based on Memory game
This Investigation raises not only the question of the overall relevance of creative re-contextualisation of archaeological heritage in engaging new audiences, but also to what extent this re-contextualisation can be allowed to undermine the ‘authenticity’ of the source material.
There is a need for criticality in relation to:

- Re-contextualisation not ‘so new’ media?
- Production: How is this contributing to anything and what to?
  - Are we just producing more ‘tat’?
- Is the simplification of Archaeological knowledge justifiable just to reach new audiences?
- Is compromising the visual authenticity and integrity of artifacts justifiable just to reach new audiences?
- etc.
From Artifact to Experience

Meredith Davis (2012:208)
from didactic to dialogic

Host Community

Archaeology

Heritage Experience

Visitor Community
Why try to connect design activism with archaeology?

*Because* archaeological practice concerned with activism advocates a collaborative approach; particularly in relation to community-based participant research (CBPR); the production and democratisation of knowledge, and “decolonising” the research process. *Because* archaeology is relevant to our past, present and future.

(Atalay, 2012)
Thank you!
If you are interested in this type of ‘stuff’, please do get in touch:

m.levick-parkin@shu.ac.uk