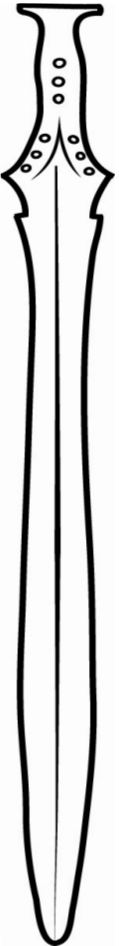
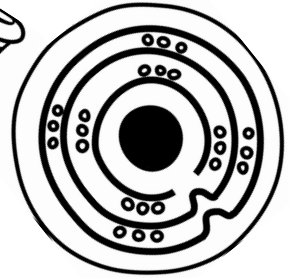




UCL

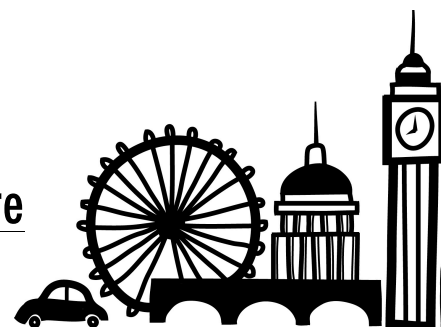


TRACING GESTURES

**THE ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY
OF
BODILY COMMUNICATION**

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

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UCL

Tracing Gestures The Art and Archaeology of Bodily Communication

Tuesday 4th and Wednesday 5th November 2014

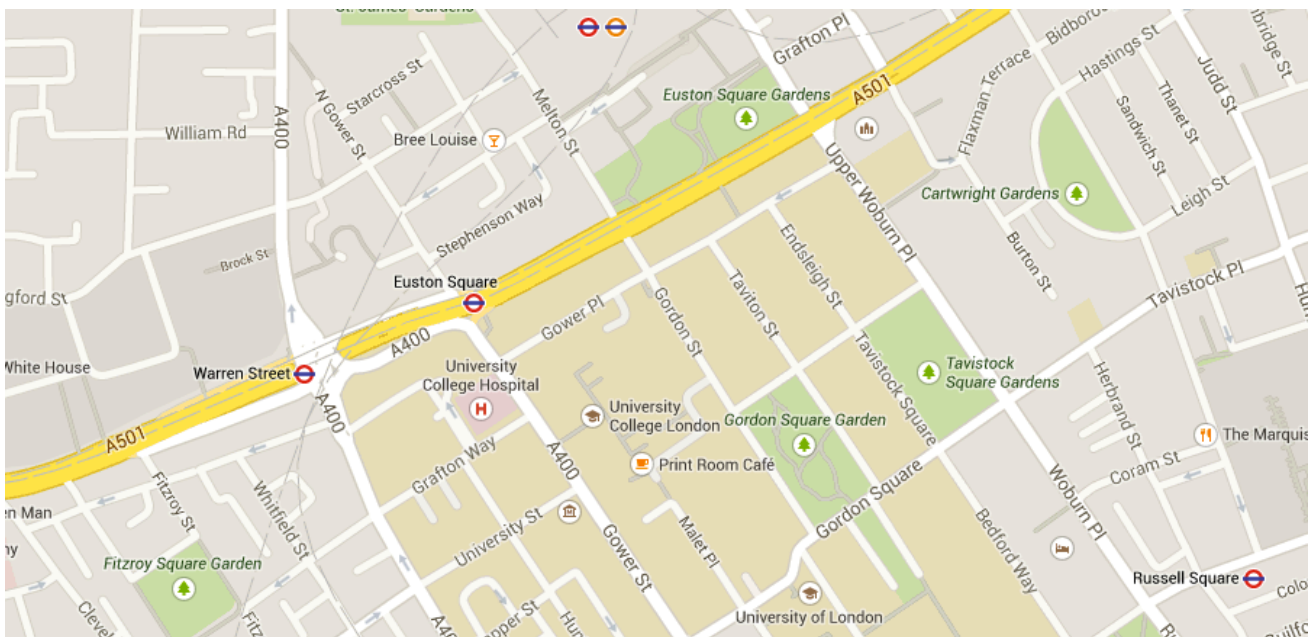
Conference Information

Location and Facilities

University College London
Gower Street
London
WC1E 6BT

Institute of Archaeology
31–34 Gordon Square
London
WC1H 0PY

For those of you who are travelling to the conference via the London Underground, the nearest tube stations to UCL are Warren Street, Euston Square, and Euston. All of these stations are 5 minutes walking distance to the main UCL campus.



The conference will be taking place in the Chadwick building on Tuesday the 4th (Marked next to the red N on the map) and in the Institute of Archaeology on Wednesday the 5th (at the top of Gordon Square on the map). Our volunteers will be placed in and around these buildings to help guide you!



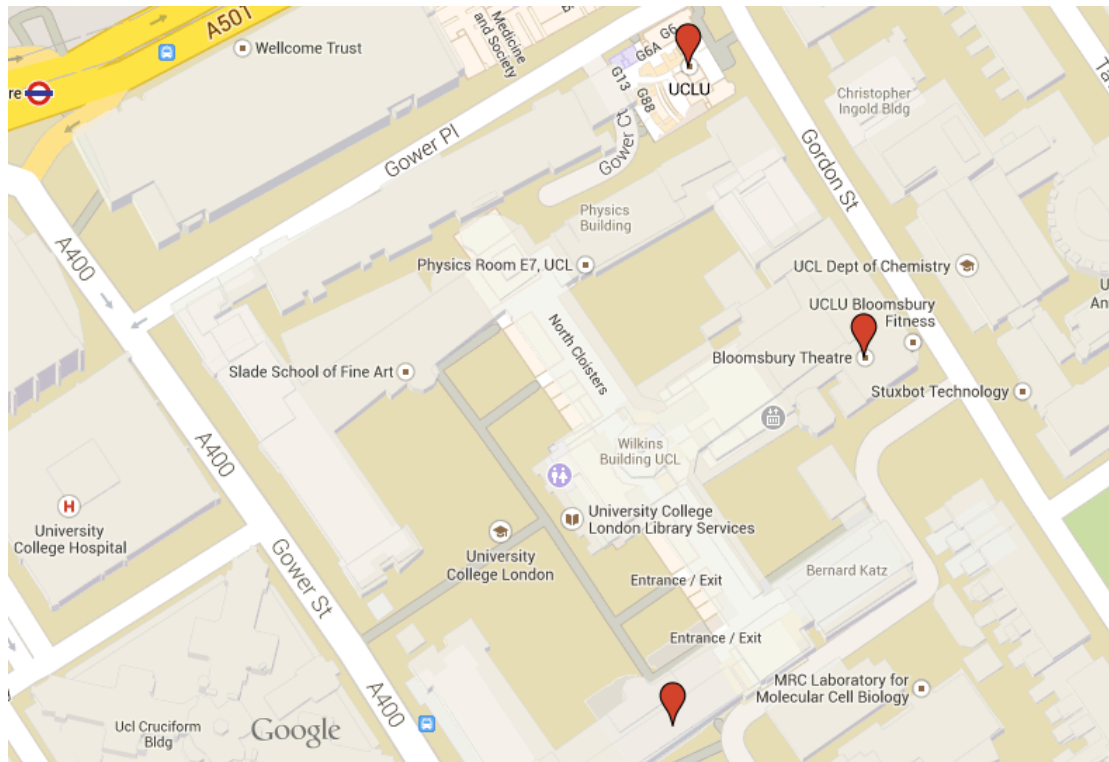
UCL Main Quad: The Chadwick building is on the right as you enter the main gate.



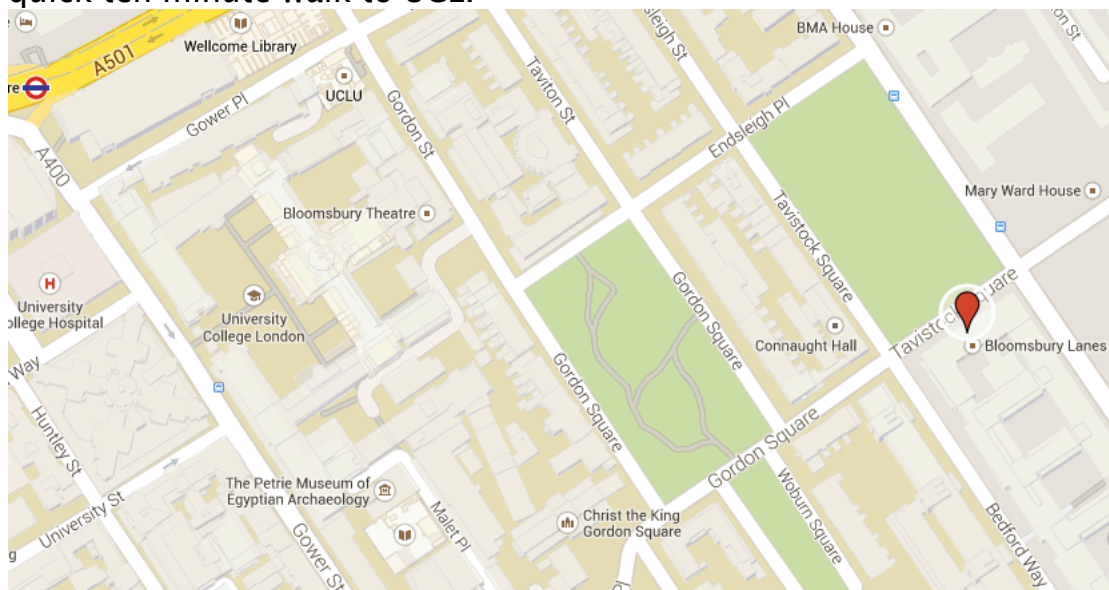
Institute of Archaeology

Refreshments and Lunch

Refreshments (coffee, tea etc.) will be provided throughout the day, but for lunches delegates will have to make their own arrangements. There are a number of cafes and canteens in UCL, which serve sandwiches, snacks and drinks as well as hot food. Some examples can be found below on the map (UCLU Café, Bloomsbury Café, Print Room Café). Euston Station also has a number of restaurants such as Nandos and Ed's Diner.

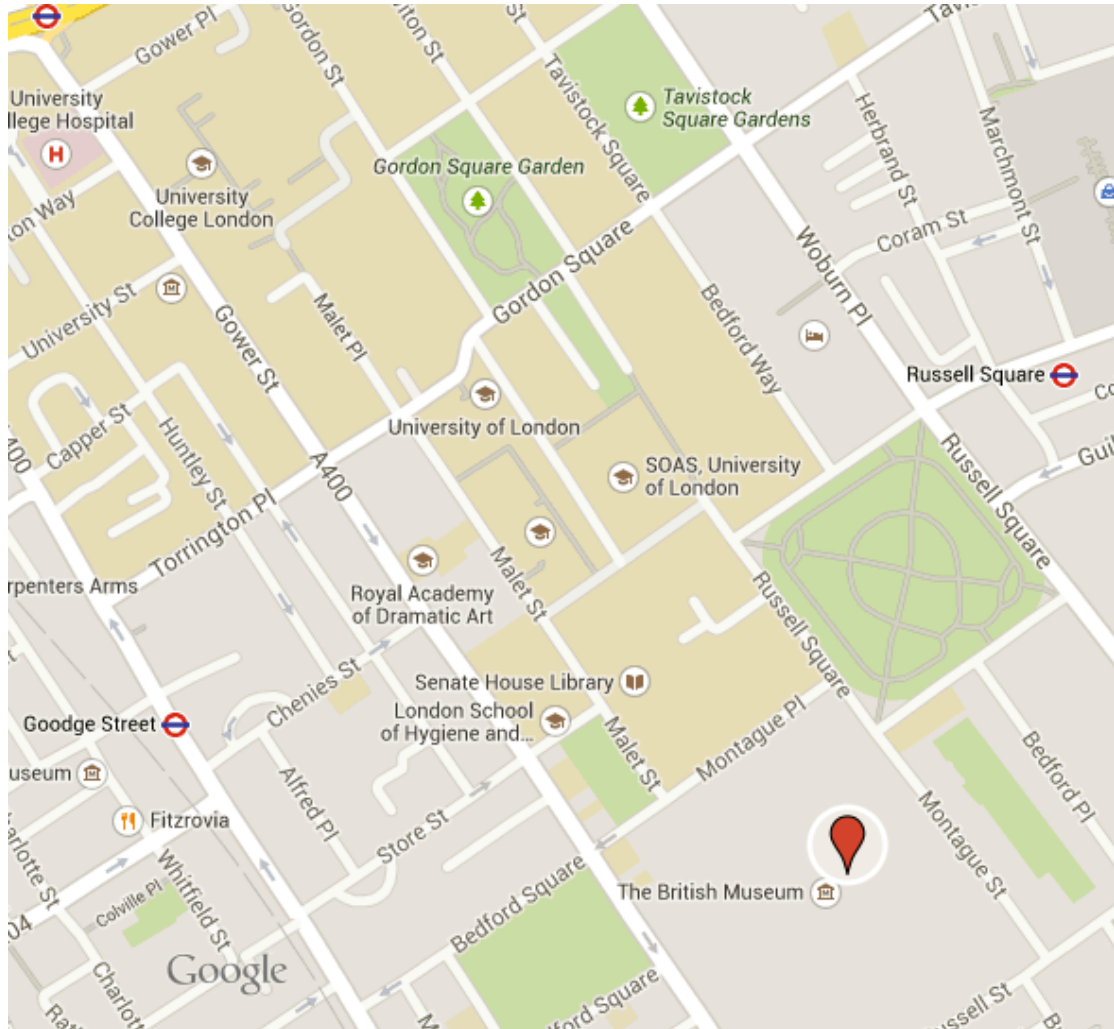


Tavistock Hotel: For those of you staying at the Tavistock Hotel, it is a quick ten minute walk to UCL.



British Museum

For those of you who would like to visit the British Museum it is only a short ten minute walk from UCL. The museum also has food facilities for those who would like to visit during lunchtime.





UCL

Tracing Gestures The Art and Archaeology of Bodily Communication

Conference Programme

Tuesday 4th November 2014

Location: Chadwick Lecture Theatre, UCL Main Building

9.00am – 9.40am: Registration

9.40am – 9.50am: *Opening Address*, Professor Sue Hamilton (Director of the Institute of Archaeology, University College London)

9.50am – 10am: *Tracing Gestures in the Ancient World*, Amy Maitland Gardner and Carl Walsh (University College London)

Session 1: The Earliest Gestures

10am–10.30am: *Reading the body language of mankind's oldest figurines: an experimental approach*, Adeline Schebesch (Department of Prehistory, Friedrich–Alexander–University Erlangen–Nürnberg)

10.30am – 11am: *Communicating social relations: The case from Neolithic Malta*, Isabelle Vella Gregory (University of Cambridge)

11am – 11.30am: Coffee Break

Session 2: Death, Performance and the Mind

11.30am – 12pm: *The Most Discouraged Mycenaeans: Performing emotion and death through gesture in Late Bronze Age Tanagra, Greece*, Anastasia Dakouri–Hild (McIntire Department of Art, University of Virginia)

12pm – 12.30pm: *Communicating grief in Ancient Egypt through culturally conditioned mourning practices*, Emily Millward (University of Birmingham)

12.30pm – 1pm: *Freud's Approach to Gesture and its Archaeological Inspirations*, Josef Fulka (Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague)

1pm – 2pm: Lunch Break

Session 3: Gesture Timelines: The Evolution of Gestures and their Contexts

2pm – 2.30pm: *Langue du geste over the longue durée: On the diachrony of gestures in the Near East*, David Calabro (Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University)

2.30pm – 3pm: *A case of working misunderstanding. The infant god Harpocrates and the gesture for silence*, Philippe Matthey (University of Geneva)

3pm – 3.30pm: *The pitfalls and potentials of using visual evidence for the history of gestures*, Timothy J. McNiven (Ohio State University)

3.30pm – 4pm: Coffee Break

Session 4: A Game of Gestures: The Ceremony and Politics of Bodily Communication

4pm – 4.30pm: *Ceremonial Objects, Ceremonial Gestures: The Archaeology of Bodily Communication in Ancient Court Societies* Carl Walsh (Institute of Archaeology, University College London)

4.30pm – 5pm: *Ceremonial Exchanges in Etruscan Banquets: Non-verbal communication, gestures and rituality through Etruscan art and artefacts (8th–5th centuries BC)*, Audrey Gouy (Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris / Ca' Foscari University, Venice)

5pm – 7pm: Wine Reception in the Institute of Archaeology

Wednesday 5th November 2014

Location: G6 Lecture Theatre, Institute of Archaeology, Gordon Square

Session 5: Making, Learning, Touching: Multisensory Approaches to Material Engagement

9.30am – 10am: *Gestures of making: an exploration of material/body dialogue through art process*, Alice Clough and Fiona Hamblin (Nottingham Trent University)

10am – 10.30am: *Learning to throw a harpoon in Greenland: Ethnoarchaeological perspectives on the deep history of a skilled community*, Matthew Walls (School of Archaeology, University of Oxford)

10.30am – 11am: *In touch with the Minoans: gestural performance and experience in Bronze Age Crete*, Christine Morris (Department of Classics, School of Histories and Humanities, Trinity College Dublin) and Lucy Goodison (Independent Scholar)

11am – 11.30am: Coffee Break

Session 6: 'Lifelike' Gestures: Images and Reality

11.30am – 12pm: *Facing the death: Phoenician and Punic funerary masks of the Western Mediterranean*, Mireia López-Bertran (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona)

12pm – 12.30pm: *Idealized divinity versus identification: ancient 'lifelike' gestures of the Buddhist statues 五百羅漢 (500 Rakan)*, Christine Kuehn (Volkshochschule Offenbach, Offenbach am Main)

12.30pm – 1pm: *The gestures of the Aztec lord of the underworld and earth deities*, Elizabeth Baquedano (Institute of Archaeology, University College London)

1pm – 2pm: Lunch Break

**Session 7: Embodied Gestures: Representing Symbolic Languages
and Communicating Identities in Figural Art**

2pm – 2.30pm: *From holding to hand lifting: bodily gestures in Dilmun iconography*, Aiysha Abu-Laban (Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional studies, University of Copenhagen)

2.30pm – 3pm: *Gesture, posture and meaning in the Ulúa cultural sphere*, Kathryn Marie Hudson (Department of Anthropology/ Department of Linguistics, University at Buffalo) and John S. Henderson (Department of Anthropology, Cornell University)

3pm – 3.30pm: *The art of silent hands: tracing the semantics of ancient Maya gestures* Amy J. Maitland Gardner (Institute of Archaeology, University College London)

3.30pm – 4pm: Coffee Break

4pm – 5pm: Keynote Lecture presented by Professor Adam Kendon, Honorary President of the International Society for Gesture Studies

Thanks and Closing Address



Tracing Gestures The Art and Archaeology of Bodily Communication

Conference Abstracts

Session 1: The Earliest Gestures

Reading the body language of mankind's oldest figurines: an experimental approach

Adeline Schebesch

Department of Prehistory, Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg

The attitude and posture of living bodies provide important clues about intended actions and emotional status. This universal ability to 'read' one another is crucial to any social exchange and communication. All known anthropomorphic figurines from the Upper Paleolithic display certain postures: they have body language. Being works of art, we respond to them in an emotional way much as if they were alive (Gell 1998). The present paper proposes a method of breaking down the figurines' body language into discernible basic units by using the traditional practice of the performing arts. Professional actors 'understand' a character on multiple levels by consciously reproducing the basic physical attitude of that character. In 2010 and 2011 two groups of German actors and acting students from Vietnam participated in the experiment. In a first step the body language of each figurine was copied. The instant effect of the specific posture on the frame of mind was examined in a second step. Standard elements of body language were recognized in a surprisingly consistent way for each respective figurine. While results for the figurines from the Aurignacian showed many parallels with existing disciplinary interpretations, e.g., of the 'Kraft und Aggression' hypothesis of Hahn (1986), the Gravettian figurines, known as the 'Venuses', represented by the Venus of Willendorf, gave diametrically opposed results to academic consensus. Her body language was described as passive, hinting at low status and evoking negative feelings of dejectedness or grief.

Communicating social relations: The case from Neolithic Malta

Isabelle Vella Gregory
University of Cambridge

Understanding social relations in the Neolithic remains a complex task, particularly in the case of Neolithic Malta. Much of the focus rests on megalithic buildings, but scant attention has been paid to the importance of bodily communication in constructing social relations. This paper will examine how a study of gesture and bodily communication requires an understanding of how materials are manipulated in the creation of materiality. The material record provides rich data in terms of extremely evocative figuration and complex architecture set in a landscape that is intimately tied to cosmology. These elements are often seen in isolation, but to understand the role of gesture and communication it is necessary to examine multiple contexts and the interactions between these contexts. In particular, the complex figurative repertoire lends itself to a cross-disciplinary analysis that enables a reading of materiality, bodily techniques and performance. This approach requires both traditional archaeology but also an engagement with anthropology, landscape studies and visual culture, all of which enable a more nuanced reading of both the study of gesture and the broader Maltese Neolithic.

Session 2: Death, Performance and the Mind

The Most Discouraged Mycenaeans: Performing Emotion and Death Through Gesture in Late Bronze Age Tanagra, Greece

Anastasia Dakouri-Hild
McIntire Department of Art, University of Virginia

The terracotta coffins (larnakes) from Late Bronze Age Tanagra in Greece are notable for their painted representations of funeral scenes, casting light on mortuary practices beyond the Mycenaean metropolitan centers. Paradoxically, the most striking quality of the larnakes is one that is frequently paid lip service to but rarely discussed in depth: the scenes are deemed to be pregnant with 'dignity and grief', 'powerful', 'remarkable and moving', filled with the 'poignancy of real-life experience'. Emotions, it would seem, are strongly cued by the 'instinctive expressions and characteristic gestures of grief', such as the clutching of heads, the thumping of brows, the pulling of hair, the scratching of faces which bleed, the lifting of arms in despair, the weeping and streaming of tears down contorted faces; as well as auditory and tactile cues, such as open mouths

emitting cries and howls, hands touching the deceased, reaching towards boundaries, or holding paraphernalia. It is this overt display of emotions that led Emily Vermeule (1965) to describe the Tanagra figures as “the most discouraged Mycenaeans to last beyond the Bronze Age”. However, the ability of this iconography to express the pain and grief of others, the role of gestures in the process, and the agentive affectivity of art (i.e. its ability to engender feelings or at least empathy with viewers) has been minimally addressed or problematized in scholarship. How are we, as contemporary viewers, to receive and interpret the emotions of prehistoric others depicted in iconography? What do gestures and other bodily techniques contribute to emotional realization, self-expression and understanding in the eyes of others? Are they transparent, cross-cultural and universal, and if not, how to access their culture-specific meanings? In this paper, I attempt to interpret the larnakes within the broader system of relations that characterized Tanagra society, looking at how they connected and departed from elite visual culture centered at the palace nearby. Secondly, I examine the iconography of grief and suffering as a visual device aiming to a) performatively construct particular ancestors as loci of enduring memory within the microcosm of the tomb, b) establish the death of ancestors as public, enduring sources of pain for the living community, and c) prescribe mood and affect upon insertion in the heterotopic space of the tomb for the duration of its use and during subsequent funeral events.

Communicating Grief in Ancient Egypt Through Culturally Conditioned Mourning Practices

Emily Millward
University of Birmingham

This paper will explore the gestures used to express grief in ancient Egypt, a topic fully researched in the speaker’s recently submitted PhD thesis titled ‘The Mechanisms of Mourning in Ancient Egypt’. Through detailed analysis of a range of archaeological material - including scenes from tomb walls, figurines, wooden models, amulets, and coffin decoration - the actions employed to express grief in this ancient society will be presented. An anthropological and sociological approach will then be applied to these findings in order to explain the phenomena of ‘cultural conditioning’ and its affect on mourning. To what extent does the subliminal conditioning of a society create a ‘culture of expectations’? Does the archaeological material support the theory that the ancient Egyptians were conditioned over time to subconsciously adopt specific gestures in moments of mourning? These questions will be examined alongside current research by anthropologists and sociologists to provide a perspective on the

position of material culture relating to mourning in ancient Egypt and its place within the interdisciplinary sphere of art, archaeology and gesture.

Freud's Approach to Gesture and Its Archaeological Inspirations

Josef Fulka

Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague

It has often been stressed that Freud's novelty consists in abandoning the observation of visual symptoms (markedly prevalent in the approach of J.-M. Charcot, among others) and in concentrating on the speech of his patients. While this general characterisation of psychoanalysis cannot be contested, it is easy to show that in Freud's writing, gesture is far from being of negligible importance. Especially in the *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), the gestural expressions of Freud's patients are described in great detail and considered to be one of the means of gaining access to the unconscious contents of their subjectivity. The great difference between Freud and his predecessors (namely Charcot) consists, however, in the fact that (visible) gesture is treated as a symptom of the (invisible) dimension of the unconscious. As such, it may represent a distorted form (condensed, displaced etc.) of the patient's unconscious thought. It may equally be shown that Freud's interest in observing the gestural "language" of neurotics bear – at least partly – a certain resemblance to the archaeological and anthropological approach to gesture, as it was developed earlier by A. de Jorio or E. Tylor. Gesture is a bearer of what might be called "survival" of neurotic trauma, hidden in the deep, unconscious layers of the human psyche. Despite the general shift of interest from the visual to verbal, the role of gesture in Freud's "archaeology of the subject" remains a crucial one. In our paper, we would like to concentrate both on the specificity of Freud's view of gesture and on its resonance with the above mentioned archaeological and anthropological approach.

Session 3: Gesture Timelines: The Evolution of Gestures and their Contexts

Langue du geste over the longue durée: On the Diachrony of Gestures in the Near East.

David Calabro

Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University

The long time span to which textual, iconographic, and ethnographic records of the Near East bear witness provides an opportunity to explore how gestures develop over time. In many cases, this evidence bears witness not so much to the gestures' formal development but to their constancy, and the issue of diachrony is one of formally similar gestures being reinvoked time and again in altered ritual contexts. In both kinds of cases (i.e., that of formally morphing gestures and that of the reinvocation of ancient gesture forms), gestures function as means of restructuring cultural practices toward semiotic centers of power located in the innovative present or the revered past. I demonstrate this by tracing four types of gestures from ancient Near Eastern texts and iconography through modern Middle Eastern ritual events: (1) raising one hand in oath, (2) raising both hands in oath and/or prayer, (3) clapping the hands, and (4) clasping another's right hand. I conclude by describing trends that recur in the formal and contextual development of gestures, trends for which the four types discussed in this paper provide examples. These trends—for example, the merging of two gestures into one—are analogous to changes observed in spoken language, thus adding to the known ways in which gesture parallels speech.

A case of working misunderstanding. The infant god Harpocrates and the gesture for silence

Philippe Matthey

University of Geneva

The gesture widely used to intimate silence in the Western world – putting the forefinger across one's lips, or pointing the index at one's mouth – has a peculiar reputation. Modern scholars and classical writers have always been convinced that its origins could be traced back to the iconography of one particular god: the Greco-Egyptian Harpocrates, the infant deity part of the Isis circle, who has often been interpreted as a keeper of secrets. But to the Egyptians, the gesture of

“Horus-the-child” – the meaning behind the Greek name of Harpocrates – had initially nothing to do with secrets or silence. It was merely a gesture alluding to the very young age of the god. Among other interpreters of the sign, the Egypto-Greek writers of the magical papyri and some Christian monks preferred to understand it as a protective gesture, to be used against dangerous deities or evil demons. While elsewhere it is also presented as a gesture of adoption and immortality.

The present paper aims to go deeper into this case of a “working misunderstanding” between the Egyptian and the Classic cultures, and to further explore the various receptions of the Harpocrates’ gesture around the Mediterranean between the 3rd century BC and the 5th century AD. In its conclusion, this presentation will also propose a small catalogue retracing how the gesture for the invitation to silence was quickly adopted in the Roman iconography, even in non-Isiac contexts.

The Pitfalls and Potentials of Using Visual Evidence for the History of Gestures

Timothy J. McNiven
Ohio State University

In studying the history of gestures, archaeologists rely heavily on pictures, but dealing with imagery presents its own problems. My own work examines gestures on Athenian pottery from roughly 750 to 300 BCE, a body of some 40,000 objects, on which gestures are often used to develop the narrative by adding emotional responses and portraying some kinds of communication. With this wealth of well-dated images, it is possible to trace a gesture’s appearance, change over time, and disappearance, and also interpret its meaning. But this is not as simple as it sounds. Ambiguity is the biggest frustration, one that is a feature of real communication, omnipresent and normal. A handshake, for example, in modern Western society as in ancient Greece, can be a greeting or a farewell, having seemingly opposite meanings. In addition, a handshake seals an agreement. The distinction between these three senses of the gesture depends on context. In ancient Greek art, where many images relate to mythology, as known from texts, the story often clarifies the context, making the interpretation clear. In some cases, though, context alone is not enough. For example, with the extended little finger, we have clear contexts, but no understanding of the meaning. Images on pots are not objective documentation, they are subject to their own conventions, and they depict only limited contexts. The nonverbal language of gestures in real life is imperfectly reflected in the visual sources, requiring us to think carefully about the methods and assumptions that we use.

Session 4: A Game of Gestures: The Ceremony and Politics of Bodily Communication

Ceremonial Objects, Ceremonial Gestures: The Archaeology of Bodily Communication in Ancient Court Societies

Carl Walsh

Institute of Archaeology, University College London

How does one excavate a gesture? Does a bow or a toast leave a material trace that can be examined? Gestures have long been an object of study in the ancient world but as of date the vast majority of approaches have overlooked the important role of material culture in reconstructing forms of bodily communication and their roles in past societies, instead relying on iconography and written accounts. In this paper I demonstrate how material culture, through its relationship with the body, can not only help us to reconstruct ancient gestures but also how they were important markers of social status in the highest tiers of past societies.

Looking specifically at the court societies of the Middle Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean, this paper will demonstrate how specific forms of gestures, what Mauss termed 'techniques of the body', were utilized in conjunction with specific forms of material culture, such as furniture and drinking vessels, to choreograph and construct specific body postures and gestures. These body techniques and their bonded material objects, were subsequently used in the construction of etiquette, a codified corpus of behaviours within specific ceremonial or ritualised contexts. These etiquettes acted as means of differentiating forms of bodily communication between those who belonged to the court and those who did not, acting as a means of establishing courtly identities in these past societies similar to what occurred in the 15th-18th century courts of early modern Europe.

**Ceremonial Exchanges in Etruscan Banquets: Non-Verbal Communication,
Gestures and Rituality through Etruscan Art and Artefacts (8th-5th
centuries B.C.).**

Audrey Gouy

Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris / Ca' Foscari University, Venice

The handling of the different objects used within the framework of ritual consumption, such as *symposia* or more widely banquets, has not been the subject of many works and research. John Boardman, Oswyn Murray or François Lissarrague have sometimes evoked in their respective work the question of the use and the function of the different utensils, but without really questioning the gestures these objects generate, the interactions they could create between individuals, and without trying to understand the place they had in social relations and exchanges. The recent work of Valérie Huet, John Scheid or Dominique Frère has contributed to open a new reflection, as much historical as anthropological. The paper I would like to present is part of a wider project of study of the ritual and ceremonial gestuality in Pre-Roman Italy. A part of this project is about the question of gestuality in the framework of ritual and collective food consumption. The sources used are mostly visual and archaeological. The visual sources, thanks to a typology of the gestures represented, and linked to a psychological study of the turning into pictures and of the look, permit to draw up a kinesic. The archaeological sources contribute, thanks to the use of the motor praxeology sciences, to determine the gestuality that each object implies and also the ritual which springs from it. This project brings us to rethink the social connections in Pre-Roman Italy, and in particular the ritual function of Pre-Roman women. Coupled with reconstructions modelled in three dimensions, it gives a new look on ritual gestures in Antiquity and permits to understand their temporality, terms of execution and functions, and the social connections they generate.

Session 5: Making, Learning, Touching: Multisensory Approaches to Material Engagement

Gestures of making: an exploration of material/body dialogue through art process

Alice Clough and Fiona Hamblin
Nottingham Trent University

Drawing upon theories of engagement between body, material, and environment, this paper will explore gestures of making through artistic practice and question how we communicate with and through material encounters. Rather than view the artefact as a *representation* of thought or vision, we explore making as *thinking action*, where materials play an active role in articulating gesture. 'The work of the craftsman implies collaboration ... Instead of imposing a preconceived idea or shape, he needs to listen to his material' (Pallasmaa, 2009: 55). This holds for both the maker and archaeologist, dynamically interacting with the environment where it could be said that creating, uncovering, and unravelling through practice is a form of dialogue between materials and the body.

This dialogue will be explored through the making of a new installation artwork. Material and bodily tension, permeability, resistance and resonance as well as the transformative potential of gesture will be considered using a variety of materials, but primarily threads in space. Can materials hold memory and traces of bodily action? How does the body understand and relate to material properties like weight, rigidity, density or resilience? In what ways do we use material interactions to construct meaning and value? From the viewpoint of a maker and anthropologist, practice, observation, and film will be used to construct and visualise a particular understanding of the embeddedness of gesture.

References

Pallasmaa, J. (2009) *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*. John Wiley and Sons Ltd,

Learning to Throw a Harpoon in Greenland: Ethnoarchaeological Perspectives on the Deep History of a Skilled Community

Matthew Walls

School of Archaeology, University of Oxford

A hunter throwing a harpoon at their prey is a scene that is often depicted in Inuit art, and the practice is well represented in the archaeological record by a variety of material signatures. In this paper, I will examine the forms of knowledge involved in this seemingly simple gesture by presenting ethnoarchaeological work conducted with an Inuit community in Greenland who practice traditional hunting skills as a way of exploring the lived experiences of their ancestors. It takes many years of practice to develop the capacities for sensory awareness and creative responsiveness involved in this moment of skilled practice. Learning to throw, it will be shown, involves a developmental ecology, or interdependence of bodies, tools, social relations, and the environment. I will argue that understanding the intergenerational creativity involved in practices such as harpooning allows for a more nuanced archaeological narrative of skilled communities through time.

In touch with the Minoans: gestural performance and experience in Bronze Age Crete

Christine Morris and Lucy Goodison

*Department of Classics, School of Histories and Humanities, Trinity College Dublin;
Independent Scholar*

The material record of Bronze Age (Minoan) Crete is rich in visual imagery and archaeological evidence for ritual performance. Study of Minoan gesture has traditionally been concerned with classification and typology or with identification of role or status (for example, in trying to differentiate human and divine). A more recent strand of scholarship has, however, begun to develop an embodied, multi-sensory approach of thinking through the body.

In this paper, we focus on case studies of gestural performances which incorporate a haptic dimension, that is physical touching or grasping, such as hugging stones, pulling trees or touching skulls. We discuss how such scenes provoke a kinaesthetic self-awareness that invites a shift away from thinking in terms of typologies and categories and towards exploring embodied practices as expressed both through bodily gesture and posture and the accompanying sensorial experiences of bodily contact with material objects.

Session 6: 'Lifelike' Gestures: Images and Reality

Facing the death: Phoenician and Punic funerary masks of the Western Mediterranean

Mireia López-Bertran

Departament d'Humanitats, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona

Masks are one of the most puzzling materials of the Phoenician and Punic rituals. Manufactured with clay, they have been produced since the late Bronze Age and throughout all the Iron Age in the Phoenician Levant. From the 7th century BC they appear in the Central (Carthage, Sicily and Sardinia) and Western Mediterranean (South Iberian Peninsula and Ibiza- Balearic Islands-) connected to the Phoenician trade diaspora. So far, they have been mostly found in cemeteries, but they also occur in shrines, albeit less significantly in number. The first study and classification of the masks was undertaken by P. Cintas in 1946 who distinguished three groups of masks: Cintas I, II, III. He also dated these objects between the 7th century BC and the 2nd century BC. It is my intention to review these materials keeping in mind the implications masks might have had in constructing, maintaining and transforming a specific Phoenician and Punic conception of the body. More specifically, I will examine their gestures, big eyes and open mouths, as they inform us on the embodiment of a certain attitude towards death. Furthermore, a discussion about their role in performing funerary rituals will be developed.

Idealized divinity versus identification: Ancient "lifelike" Gestures of the Buddhist Statues 五百羅漢 (500 Rakan)

Christine Kuehn

Volkshochschule Offenbach, Offenbach am Main

In Theravada Buddhism, *Rakan* are described as saints, who have completely freed themselves of all earthly desires and possessions. They are often displayed in groups, originally 16 or 18 strong, but sometimes in groups of 500 to represent the 500 monks assembled during the first Buddhist council. Each *Rakan* has distinctive features, expression, and physique. Observers from different theoretical and practical backgrounds commonly ascribe a stunning expressiveness to the *Rakan* and feel surprised by how lifelike they are.

It is argued that this “lifelike quality” is due primarily to the gestures. As the *Rakan* have divine status, their poses can be investigated in the context of the codified Buddhist gesture system of *mudra*. Two of the most frequent *mudra*, the 安慰印 (*an-i-in*) and the 施無畏印 (*semui-in*), will be traced by their usage in historical and contemporary documents of daily life, as well as in the art, science and religion of various cultures.

It will be shown how one single gesture may travel along a gestural continuum and accordingly have its status changed from the perspective of the recipient. Exploring the gradual change in the interpretation of these gestures emphasizes the importance of breaking away from traditional dichotomies such as production versus reception, universality versus cultural specificity, or conventionalized versus non-conventionalized gestures and may also help us understand the factors underlying the “lifelike quality” of the *Rakan*.

The Gestures of the Aztec Lord of the Underworld and Earth Deities

Elizabeth Baquedano

Institute of Archaeology, University College London

It is a commonplace that scholars refer to Aztec earth deities being depicted with a menacing or threatening appearance (Nicholson 1983: 68). While it might be expected to see unflattering depictions of the god of the dead, it is arguably surprising that gods of the earth are shown in frightful and aggressive postures with up-raised clawed hands, open or closed. These hand gestures are consistent across representational media, in codices and in sculptures.

The Aztecs were knowledgeable of the human body, and gave special importance to the joints as key points of articulation. I argue here that the ‘clawed-hand’ gesture of both earth and death deities is a symbolic expression of physical death, an artistic replication of rigor mortis. The depiction and symbolism of this unsettling gesture may derive from Mckeever Furst’s (1995:69) contention that the *tonalli* (soul) seems to be concentrated in certain parts of the body, and particularly around the joints, where the blood pulses most strongly.

At death, there is a progressive withdrawal of blood from the wrist to the elbow, and thence to the shoulders (the limbs) as the end approaches, leaving the hands stiff; rigor mortis is thus a universally recognizable sign of physical death. This would explain why the Lord of the Underworld is depicted with rigor mortis, but not (obviously) why earth deities are similarly represented.

For the Aztecs, there were two ways of becoming one with the earth. First, by ingesting corn, making contact with that which is born of the Great Mother, incorporating it into their own bodies, and thereby participating in the telluric nature of what has sprung from the region of the dead (López Austin 1980:313). Second, by disposing of the dead by burying their remains in the ground. The bodies acted as a kind of humus that fertilized the earth. In this way, death was transformed – in a sense recycled - into life. In a world view characterised by symbolic analogical reasoning, it made metaphysical sense for earth deities to carry the attributes of death.

Session 7: Embodied Gestures: Representing Symbolic Languages and Communicating Identities in Figural Art

From holding to hand lifting – bodily gestures in Dilmun iconography

Aiysha Abu-Laban

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By the end of the 3rd millennium BCE, the Arabian Gulf region grew in importance because of its strategic location between large city states in Mesopotamia, Iran and the Indus Valley. With the intensified trade, a standardized sealing system was established by the Dilmun culture possibly administered from its proposed capital at Qal'at al Bahrain. The seal corpus is quite unique, as until c. the 16th century BCE it is the only surviving source to Dilmun figural art. On the seals images of humans, animals and mythological creatures are shown engaged in among others ritual acts.

As the Dilmun civilization did not have a writing system, reliance on especially Mesopotamian sources have been a scholarly tradition to understand some aspects of this culture. This tendency is also evident when dealing with the iconography which is considered as being influenced from the outside.

The paper will approach Dilmun iconography from within by focusing on the bodily gestures of the motifs. It will be postulated that the arm gestures of humans and mythological figures are crucial means for conveying the meaning of the scenes displayed on the seals. More specifically the transition from the dominant arm gesture holding to hand lifting will be explored. Different methods to an improved approach of the iconography of Dilmun will also be discussed.

The preliminary results are based on the author's PhD research on the seal corpus from the island Failaka in Kuwait.

Gesture, Posture, and Meaning in the Ulúa Cultural Sphere

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Although the Ulúa Valley region of Honduras is often viewed as a peripheral zone whose material productions were designed – at least in part – to emulate their Maya neighbors to the west and north, archaeological evidence counters this perspective and indicates the existence of a distinct Ulúa cultural sphere. This distinctiveness is manifested in a range of archaeologically attested differences, including architecture and characteristic goods such as carved marble vessels, but it is nowhere more apparent than in the distinctiveness of Ulúa ceramic imagery. Although the Ulúa sphere lacked writing of the sort found elsewhere in Mesoamerica, the particularities of its imagery were capable of conveying a range of highly specific meanings that could be refined to create a broad range of significances. This paper explores the place of body posture and gesture within the Ulúa system of image-based communication and examines the meanings that could be conveyed by this kind of body-based communication. The particulars of body position and alignment correlate with vessel form as well as with other elements in the corpus of Ulúa imagery and iconography. These patterns are evident in relationships among figures in multiple-figure compositions and in features of individual figures such as their associated elements, items of bodily adornment, costume elements, and – especially – their body positions and hand gestures. The conventionalized meanings carried by these elements and their variations across the Ulúa sphere and through time represent an embodied semantics and illustrate the central role of the human figure in ancient constructions of meaning.

The art of silent hands: tracing the semantics of ancient Maya gestures

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Gestures are bodily actions that are used to communicate meaning in all cultures around the world. In Classic Maya art, figures are represented with stylized hands, which suggests that gesturing was significant in ancient Maya culture and

that Maya artists were aware of the communicative potential of hands in art, which could function to enhance the semantic engagement between image and viewer. Although Classic Maya art has a rich gestural language, the structure of the system and the semantics of particular hand types have remained difficult to decipher.

In this presentation, I discuss the importance of methods for classifying and interpreting hand types in Maya art and consider two key questions raised in gesture studies: (1) To what extent does the physical form of a gesture relate to its meaning? (2) How are gestures used in conjunction with spoken languages? (Kendon 2004, McNeill 2000). These questions are initially examined by grouping Maya hand types into gesture 'families'. A comparison is then made between hands in the art and hands in logograms and syllables in Maya writing, in order to see if hand forms commonly occur in particular semantic fields. Furthermore, I discuss evidence of cognitive and cultural attitudes to gestural space and gesture types from contemporary Maya gestural practices (Haviland 2000, Le Guen 2012), which may help in understanding the production and performance of Maya gestures in the past. I conclude by drawing together research in anthropology and art history, and by incorporating, into the Maya context, perspectives from cross-cultural studies of gestures, the richness of hands in communication and meaning in Maya culture and the importance of reflexive methods and interpretive frameworks for tracing the symbolism and significance of gestures in the ancient world.

Conference Posters

Bodily Communication & Politics as portrayed in Vulture Stele: An analysis of gestures and implicit messages when reflecting upon the biological concept of *exaptation*

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The role of art in the Ancient Near East as a visual code of communication has long been examined. Every detail could be regarded as the result of a precise and accurate selection of values. In a society in which visual communication was everything, it was essential that the implicit messages in gestural representations were clear and entirely comprehensible. However, does this concept mean that they had to be necessarily univocal? Alternatively, following the evolution of politic thoughts that had become more and more complex, also art and gestures acquired different and numerous meanings, adapting themselves to different political circumstances and a different audience? Through the biological concept of *exaptation*, this paper attempts to suggest another interpretation of bodily communication and gesture in the art of Ancient Near East, with reference to a specific case study.

Mourning gestures: function and symbolism of some weeping figurines found inside ancient Egyptian tombs

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Mourning gestures were an essential part of the ancient Egyptian ritual of rebirth, due to their mythical role. Some rare terracotta figurines found inside tombs confirm the will to keep up this practice in addition to the well-known painted or relief evidence. These small weeping statuettes, generally female, were obtained from vases adding heads, breasts and arms moulded in typical mourning attitudes, with hands raised over eyes or heads, or with arms crossed on the chest, all gestures suggesting despair and grief. They were buried next to the deceased to guarantee an everlasting mourning and gain rebirth. Exemplars have been found in tombs dated to the Middle Kingdom up to Greco-Roman period. The reason of pursuing a perpetual wail lies in textual sources evoking the mythical account of the two wailing goddesses Isis and Nephthys. Hence the symbolism behind the gestures performed by these statuettes justifies their

presence inside tombs: to mourn means to guarantee the rebirth through tears and weeping. As part of a current PhD research on the expression of feelings in Egyptian literature, the purpose of the paper will be to investigate, with the support of an archaeological, philological and literary method, the role of these mourning figurines as well as the symbolism of their gestures and their position inside tombs.

Head Gestures in the Bible

Deborah Lasry

Bar-Ilan university / KU Leuven

Speech is a prominent instrument for expressing thoughts, ideas, and emotions. While vocally expressing themselves most people will perform bodily gestures. These non-verbal gestures often allow better understanding of the speaker's intentions and ideas. Indeed, the bible includes numerous descriptions of such gestures, which often convey their emotive force and allow modern readers to better understand the symbolic world of the Ancient Near East.

In this lecture I would like to focus on head gestures. I will discuss head gestures in the bible, the emotions they signify and their social context. This will be done by correlating different instances of head gestures along with etymological discussion of related terms. My principle argument is that shaking of the head in the bible has been the subject of a contextual transformation. What began as a gesture of sincere condolences went on to signify a wider spectrum of emotions, like sarcasm and mockery. This transformation is examined in Job 16, 4, which acts as the link between two meanings of the gesture (offering condolence and mockery).

Girija kalyana panels- a spatial narrative cognition of vivaha: with special reference to the panels in Bangalore and Ellora"

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The society in India through time has regarded vivāha (marriage) as one of the important events in an individual's life. The bodily gestures and rites which are performed during marriages date to ancient times, which can be attested through literature and the archaeological record. Numerous structures, the temples specially, are seen to have been adorned with numerous gestures of the ceremony of marriage- the most popular one being the representation of Girijā kalyāṇa, the marriage of Shiva and Parvati.

Of the *Samskaras*, the sculptural representation of vivaha in various stages has enthralled academics, scholars, students, artists and the devout. The inclusion of *Kalyana-mandapa* (Marriage hall) as an element of temple architecture speaks volumes about the importance of the rite in social and religious sphere. Girijakalyana has been represented through time, often displaying the changing socio-cultural elements. Details of *Kanya-dāna*, *Homa-havan* and the like have to be explored through the changing trends from ancient to medieval into the modern times.

This paper aims at illustrating the nuances of the ceremony of marriage through the archaeological record of sculptures and some literary traditions. An interpretation from the socio-cultural point of view will be considered. The importance of certain gestures and body practices in the ceremony will be highlighted, with relevant examples from texts of the period. Also, comments on the societal structure and familial hierarchy will be touched upon. Instances from Puranas, Epics and also from some historical sources will be examined for detailed exposition through frescos and sculptures of Ellora and the unique panels from Bangalore.

Iconography of gestures in the study of emotions in ancient world: shaping immaterial concepts in figurative art

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University of Cagliari

This paper focuses on the expression of emotions in ancient Greek and Roman societies, through an integrated analysis of literary and iconographic sources, with the aim to show the polysemy of "pathos" in its broadest sense.

The topic will be approached by a dual-level analysis, by examining how emotions were represented both in literature and visual arts from the age of Homer until Late Roman Age. Iconography becomes a "medium" through which abstract concepts like emotions can acquire bodily and material evidence, reflected by gestures and attitudes.

Gestures, in fact, play a key-role in the iconographical representation of emotions, through specific "schemata" which are a well-known category, notably applicable to dance schemes, but also to theatrical performances. A significant range of emotions, both positive and negative, from happiness to sadness, from enthousiasmos to pain, will be taken into account, in order to show how the same gesture can assume a different meaning, depending on the cultural,

historical and mythical context where it is used, and according to the purpose of the artist too.

The passage from intangible and immaterial sphere into physical one, is possible through personifications. The best example is represented by Persuasion (in Greek Peitho). The powerful logos, used by rhetoricians to persuade the audience, takes shape of a female figure, a goddess, whose significant gestures in Athenian V-IV century pottery can quite unequivocally be decoded.

Does the Analysis of Gesture Contribute to our Understanding of Gender Roles and Relations in the Pre-Historic Aegean?

Susan Poole
Independent Scholar

This paper presents outcomes of Doctoral research in archaeology undertaken at University College London. The aim was to see whether the depiction of male gestures and postures had been presented differently from those of females in Bronze Age Aegean art of the 2nd millennium BC (popularly known as the Mycenaean and Minoan periods), and if so, whether conclusions may be drawn from this about the social roles and relations between these genders in practice. By drawing on ethological models bodily behaviour that appeared to be innate, or have at least near universal meaning, was identified, whereas a structural-iconographic methodology revealed gestures which seemed to be more specific to these individual societies.

A comprehensive and systematic analysis was made of frescoes, seal stones (or impressions made from these), and a selection of the best preserved three-dimensional artefacts in which the human form was depicted. Patterns and inter-relationships between elements in the images were sought, making use of images as metaphors, and both quantitative and qualitative analyses were made.

Many distinct differences between the portrayal of male and female gestures and postures were observed, suggesting, it is postulated, an overall indication of male dominance, contrary to some earlier views of gender roles at least in the Minoan period. However, some exceptions appear in images of formal activities, like processions, where females may have been placed at least temporarily in limited roles imbued with prestige.

It was concluded that gestures portrayed in prehistoric Aegean art communicated gender differences of status in these societies.

Reproductive worship and males' status: interpretation of Xinjiang prehistoric rock arts

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The Xinjiang region is situated on the east central region of Eurasia, connecting the east and west intersection of early civilizations. In the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age, complex changes occurred in the structure of the population, economic and social form of this region. Thousands of rock paintings are in the Xinjiang region, many of which are about reproductive worship. In earlier studies, scholars have only interpreted the gender, human groups and activities in the displayed images.

In this paper, the authors will conduct a detailed analysis of these reproductive worship-themed rock paintings. First, the authors will interpret the meaning of the unusual gesture and body communication in these rock art images. Secondly, this article will analyze the group activities, for example, the meaning expressed by the gesture of their actions and their interactions. By observing the proportion between figures, we can analyze the different importance of the characters in the pictures. The male genitalia are exaggerated, as their body movements are relaxed and positive, even in the group scene. But the images of women are relatively simplified, and in gender activities, showing passive (or auxiliary) gesture. Moreover, the article also points out that they use animals copulate and arrow metaphor as reproductive behavior in the rock art images. Relations between animals and nomads are not limited to hunting and grazing. Nomads also imitate these animals that have a strong ability to reproduce, to ritual prayer (or promote) racial reproduction.

In summary, the gesture of figures and interactive body communication in the group activities is the key to interpret the social relations in early society.