Introduction: Communicating Bodies in Aegean Bronze Age Archaeology

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Gestures, facial expressions, postures, and other aspects of bodily communication are among the most important means through which intentions, feelings, or thoughts are shared without the use of spoken language. In real life and representation, such non-verbal cues, which may be as subtle as the positioning of a finger or the orienting of the shoulders and torso, play a salient role in the characterisation of the tone of the interaction, of its participants' roles, and of the message conveyed. Defining a framework within which to decipher the workings and meanings of bodily communication is consequently a fundamental necessity for the study of any culture's art, and especially for cultures from which no – or very limited – written sources remain, such as those which thrived in the Aegean during the Bronze Age. Careful analyses of gesture, facial expression, posture, stance, and movement can provide essential information about what symbolic and non-verbal communicative behaviour was considered appropriate, purposeful, and narratively relevant to these cultures, and how these social attitudes may have varied regionally or changed over time.

Gestures in Aegean Bronze Age Archaeology

The first scholarly treatments of gesture and posture in Aegean Bronze Age art appeared in the late 19th century, when the discovery of a number of hitherto unknown figurine types presented archaeologists with new interpretive challenges. While Heinrich Schliemann (1878, 11–15) initially considered the curved excrescences apparent on the torsos of the Mycenaean 'psi' figurines as horns rather than limbs, it was soon proposed that they in fact represented raised arms. In carefully examining the artefacts, Maximilian Mayer (1892) and Wolfgang Reichel (1897) argued that the gesture was of a 'pathetic' nature, and that these pieces consequently represented mourners and lamenters or deities accompanying the deceased. Similarly, the gestures of bronze figurines, such as that of the Late Minoan I piece from the Troad (Fig. 1) acquired by the Berlin Antikensammlung in 1888, and another contemporaneous piece from Smyrna, were also rapidly associated with mourning (see *e.g.* Furtwängler 1889, 1900; Mayer 1892; Collignon 1903; Verlinden 1984, cat. nos. 23, 33).

With the turn of the century, and with the extensive archaeological undertakings occurring in Crete, interest in gestures persisted but also took new directions. For example, in his account on the Minoan peak sanctuary of Petsophas, John Myres (1902/1903) proposed that the gestures performed by the terracotta figurines represented attitudes of adoration, supplication or prayer, and that the artefacts thus represented votaries. This argument was constructed both in consideration of the figurines' find place, but also on the assumption that they fulfilled similar functions to modern Christian effigies or Greek Orthodox 'tamata' (Myres 1902/1903, 368; *cf.* Rutkowski 1986, 87–88; 1991a, 52–56; for critique see Morris 2001, 246; 2009, 182). In a similar vein, Arthur Evans argued that figures depicted on Minoan signet-rings, seal-stones, and bronze figurines communicated attitudes of adoration (*e.g.* Evans 1901; 1930, 461, 463). Nevertheless, drawing on academic works in other fields (such as Andrea de Jorio's 1832 volume on *La mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire napoletano*) and through comparison with later archaeological material, Evans also attempted to associate gestures rendered in Aegean Bronze Age iconography with 'universal' and 'primitive' forms of bodily comportment recognisable in all cultures. For example, he argued that the arms raised sideways on the Ring of Nestor represented "a universal primitive sign of surprise" (Evans 1930, 57–58, 152 with n. 1), and that the crossed forearms and

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Fig. 1: LM I bronze figurine from the Troad (© Antikensammlung. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz; photographer: Johannes Laurentius; inv. Misc. 8092).

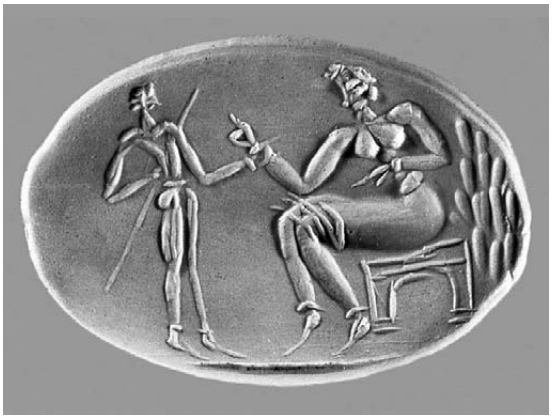

*Fig. 2: Gold signet-ring from Mycenae (*CMS *I, no. 101; courtesy of the* CMS *Heidelberg).*

joined thumbs and forefingers on a gold ring from Mycenae (Fig. 2; *CMS* I, no. 101) depicted "a very widespread expedient of sign-language for indicating agreement" (Evans 1901, 176; *cf.* Evans 1928, 832; 1930, 464).

Following Myres' and Evans' work, it became common to interpret the non-verbal cues depicted in different iconographic media as expressions of 'worship', 'adoration', 'supplication', 'respect', 'salute' or 'command', but also as the representation of dance movements. In most cases, these gestures were considered as religious and ritual in nature, representing for example the performance of ecstatic dances, the summoning of epiphanies, and the divine sanctioning of rulership. Similarly, the same non-verbal cues were also understood as indicative of the role or of the position held by the depicted figures in Aegean Bronze Age society or cosmology. Consequently, gesturing figures often became described as 'gods' or 'goddesses', 'priests' or 'priestesses', 'rulers', 'heroes', 'adorants', or 'votaries'. Such treatments of gestures thus not only allowed for developments in the field of iconographic research, but they also played a consequential role in reconstructions of Aegean Bronze Age religious rituals or systems as a whole. These approaches indeed contributed to the consolidation of concepts such as epiphany, ecstatic performance and rites of passage (see *e.g.* Nilsson [1927] 1950; Matz 1959; Brandt 1965; Marinatos 1993).

Although these concepts have persisted, shaping to some extent the ways in which interpretations on Aegean Bronze Age iconography are still presently developed, a notable theoretical and methodological shift occurring towards the end of the 20th century nevertheless allowed for new considerations. The influence of semiotics and structuralism led to a greater interest in the spatial and structural patterns observed in the use of certain gestures, both in images and in archaeological contexts. Lyvia Morgan (1985, 14–16), for example, highlighted the importance of considering recurrent syntactic associations in reconstructing meaning in images, using the example of the raised hand gesture in the miniature frieze from the West House at Akrotiri. Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier (1989) included a consideration on gestures in his iconographical review of deities and adorants in Minoan and Mycenaean glyptic scenes, and in his reconstruction of the Knossos 'Prince of the Lilies' fresco (Niemeier 1987). Bogdan Rutkowski (1991b) devoted an article to prayer gestures in prehistoric Greece, whereas questions of rulership were again addressed by John Younger (1995). Furthermore, in her publication on bronze figurines, Efi Sapouna-Sakellaraki included a discussion on gesture, for which she identified seven general types, or sixteen subtypes (Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1995, 106–111; see also Sapouna-Sakellaraki 2012; for gestures on

clay figurines see Rethemiotakis 1998, 2001). Colette Verlinden (1984), on the other hand, distinguished no more than six gesture classes, which were later used by Louise Hitchcock (1997) in her analysis of gender on bronze figurines. Finally, it is also noticeable that even without forming the main subject of discussion, bodily comportment also became more frequently addressed in research on Aegean Bronze Age iconography (*e.g.* Coulomb 1981; Ulanowska 1993; Morgan 1995, 2000; German 1999, 2007). Despite these significant shifts, it is nevertheless apparent that the interpretations on the inferred meaning and function of gestures advanced in these studies still heavily relied on the inferred meaning of the pictorial context in which they were represented, on the nature of the archaeological contexts in which the artefacts were found, and on the latter's presumed function within these contexts. Less common were examinations of the actual communicative quality of the depicted non-verbal cues. In fact, the only area of research in which such approaches have remained unproblematic is that of painted larnakes: owing to the funerary function of these artefacts and the parallels that the figures depicted on them bear with figurines of mourners also discovered in funerary contexts, the represented gestures and postures were confidently interpreted as expressive of mourning and lamentation (see Iakovidis 1966; Vermeule 1991; Cavanagh and Mee 1995; Kramer-Hajos 2015; Dakouri-Hild 2021).

With the advent of the new millennium, more works were explicitly devoted to gesture. Michael Wedde (1999) took a first step towards deciphering the function of individual ritual gestures by classifying the evidence into types and studying them on the basis of their integration into more complex scenes of interaction. Christine Morris (2001) subsequently discussed the necessity of studying the 'language of gesture' in Minoan iconography, while challenging the strong influence of Western religious traditions on scholarship on Aegean Bronze Age depictions of the body. Drawing on shamanic concepts of religious practice, Morris together with Alan Peatfield interpreted the gestures and postures rendered on Minoan clay figurines and on signet-rings as embodiments of altered states of consciousness allowing for healing or divine visions (Morris and Peatfield 2002, 2004, 2022; Peatfield and Morris 2012). Since then, further studies of selected gestures and forms of bodily comportment, which bring individual arm postures into focus, have been developed (*e.g.* Murphy 2015; MacGillivray 2018), as well as comparative studies (Kekes 2016, 2018, 2021), or new methodological approaches which draw on interpretive models from ethology, sociology, and linguistics (*e.g.* Poole 2020) or on experimental practice (McGowan 2006; Steel 2020; Morris and Goodison 2022). These recent developments reflect a growing awareness of the salience of gesture and bodily comportment in representations of the anthropomorphic (and anthropomorphised) body, and of the need to challenge established hypotheses on religion and ritual action. They also evidence a rising interest in the use of the types of vocabulary employed in discussions on bodily comportment, and in the exploration of analytical methods drawn from fields beyond that of Aegean Bronze Age iconography.

The Challenges of Studying Gesture and Bodily Comportment

While the above overview of how gestures have been examined throughout the history of the discipline shows increasing and varied progress in the understanding of Minoan figural representations (and, interestingly, drastically less in Mycenaean representations where the focus remains on mourning), it also highlights the challenges that research on gestures and bodily comportment still faces. In effectively dealing with a 'picture book without text' (Nilsson 1950, 7) which still withholds many of its secrets, we have not yet been able to develop a standardised approach to the study of non-verbal cues and bodily comportment. It is indeed evident that, despite their value, the above studies presently represent a collection of varying, somewhat idiosyncratic, and often discordant, accounts. Outlined below are some of the specific difficulties posed by the studied material and which have to date impeded the creation of more harmonised approaches to gesture and posture in Aegean Bronze Age imagery.

One problem concerns the criteria by which different gestures, postures, and stances can be distinguished from one another. In many cases, it is difficult to assess whether a range of slightly

varying bodily placements represent a single motif or whether they represent different moments of an act or of an event otherwise characterised by the same features. For example, a gesture may either form part of a still attitude or signify movement and effectively consist of a 'snapshot' selected from a dynamic sequence of gestures and postures. Most gestures occurring in Aegean iconography might consequently reflect a characteristic moment of a more complex cycle of movements.

Another problem relates to whether it is possible to tell if a gesture was merely an iconographic convention or if it was also performed in real life. Indeed, gestures, of which the representation flourished when a highly standardised form of Aegean Bronze Age imagery developed, do not in themselves provide information about whether or not they were also used in practice by the people who rendered them. To date, depictions of gesture have been principally regarded as images of actual events, such as ritual and religious activities, funerary practices, or combats, yet the possibility that some of these in fact rendered mythological scenes has only been briefly addressed.

One of the solutions found to the above problems has been to compare Aegean Bronze Age iconography with contemporary Egyptian and Near Eastern imagery for which more archaeological information and textual explanations exist (*e.g.* Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1995; Kekes 2016, 2018, 2021). However, these comparisons, as some of the papers collected in this volume demonstrate, do require caution. Indeed, while Nanno Marinatos (2013, 253) argued that "Near Eastern texts and representations offer an invaluable guide for the 'reading' of Minoan images and religion", it equally remains unclear whether the Aegean 'imported' versions of Egyptian and Near Eastern gestures were also practiced or whether they were only adopted as pictorial formula, and whether or not these 'imports' bore the same meanings and visual functions as they did in their 'original' contexts. Consequently, suggesting the occurrence of a cultural transfer between the Aegean and other cultures invites us to reflect on the Aegean specificities of a 'language of gestures', on how and where these specificities were compatible with Egyptian and Near Eastern ones, and on whether an Eastern Mediterranean 'koine' of gestures existed.

Towards an Agenda for Aegean Bronze Age Gestures Studies and the Scope of the 2021 Conference

In view of the above, it becomes clear that the study of gesture, posture, and stance in Aegean Bronze Age iconography, despite the progress made in recent decades, is still in a formative phase due to its complexity. Nevertheless, it is also presently possible to tell which aspects of this field require particular attention and what form further developments might take. In particular, there are three main objectives that research might work towards in the near future. The first consists of the creation of a standardised formula according to which Aegean Bronze Age depictions of bodily comportment and non-verbal communication can be classified and described. The second objective consists in systematically pursuing the identification of subtle iconographic conventions hidden in depictions of the moving or still anthropomorphic or anthropomorphised body. Finally, the third step consists in initiating more careful chronological and geographical analyses of Aegean Bronze Age depictions of non-verbal communication as it is conspicuous that similar, if not identical, gestures appear in different parts of the Aegean and beyond, in different contexts, and over a broad period. Engagement with these goals will consequently allow for the progressive construction of solid factual foundations upon which new interpretations can be proposed and against which established views and concepts can be assessed.

The *Gesture – Stance – Movement. Communicating Bodies in the Aegean Bronze Age* international conference marked a first step in this direction. By creating a platform via which current theoretical, methodological, and interpretive perspectives could be discussed and articulated collectively it allowed for the initiation of a new phase of research. The enthusiastic participation of thirty-eight contributors and of a broad audience in the online event evidences the interest that gesture, posture, and bodily communication still generate today, and demonstrates this field's relevance not only to research on iconography but also on Aegean Bronze Age social organisation,

identities and inter-regional contacts among other topics. This volume, with papers grouped into eight thematic clusters, contains the fruits of three days of lively presentations and discussions.

Thematic cluster 1: Frameworks of analysis for communicating bodies

The volume opens with three theoretically informed approaches which both address the methodological challenges of studying non-verbal communication and utilise novel methodological tools for fresh readings of pertinent archaeological sources. **Diamantis Panagiotopoulos** problematises the notion of ambiguity in Aegean imagery. Given their semantic fuzziness, the majority of figurative scenes and especially gestures and stances do not convey a straightforward message to the modern viewer and are consequently open to more than one interpretation. The author discusses selected cases of ambiguous/unambiguous imagery and explores the hermeneutical potential of a historical versus an ahistorical reading. Advocating a 'synthetic' approach, **Anna Simandiraki-Grimshaw** argues that a proper understanding of the role(s) that the human body played in Bronze Age Cretan imagery is only possible through a combination and contextualisation of heterogeneous data sets. Based on an elaborate methodology and a thoughtful deployment of theoretical notions, she discerns perceptible shifts in the variety and audiences of overt and covert bodily communication through time that can be symptomatic of developments in wider social and political contexts. The significance of arms and hands as main media in non-verbal forms of communication at both levels of reality and representation form the topic of **Katerina Giannaki**'s contribution. Starting with a comprehensive overview of Minoan hand gestures and highlighting their role as semiotic codes of visual communication, the author distinguishes two main configurations: open (extroverted) and closed (introverted) hand gestures. Through the use of the notion of 'energy management factor', she tackles the question of how arms and hands were used for articulating social interaction and the self-perception of the Minoan body.

Thematic cluster 2: Communication through expression and movement

The notion of gesture is not limited to arms and hands but refers to the entire body and the manifold ways in which it was shaped, framed, and presented to the observer, as the contributions of this section lucidly demonstrate. **Fritz Blakolmer** takes us through a richly detailed investigation of alterations in mimic features such as open mouth, closed eyes, and other non-canonic physiognomic expressions that deviate from the standardised depictions of the human face with no mimic. The author discusses how and why facial expressions were attributed to selected figures and addresses the most crucial issues that arise from this small corpus of mimics. These include their role as indicators of acoustic and/or atmospheric components of a depicted action, and as visualisers of verbal expressions. **Lyvia Morgan**'s thought-provoking article is a powerful acknowledgement of the communicative potential of movement and gesture in Minoan and Cycladic wall-paintings. Based on the premise that the perception of figurative mural art was a sequential, interactive experience, the author explores the different impacts that large-scale and small-scale figures might have born on viewers physically moving through architectural space and visually moving through an image. This subtle analysis shows that movement, stance, and gesture functioned not only as bearers of symbolic meaning but also as directives of viewing. Body postures also comprise one of the tools implemented by **Lucie Valentinová** in her reassessment of the much-discussed Xeste 3 Adorants Fresco from Akrotiri. Drawing on the absence of a discernible narrative, on the body comportment of the 'Seated Woman', and by revisiting some anachronistic arguments advanced in previous studies, the author questions the traditional interpretation of the scene as a female rite of passage and instead proposes that it served to depict different aspects of female identity. In a discussion on Minoan sacred caves, **Maria Mina** suggests that the figurines found therein served as stimulants for multi-sensorial religious experiences. Assuming that these objects were handled by the participants of the ritual, she conjectures that the figurines' postures (and gestures) instigated a form of bodily movement essential for attaining an ecstatic state in the course of the ritual experience in enclosed spaces.

Thematic cluster 3: Gesture, posture, and societal matters

In situating depictions of non-verbal communication and bodily comportment within the social contexts they were created and consumed, the three following papers demonstrate that representations of the gesturing body reveal aspects of social relevance beyond the immediate meaning of the posture or action shown. **Céline Murphy**'s contribution sensitises us to the importance of the torso's orientation and posture. Her rigorous analysis of the visual conventions for depicting different modes of communication between pairs of figures or within groups of figures (direct interaction, indirect interaction, no interaction) reveals the existence of a standardised iconographic tradition articulating social differentiation and social collaboration. Following the author's argumentation, these visual strategies were employed to legitimise a strongly hierarchical Neopalatial social model. **Diana Wolf** re-evaluates gestures performed by female figures and traditionally interpreted as representations of adoration, processions, or dances, rendered on Neopalatial soft-stone seals ('Cretan Popular Group'). The social implications of the inconspicuous medium (in terms of material and manufacture) and the correspondence of its imagery with gestures found in elite media, such as signet-rings and frescoes, provide the key for its understanding. According to the author, the seals displayed choreographed and staged social action that fostered social cohesion between groups of different ranks. Rewinding to the Prepalatial period, **Susan Ferrence, Philip Betancourt, Alessandra Giumlia-Mair, James Muhly, Metaxia Tsipopoulou,** and **David Rupp** discuss an intriguing new find from the cemetery of Petras: a miniature cast gold pendant amulet in the shape of two male bearded figures positioned in an embrace. Based on a fine-grained stylistic and technological analysis, the authors make a convincing argument for the foreign (probably Mesopotamian) origin of both the pendant and the depicted gesture and try to elucidate the biography and symbolism of this exotic piece.

Thematic cluster 4: Of deities and humans

This section includes papers that revolve around gestures articulating symbolic messages of (divine or human) identity, status, and power. **Eleni Drakaki** studies a selection of seal motifs presenting the so-called 'chest gesture' or 'hands to the chest gesture', frequently shown on male figures in 'Master of the Animals' compositions. The main claim of the paper rests on the existence of two distinct regional variations of this emblematic depiction of human strength in Aegean glyptic (Central Cretan and Western Cretan/Greek Mainland). **Alexia Spiliotopoulou** offers a meticulous analysis of the well-known male bronze figurine from Katsambas, focusing on its unique gesture that – despite intensive discussion over the previous decades – remains enigmatic. Drawing on insights from her systematic study of the gestures of the anthropomorphic figurines from the peak sanctuary of Kophinas, the author highlights their affinities with the Katsambas piece and makes a new suggestion as to the figure's identity as a boxer. **Louise Hitchcock** and **Madaline Harris-Schober**'s contribution focuses on a small bronze figurine discovered in a pit bearing obvious ritual associations, in a Neopalatial house at Palaikastro. The authors attempt to demonstrate why this remarkable female figure, whose hands rest on her hips, should be interpreted as the depiction of the most powerful woman of Minoan Crete. **Bernice Jones**' paper offers a thorough and insightful reassessment of the three faience Snake Goddess figurines from the Temple Repositories at Knossos. This detailed study of the figurines' gesture, stance, movement, and other attributes exposes the weaknesses of some modern reconstructions of these pieces, and leads to different suggestions on their identity. **Philip Betancourt** introduces an important assemblage of standing female figures performing the distinctive 'upraised arms' gesture from the cave shrine of Eileithyia at Inatos (southern Crete) known to have been in use between LH III B to the Early Geometric period. The author argues that the figures' bodily comportment and physical attributes, alongside their find context, provide a straightforward argument for identifying them as goddesses.

Thematic cluster 5: Communication in ritual action

Ranging from close readings of the most iconic gestures of Minoan iconography to stimulating analyses of Aegean ritual as depicted action and embodied experience, the contributions of this section explore the religious significance of gestures and stances. **Stephanie Aulsebrook** applies a practice-oriented approach to vessel-based gestures. Her careful analysis examines the two main modes of handling vases – presentation/transport and use – and focuses on the variety of the depicted types and their praxeological context. An interesting insight is provided on the role that handles acquired as nodal points in the depicted action. **Caroline Tully** examines scenes in which humans ritually interact with trees on Minoan gold signet-rings. Concentrating on examples showing a vigorous clasping, pulling or shaking of the tree, the author relates the figures' bodily comportment to that of figures rendered in scenes of agonistic sports. Moreover, assuming that the Minoans conceived of their world from an animistic perspective, and drawing on pertinent Near Eastern evidence, she argues that tree-shaking served to express a ritual control over the natural world through aggression and domination. Similarly concerned with trees, but also with architectural features, **Laetitia Phialon** examines the gestures of both humans and fantastic beings in Aegean glyptic imagery. Following an overview of expressive action (trees shaken or pulled by human figures), calm gestures (columns touched by human figures and by a sphinx) and antithetical group compositions, the paper discusses the symbolic significance of tactile gestures and suggests that trees, pillars, and columns might have functioned as interchangeable motifs in these glyptic scenes. **Tina Boloti** engages with the iconography of ritual processions, a pictorial theme that features prominently in Late Bronze Age wall-paintings and other media. Her review of the relevant sources focuses on the main pictorial formula for depicting the gestures commonly performed by humans and supernatural creatures in procession.

Thematic cluster 6: Gesture, posture, sex, and gender

Bodily comportment forms the starting point for three contributions exploring its significance in the visual representation of sex and gender. **Paz Ramirez-Valiente** focuses on Neolithic anthropomorphic figurines of clay and stone. A survey of relevant evidence demonstrates that the rendering of specific postures and gestures might have been determined by the biological sex, gender (male, female, or asexual), and age of the depicted figure, but also by other parameters such as the figurine's chronology and material. Shared gestures and postures among figurines of different sexual categories might have served to represent similar gender identities or roles. In an attempt to unveil the polysemy of the 'hands on the abdomen' – a common gestural type for Minoan (Protopalatial to Postpalatial) and Mycenaean (LH III A–B) figurines – **Christos Kekes** critically reappraises previous interpretations and weaves a methodology combining archaeological and ethnographic evidence. The author concludes that – depending on the context – this gesture can be interpreted as an expression of reverence, as an indication of female coming-of-age rites performed in Aegean sanctuaries, or as a symbolic reference to social status. **Michele Mitrovich** proposes a new pathway for reading body language in Minoan imagery, by exploring how important messages about health, physical fertility, and sexual attractiveness could be communicated by figurines. Drawing on insights from the fields of Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology, she proposes that specific gestures, stances, and comportment articulated mate selection strategies which constituted one of the core mechanisms of Minoan religious practices, social cohesion, and cultural identity.

Thematic cluster 7: Stances of triumph, defeat, and combat

Several papers of this volume are dedicated to combat scenes and discuss how the iconography of violence conveyed symbolic messages relating to domination and defeat. The common denominator of the following four papers is that they treat Aegean martial images drawing extensively on Egyptian/Near Eastern comparanda. **Filip Franković** and **Uroš Matić** explore how body poses, stances, and movement were utilised for expressing victory, domination, defeat, and submission

in Late Bronze Age Aegean iconography. Concentrating on the body poses of victorious swordsmen, the authors argue that these images show an appropriation of the Egyptian motif of the 'pharaoh smiting his enemies'. Furthermore, they detect a similar case of artistic transfer in the case of the Aegean depictions of defeated warriors that correlate with poses related with defeat, death, fear, and deprivation of freedom in Egyptian imagery. Also focusing on gestures that signify dominance and submission, **Nanno Marinatos** strives to track transcultural encounters between Aegean and Egyptian iconography, arguing, like the aforementioned paper, that some of these gestures can be explained as appropriation of the diachronic Egyptian template for domination over foreign foes. The author underlines, however, that there are further gestures that seem to have emerged in the Minoan tradition, thus implying the existence of a warrior imagery in Neopalatial Crete and – by expanding this argument – suggesting some sort of Minoan dominance in the Aegean and part of the Peloponnese. The problem of the 'missing ruler' in Aegean imagery is revisited by **Veronika Verešová** who approaches this long-standing riddle by adopting a comparative perspective. Through a systematic juxtaposition of Aegean and Near Eastern images showing standing male figures in a dynamic pose alongside kneeling/lying enemies, the author claims that Minoan and Mycenaean motifs of triumph and defeat were emulations of oriental prototypes. Furthermore, she discusses their occurrence in different pictorial settings (beyond combat scenes) and explores the possible reasons for their adoption and adaptation. The case treated by **Robert Koehl** reminds us how the study of a specific gesture can be utilised for the detection of a regional artistic tradition and consequently for pinpointing the artefacts' provenance. The author focuses on duel scenes depicting the 'lunge and thrust' posture, which he identifies – after a survey of the relevant evidence – as the Mycenaean formula for showing the moment of the kill in face-to-face combat.

Thematic cluster 8: Death and the communicative body

The volume closes with three papers that turn the attention to gesture in the context of death. **Sotiria Kiorpe** expands the analytical scope of the present volume beyond the realm of iconography, dealing with anthropological material that provides an unexpected field of evidence for our topic. The author examines particular gestures and stances evident in the few primary burials of the Petras cemetery, their iconographical counterparts, and different modes of placing and interacting with defleshed or still decomposing human remains. Gestures emerge here as entangled expressions of embodied identities in both imagery and burial ritual. **Jacob E. Heywood** returns to the much-discussed Agia Triada sarcophagus and engages with the long-standing dilemma over whether its iconography can be related with funerary rites or – alternatively – with the biography of the deceased. Drawing on the iconographical composition and the attributes and gestures of the sarcophagus' key figures, the author argues that the imagery conveyed a biographical statement referring to the status and social role of the deceased, who in turn can be identified as a female member of the local elite. Finally, challenging traditional assumptions, **Ute Günkel-Maschek** presents a multi-faceted exploration of gestures in Middle and Late Minoan religious iconography which were previously related to the adoration and/or invocation of divine epiphanies. She draws our attention on the fact that self-touching gestures are regularly associated with negative emotional states and stress, and accordingly proposes that, in the context of Minoan imagery, they expressed sadness or grief, addressing a dead hero or a deity absent from this world. With this compelling argument, the author re-introduces mourning and lamentation as indispensable components of Minoan religion.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion to these introductory remarks and rapid overview of the contributions, a few final words on this volume's character and achievements must be advanced. First, a noticeable feature of this collection of papers is its general departure from a prevalent focus on worship, adoration, and religious ritual. In comparison to earlier studies on gesture, posture, and stance, concern with the religious meaning of bodily comportment is here lesser, although religion is certainly addressed in a number of the papers. Indeed, only in a few cases do the authors seek to differentiate deities from humans and votaries from priestesses – an elementary problem in Aegean iconography. Rather, the majority of the contributions express a strong interest in Aegean Bronze Age social and political matters, which they articulate through discussions on hierarchy and identity. Second, it is conspicuous that mourning is also less frequently addressed. It instead appears that depictions of gesture, posture, and stance in situations which may lead to death are of more interest. Noticeable is also the very sparce mention of Mycenaean figurines, and of Mycenaean material generally. A continued interest in the Near East and Egypt is nonetheless apparent.

Finally, in shedding new light on the many dimensions of the 'language of the body' in Aegean Bronze Age imagery, its problems, and the trajectories it may take, this volume shows how much work this field of research still deserves. Our task is consequently to continue systematically exploring the clues that the imagery offers us, to carefully examine the bodies of evidence, in an attempt to slowly but surely decipher the meaning of the rich and varied iconography.

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