

**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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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.

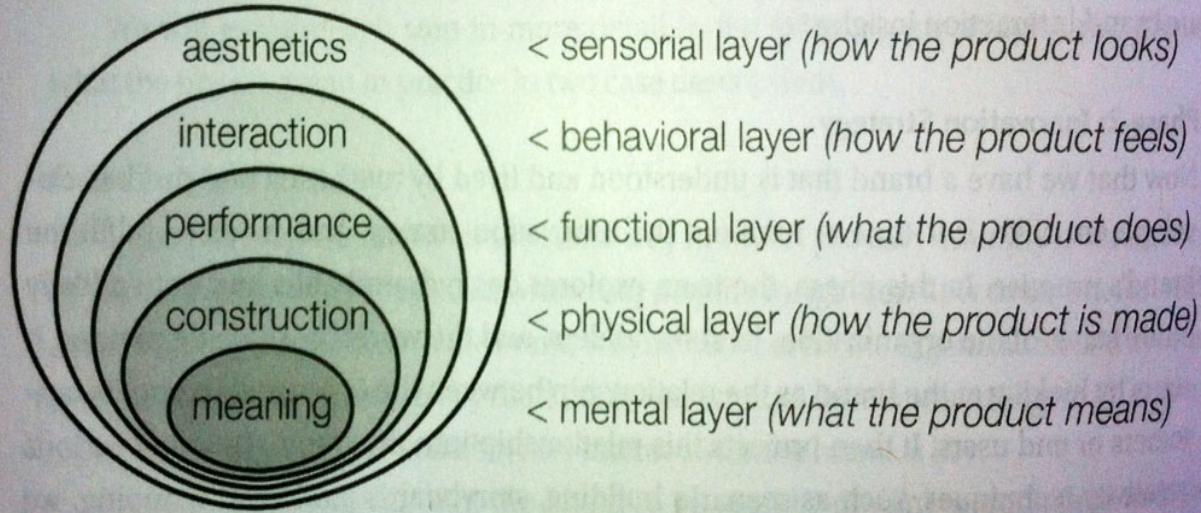


Figure 2. Layers of brand-driven design. The layers correspond with the way the user comes into contact with and experiences designed brand touchpoints. These layers are helpful in the use of design as a strategic resource because design plays a specific role for each one.



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

Label for  
Archaeological  
Artifact

# Visual Communication

Visual  
Communication



Visual  
Communication



Visual  
Communication

# Signs and Symbols

Their Design and Meaning



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 de-coded by the receiver.

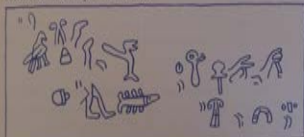
Like visual design, ancient script deals with visual presentation of meaning and is directly relevant in relation to Frutiger's interest in archetypes and Neurath's Isotype collection.



## II. Speech Fixing

Writing, in the sense of a genuine record of thought and speech, can be said to have actually existed from the time at which drawings or signs appear in direct relation with spoken syllables, words, or phrases.

The first "scribes" of early times can be supposed to have existed in the fifth millennium B.C. in the Middle East. With the aid of signs known as pictograms, they made schematic representations of objects, dates and actions. Writing in the proper sense, however, did not begin until the moment when they started to arrange the signs horizontally or vertically in rows, corresponding to their own linear train of thought. Thus alignments of signs gradually began to appear and, through constantly repeated use, were further developed into continuous script cultures.



Early Mesolithic pictograms, ca. 4000 B.C.

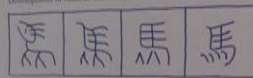
### 1. Two ways of script development

Pictorial signs were certainly at the origin of all scripts that have come into existence through a natural course of development. In the study of the laborious and widely differing routes toward the definite graphic fixing of a language, two main categories can be identified.

### a. Scripts "remaining" pictorial

This category includes all scripts which have undergone no revolutionary change, even over hundreds of years, but have kept their signs at the pictorial stage, even though stylized. The living proof of this is the Chinese script. For example, the sign for a horse is clearly recognizable in its archaic form, and although this has later been somewhat systematized, the basic strokes and movements are still present in the modern sign (four legs, head, tail, etc.).

Development of Chinese characters



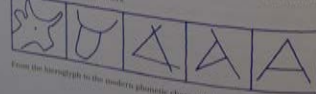
Horse (archaic)

Horse (modern)

### b. "Alphabetical" scripts

This category includes all those scripts whose original picture signs have been changed over the centuries to purely phonetic signs, their strokes being reduced to the most extreme simplification. This is most clearly expressed in the Latin alphabet. Our illustration shows, in the first panel, an early pictorial sign for a bull, "aleph," with all the details such as ears, horns, and an eye. As the sign develops, the pictorially significant parts of the image are left out bit by bit until the letter A crystallizes as a pure abstraction.

Development of Latin characters



From the hieroglyph to the modern phonetic character A

### 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 affinities and associations between the primitive scripts of different regions and continents, but it has never been possible to establish them incontrovertibly and it is improbable that they will ever be found.

Nevertheless there are some irrefutable 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 arrows. The moon was surely represented all over the world as a sickle shape, a mountain as a triangle, and water as a wave line, but these facts do not in any way indicate the existence of an original script, or *urschrift*, but rather of keen powers of observation and a special sense of interpretation possessed by the early scribes.

### 3. Inherited archetypes?

The idea that certain figures are anchored deep in our subconscious, from birth, as inherited "archetypes" with a common symbolic interpretation should also be mentioned here. Does a kitten have a mental picture of "mouse" before it sees one for the first time, or does a child recognize fire as "danger" before it has been burned? This gives rise to a fundamental question which goes far beyond the scope of our inquiry, namely, whether a pictorial notion can be inborn or whether it must first be experienced in order to enter the subconscious as a memory.

### 4. From pictogram to ideogram

In a combined illustration, we attempt to compare signs from three major cultures and demonstrate some basic principles of these pictographic scripts.

Three archaic signs for water



Mesopotamia



Egypt



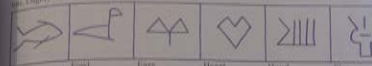
China



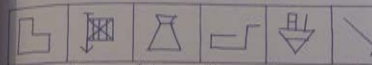
Inborn archetype?

### III. The Graphic Growth of Pictograms

Archival Mesopotamian pictographic script, ca. 3500 B.C., already tending toward the abstract (after von Soden)



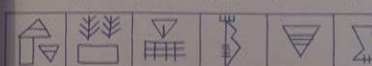
Fish Fowl Ears Heart Hand Fire



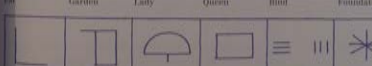
Foot Door Tent Ship Jug Cutting edge



Boat Plug Corn Textile Man Walk



Garden Lady Queen Bird Foundation



Grow Sea Enclosure Precision Godhead

contrast to the mighty monuments of Egypt, which the Sumerians possessed a more mobile temperament, making the idea of transport and the exchange of information the most important factor in writing. Clay tablets were the main material used. After baking in the sunshine or in fire, they could be transported and stored in piles.


Cuneiform, or "wedge-shaped" writing, owes its name to the individual, straight-line units with extend-

# 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

<b>ADRC DESIGN RESEARCH</b> <b>PROJECT 2014/15</b> 	<b>Brief</b> <b>Visual translations of ancient heritage</b>	
	Re-contextualising ancient European script through contemporary visual communication methods and media	
	Supervising Design Researchers: Research Workshops	Melanie Levick-Parkin, Johnny Wozni Wednesday 25 <sup>th</sup> & 27 <sup>th</sup> of March
<b>Brief</b> The purpose of this practice led research will be to explore the application of service design methodology and design thinking for the engagement in encounters with heritage in Archaeology. The intention is to re-contextualise visual aspects of ancient European script, through the application of contemporary visual communication practice and media touch-points.	without the context the knowledge was created in being examined or opened up for discussion. This limits opportunity for audience engagement and for stakeholder inclusion in the construction and communication of that knowledge and thus how the Archaeological heritage is experienced.	
	<b>Considerations</b> 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.	
<b>Background</b> Archaeology can grant us access to our history by allowing us encounters with remnants of the past. 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. This makes any interaction with history also a potential interaction with the present and future. Any 'reading' of the past, is also a reflection of our presence (Gamble 2001)(Gere 2009) (Hayden1993).  Ancient script deals with visual presentation of meaning and is relevant in relation to Fruigers discussion of archetypes and Neuraths interest in isotypes. Post-modernism proposes that knowledge is socially constructed and if we consider this to be an important insight, we may concur that knowledge construction in the heritage experience should be inclusive and socially accessible. Archaeology is an area of practice where the notion of socially constructed knowledge is examined within the discipline, but does not always translate into how archaeological knowledge and artifacts are presented to the public or cultural tourists host communities. Artifacts and fact may potentially be presented as static knowledge	The intention is to look at how visual communication and service design can help create archaeological heritage experiences that explore a multi-layered narrative through co-creation and democratised strategies of engagement. Silverman (2002) noted that "archaeological tourism provides the opportunity for selective re-creation and reconstruction of the past", but in todays interconnected age this does not sound like a strategy fit for the 21 <sup>st</sup> century. The aim is to investigate the overall relevance of visual communication and service-design to a heritage experience design in archaeology and whether it may offer the potential to engage new audiences in archaeological heritage through re-contextualisation of ancient content. The Archaeologist adviser will provide the expert voice in order to ensure the appropriateness of visual materials worked with and the scientific integrity of the design outputs.	
	<b>Deliverables</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A range of visual communication strategies with a variety of visual outcomes</li></ul>	

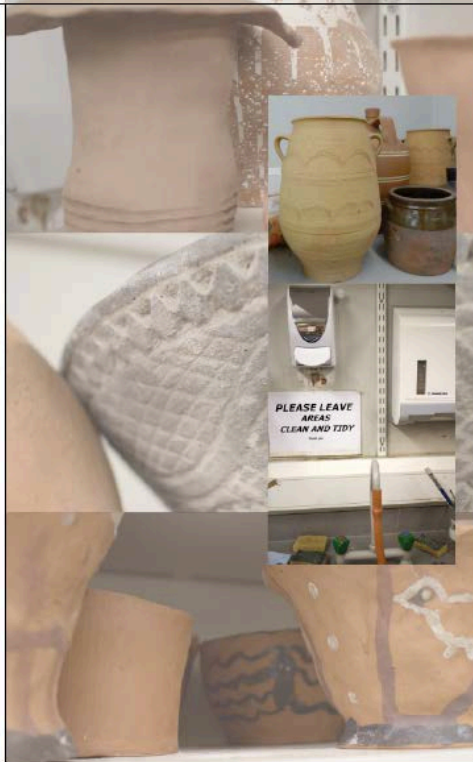
# Observation of Linear B Session

- MA Archaeology University of Sheffield
- Professor John Bennet
- Basement Lab



As it is a basement room the ceiling is quite low, with some exposed pipework and box cabling. There are work surfaces on both sides of the room, one is completely covered in various boxes and some big pirhoi style jars in the corner, the other one is fairly clear and has a sink in the middle, with a sign asking for cleanliness.

There's a big grey shelving unit at the far end of the room, which also houses a glass display case and more shelves on the wall. The front of the room has a whiteboard and projection screen on it. There are more shelves at head height, crammed full with different clay based artifacts, some easily recognisable as beautiful replicas of ancient objects others not so much, - sporting charming, but to my eyes slightly dodgy, decorative painted motives. Some of the vases are broken and most are very dusty.



The MA Archaeology students are here to re-create linear B tablets. In the middle of the table is a big slab of clay and examples of replica tablets produced by John Bennet in previous years. These examples have a variety of shapes, some oblong, some more tablet shaped, and all are full of Linear B inscriptions. The tablets have all been fired and their colour ranges from the light brown of oven fired clay, to the irregular dark brown/black of clay fired in an open fire as an experiment, to emulate the accidental firing of the originals. Quite a few of the tablets are broken.

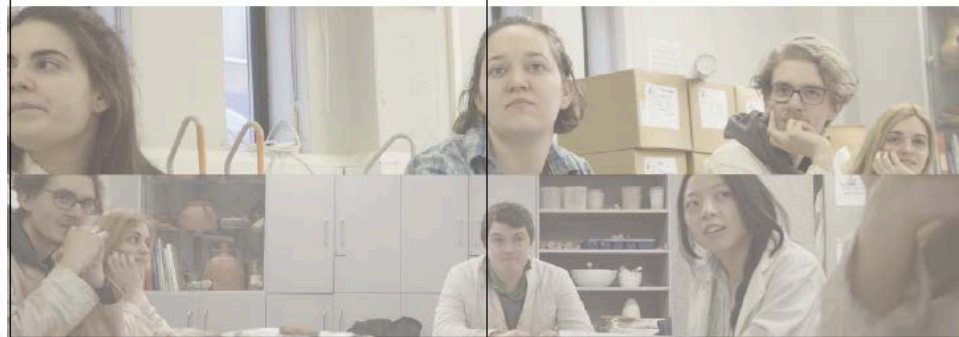
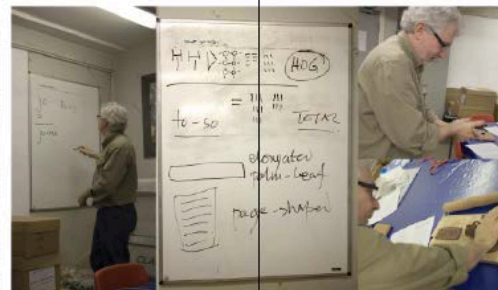


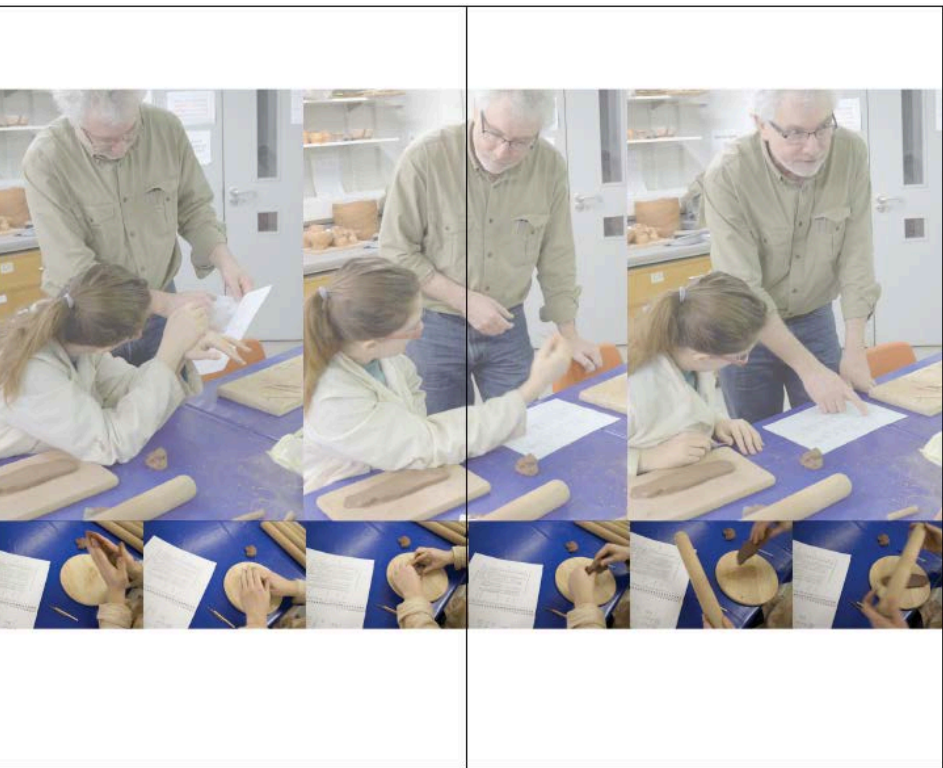


One of the instruments is a thumb-length machine cut piece of cylinder shaped wood with a sturdy, blunt metal needle sticking out of one end. The other is a piece of hawthorn twig, with the end being formed naturally by the twig's pointy, thorn-like end to it. The natural writing implement is about the same length as the man-made one. It makes sense to me to offer this variation, as the choice of tool will ultimately impact on the production of the script. It would be interesting to compare these to original implements.



After the initial welcome and settling down, Angela cuts a piece of clay for every student, while John explain to the students the nature of the task about to be commenced. He asks them to start by creating a piece of table, in any shape they wish and to then transcribe their name in Linear B into the wet clay, using one of the writing instruments provided. He demonstrates the moulding of a sample tablet and writes some instructions for the Linear B script onto the whiteboard.

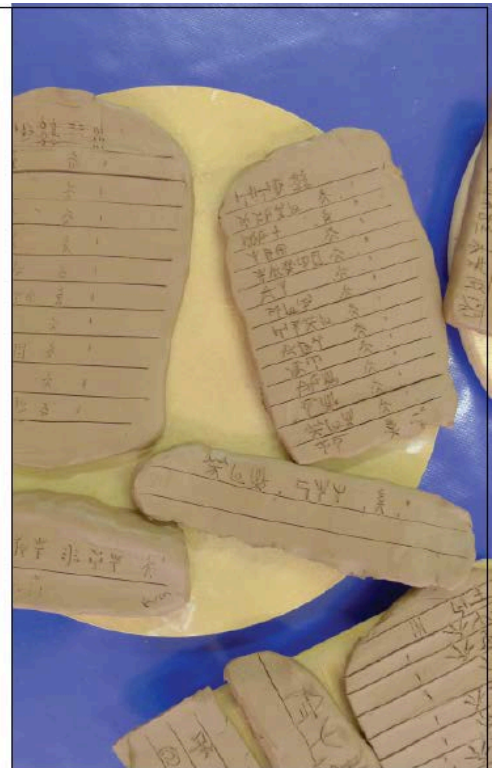




The students busy themselves discussing what syllables best to use to spell their names in Linear B and John highlights a few of the peculiarities of the script, such as the omission of last syllables and the order in which information was communicated in relation to numbers.

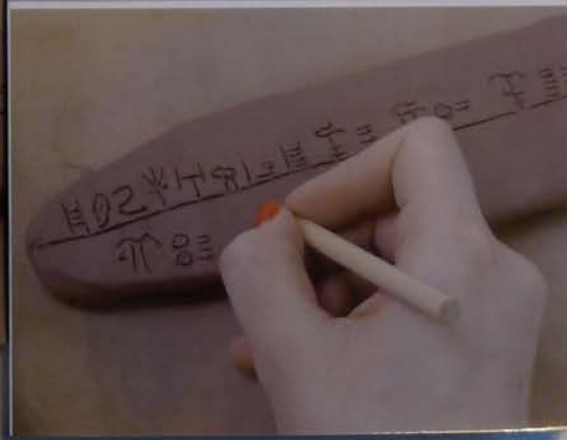
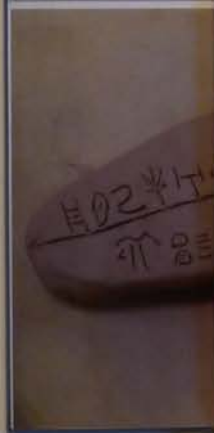
The students try out the different writing implements and in conversation reflect on how they are finding the usability of them. Some prefer the hawthorn stick and think it move more elegantly through the clay, whilst others prefer using the reed implement as they find it more controllable.

After having completed this first task the students move onto making a slightly larger tablet on which to record everybody's name one. This seems quite befitting for Linear B as so many of the original tablets were lists of things. Goods, animals, people – lists of economic commodities, who paid what to whom, who owed and who possessed.





Material Practice in LINEAR B





# NATIONAL ART&DESIGN SATURDAY CLUB

scripts and discuss how their meaning relates to young peoples lives today and how they might be visually presented to make them suitable for todays media environment.



I hereby give permission for my child to participate in and contribute to the  
ADRC Visual Translations research project 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2015

Childs name:

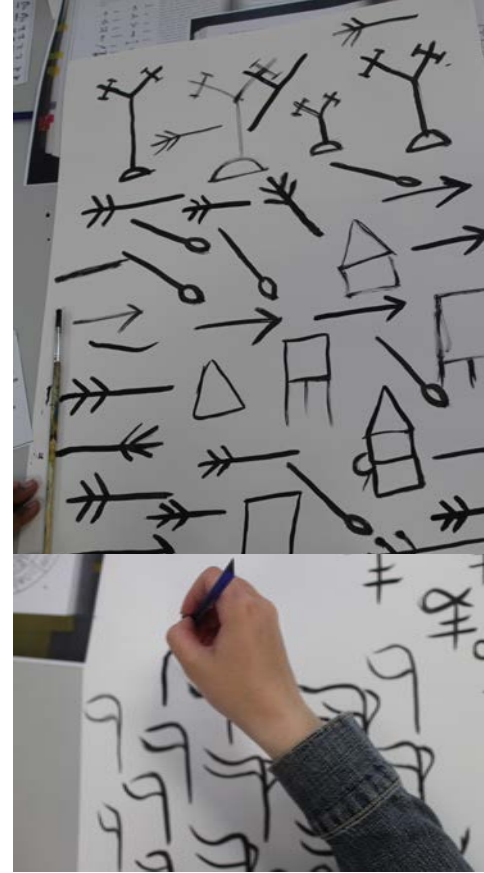
Parent/Carer:

Signature:

## 3 Part Brief

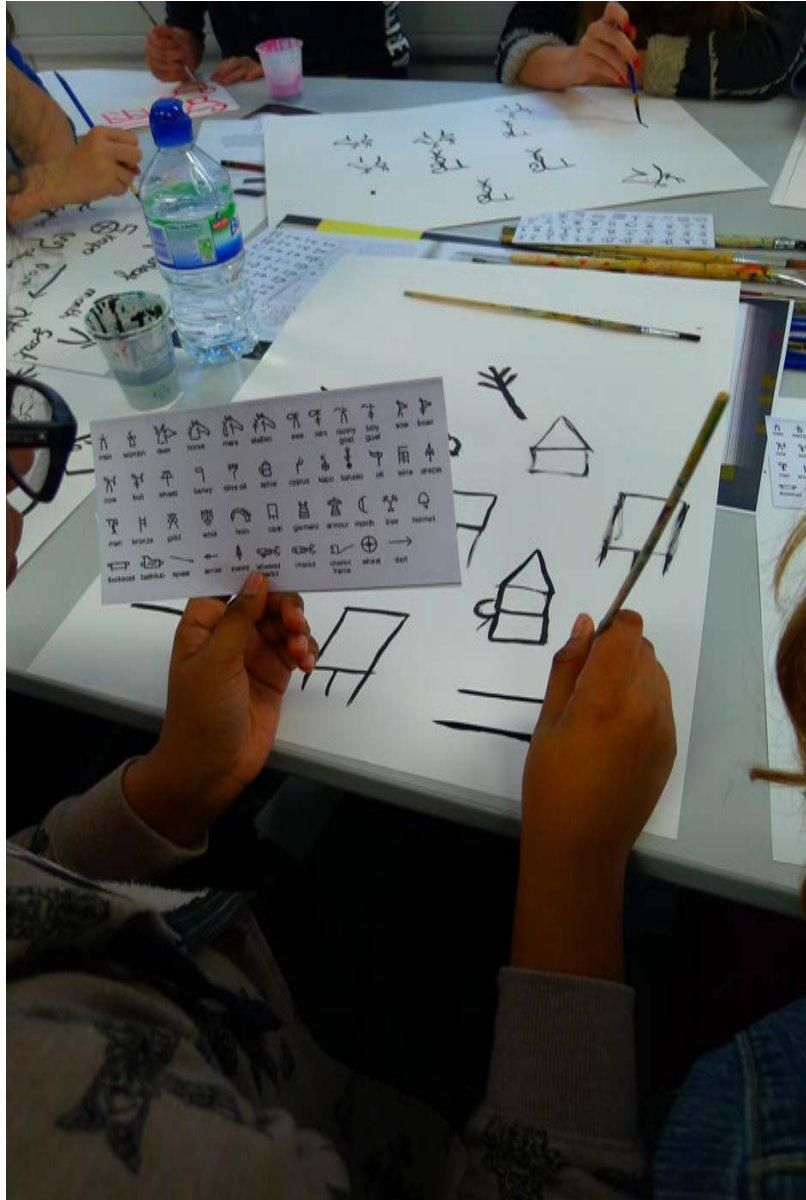
- Working with the script in ink
- Ideas generation for contemporary meaning
- Generating of new symbols in vinyl and perspex









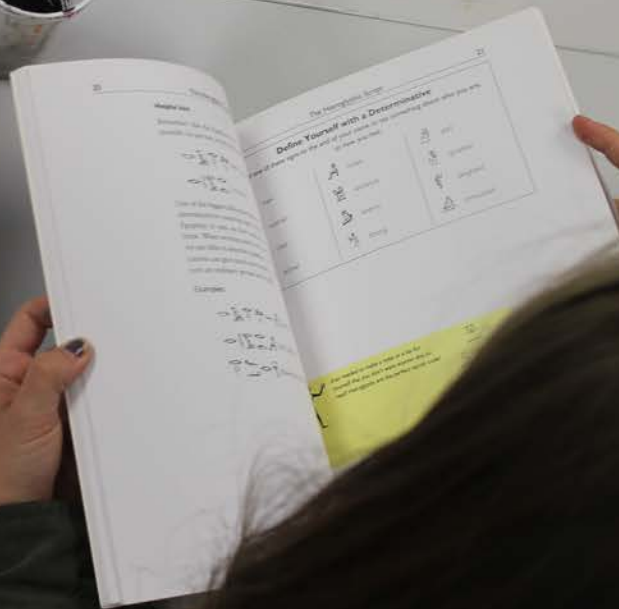


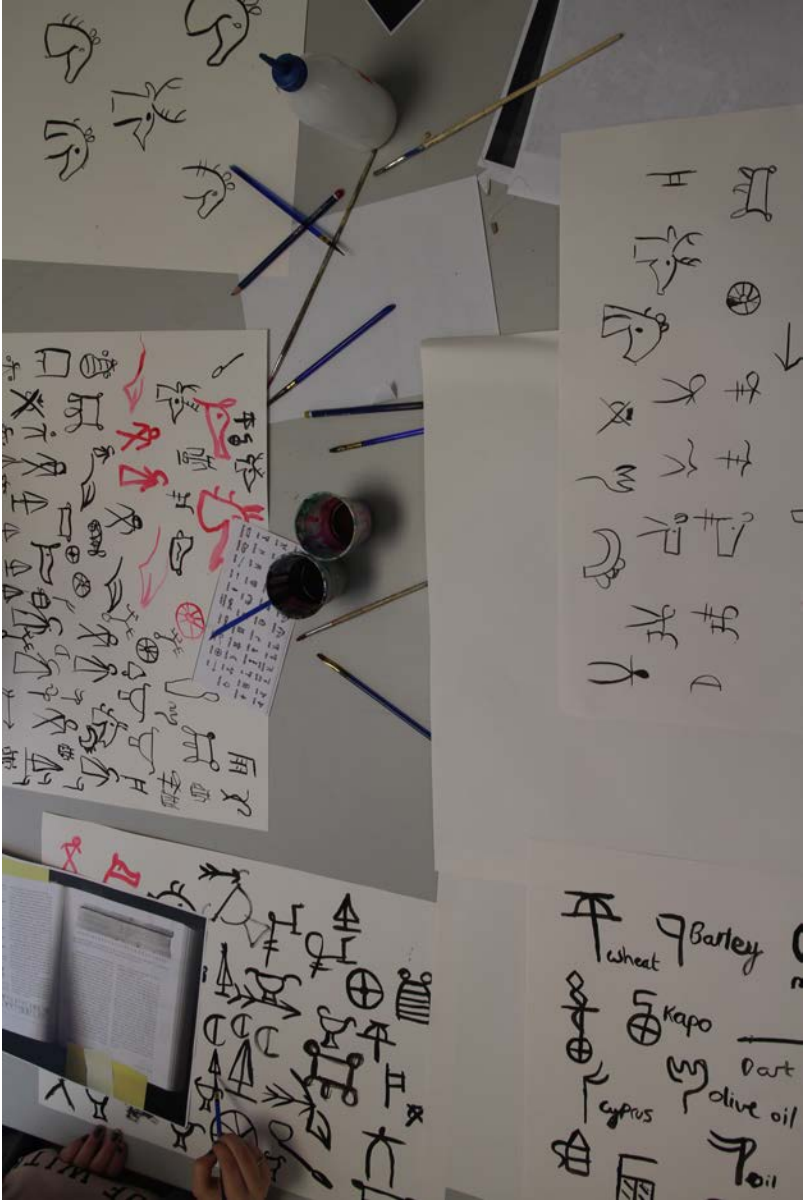






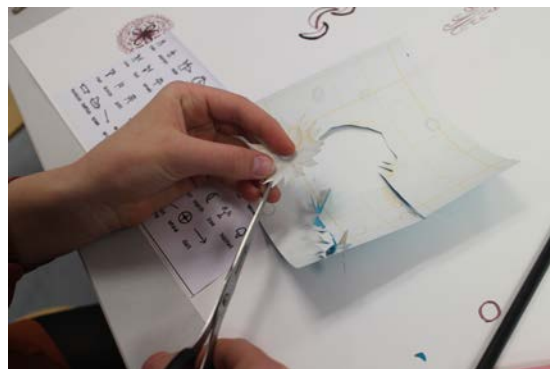
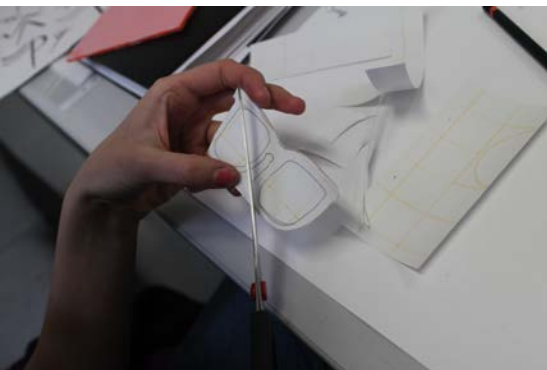
















# Georgia's Visit

- 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

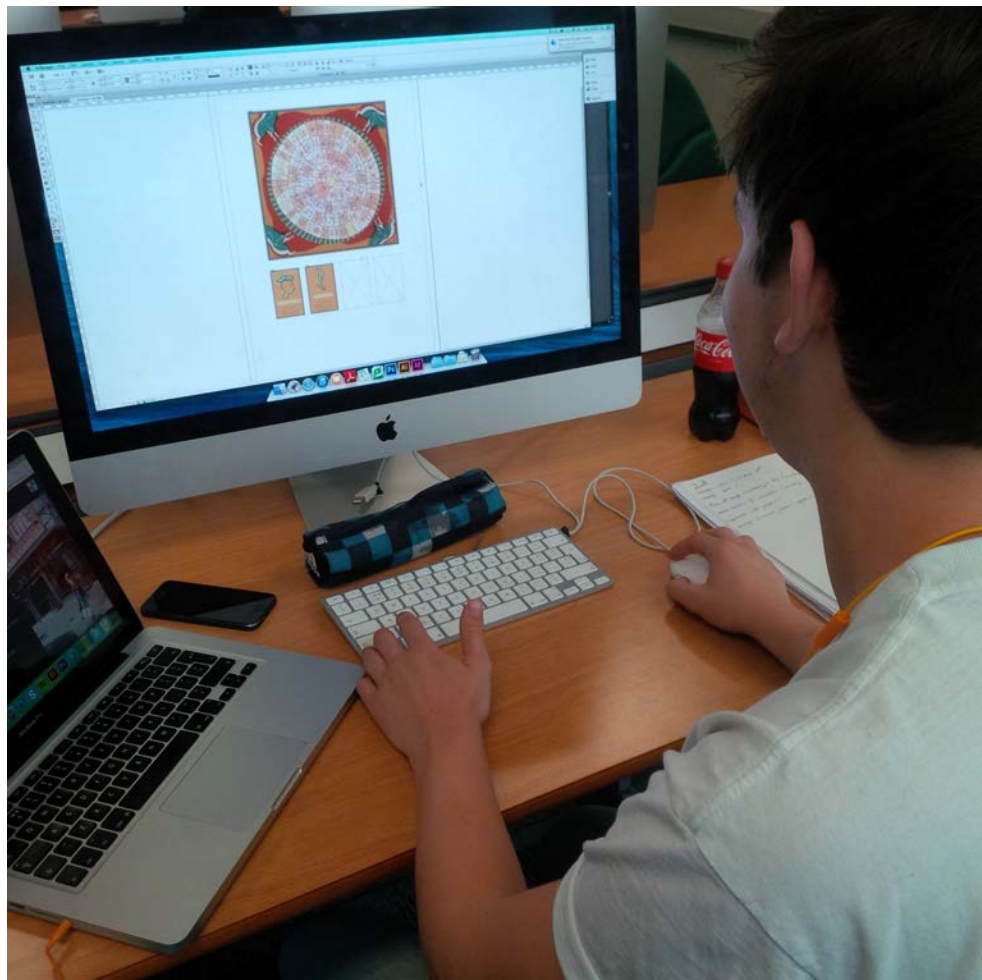
# General Discussions about materiality

- 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







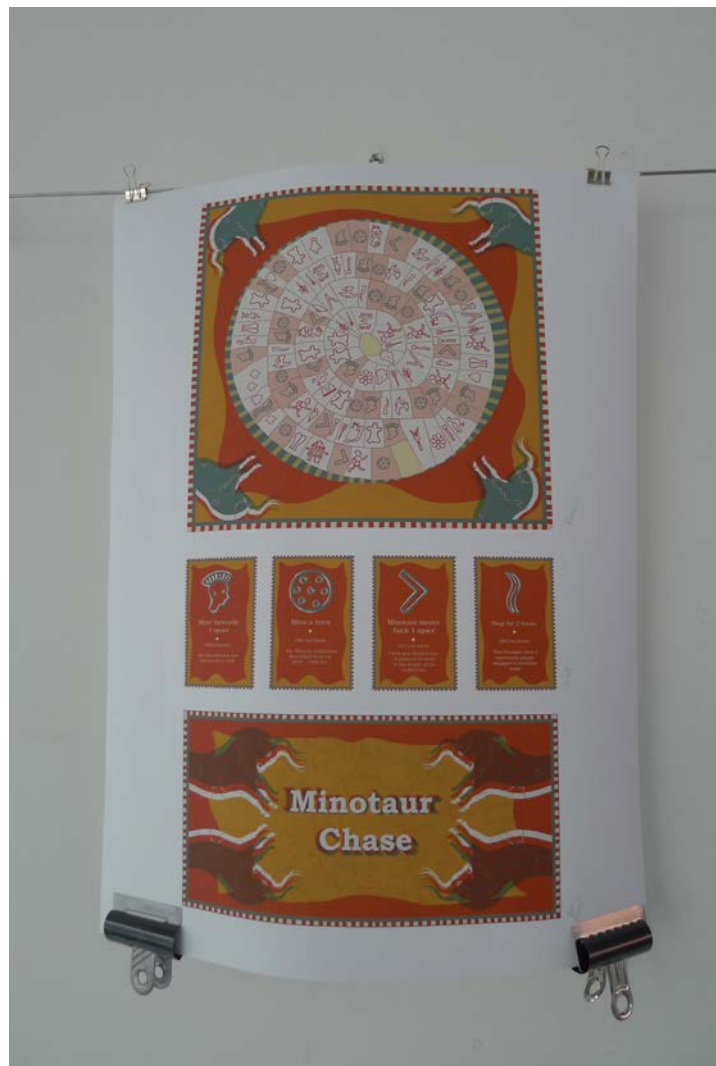


Move forwards 1 space

♦  
Did you Know:

The Phaistos Disk was  
discovered in 1908.





# Proto-type 2

Graphic Typology of Script

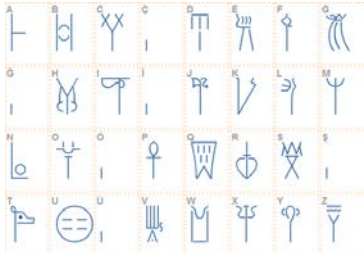
Visual Development



Visual Development



Linear B Font



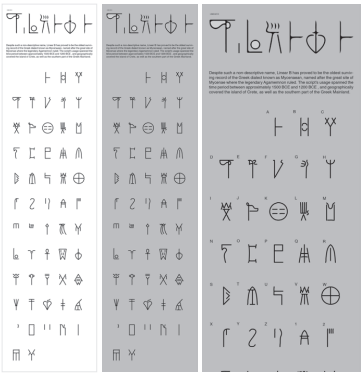
Font Posters



Font Posters Development



Font Posters Development





## Font Posters Development



## Visual Development



# Proto-type 4

Cooking based artifacts and embroidery



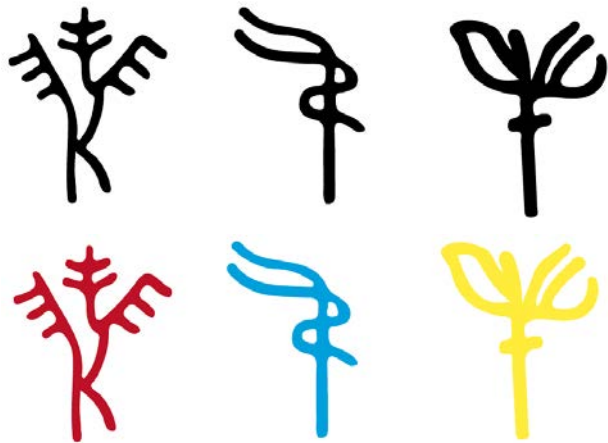
Childrens Cookery Wear



Embroidery



Embroidered Symbols



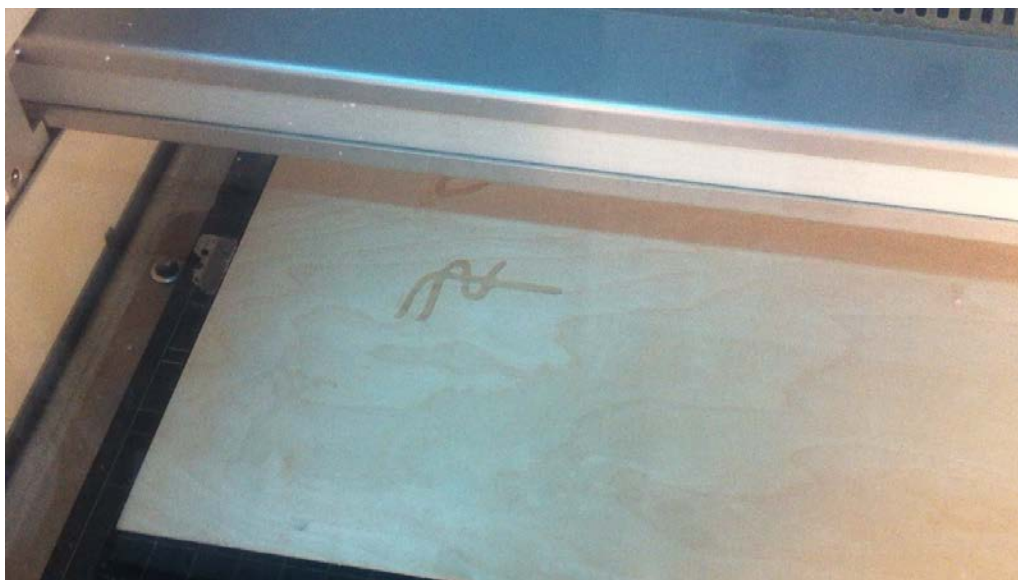
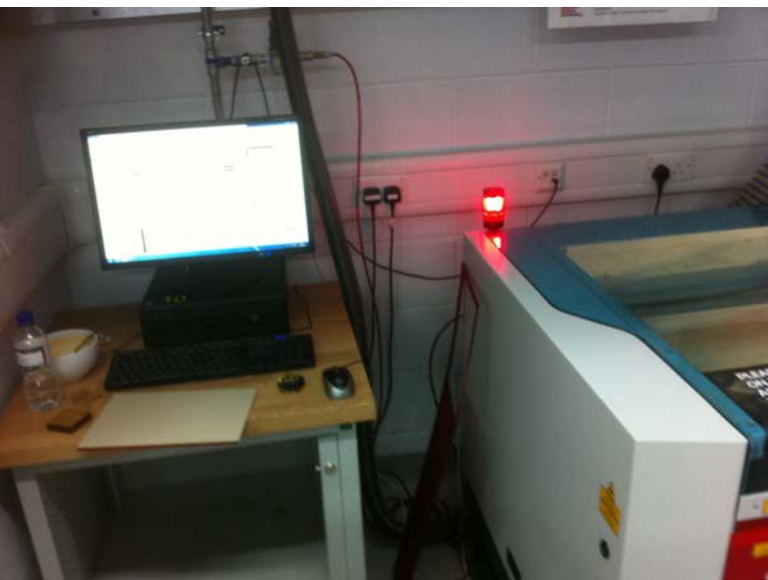










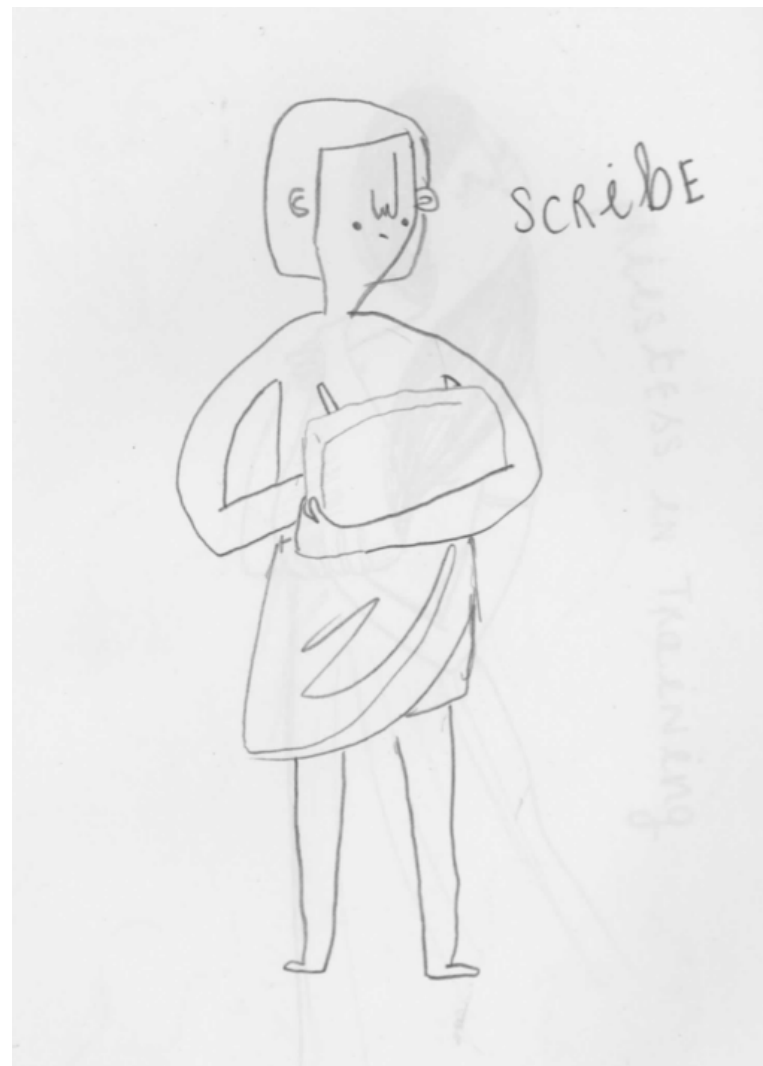




# Proto-type 5

Children's book illustrations





# Proto-type 6

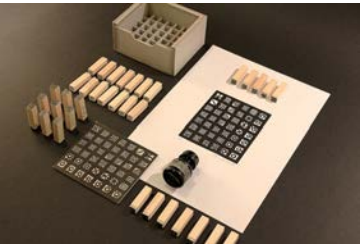
Linear B Logograph Stamp Set

Research and Idea Development



The phaistos disc, is an artifact from the Minoan period. It is made form 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.

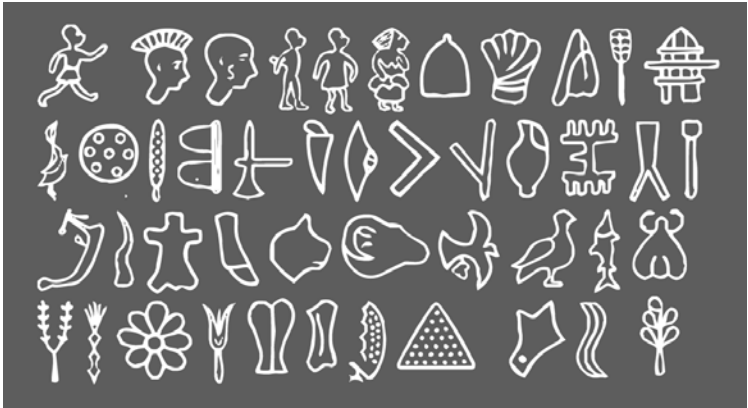
Therefore a stamp set and accompanying activity book were to be created. Below are som initial images from research into stamp sets.



Vector Symbols



Above is a drawing of the symbols of the diisc 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 stamps templates were created on the lasercutter 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.

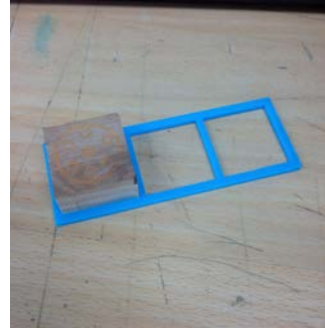


30 mm squares were laser etched into the wooden board to create a template for cutting out the stamp handles. As the wood was so thick and highly durable a bandsaw would be used to cut the board.

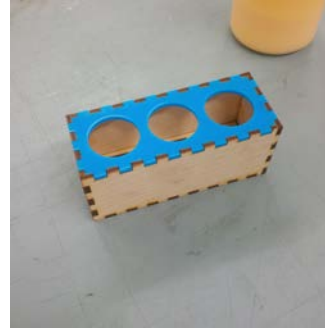


Using the bandsaw three stamp handles were cutout as prototypes. Here the board can be seen ready to be cut on the machine.

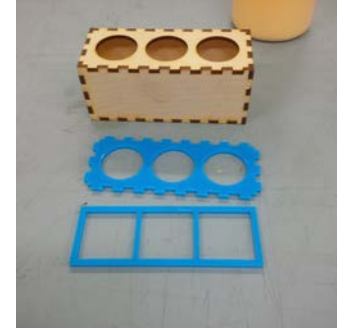
## Stamp Development



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.



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



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



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.

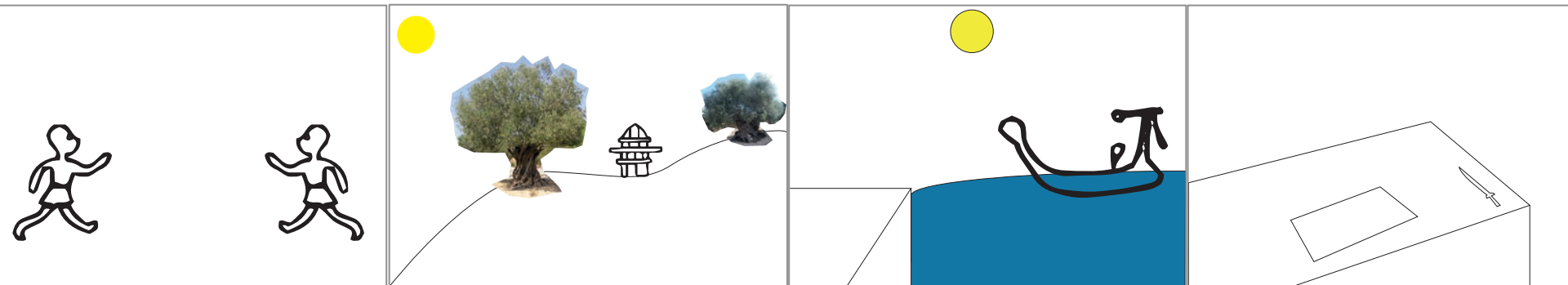










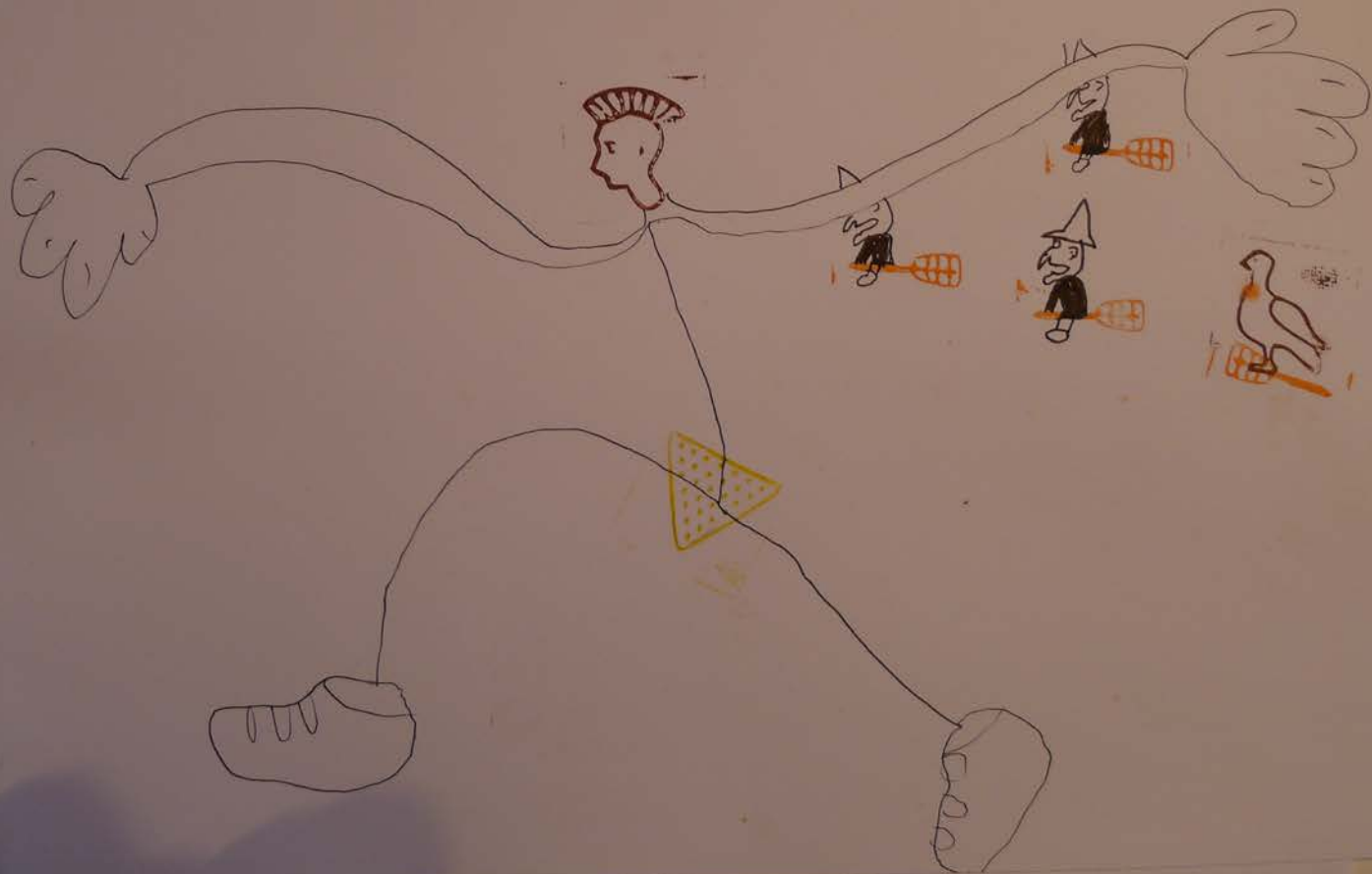










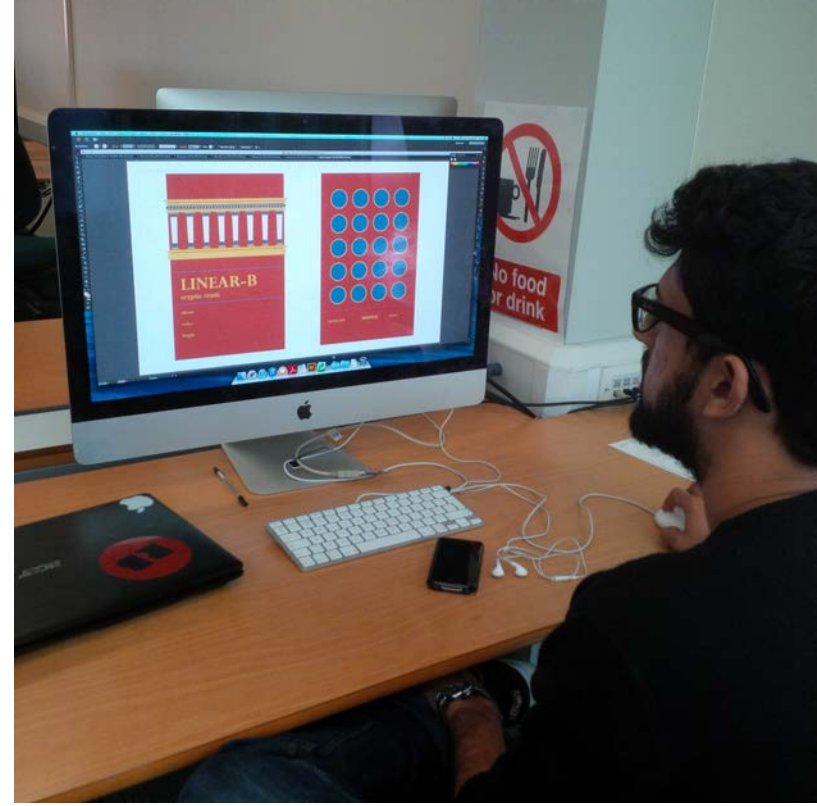
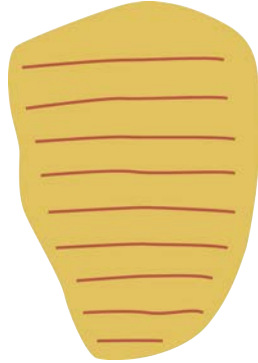
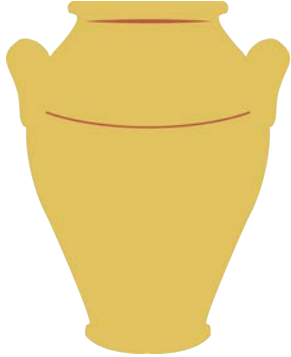


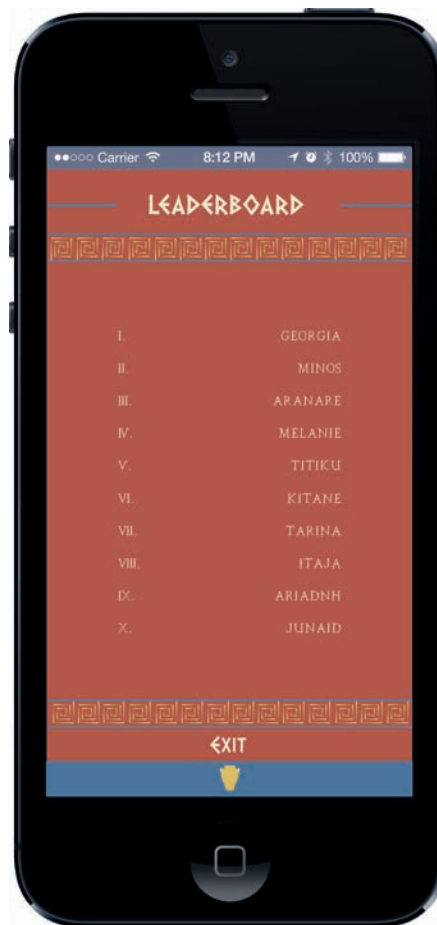


# Proto-type 7

‘Cryptic Crush’

Linear B Syllabic app based on Candy Crush principle



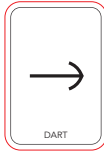
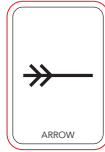
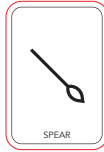
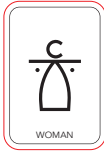
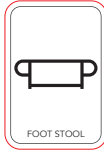
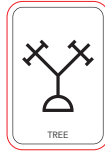
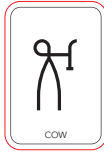
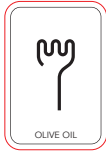




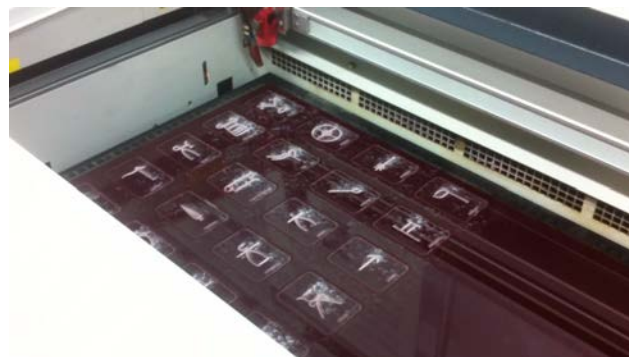
# Proto-type 8

‘Minory’

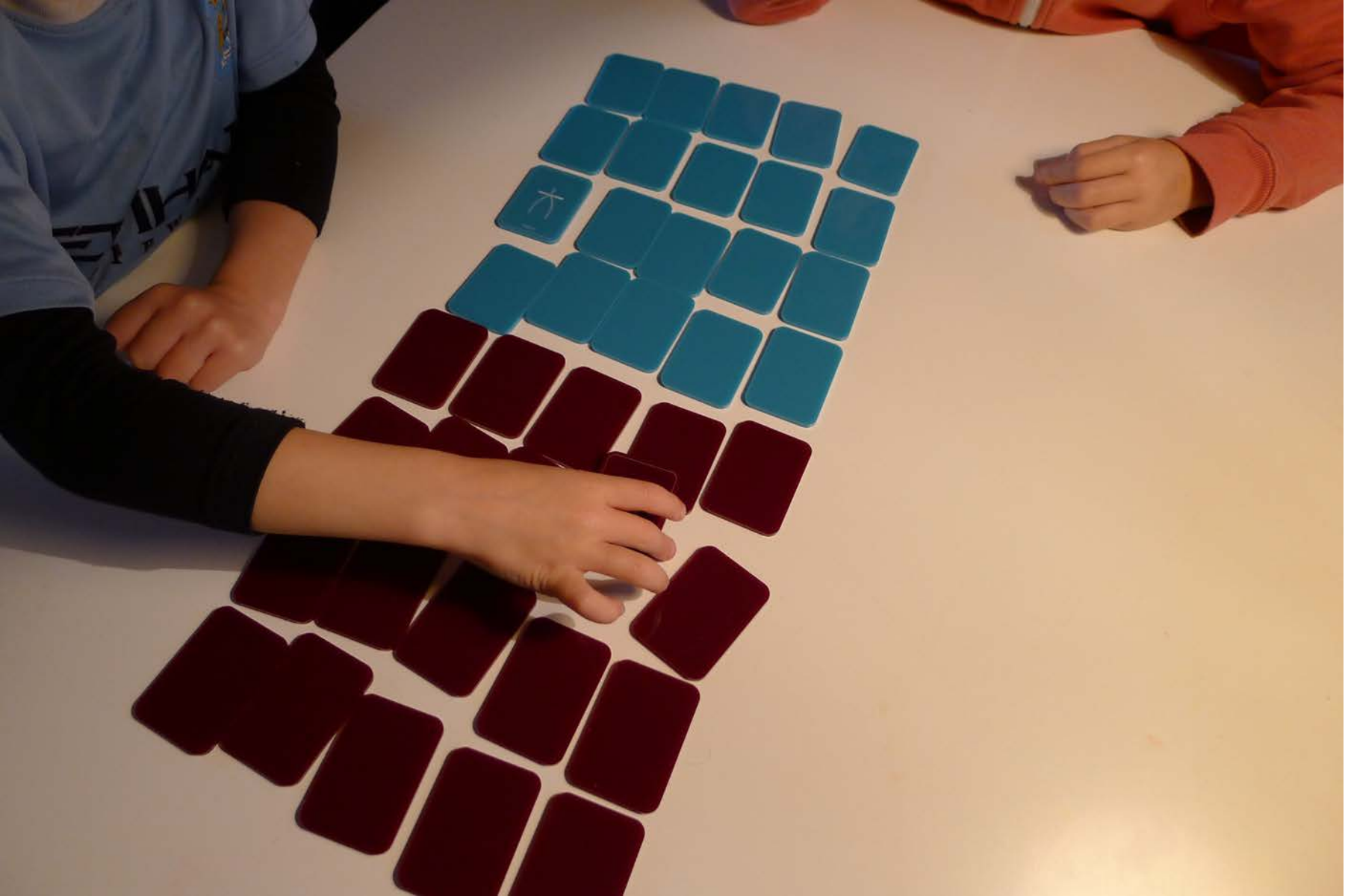
Linear B Logograph game based on Memory game



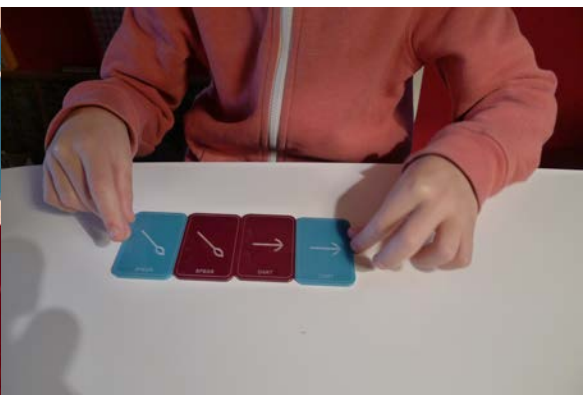
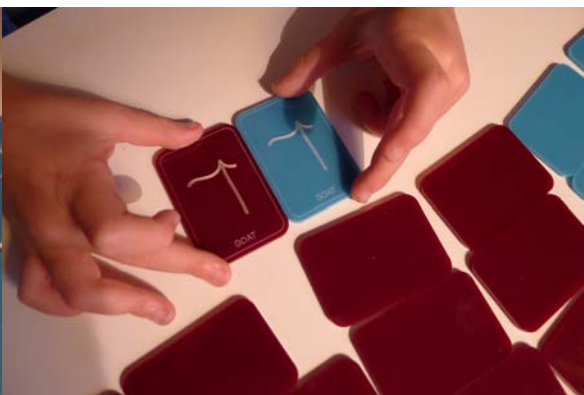
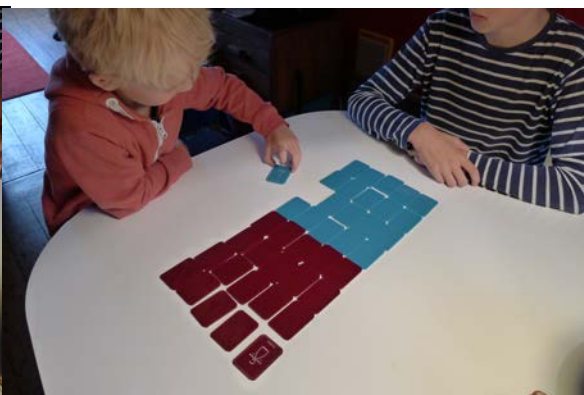














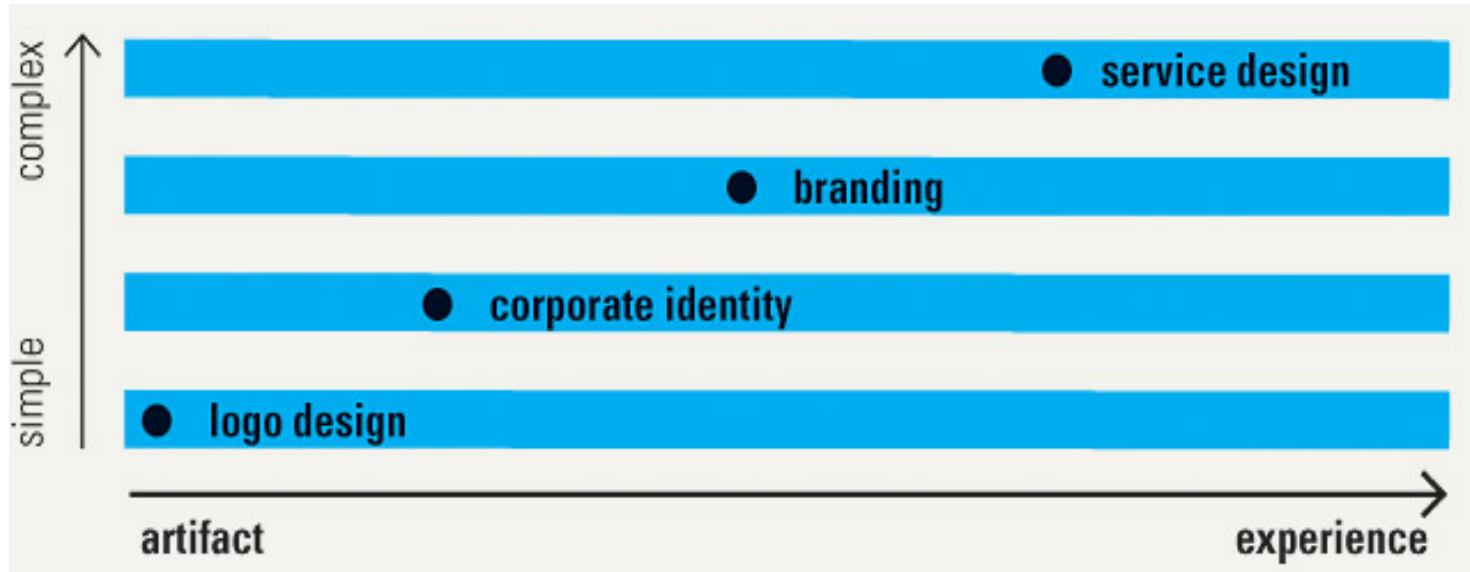
## This Investigation

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.

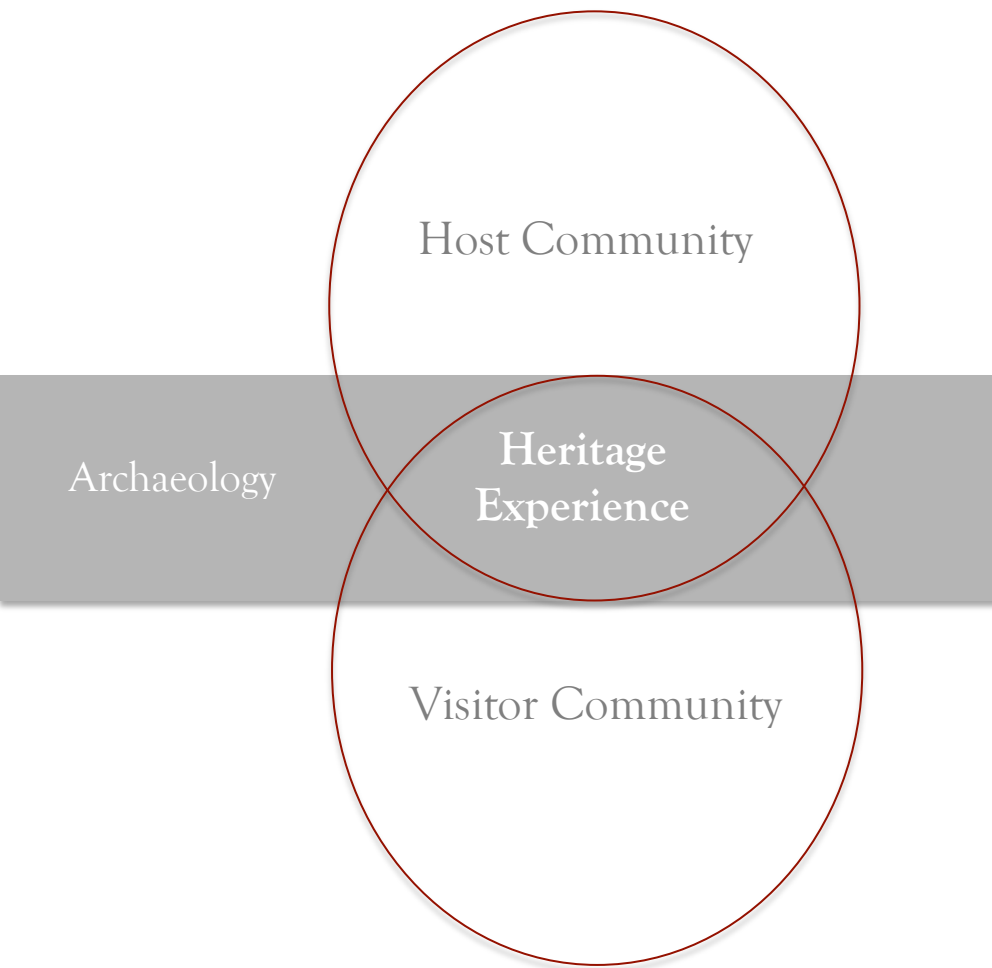
# There is a need for criticality in relation to:

- 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**



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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