

Beyond the Alphabet: Communicating in Ancient Greece, c. 1200–500 BCE

University of Heidelberg, 12-14 November 2027

The ‘collapse’ of the Mycenaean world and the disappearance of Linear B around 1200 BCE left the archaeological record with an apparent void lasting some 300 years: writing fell out of use and pictorial art was produced ever more rarely. And yet, when the alphabet was introduced in the Geometric period, it did not enter a vacuum. Rather, it entered a world already saturated with images, gestures and objects that carried meaning: from art—both figurative and non-figurative—to scripts from across the Mediterranean and beyond, conveying messages to gods, the dead, fellow citizens and to strangers passing by.

This conference sets out to explore how people communicated from the end of the Bronze Age until the end of the Archaic period in Greece, moving beyond a logo- and Graeco-centric focus on script alone to consider the full spectrum of visual, material, and literary strategies through which meaning was transmitted. It invites contributions that examine written and non-written (including non-figurative) communication, and that ask how each shaped, competed with, or reinforced the other.

We welcome papers from late-stage PhD candidates, ECRs and senior academics addressing, among others, the following themes:

- **Materiality and media:** which materials were chosen for which types of communication and why? How did the choice of medium shape the message conveyed? How did the material and physical form of an object influence the way script or images were applied, laid out, and understood?
- **Content, purpose and audience:** what kinds of messages were communicated and what can these tell us about the concerns of those who created them? What strategies were used to engage an audience which might range from the fully literate to the barely literate? How were non-local imagery and scripts utilised and what communicative effect was sought through their use?
- **Juxtaposition:** how did images, the non-figurative and the written interact on a single object or monument? Did one medium clarify, complicate, or corrupt the other?
- **Non-literary communication:** how did symbols, images and iconography convey messages independently of text and how did they interact with the world of orality and gestures?
- **Writing and visual narrative(s):** given the cognitive consequences of literacy, to what extent did the ability to read and write (an alphabet) influence the creation of images and visual narratives? Did early Greek communication draw on epic and other literary/oral traditions, and what did such references achieve for their audience? How did neighbouring cultures influence the structures of the Greek visual world?

Each session is expected to last 45 minutes, with 30 minutes allotted to each paper, followed by 15 minutes of discussion. Papers in both English and German will be considered. To submit an abstract, please email the organisers Julia Kretschmer and Elisa Scholz at CIAGconference27@gmail.com with the following: your name, email address, affiliation, paper title, abstract (250-300 words), and a brief scholarly biography. **The deadline to submit an abstract is 11.12.2026.**