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

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Welcome
Visual Translations of Ancient Heritage

Re-contextualising ancient European script through contemporary visual communication methods and media.
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The Purpose

of this practice led research project was to apply a design anthropology approach to the visual re-contexualisation 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

The later is described as 'social' or 'public' design, a process of 'co-creation' resulting in the common good by means of sustainable solutions.' (Viladas 2011, P31)
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
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.
If Speech Fixing

The study of the numerous written languages of our civilization reveals in vain for a common origin of sign formation. Many attempts have certainly been made to discover analogies and associations between the primitive scripts of different peoples and epochs, but it has never been possible to establish them incontrovertibly and it is improbable that they will ever be found.

Nevertheless, there are some undeniable analogies between elementary signs, at least in the pictorial representation of objects which must have been common to all peoples. We need only think of the representation of human and animal figures and typical weapons such as spears. The rooster was very common in all the ancient world as a symbol, a triangle, and water as a wave line. But these facts do not in any way indicate the existence of an original script, or a text, but rather of keen powers of observation and a special sense of interpretation possessed by the early peoples.

3. Inherited archetypes

The idea that certain figures are anchored deep in our consciousness, from birth, as inherited "archetypes," is a common symbolic interpretation that should not be ignored. Does a kitten have a mental picture of "Mother," before it sees one for the first time, or does it learn recognition "as a cat" before it has been born? This gives rise to a fundamental question which goes far beyond the scope of our inquiry, namely, whether a pictorial notion can be innate or whether these first be experienced in order to create a representational notion as a memory.

1. Two ways of script development

Pictorial signs were certainly the original script and then came the letter signs. This is the study of the interrelations and developments in the study of the interrelations and developments in the study of the interrelations and developments. In this chain of events, the letter signs were added and then the different stages toward the gestural-primitive script. Thus we find a crystallization of a pure abstraction.

2. A common origin

Those who study the history of the numerous written languages of our civilization search in vain for a common origin of sign formation. Many attempts have certainly been made to discover analogies and associations between the primitive scripts of different peoples and epochs, but it has never been possible to establish them incontrovertibly and it is improbable that they will ever be found.

Nevertheless, there are some undeniable analogies between elementary signs, at least in the pictorial representation of objects which must have been common to all peoples. We need only think of the representation of human and animal figures and typical weapons such as spears. The rooster was very common in all the ancient world as a symbol, a triangle, and water as a wave line. But these facts do not in any way indicate the existence of an original script, or a text, but rather of keen powers of observation and a special sense of interpretation possessed by the early peoples.
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 in front of every chair are wooden folders, 2 pens and implements and two sheets of printed paper. There are more folders on the wall, where they are stored under the table after a period of use. On the shelves above the tables there are various tools, which show evidence of previous research activities, currently a large bag on the shelf holds brand new items.

The basement lab looks more like an art & design studio than the Inside archaeology data would normally associate with the word 'lab', and the act of doing more lab work in an environment such as this makes one appreciate the newness of the tools.
A small room in the basement has a stone floor, and the walls are lined with shelves. The shelves are filled with various artifacts, including ancient pottery and clay tablets.

There is a large stone vessel in the center of the room, surrounded by smaller objects. The walls are covered with additional shelves and cases, holding more artifacts.

The stone floor is slightly worn, with some areas showing signs of wear. The overall atmosphere is one of history and culture, with the artifacts serving as a testament to the past.

The room is well-lit, with a mix of natural and artificial light, creating a warm and inviting space.

The artifacts include a variety of objects, such as clay tablets, pottery, and bronze figures. Each object tells a story, providing a glimpse into the lives of those who created them.
One of the instruments is a thin, cylindrical, medium-cut piece of cylinder-shaped wood with a smooth, thin, curved, knife-like cutting edge of one end. The other is a piece of wire, sharpened with the end being finished naturally by the edge. An individual takes the end and:

- The natural cutting implement is about the same length as the man-made one. It makes sense to use to offer this variation, as the choice of tool will minimally impact on the practicality of the project.
- It would be interesting to compare these two natural implements.

After the initial welcome and setting down, Angela cuts a piece of clay into very sticks, while John explains to the students the nature of the task about to be commenced. He asks them to start by making a piece of clay, in any shape they wish, and to then transfer that form in the form in the way using one of the cutting instruments provided. He demonstrates the amounting of a sample stick and takes some instructions for the in three B insufficiency on the whiteboard.
The students busy themselves examining the tablets kept in a box to spell their names in Latin. B and John highlight a few of the products of the script, such as the names of two scribes and the order in which information was communicated in relation to manuscripts. The students try out the different writing implements and in conversations affirm that they are finding the scribes of these. Some prefer the lacquered stylus and think it moves more elegantly through the cuneiform script. After completing this first task, the students move onto making a slightly larger tablet on which to record everybody’s name. This seems quite helpful for later.”
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 time period between approximately 1500 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
priestess in training

scribe
you can put the wool over there.

EGYPTIAN

scribe

husband in training
Proto-type 6

Linear B Logograph Stamp Set
Research and Idea Development

The phaestos disc, is an artifact from the Minoan period. It is made from fired clay and contains symbols on both sides. These symbols are undeciphered 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 vectored symbols.
Stamp Development

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 60mm and one at 100mm. Following this it was decided that 30mm 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.

20 mm squares were laser etched into the wooden block 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 30mm 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 juxtaposition 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
MOVES LEFT:

LEADERBOARD

RULES

4 Minoan symbols have been crushed and need to be matched together within 15 moves.
Match 3 symbols in a row to gain 2 points.
Match 4 symbols in a row to gain 5 points.
Stuck? Tap shuffle to rearrange the grid 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

Archaeology

Heritage Experience

Host Community

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:

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