Beyond the Body: Facial Expression, Human Interaction and Narrativity in Aegean Iconography

Fritz Blakolmer

Abstract *Although, in the iconography of the Aegean Bronze Age, the depiction of facial expression can be observed only sporadically, it occurs in manifold forms and contexts. Especially in images from Neopalatial Crete we observe mimic expressions, such as different versions of open mouth and closed eyes, of individual human figures. Based on the iconographic contexts of examples such as the Harvester Vase from Agia Triada, a series of seal-stones and signet-rings and examples of Mycenaean painted pottery, this contribution aims at analysing their meaning as well as the question of a possible interrelation between several of these images. Aegean examples of facial expression constitute the exception to the rule, a stereotypical, multivalent depiction of the human face that can be defined as 'the Clint Eastwood syndrome'. However, all the more challenging is the question of how and why facial expressions were attributed to selected figures. How were verbal expressions such as addressing speech and conversation, shouting, singing, and saying a prayer defined by iconographic means? What were the alternatives to mimic expression in Aegean iconography for depicting psychological insight into the character and feeling of a figure in distinct situations such as physical effort, aggression, pain, mourning and other kinds of emotional expression?*

Introduction

In the iconography of the Aegean Bronze Age examples of non-verbal messages expressed by the human face occur very seldom but can be found throughout all regions and periods. From Middle Minoan seal images and figurines preceding those of the Neopalatial period we learn that, in Minoan Crete, gesture is a much more widespread and elementary phenomenon than the differentiation of the human face. The depiction of action and interaction first appears on seal impressions from the MM II B Archivio di Cretule at Phaistos (Pini 2011, 416; Blakolmer 2020, 48). As a consequence, 'talking hands' were the rule whereas 'talking mouths' always constituted the exception to the rule. We also have to bear in mind that the codified artistic depiction of an equally codified human behaviour is not devoid of artistic individuality, misinterpretation, and further imponderables. Nonetheless, the depiction of mimic expression presupposes the existence of certain artistic standards that point to the definition and differentiation of such pictorial contexts (see in general Kenner 1960; Evans 1969; Borrmann 1994; Krierer 1995).

This contribution focuses on depictions of the human face that contrast the norm, meaning alterations in mimic features such as an open mouth, closed eyes, and other non-canonical physiognomic expressions. What was their significance in depictions of communicative processes or when they appear on isolated figures? Do they permit us to define the iconological content, emotions, or any other messages? In short, what was the norm of depicting mouth, eyes and face, and what were the meanings of the deviation from this norm, *i.e.* the specific transcending of the unspecific?

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The Iconographic Norm: 'the Clint Eastwood Syndrome'

When we study high-quality images such as the wounded and suffering seated woman in the Xeste 3 murals (Doumas 1985, 30; 1992, 142–143, figs. 105–106) and figures such as the ivory figurine of a bull-leaper from Knossos (Evans 1930, 431–433, figs. 297a–b; Hood 1971, 106, 227, pls. 82–83; 1978, 119, fig. 106), we wonder why the facial expression of figures in these dramatic activities remains so constantly static and inexpressive. Throughout the entire Aegean Bronze Age, in small-scale images as well as those of less naturalistic style, the human face in profile was depicted in a bipartite manner: in MM II vase painting the most protruding elements, nose and chin, were highlighted whereas in the late Mycenaean period similar facial features may indicate the mouth. In none of these cases bird-heads with a beak were depicted;[1] instead, in the pictorial art of the Aegean, occasionally, the human mouth was the less meaningful element of human faces. In more elaborate images the Aegean norm constitutes open eyes and a closed (or slightly open) mouth. In faces given in profile or in frontal view a slight smile may result from the accentuated nasolabial groove (*sulcus nasolabialis*) and occasionally prominent cheek bones; this, however, does not seem to bear any specific meaning, since its occurrence is unrelated to any situation or context of the figures.[2]

One could name this standardised depiction of a stereotypical human face 'the Clint Eastwood syndrome'. When Clint Eastwood was advised by a film director to make stronger use of his facial expressions, he answered that he has only two facial expressions in his repertory: that with a cigarillo in his mouth (Fig. 1) and another one without the cigarillo (Eliot 2010). Although, in our cases, we are not confronted with an expression of coolness and superiority, this example reflects an artistic phenomenon widespread in the Ancient Near East and predominant also in the Aegean Bronze Age as well as in later periods of Greece: immobile and indistinct facial features of equally indistinct figures and the concentration or even limitation to the use of prop-like elements for defining the character of a figure and its pictorial context, such as a distinct hair-style and beard, a special dress and head-gear, weapons, a staff, or other items. In contrast, mimic expression enables a considerably more distinct definition of a figure and his/her situation in an image. An additional difference is that facial expression can change suddenly, according to an altered situation, which is not the case with dress and other insignia, at least not to the same extent.

In a similar fashion as Clint Eastwood and other modern heroes in their movies, in the Aegean 'language of images', Minoans and Mycenaeans did not have a lot to say to each other, at least, as far as can be judged by the play of their facial features. Instead, similar to movie heroes, they let their fists and arms do the talking. It goes without saying that Aegean artists, unlike the actor Clint Eastwood, did *not* intend to represent static, immobile and identical figures, which becomes clear from the varying ornamented dress in polychrome painting, even when figures in a regular procession were depicted. Thus, variety mattered but, obviously, not the variety of human faces.

We should not necessarily interpret the depiction of static, almost expressionless faces as an absence of meaning. Despite its immobility, the modelled landscape of the human face can be perceived as a sign of stability and cosmic order, as might have been the case in Egyptian art (Schäfer 1963, 36–74; Davis 1989; Assmann 1999, esp. 26–31). Although the pictorial formula of the 'Archaic smile' in ancient Greek art could simply be a normative artistic stereotype, perhaps for 'vitalizing' a statue, without any specific meaning, it was also interpreted as an expression of 'charis' of the aristocratic Athenians (Hughes Fowler 1983; Martini 1990, 83–85; Stieber 2004, 49–55). In a manner similar to Clint Eastwood in many of his movies, when

1 An exception are seal motifs of the 'bird-woman': Pini 2010, 329–332, figs 5–8; Zouzoula 2018; Dubcová 2020.

2 See especially the figures in the mural paintings from Xeste 3 in Akrotiri: Doumas 1992, 126–171, pls. 100–134.

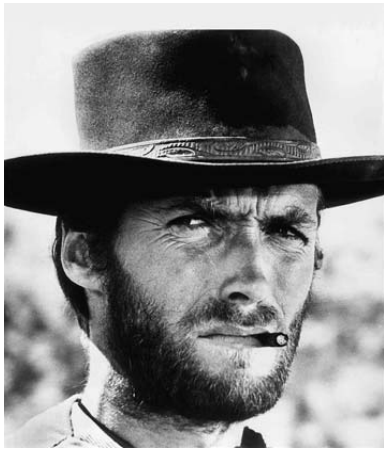

Fig. 1: Clint Eastwood (https://www.kaufmann.dk/the-journal/mennesker/clint-eastwood).

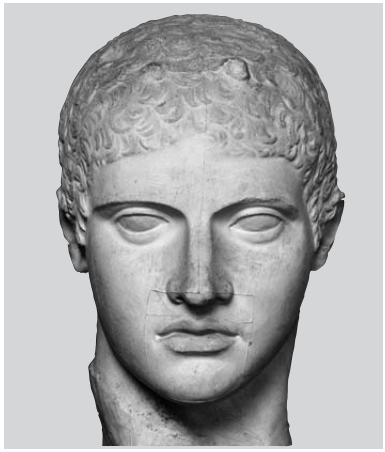

Fig. 2: Head of the Discobolus Lancelotti, plaster copy; original in the Museo delle Terme, Rome (Cast collection of the Institute of Classical Archaeology, University of Vienna).

looking in the face of the Discobolus of Myron (Fig. 2), we cannot recognize that this statue is an athlete in vivid motion. Thus, stability, uniformity and continuity of a canonical artistic form, *i.e.* the continuous reference to iconographic concepts of the past, may have signified an expression of political and social stability, an attempt to highlight an eternal order guaranteed by deities and rulers (Ehrenberg 1998; Roaf 2000; Panagiotopoulos 2017, 82–84; Blakolmer 2019, 429–433). In the depiction of the human body in the Aegean, this artistic conservatism is also exemplified by the traditional 'wasp waist', the elongated legs and other modes of depicting male and female figures lasting from the early Neopalatial period of Crete until the end of the Mycenaean palatial era.

The So-called 'Portrait Gems'

The open mouth of a figure mainly implies an acoustic component, signifying a dialogic semantic expression towards another being, or the expression of an emotional, inner condition of an isolated figure. While, for gestures in imagery, the most characteristic moment of a motion sequence of the human body was selected, in the case of the depiction of an open mouth it can be suspected that artists selected the maximum open mouth in order to differentiate between talking, singing and shouting.

In the iconographic repertoire of the Aegean, a mimic expression either belongs to a cluster of images of the same narrative theme or it constitutes an individual creation in a specific contextual situation that is presented in different clusters (*cf.* Wedde 1999, 913; Blakolmer 2007, 222–227). The heads depicted on so-called 'portrait gems' appear isolated, without context or any unmistakable indication of a situation or a target (see Biesantz 1958; Pini 1999; Younger 1995, 165–168, pls. LVII–LIX; Foster 1997; Karetsou 2005). They possess some similarities to figurines of bronze and terracotta but lack any gesture. However, interestingly enough, only a few of these male heads appear insignificant, whereas many of them are defined by an open mouth, a raised position of the head, a distinct hair style, or a special head-gear (Figs. 3–4). Thus, instead of reflecting individual portraits, they imply a distinct situation and a more specific meaning that may indicate a distinct social position and/or a specific role in a broader iconographic context. For example, the so-called 'portrait gem' from Shaft Grave Gamma of Grave Circle B at Mycenae (Fig. 3; *CMS* I, no. 5), without any doubt of Minoan origin, not only presents the open mouth in U-shape but even shows the upper row of teeth, permitting us to interpret the figure as talking or shouting.

*Fig. 3: 'Portrait gems' from Shaft Grave Gamma at Mycenae (*CMS *I, no. 5; courtesy of the* CMS *Heidelberg).*

*Fig. 4: 'De Jong gem', Oxford (*CMS *VI, no. 293; courtesy of the* CMS *Heidelberg).*

Fig. 5: Reconstruction of the frieze of the Harvester Vase from Agia Triada (after Blakolmer 2008. pl. LV 12).

There is no reason why an isolated figure should be depicted with an open mouth, unless he or she is intended to be communicating with another figure or an invisible deity and the like. Alternatively, in the case of an isolated head on a Minoan seal, one could also argue that the open mouth was depicted because this figure is unable to gesture. If so, the open mouth substitutes a gesture, while gestures in art express and substitute meaning. In any case, the specificity of the open mouth makes it very probable that these heads are excerpts taken from and referring to a specific situation in a larger scene (*cf.* Blakolmer 2010, 103–107, fig. 8). Amongst the so-called 'portrait gems', it is likely that none of them presents any individual portrait, but they seem to allude to types of figures depicted in a distinct state or situation and taken from extensive, large-scale, narrative friezes.

Mimics on the Harvester Vase from Agia Triada and Their Parallels

This leads us to the so-called Harvester Vase from Agia Triada (Figs. 5–7; Savignoni 1903; Kaiser 1976, 24–25, 149–155; van Effenterre 1999; Blakolmer 2007, 201–242; 2008, 265–266; Halstead and Isaakidou 2021). Irrespective of the interpretation of this frieze, characterised by Robert Laffineur (2012, 4–5) as "an extraordinary premonition of the Seven Dwarfs coming back from work at the mine", we will focus on the faces of several figures depicted in this lively male procession. Although the frieze of this stone relief vessel is unique in its large number of mimic expressions, most of them possess parallels in other artistic media, mainly in seal images. Thus, among the seven figures exhibiting mimic facial expressions, based on present knowledge, hardly any of them is unique in Aegean iconography (Blakolmer 2007, 222–227).

Curiously enough, the singing sistrum-player with his wide-open mouth (Fig. 6) may form an exception to this: in the case of other depictions of musicians in Aegean iconography, such as the (equally singing?) lyre-players in mural paintings from Agia Triada and Pylos (Younger 1998,

9–28, pls. 10–14), no open mouth is indicated. As the sistrum-player on the Harvester Vase shows, in the case of an open mouth, the nasolabial groove is defined more expressively than usual. In three-dimensional art, such as in the terracotta figures from Agia Irini on Kea (Caskey 1986) and on stone relief vessels, the nasolabial groove is indicated often, but without showing any relation to an open or a closed mouth.

Fig. 6: Harvester Vase from Agia Triada, detail (after Marinatos and Hirmer 1973, pl. 104 bottom).

Additionally, one of the participants of the procession on the Harvester Vase, namely the figure walking immediately in front of the sistrum-player (Fig. 6) possesses a feature that is so far unique. His slightly open mouth is represented in V-form and can hardly be interpreted other than as a soft singing along. This suggests an individual narrative feature, an iconographic gimmick, probably signifying an emotional reaction to the musician in his immediate vicinity (Charbonneaux 1929, 23; Kaiser 1976, 150). As will be shown below, this is not the only example of figures with open mouth amongst the participants of procession in Aegean iconography.

The three figures with their open mouths and deeply carved nasolabial grooves in the background behind the sistrum-player on the Harvester Vase (Fig. 6) are traditionally interpreted as representing coordinated singing but, perhaps, can be better understood as spectators positioned beside the procession file and shouting or calling out to the participants (Blakolmer 2007, 210). Their mouths, given in variable U-form, possess good parallels in several 'portrait gems' shown above (Figs. 3–4; *cf.* also *CMS* VI, no. 293; IX, no. 6D b).

Open Mouth and Hand-to-Mouth Gesture as Indications of Conversation

A special case is the scene of two figures in the rear part of the procession on the Harvester Vase consisting of a figure at a lower position, perhaps bent over, and raising his right hand, and the man walking in front of him and turning his head (Fig. 7). Both have an open mouth and are communicating with each other, although without any dialogic direct eye contact. The sequence of this event is clear: first the action of 'falling', then the reaction of the walking man turning his head. Different meanings have been proposed for this scene, for example, that of touching the genitals of the man in front as a salty joke by Kurt Müller[3] or as a grotesque disruptive dancer by John Forsdyke (1954, 2, 7). Most recently, Vangelis Kyriakidis (2013, 160) suggested that the figure bent over "probably lost his pace and fell down distracting the man in front who turns to look what happened". However, none of these interpretations appears convincing. Irrespective of the exact meaning of this scene, here we discern action and reaction as well as communication and probably even emotion (Blakolmer 2007, 211).

As Christos Kekes demonstrated, in Egyptian iconography, the gesture of raising the inner side of the right hand to the mouth was used when a figure was defined as talking, singing, giving advice or in magical activities. Thus, it forms a gesture of addressing somebody else and meaning 'I speak' (Kekes 2017, 2–7; see also Shaw 1996, 178). For Minoan iconography, a similar meaning of this gesture is supported by a series of examples, such as several seated women in the miniature frescoes from Knossos (Evans 1932, 49–62, figs. 29–35, pl. XVII) and the women looking out of the window on a fresco fragment from Mycenae (Shaw 1996, 172, fig. 5; pp. 176–178, pl. A9). An additional argument that points to this interpretation is the gesture of invocation ('αποσκοπείν') by raising one hand to the head, as is attested in several Minoan

3 Müller 2015, 255 ("recht derber Scherz"). For earlier interpretations as captured warrior or as dancer, see ibid. 256 with n. 1.

Fig. 7: Harvester Vase from Agia Triada, detail (after a plaster copy in the Cast collection of the Institute of Classical Archaeology, University of Vienna).

Fig. 8: Minoan bronze figurine from the Diktaean cave (?) (after Vasilakis 2005, fig. on p. 123).

bronze figurines.[4] If the open mouth of an isolated figure means speaking, the speech is addressed to a non-present target subject. For example, the Minoan bronze figurine of a man with raised right hand said to come from the Diktaean cave at Psychro (Fig. 8) clearly presents an open mouth (Verlinden 1964, no. 106, pl. 48; Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1995, 27–28, no. 33, pl. 22; Vasilakis 2005, fig. on p. 123). If this figurine is authentically Minoan, it delivers clear evidence of speaking, singing, or saying a prayer in a sacral context. Thus, the open mouth may support the meaning expressed by the hand-to-mouth gesture. A bronze figurine from an LM I context at Gournia equally shows a slightly open mouth and a similar gesture (Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1995, 14–15, no. 10, pl. 22). Nonetheless, it is difficult to decide whether this gesture in association with an open mouth, which is the exception to the rule, signifies that all figurines making this gesture have to be understood as talking or praying.

Thus, this interpretation of the Minoan hand-to-mouth gesture would reinforce the mimic expression of the open mouth in the scene on the Harvester Vase (Fig. 7). However, given the scarceness of facial expression and the frequency of this gesture in Aegean iconography, one should rather define it the other way around: the mimic expression supports the gesture of speaking. This is remarkable in that it suggests that in Minoan iconography mimic expression was a supplementary artistic means, which was only sporadically used to reinforce gestures, some of which were inspired by Egyptian imagery (see also Marinatos in this volume).

An important issue in deciphering gestures and other physical expressions is repetition. This artistic mode of indicating conversation finds good parallels in other Minoan and Mycenaean images, although only in a few examples is an open mouth indicated. On a signet-ring held in Berlin (Figs. 9a–b; *CMS* XI, no. 30), the mouth of the female votary in front of a seated goddess seems to be slightly open, probably as a sign of speaking, which is supported by her raised hand, whereas the mouth of the goddess is not indicated at all. On the large signet-ring from the tomb of the Griffin Warrior at Pylos (Figs. 10a–b; Davis and Stocker 2016, 640–643, fig. 10), the front figure of the two women with peaked hats approaching the central tree-shrine is the only figure with a naturalistic face and open mouth; this could be interpreted in connection with her hand-to-mouth gesture as a sign of addressing speech – in this context presumably saying a ritual prayer or the like. In the light of this gold ring, the unusually large open mouth of the seated figure with raised hands in front of a tree-shrine on the signet-ring from Mylopotamos (Fig. 11) points to the same interpretation (Papadopoulou 2011), irrespective of the question whether the figure is a votary or a goddess.

4 Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1995, 110–111. See also the male votary on the seal image of the 'Mother of the mountain' from Knossos: *CMS* II 8, no. 256.

*Fig. 9a–b: Signet-ring, Berlin (*CMS *XI, no. 30; courtesy of the* CMS *Heidelberg).*

Fig. 10a–b: Signet-ring from the tomb of the Griffin Warrior, Pylos (after Davis and Stocker 2016, 641, figs. 10a [drawing T. Ross], 10b [photo J. Vanderpool]; courtesy of The Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati).

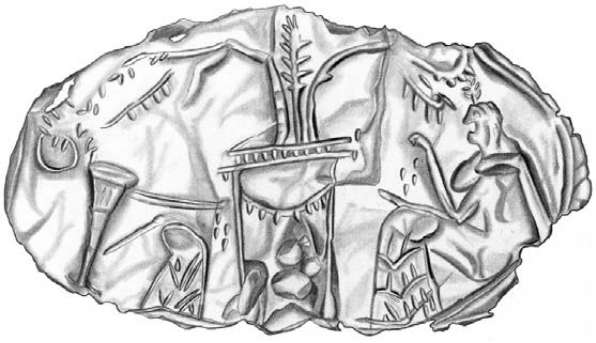

Fig. 11: Signet-ring from Mylopotamos (after Papadopoulou 2011, 6, fig. 5b).

While the drawing of a seal-stone in the Giamalakis Collection in *CMS* III (Fig. 12a) is slightly inaccurate (*CMS* III, no. 351; see also Krzyszkowska 2020, 259–260, fig. 2a), the detail photograph of the head clearly shows that the female figure with her hand-to-head gesture has a wide-open mouth in a U-form (Fig. 12b). If the gesture of this figure is identical to that of the central female in ritual scenes with tree-shrine and baetyl – one hand to the mouth, the other arm lowered and the hand bent outwards – such as on the signet-rings from Archanes and Isopata (Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellaraki 1997, I, 654–660, fig. 722; Rehak 2000; Cain 2001), this type of figure can be understood as speaking, shouting, crying or the like. A hitherto unique case is shown on a lentoid seal-stone inserted in a gold ring from Aidonia: a divine female figure with hand-to-mouth gesture, wearing a flounced skirt and an unusual head-dress (?) and flanked by two dolphins (Figs. 13a–b; *CMS* V Suppl. 1B, no. 116). Not only is her mouth open but also the nasolabial groove was engraved. We remain ignorant about the reason for the depiction of her open mouth; as an indication of authority and strength this would be unique.

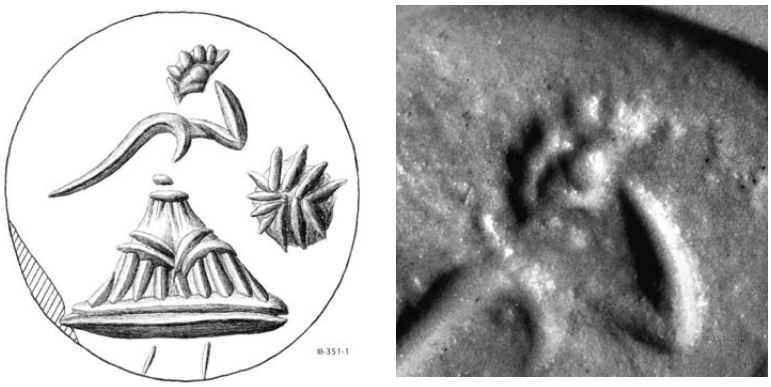

*Fig. 12a–b: Seal-stone in the Giamalakis Collection (*CMS *III, no. 351; courtesy of the* CMS *Heidelberg).*

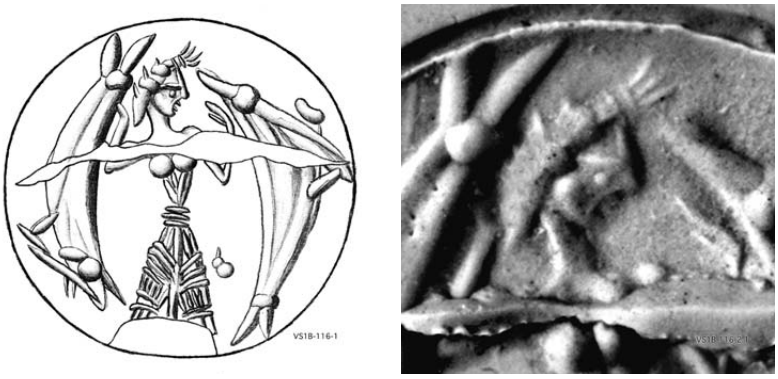

*Fig. 13a–b: Seal-stone from Aidonia (*CMS *V Suppl. 1B, no. 116; courtesy of the* CMS *Heidelberg).*

Communication of a Figure Turning its Head

Let us return once again to the scene with the two interacting figures on the Harvester Vase (Fig. 7). With regard to the motif of the head turned backward, Christos Boulotis, in his thorough study of this iconographic motif, pointed to its multivalent character by summing up that "its use was never void of significance and meaning," but it "never became a standardized figurative formula" (Boulotis 2011, 283). Nonetheless, in many examples of this recurring pictorial motif the figure is depicted with an open mouth and thus addresses his voice to the figure behind, just as in the related scene on the Harvester Vase. Although, in the mural painting programme from Xeste 3 in Akrotiri, the mouths of several figures are slightly open and the motif of the head turned backward occurs several times, the meaning of a markedly open, speaking mouth can be attributed only to the naked young man in the male procession carrying a textile and turning his head back to the small boy walking behind him and holding a bowl in his hands (Fig. 14; Doumas 1992, 146–149, figs. 109, 112–113).

The pictorial motif of the figure turning its head backwards often occurs in examples of what can be named the 'special procession' (Blakolmer 2016; 2018; Blakolmer and Hein 2018). For example, seal impressions from Agia Triada (Figs. 15a–b; *CMS* II 6, no. 9) show three figures taken from a comprehensive procession frieze, amongst them the middle female figure with raised head and possibly with an open mouth, while the man walking in front of her turns his head back to her. Another seal impression from Agia Triada presents a similar scene of double-axe bearers, unfortunately with badly preserved heads (*CMS* II 6, no. 10). On two signet-rings with female processions from Aidonia, the middle figure turns her head and raises one or two hands to address the figure behind, although their mouths remain closed (*CMS* V Suppl. IB, nos. 114–115). The same motif is depicted on a seal-stone from Modi that shows two women in the great outdoors (*CMS* V Suppl. 3, no. 80). In contrast, in the procession scene on a gold ring

Fig. 14: Mural painting from Xeste 3 in Akrotiri, Thera (after Doumas 1992, 146, fig. 109).

*Fig. 15a–b: Seal impressions from Agia Triada (*CMS *II 6, no. 9; courtesy of the* CMS *Heidelberg).*

from Midea (Figs. 16a–b; *CMS* I, no. 191), Ingo Pini interpreted the rearmost of the two female figures, with a raised head and wide-open mouth, as singing (Pini 2008, 251 with n. 26). Yet, it could well be that the large distance between nose and chin indicates that *both* figures have an open mouth. Examples such as these remind us of the scene of the two interacting figures in the procession frieze of the Harvester Vase from Agia Triada (Fig. 7). Although the examples vary in many aspects, the narrative element of a pair of figures communicating with each other occurs in several other procession images.

*Fig. 16a–b: Signet-ring from Midea (*CMS *I, no. 191; courtesy of the* CMS *Heidelberg).*

What conclusions can be drawn from this analysis for our understanding of the frieze of the Harvester Vase and its parallels? These observations not only point to the existence of a common prototype of lively procession friezes, structurally similar to that of the Harvester Vase, with identical narrative elements and scenes; furthermore, they also demonstrate that a common repertoire of mimic expressions for describing figures in specific situations by specific pictorial formulae was developed in Neopalatial Crete.

The Open Mouth in Warrior Scenes

In Aegean warrior scenes, we can neither observe any triumphal expression in the face of the winner nor any clear indication of suffering and pain by mimic elements of the defeated who, occasionally, has turned his head *en face* to the viewer (Morgan 1995). Nonetheless, a considerable number of warriors in action were depicted with an open mouth. On the prominent signet-ring with battle scene from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae (Figs. 17a–b; *CMS* I, no. 16; Stürmer 1982) the un-helmeted opponent warrior has his mouth opened in V-form and thus contrasts the 'mouth-less' victor. Could this imply the pejorative meaning of an open mouth, as a sign of infer-

*Fig. 17a–b: Signet-ring from Shaft Grave IV, Mycenae (*CMS *I, no. 16; courtesy of the* CMS *Heidelberg).*

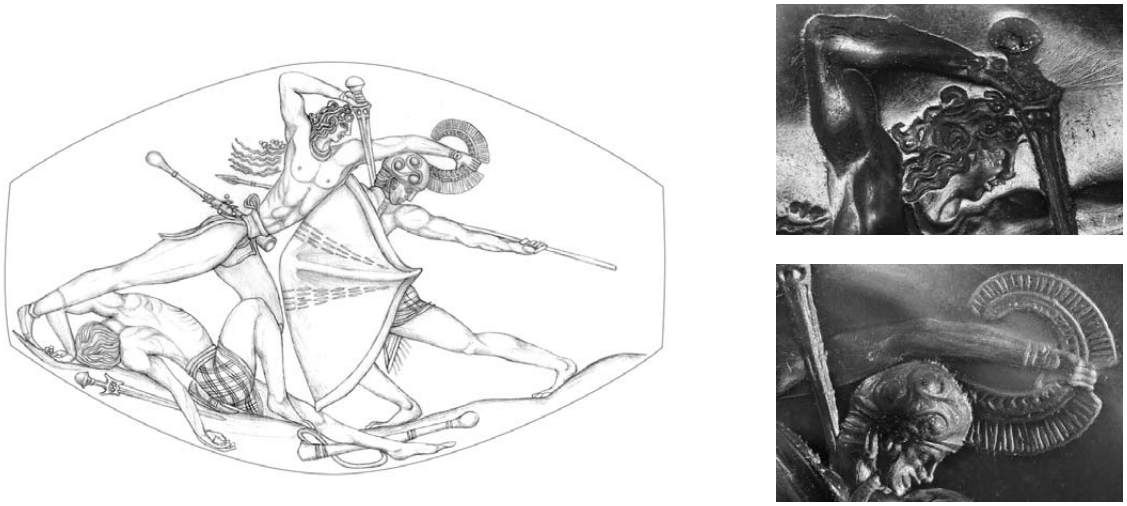

Fig. 18a–c: 'Warrior agate seal' from the tomb of the Griffin Warrior, Pylos (after Stocker and Davis 2017, 590, fig. 10 [drawing T. Ross], p. 591, fig. 11; p. 593, fig. 13 [photo J. Vanderpool]; courtesy of The Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati).

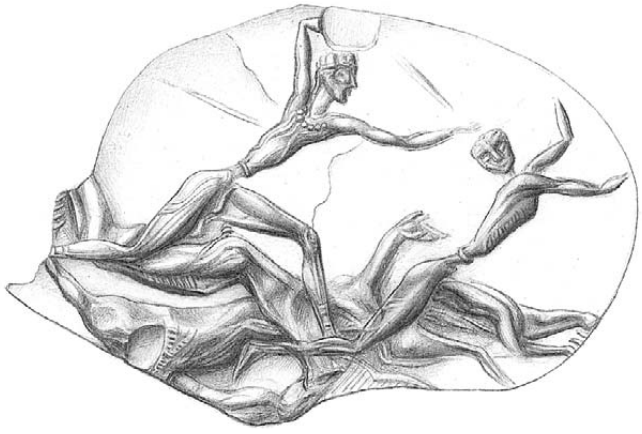

*Fig. 19: Seal impressions from Knossos and Agia Triada (*CMS *II 6, no. 15 =* CMS *II 8, no. 279; courtesy of the* CMS *Heidelberg).*

iority, *i.e.* a less canonical face as underlining the inferior position in combat? Likewise, on the Combat Agate seal from the tomb of the Griffin Warrior at Pylos (Figs. 18a–c), the opponent warrior with his mouth opened in V-form stands in contrast to the victor with his closed mouth (Stocker and Davis 2017). However, in the fighting scene on seal impressions from Knossos and Agia Triada (Figs. 19a–b) the mouth of the rushing attacker is open, whereas the fleeing opponent has turned his face to the viewer.[5] The archer on the fragment of an LM I stone relief vessel from Knossos has his mouth opened in V-form (Evans 1932, 100, 106, fig. 59; Müller 1915, 262–263, fig. 10; Kai-

5 *CMS* II 6, no. 15 = *CMS* II 8, no. 279. For an alternative interpretation as a hunting scene by R. Koehl, see Montecchi 2019, 2, n. 1.

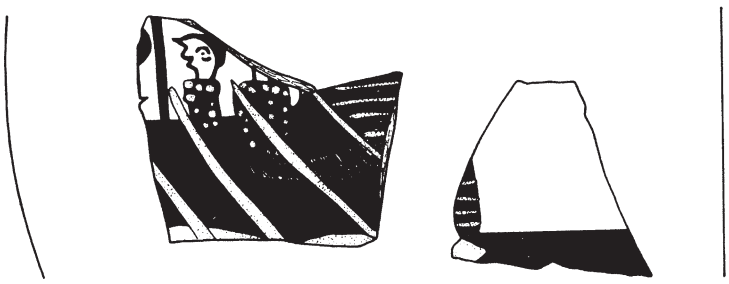

Fig. 20: Fragment of a pictorial krater, Tiryns (after Güntner 2000, pl. 12, 6; courtesy of Joseph Maran).

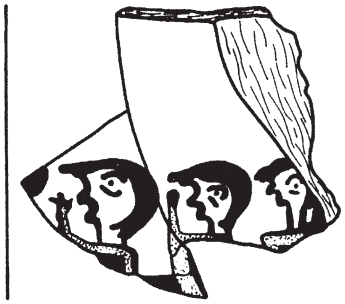

Fig. 21: Fragment of a pictorial krater, Tiryns (after Güntner 2000, pl. 12, 7; courtesy of Joseph Maran).

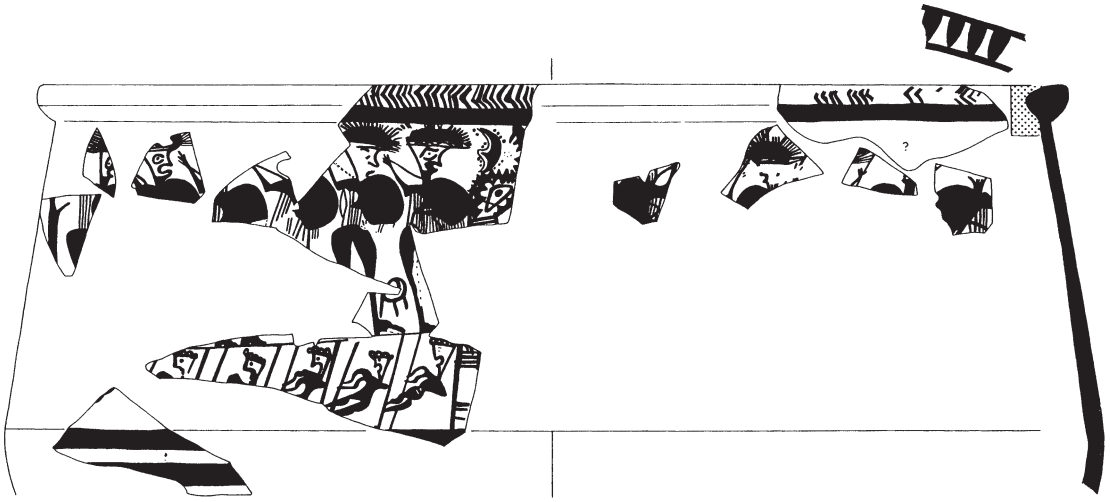

Fig. 22: LH III C krater from Bademgediği (after Mountjoy 2005, pl. XCVI).

ser 1976, 12–13 [Knossos 3], 158, 181, 409 with n. 539, fig. 3); either this has to be understood as an arbitrary depiction of the mouth or it should be seen as an expression of the vivid motion of the warrior. An open mouth in a war-like context, perhaps, also can be recognised on one of the stone relief vessel fragments from Epidavros: on the fragment with the boat, the foremost figure with a weapon in his outstretched hand shows an open mouth, unless this results from the awkward depiction of the head (Sakellariou 1971; 1981, 532–534, pl. 180; Morgan 1988, 151–154, pls. 193–194; Dickers 1990, 187–188, pls. 10, 4a–b.A).

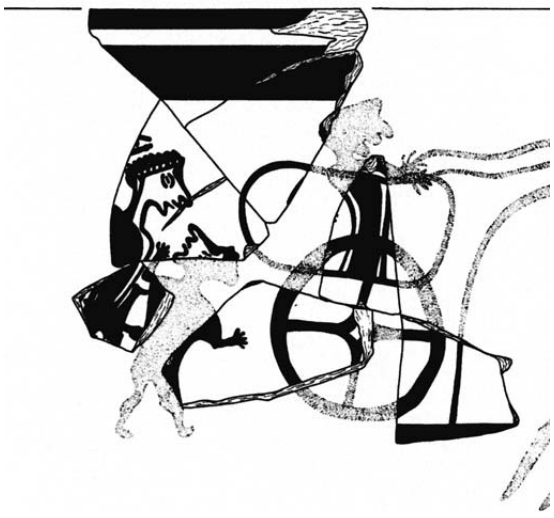

Fig. 23: Pictorial krater from Tiryns, detail (after Güntner 2000, pl. 4; courtesy of Joseph Maran).

In late Mycenaean pictorial pottery, the depiction of the mouth of the figures is mostly understood as insignificant. However, we find a series of exceptions. An interesting case is presented on two fragments of LH III B2 pictorial kraters from Tiryns each showing a row of seated rowers with open mouths. The fragment of the first krater (Fig. 20) shows a series of rowers with oars in a boat; the only preserved head behind the mast is depicted with an open mouth (Güntner 2000, 33 [Mensch 17], pl. 12, 6; 2006, 179,

Fig. 24: Golden mask from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae (after Karo 1930, pl. XLVII).

Fig. 25: Late Mycenaean head rhyton, Boston (after Vermeule 1991, fig. on p. 99).

fig. 5). The fragment of another krater from Tiryns (Fig. 21) presents a series of at least four figures, possibly rowers in a ship, with open mouths and one raised hand (Güntner 2000, 33–34 [Mensch 18], pl. 12, 7; 2006, 179–180, fig. 6). An LH III C sherd from Lefkandi presents a good parallel to that (Deger-Jalkotzy and Lemos 2006, cover ill.; Lemos 2008, fig. on p. 181). On the fragments of an LH III C Middle krater from Bademgediği (Fig. 22), all preserved warriors in both hostile ships, facing each other, are depicted with open mouths (Mountjoy 2005; 2006, 110–112 [no. 4], fig. 3). Additionally, several of the rowers in the lower part of the ship on the left side equally were shown with an open mouth. In all these cases, the open mouth probably indicates the aggressive, warrior-like character of the figures as well as the physical effort of rowing, and thus underlines the dramatic pictorial theme of the naval battle.

The interpretation of the open mouth as expressing a warlike context is perhaps supported by another LH III B2 krater from Tiryns depicting a series of sphinxes on one side and a chariot scene on the other side with two figures behind the chariot (Fig. 23; Güntner 2000, 20–21 [Wagen 15], pl. 4). The figures face each other and probably constitute a hostile confrontation of a sphinx and a man, both with open mouths. Although this could be a specificity of this individual painter, the open mouth could well indicate a warlike interaction between an attacking warrior and the sphinx defending the chariot.

Mimic Expression in Sepulchral Contexts

Let us move on to facial expressions in sepulchral contexts, where we find a series of examples of closed eyes. They mostly occur on gold masks from the Shaft Graves at Mycenae and therefore define them as depicting the dead, instead of reflecting the face of the living (Kopcke 1976; Graziadio and Pezzi 2006; Hristova 2012). On the electrum mask from Shaft Grave Gamma (Mylonas 1972–1973, 76 (Γ-362), pls. 60a, XII; Kopcke 1976, 4–6, pl. 1.1) the closed eyes are indicated by both rows of eyelashes, as is also the case on two masks from Shaft Grave IV (Fig. 24; Karo 1930–1933, 75, nos. 253, 254, pls. XLVII–XLVIII; Kopcke 1976; Dickinson 2005), whereas on the so-called 'Mask of Agamemnon' the closed eyes are only defined by the line separating the closed eyelids (Karo 1930–1933, 121, no. 624, pl. LII; Kopcke 1976, 6–9; Dickinson 2005).

Likewise, an LH III rhyton in the form of a human head in Boston (Fig. 25) shows a bearded man with closed eyes, similar to the considerably earlier metal masks from Mycenae (Vermeule 1988; 1991, 110–112, figs. 23–27; Blakolmer 2004–2005, 60–61, fig. 10). The head is

portrayed as turned upwards and the three painted strokes on each cheek perhaps have to be seen in a sepulchral context. Without any doubt, the closed eyes of this head-rhyton indicate a dead man. A somewhat comparable face with closed eyes and clearly defined nasolabial groove can be seen in the head of a terracotta figure from Vrokastro dated to the Geometric period (Schiering 1964, 13, figs. 15a–b; pp. 15–16; Vermeule 1991, 114–115, fig. 36; Rethemiotakis 1998, 21, no. 11, pl. 75c–d; 2001, 49–50, 52, fig. 52).

Fig. 26: Terracotta larnax from Tanagra (after Aravantinos 2010, fig. on p 114 top).

Perhaps, closed eyes are also indicated in the face of the deceased figure on a larnax from Tanagra (Fig. 26; see esp. Dakouri-Hild 2021, 18–19). In this context it is worth noting that the presumably dead male figure carried by a Minoan 'genius' on his shoulders on a seal-stone from Voudeni exhibits an unspecific face with open eyes (*CMS* V Suppl. IB, no. 153). Since, in Aegean art, the pupil is indicated almost exclusively in the eyes of large-scale heads in mural paintings and occasionally in ivories, we do not know whether the eyes of the singing musician on the Harvester Vase (Fig. 6) are open or closed.

Although in the sepulchral iconography of late Mycenaean Greece, mourning was mostly expressed by gesture (Vermeule 1965, 142–144; Iakovidis 1966; Cavanagh and Mee 1995, 46–50; Hiller 2006, 184–185; Burke 2008; Kramer-Hajos 2015; Vlachou 2018; Dakouri-Hild 2021, 13–17), in a few cases grief, pain, and lamentation were additionally indicated by facial expressions such as an open mouth and possibly also tears, irrespective of the question whether this reflects crying, shouting, or ritual lament of a female (and also male?) mourner.[6] On the Tanagra larnakes of her Group 3, Margaretha Kramer-Hajos defines several figures as "open[ing] their mouths in a wide gash, uttering, it seems, a 'cry of angry grief'", in quoting Emily Vermeule (1965, 132; Kramer-Hajos 2015, 643, 645, fig. 10). In a prothesis scene on larnax 23 from Tanagra, already mentioned above (Fig. 26), at least two of the mourning figures beside the bier with the corpse are depicted with an open mouth (Kramer-Hajos 2015, 645 [larnax 23], fig. 9). A larnax from Tanagra Tomb 16 shows two pairs of mourning figures approaching each other (Aravantinos et al. 2018, 430, 436, fig. 5b); the two opposing figures in the centre have their mouths open. A remarkable figure with a two-handed mourning gesture on the narrow side of another larnax from Tanagra perhaps has its mouth wide open to the temples[7] – apparently a strong physiognomic expression of emotion that led Emily Vermeule to the often-quoted characterisation: "The most charming figure of any larnax […] He is the most discouraged Mycenaean to last beyond the Bronze Age" (Vermeule 1965, 132; Huber 2001, 53). In any case, sepulchral images of Mycenaean Greece were a prominent subject that offered the opportunity to use facial features for describing the special situation and behaviour of distinct figures.

Conclusions

We have to confess that, in Minoan and Mycenaean arts, facial expression did not constitute an elementary and often used iconographic tool. The scarceness of mimic expressions in Aegean iconography is best demonstrated by the fact that, since the discovery of the Harvester Vase at Agia Triada in 1902, no other example has come to light that exceeds the number of seven fig-

6 Although the majority of mourning figures is female, a few exceptions seem to be male. For this discussion, see Burke 2008, 75; Vlachou 2018, 269; Dakouri-Hild 2021, 16–17.

7 Vermeule 1965, 132, no. 8, fig. 3 b; Panagiotopoulos 2007, 207, fig. 4; Kramer-Hajos 2015, 643 (larnax 24), 645, fig. 10. The female sex was attributed to this figure by Dakouri-Hild 2021, 17.

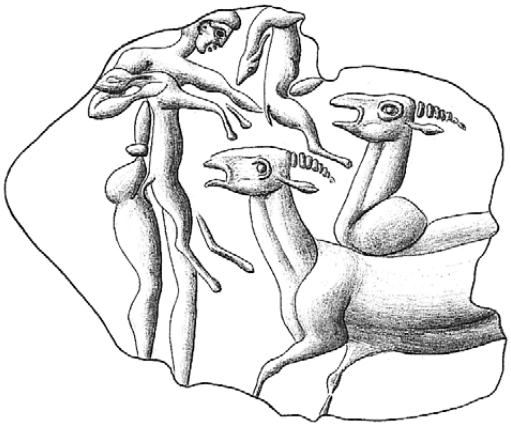

*Fig. 27: Seal impressions from Kato Zakros (*CMS *II 7, no. 30; courtesy of the* CMS *Heidelberg).*

ures with an open mouth in an Aegean image. Nonetheless, the examples of physiognomic expression clearly surpass the character of merely individual cases. Additionally, facial differentiation occurs at all artistic levels and extends from 'high art' through to schematic drawings. We also have to bear in mind that, in Egypt, expressions similar to those on the Harvester Vase can be observed not earlier than during the time of the artistic 'expressionism' of the Amarna period (*cf.* Hornung 1995, 51–53). This makes mimic expressions in iconography a remarkable artistic phenomenon.

With regard to the question of a standardised codification of mimic expressions in Aegean iconography, the relatively low number of examples and the high morphological diversity of the open mouth allow us to assume that individual examples, such as in Late Mycenaean pictorial vase painting and in the somewhat local images of the Tanagra larnakes, were taken from human behaviour, whereas in the more standardised arts of Neopalatial Crete they rather constituted clear-cut artistic formulae. In any case, the development of facial expression seems to correlate with the depiction of nature as well as the behaviour of animals in Neopalatial Crete: the acoustic and atmospheric component in the depiction of the open mouth of animals is expressed in an impressive way on sealings from Kato Zakros (Fig. 27): here two goats are depicted with their mouths open in a highly naturalistic and meaningful manner as protesting against the removal of two bucklings by a man (*CMS* II 7, no. 30).

Mimic expressions were part of the pictorial vocabulary of the Aegean and defined figures in a variety of contexts and situations: different varieties of the open mouth as an indication of verbal communication form by far the majority – speaking, shouting, calling out, wailing and, only sporadically, singing. In a series of examples, the open mouth supports the hand-to-mouth gesture in order to indicate addressing speech or conversation. In the case of isolated figurines, the open mouth of votaries may indicate their addressing the divine, perhaps by saying a prayer. Another pictorial formula for communication was the open mouth of a figure turning its head to another figure in a procession; it could well be that this signifies an uncoordinated shouting. The open mouth may also have constituted a supplementary expression of physical effort of fighting warriors (victors as well as vanquished) and sailors. Closed eyes as an indication of dead men occur in a few special cases of mask-like heads, whereas the open mouth was depicted in a series of late Mycenaean mourning figures. Especially in this last case, emotional attitudes and psychological insight into the character and feeling of a figure became apparent.

With regard to gender, we observe the same facial stereotypes for male and female figures in contexts such as processions and mourning scenes. The common principle in Aegean iconography that women occur approximately as often as men applies also to the occurrence of facial expressions. However, similar to other aspects, male figures with a distinct physiognomy cover a broad range of activities, whereas women with open mouths are confined to ritual and religious subjects (*cf.* Weingarten 2005, 356). In the case of bronze figurines, as far as I can see, only males seem to have an open mouth.

In none of these contexts was the depiction of an open mouth obligatory for the artists in clarifying the context and the situation of a figure. In contrast to that, closed eyes may have formed the primary indicator of a mask-like dead man. Categories such as a positive and a negative mimic expression appear to have been irrelevant: no figure is laughing, or shouting with joy, but several are mourning, probably even moved to tears. In any case, Aegean imagery by no

means presents a speechless and silent realm, although we hardly can reconstruct the words these figures are speaking, shouting, or praying.

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