You Didn't Have To Be There:
Evidence of Humour in the Creation and Use of Material Objects From the Near East, Eastern Europe and Mediterranean, From the Neolithic to the Middle Bronze Age

MRes Dissertation ● UWTSD ● Ancient Civilisations

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24 September 2024

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DECLARATION
This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for deposit in the University's digital repository**.**

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Abstract

When Malinowski said, "Anthropology is the science of the sense of humour" in 1966, the theories of the study of humour itself were still being developed, and yet he so clearly summarises why it is important to find our shared funny bones. Through humour we gain sympathetic understandings with each other in a way that goes beyond words; indeed humour may have preceded language in our evolutionary development and has been seen in primates. Such longevity of humour suggests it would have been found in pre-literate societies, such as in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age in the Mediterranean and Near Eastern; areas where the marrying of two incongruous ideas can be found in ancient examples of ritual and/or art objects, a thought process facilitated by humour and perhaps even motivated by it. Therefore in this dissertation I seek to identify ancient examples of humour which I will explain and interpret using such theories as 'Benign Violation' by McGraw & Warren (2010) and Apter's 'Reversal Theory' from 1982. My aim is to explain why objects could have been funny and may have acted as powerful social tools, catering to our strong psychological drive to laugh. Drawing upon a number of interactive clay objects from the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age in the East Mediterranean I aim to demonstrate that these objects are perhaps the earliest tangible evidence we have for 'jokes'.

Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank the University of Wales Trinity St David for offering me this opportunity to undertake my research. In particular I am deeply grateful to Professor Louise Steel for helping to foster my interest in the Ancient World, past lives and materialities. I would like to thank the GRAMPUS Heritage Organisation for enabling me to explore and immerse myself in ancient eastern European archaeology. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Petar Minkov of the National Archaeological Institute with Museum, Sofia, who sent me information and images on a much underrepresented object. My deep appreciation to my family, in particular my mum and brother who supported me throughout my studies, allowing me to prioritise this dissertation over many, many days of working for them; I genuinely could not have pursued this so far without you. I very much appreciate my very supportive partner who always encouraged me to put my studies and my passions first, even if it meant spending months apart. I would like to thank Chelston Workshops and Stuart Hopkins for allowing me to play with clay and providing a fun, sociable environment whilst making the ancient reconstructions; hopefully we all gained insight and interest into some of these objects. I enjoyed all feedback and insight from the people there as we muddled through our projects together. Thank you also to the University of Northampton for hosting a conference at which I could first broach my research. I learned so much from hearing how people related to the objects I presented and how everyone had some kind of personal connection to them. I would like to thank my family in general for all supporting and encouraging me in my studies, in particular my late grandma, I know she would have enjoyed hearing about my dissertation, asking to read it and then never actually getting around to it.

Chapter 1: "From There to Here, From Here to There....

We are funny beings, the humerus is a bone in our arm, but *humorous* is something we can be, see, feel and make. People can be funny, words can be funny and *things* can be funny. Words assembled to be funny are often referred to as jokes, such as this:

An ancient Greek goes into a tailor to get his trousers mended. The tailor asks, "Euripedes?"
The man replies, "Yes, Eumenides?"
-Mudie, 2013

But why is this funny, and more importantly can it be explained how it is funny? The first response may be because it works with a double meaning, in particular when spoken."Euripides" sounds like 'you ripped these?', indicating the tailor asking whether the ancient Greek ripped his trousers. The response "yes, Eumenides" sounds like "you mend these?". What at first appears as an exchange of names between a customer and a tailor then becomes an exchange of meaning as to why the man is at the tailor, all in two sentences and in a humorous way. But humour works on many levels. Regardless of the subject of the joke, there are social cues that this is a joke in the simple introductory phrase 'X walks into a Y' and its two-stage deliverance, there is a set-up and a punchline. There is another element here of the suggested embarrassment of one having ripped his trousers, providing an emotionally arousing theme. All of these explain why it is funny even if not everyone finds it so. Appreciation of humour does not negate its existence. Because of the social cues of the joke we know it is to be interpreted as such, so what then do we do when such cues are lost and we are just left with the material? Can we still judge it to be humorous?

The history of humour, when studied, is the history of *written* humour[1] and yet the behaviour is an established part of our repertoire.[2] This may be due to the difficulties of studying humour itself, a topic that is often seen as non-serious and therefore risks making the research appear likewise (Palmer, 1993). It can further be complicated by limitations in identifying and understanding humour. Perception of humour within stimuli can be down to personal taste, we might not therefore be able to understand the humour, even if we recognise its presence. It is this culmination of a disinclination to study a material that is difficult to identify that has left it a relatively untouched area, although within areas such as psychology it is starting to receive more focus. Although even within modern studies, it is not fully understood (Martin & Ford, 2018), difficulty in identifying a joke without such social cues makes it a difficult task within archaeology. A further limitation within archaeology and jokes is the loss of the cultural frameworks that provide the double meaning, for example the knowledge of how '*Euripedes*' is pronounced. All of this therefore justifies why a history of humour only addresses recorded, literary sources that are explicitly humorous, such as the *Philogelos,* otherwise known as the world's oldest joke book (Bremmer, 1997).

If we focus on the details of humorous material, we may thus lose its comic value as the material often communicates cultural attitudes that may not be considered funny external to that culture. This is best demonstrated by the modern day stigma around ancient comic ideas such as the 'buffoon' in Ancient Greece (Bremmer, 1997) or derogatory depictions of foreigners in Ancient Egypt (evident in the rendering of the Queen of Punt from Deir el- Bahri). However Russel (1991) wrote an article about how humour and comedy in Ancient Greece and Rome can also contain similar stimuli that we use now, such as stories of cuckolds and lovers. These concurrent themes in literary humour suggests that the emotional stimulation we get from them to instil humour is still prevalent

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[1] for example, in *A Cultural History of Humour* (Bremmer & Roodenburgh, 1997)*,* the earliest examples come from Ancient Greece, likewise other 'oldest' examples come from 4th Century Ancient Egypt (demonstrated throughout).

[2] In the next chapter I will discuss how we know humour is a universal behaviour and how it can be modelled.

today. Likewise environments for humour change, for example in the upper classes of Ancient Greece, humour was not for everyday life but rather occasions of festivity (Bremmer, 1997), whereas in today's society humour usually occurs in daily conversation (Martin & Kuiper, 1999). Furthermore the stimuli themselves are not always enough to instil humour, but rather how it is presented, there are social cues along with humour. It is a highly social and cognitive process, as such it appears to be impossible to identify beyond clear evidence where we are more or less told something is humorous, in particular within ancient objects where their social lives are obscured by millennia. Indeed the approach to humour itself is rarely undertaken from more than a single academic approach (Palmer, 1993;4). This approach may not be the most effective as I contend humour cannot be understood from isolated examples to which we apply our own understanding of humour. I propose that instead we should understand the psychological models that formulate the perception of stimuli as humorous and use them to scaffold interpretations of material. Palmer (1993) suggested that the studying of humour has to be a multidisciplinary affair, it is in this spirit that I have applied both psychology and anthropology to archaeology to better understand the ancient history of humour.

But first it is worth considering how social enmeshed we are with the material world. To reiterate humour demonstrates complex cognitive thought and demonstrates Theory of Mind (ToM), the foundational process of sympathy by which we acknowledge another person's experience of the world is different to our own and try to anticipate it (Bloch, 2013). The extent of this psychological process that appears to be exclusive to the human mind therefore could be difficult to identify in material objects.

Interpreting objects, especially when their contemporary culture is unavailable and therefore must be supplemented, can be done through anthropology. Such theories as material agency, Entanglements (Hodder, 2014) and even Enchantment (Gell, 1994) effectively explain how objects can be potent players in human lives and hold meaning beyond their practical use. Further theories such as Social Brain Hypothesis (SBH) and Material Engagement Theory (MET) propose that because the material world makes up our environment,

through our inherently social brain it is therefore interpreted with social agency already (Barona, 2021). Furthermore our interpretation is framed by feedback from such materialities, such as physical availability, capabilities and limitations, we are therefore shaped by our own engagement with the material world, enacting MET. Theory of Mind itself is the theory of our minds capable of understanding the minds of others. Therefore even amongst people our 'minds' are not internal but constantly reaching out, reading and responding to its environment; our understanding is coloured by the understanding that others, including objects, can fit within this environment and also be manipulated to perform with this 'external mind', thus influencing the internal mind (Barona, 2021). Therefore the boundary between the social mind and the material world may not be a very defined one, if we are a social species then our perception of our landscapes may have social framing itself, and by extension we may understand objects through such social means. If we therefore understand objects through a social lens, it could be argued that such objects could be made to act socially, such as partaking in or eliciting humour.

Tim Ingold promotes learning through living, learning about something by living with the subject and like it, not merely through observation (Ingold, 2013). Ingold further argues that archaeology is separate from proto-historiography (the reconstructions of everyday life) and instead likens excavation to participant observation, focusing on archaeological excavation as a direct way to confidently enact anthropology in archaeology by placing the researcher in the field as much as possible. In situations where this cannot be done (such as the objects already being excavated, losing its landscape) then I propose that through use of the object, especially when combined with MET, then the object can inform the researcher as to its use, limitations and effect. To incorporate my own research I also looked at Ingold's theories of 'making' and how it has theoretically informed my own reverse-engineered experimental archaeology of reconstructing some objects out clay, as will be discussed later. This would be particularly effective if the object holds strong social agency that plays on inherent mental schema, such as humour recognition and appreciation.

Some of the objects discussed within this dissertation come from auction houses and therefore raise ethical questions as to whether it is right to privately own ancient objects, especially those from other cultures. Further issues include the ethics of profiting from ancient art and problematic biographies, as the antiquities trade often encourages tomb looting and destruction of heritage sites. A final consideration given the current political climate is the Western European procurement and trade of Near Eastern objects. Therefore such objects will be used as supporting examples of a practice seen in other comparable cultures.

This dissertation's primary aim is therefore to establish and apply criteria by which to identify humour in a material record without supplementary literature from their contemporary culture. This has been done by firstly looking to understand the fundamental elements of humour in Chapter 2 through psychological theory and social evidence to signpost how humour is made and recognised as well as why it might be applied. It is these criteria that scaffold interpretations in Chapter 3 of a variety of objects from different ancient cultures and therefore provide insight into how this may expand their social agency; most of these objects deal with engagement with liquids which may affect their interpretation and use. In order to better understand these objects from a materialities and social perspective, a few were recreated and experimented with, which is explored in Chapter 4, providing an opportunity to observe how their use affects interpretation. An overall summary and discussion of future avenues of research is then discussed in Chapter 5 as well as whether humour can be identified within the archaeological material record.

Chapter 2: Funny to the Bone: The Relationship Between Humour and Humanity

Humour is a daily phenomenon: daily because it permeates most conversations and social interactions, phenomenon because no matter how much it is studied, it is never fully explained and understood. Instead over the centuries we have tried to define it and find ways to identify this behaviour. Whether this began with Plato's interpretation of humour and laughter as expressions of superiority (in Philebus, reprinted in Morreall, 1987) or Schopenhauer's sudden perception of incongruity (1909:95) the theories around humour have struggled to fully encapsulate the theory *of* humour. In this chapter I will briefly discuss each of the six main psychological theories of humour as well as why it has remained a constant of the human experience, perhaps before we were even homo sapiens. It is my opinion that by understanding the cognitive mechanisms behind humour we can identify and understand how such objects, as will later be discussed, embody triggers for these mechanisms. That being said, before we discuss how humour works it should first be defined.

What is 'Humour'?

By Freud's definition, 'humour' is benign and sympathetic amusement with the ironic misfortunes of life, if jokes are an action, humour is the passive acknowledgement of the funny (1905). Humour itself is hard to define, its meaning often changing over time and culturally.[3] The modern, psychologically accurate definition is something that induces a mirthful state (Martin & Ford, 2018:3). Further partial definitions of humour can include the symbolic language or affiliations of laughter that can act as a form of social sanctioning (Viana, 2017:2). Koestler defined humour as an "intellectual emotion" (1964, in Viana, 2017), reasoning that through the *bisociation* (a process necessary to humour) of ideas, bodily reactions can be connected to mental activity. However I would like

3 For a more in-depth look into how humour has been defined please see the discussions in the introduction to Martin & Fords book 'The Psychology of Humour'

to extend this definition to include what I will be referring to as 'sympathetic alignment', meaning a process in which we instinctively take on the mental state of the jokester. This method of sharing mirth also works to direct focus and attitudes about and towards a punchline in a way that circumnavigates reason, instead it is done through emotional engagement. I propose that it is through humour that ideas are best shared as it affects directly our emotional and cognitive centres;[4] this extensive involvement is perhaps the fastest way to holistically engage the human mind. Ultimately, however, the experience of humour can include shared joy and mirth as well as a state in which people engage within cognitive play.

We must first understand humour before applying it to the past; we must understand its social significance, its personal benefits that may motivate the production of physical humour material as well as its utilisation. Before it can be assessed however, we should first understand the many ways in which humour works so that such objects can be interpreted with informed understanding of the mechanism behind humour generation and interpretation.

Why We Laugh: Modelling Humour

The development of theories as to how humour works, and indeed why we enact it at all is something that was initially the job of philosophers and then later psychologists. It was first studied with sincerity in the mid 1900s with the first wave of psychology research that resulted in three classic theories, Relief, Superiority and Incongruity. Where these models all have merit in identifying experiences of humour, motivations behind it and aspects of how it works to an extent, it is the second wave of psychological study from the 1980s onwards that provided more effective models for humour. Furthermore, I should note that in the ancient examples I shall be providing, the applicable theories will be from immediate impression, deeper cultural meanings and significant may perhaps enhance humour but may just as likely convolute its appreciation.

4 For a discussion on the efficacy of humour and persuasion see Martin & Ford (2018: 249-255).

Relief Theories

The idea of humour providing a sense of relief has a long history and formed the basis of many models, one of the key ones being Freud's psychoanalytic theory that acted as a foundation for many further psychological studies of humour.

If Freud looked at the psychoanalytic reason behind humour, Spencer explained laughter itself in its physiological effect as a release of built up 'nervous energy' (1911:584). Spencer reasoned that this built up energy is what motivated motor behaviours, beginning with speech and progressing up a behaviour scale that included other expressions such as gesture and laughter (1911). Such a theory explains the link found by psychologists between laughter and relief (such as Shurcliffe, 1968, Morreall 1987), in particular sudden relief such as from a near-accident or perceived threats being rendered harmless; indeed it is this latter one that appears to be a recurrent criterion for making something humorous. However Spencer's theory does not explain all instances of laughter, such as those that do not exhibit behavioural escalation or those that do not involve emotional energy, as noted by Morreal (1987), nor does it help predict what makes something funny. Nonetheless Spencer's relief model has been used in the development of later theories, such as Freud's psychoanalytic model and contemporary Benign Violation Theory.

A key critique of any models of humour being derived from aggression is that Berlyne (1972) found that subjective pleasure and physiological arousal had an inverted-U shaped relationship. The greatest pleasure comes from moderate arousal, too much or too little is unpleasant, this is summarised by Suls (1977), who argued that although subjects laughed at the misfortune of another, it was only if the person violated was either deemed deserving of it (i.e., a generally disliked figure in society, such as a politician). Even then, so long as the misfortune was not too extensive. Nonetheless a long working theory of humour was that some arousal was necessary, and often this was done through aggressive or sexual motifs.

Sigmund Freud was probably the first person to properly study humour as a psychological phenomenon, surpassing previous assumptions that laughter was an expression of superiority (based off of Plato and Aristotle's theories) and as such provided one of the most influential theories on humour. In his 1905

work ‘Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious’ he proposed that laughter-related phenomenon came in 3 forms: Jokes and Wit, Humour and the Comic. Each represents a defence mechanism that allows for the release of psychic energy through laughter, for example the structure of Jokes is such that they allow us to use clever cognitive ‘tricks’ to enable our minds into enjoying the release of primal impulses in a socially acceptable way.

To Freud, humour was found in scenarios where our morally conscious superego was distracted, allowing the primal libido to release its impulses through the joke; this in turn creates pleasure by saving the psychological energy that would have been used in suppressing such impulses. Jokes were therefore made up of the ‘tendentious’: pleasure derived from saving energy on inhibitions, and the ‘non-tendentious’: the method by which the superego is distracted by clever cognitive tricks (Freud, 1905). If we apply this approach to the Westcar Papyrus (16th century BC):

"How do you entertain a bored pharaoh?

"You sail a boatload of young women dressed only in fishing nets down the Nile and urge the pharaoh to go catch a fish."

-(McDonald, 2008)

The tendentious element of this joke is the release of sexual libidinal impulses by the suggestion that the Pharaoh can entertain himself by ‘catching’ a young woman, however it is disguised through the non-tendentious setting in the Nile and fishing nets. Like the women in the joke, the sexual themes are gauzily disguised by fishing innuendo. This distraction or masking of sexual or aggressive elements may explain why they are not always apparent in humorous material but can often be found. Though it should be considered that, especially when viewing ancient materials, humour and our interpretations of it can be highly subjective. It is important to note that Freud provides us with a criterion for identifying humour, highlighting that jokes often contain double meanings thus requiring symbolic thinking (1905). Further to Freud’s identification of humour as a defence mechanism, the pretext of a joke often mitigates harm when the joke comes at another’s expense, assuaging guilt and also minimising one’s blame as it is within a non-serious scenario. However we know that humour cannot be

overtly aggressive, as discussed in Suls (1977). Overly aggressive jokes, in particular to a sympathetic character, actually diminish the enjoyment of a joke as they can no longer be relegated to a fantasy mindset. Ultimately it reveals that during aggressive jokes, humour is enjoyed only when whoever is the punchline is either ultimately okay or may deserve what happens to them; thus proving that even within a joking scenario, we are not immune to guilt, merely the parameters of it are relaxed. Even Freud admits that humour can exist without aggression or sexual elements, what he referred to as 'innocent' or 'nontendentious' jokes, where the pleasure is derived from the joke-work itself (the clever cognitive puzzle), or the regression of the mind's logic to more childlike processes (1905). Indeed the connection between the fantastical and humour becomes later more established with studies into the incongruity of humour. Alas it could be argued that the nature of Freud's approach to the human psyche limited his interpretation of such jokes.

By Freud's definition, 'Humour' is benign and sympathetic amusement with the ironic misfortunes of life, if jokes are an action, humour is the passive acknowledgement of the funny and thus the tension-release function of mirth and laughter's ability to relieve stress (1905). Freud acknowledges humour's agency as a defence mechanism that diverts unpleasant emotions and therefore prevents them from overwhelming people in difficult situations. It thus works as a defence mechanism that not just diverts unpleasant social interactions but also our own processing of negative scenarios. This works to an individual's benefit by allowing them to face situations with a more realistic view of them. This argument is interesting, as we discover with other humour theories (such as the Incongruity-Resolution Model), humour comes from the making sense of the non-sensical. Therefore even if the nonsense is not resolved, it still requires the incorporation of a certain level of unrealistic connections to ascertain its meaning. It is therefore worth noting that Freud considers this a way of maintaining reality even when the process itself requires a deviation from it (1905). It is through this definition that Freud explains how people are able to laugh at their own shortcomings or mistakes; however the definition for humour itself has now become a lot more of an umbrella term for laughter-evoking

phenomenon and therefore his explanation and applications are only relevant within his provided definition.

Finally ‘Comic’ applies to nonverbal sources of mirth, such as comics and physical comedy, which often utilises mental energy in the prediction and anticipation of what is expected to happen and prompts delight when these expected outcomes don’t happen and the excess mental energy becomes superfluous, releasing as a laughter. Freud likens such a release of laughter to that of “the regained lost laughter of childhood” (Freud, 1905:22).

However Freud himself considered his own theories of humour to be a tangent of his main focus of psychoanalysis (Kline, 1977), showing the perpetual attitude towards humour studies, even by the psychologists studying it.

What is worth mentioning in Freud’s work is his drawing of a parallel between joke-work and dream-work, such techniques within joke-work include:

- Displacement, by which emphasis placement can change meanings
- Absurdity when an absurd punchline points out a previous absurdity
- Sophisticated reasoning
- Unification where unexpected unities are pointed out
- Representation by the opposite (which is not irony)
- Reference to the similar, often through allusion to common or previously disclosed knowledge.

The last two ultimately being forms of indirect representation. This list was in no way complete, even by Freud’s own admission (in Kline, 1977:8). Kline (1977:8) comments how dream-work is the transmuted manifested content of an individual’s wish, thus fulfilling libido’s drives and circumnavigating the superego.

We could conclude that from the Freudian perspective that humour is the cognitive puzzle by which latent desires are expressed in a socially acceptable way and unpleasantness disarmed or diverted. Similarly the enjoyment of humour may result from libidinal impulses, however there has been little empirical evidence to support this theory, regardless of any emotional, sexual or aggressive repression, or that through such humour a stimulated individual could find catharsis (Martin & Ford, 2018:45). However sexual and aggressive themes have been proven to be a default theme when generating jokes spontaneously (Ziv & Gadish, 1990) and that directing attention towards tendentious themes in

jokes often reduces the enjoyment of the joke (Gollob & Levin, 1967), suggesting that by doing so depletes the efficacy of the non-tendentious elements. Overall Freud's theory explains an interesting mechanism by which the enjoyment of humour may be explained and provided a foundation from which humour studies could be progressed. It contains many themes that carry over into other theories; however as a solitary explanation is has been difficult to prove and failed to stand the test of time outside of psychoanalytic study. For example, the non-tendentious element of jokes may have more to do with navigating social taboos rather than the release of libidinal impulses, whilst the tendentious elements are relatable to most people (Mulkay, 1988). Perhaps, therefore, what we see in these jokes is the attempt to circumnavigate social rules using key, shared elements of the human experience.

Superiority

The earliest theories on humour come from Plato (428-348BC), who believed that laughter originated in malice and was directed at the ridiculousness in other people (*Philebus,* referenced in Morreall, 1987). They are corroborated by his student, Aristotle (348-322 BCE) who considered comedy to be a parody or imitation of the "species of the ugly" - people believed to be worse than average, cynically conjecturing that comedy presents the worst in people, whilst tragedy presents the better part of people (*Poetics* referenced in Morreall, 1987). This insight into humour, from teacher and student, goes to show how even the *idea* of humour can be influenced by cultural attitudes. The aggressive side of humour is often studied, such as by T. Hobbes (1588-1679), a British philosopher, who argues for its use in the enhancement of self-esteem through disdainful comparison to others. He equated laughter with an expression of triumph over another, a theory often grounded within its potential evolutionary advantage by later theorists. We can even argue that in Freud's tendentious nature of humour, it would be natural for the libido's expression of aggression to be just as concurrent as the other 'primal' drives. No one advocates for the aggressive, superiority cementing role of humour more than Charles Gruner (1997), who called it "playful aggression". It is considered a safe, socially acceptable form of attack as there is no physical harm, and the psychological or emotional harm is

mitigated by the 'just joking' clause. Peter Gray (2014:193) would contend this, "play always requires the voluntary participation of both (or all) partners, so play is always an exercise in restraint and in retaining the other's good will." Therefore what Gruner would call "playful aggression" would have a lot of social constraints in order to maintain its 'playful' nature, otherwise it can quickly become bullying. Gruner's interpretation of humour places its main emphasis of humour as a form of play, basing it off competitive models of the behaviour.[5] This is further evidenced by Gruner proposing that humour must contain a sudden feeling of victory, "it is to win!" (Gruner, 1997:6). The theory itself was heavily influenced by evolutionary views that competitiveness and aggression are apparently innate to humans; it is what allowed us to survive, basing this in the physiology of laughter the Gruner likened to a "roar of triumph" (1978:43). Similar to Relief Theory, Gruner comments on how built up adrenaline and physical energy during a physical or emotional struggle must be expelled upon winning and is done so as laughter, which readily restores homeostasis and simultaneously signalling victory. This highly emotional theory suggests that the loser expels the excess energy through weeping.

Unfortunately this theory can be easily supported by any account of someone experiencing mirth in detriment to another and is seen globally, as commented on by Morreall (1983). It further lends credence to instances of prejudice, as is evident in many cultures, that is expressed through jokes about members of the subject nationality or subculture (Davies, 1990). Gruner also applies the theory to many instances of humour, such as riddles and puns which he equates with ancient "duels of wits", used to display intellectual superiority(1997). Similarly jokes in front of audiences are a way for the listener to share the feelings of mastery with the comedian over the subject of the joke, indeed he considers all jokes as acts of playful aggression "the more hostile the humour, the funnier" (1997:110). This combative nature of humour can be seen in the writings of Cicero, a Roman politician, orator and academic in the first century BCE, who comments on the role of humour in speeches:

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[5] However here I would like to interject that his idea of play is in itself flawed, again as evidenced on how a competitive nature play is subjective to societies and does not exist in some egalitarian hunter-gatherer tribes (Gray, 2014)

'it certainly becomes the orator to excite laughter… it overthrows the adversary, or hampers him, or makes light of him, or discourages, or refutes him'

- (Cicero, De Oratore, 2:236)

Indeed to Gruner aggression was necessary as the true source for all aspects of humour, its generation and appreciation, humour and aggression were mutually exclusive and co-dependent. This analysis, and theory in general, is insistent that humour can be found even in the most innocuous jokes, denoting any lack of evidence as instead subtle, even self-deprecating jokes are expressions of superiority over our past stupidities that belong not to us, but the person we were.

Research into this theory has produced mixed results, especially that aggression is necessary in humour, for which there is little supporting evidence (such as in a study by Ruch & Hehl, 1988). Gruner's response invalidates his own theory as he claims that he can identify aggression in humour (1997), suggesting that perhaps this theory is more a commentary on perception of humour, internal motivation and how personality affects the humour experience. By making himself judge and jury of the aggression in humour, his theory becomes unfalsifiable and derived from an outdated idea of evolution. For example, the silent bared-teeth display and related open-mouth play face in apes are exclusively displayed in friendly social and play activities and never in the context of aggression, such a face is equated with human laughter (van Hooff, 1972), suggesting that the origin of this behaviour is not aggression but rather play. Ultimately, although this theory validates some of the forms of humour and explains how humour may be derived from aggressive or superiority asserting material, it does not fully explain the multifaceted nature of humour, nor does it appropriately incorporate the effect of social contexts on aggressive humour (Gallois and Callan, 1985).

Incongruity Model

The previous theories address one's motivation to apply and perceive humour, but does not effectively model the generation of humorous material itself.

Regardless of previous theories on why we laugh being subjective to societal influences, it is nonetheless a fact that people have always found amusement in the bizarre, even Gruner recognised not all humour contained aggressive motivations, sometimes 'nonsense humour' is precisely that, nonsense. From as early as the 18th century it has been recognised that the sudden perception of incongruity may itself be the cause of laughter (Schopenhauer, reprinted in Morreall, 1987:52; Beattie in Ritchie, 2004). Thus it is when the perception of reality is noticed to be incompatible with our conceptual understanding of reality that one experiences mirth and laughter. This understanding and experience needs to be relatively objective, according to Eyseneck, who comments on the 'sudden, insightful, integration of contradictory or incongruous ideas' producing laughter (1942:307). Again, although humour is not identified, merely its symptom of laughter, we see that the recognition of incongruity, whether just its recognition or puzzling out, generated mirth.

Before discussing this theory further I would firstly like to emphasise what is passingly noted by many and that is the sudden element of humour (such as Schopenhauer reprinted in Morreall, 1987; Eyeseneck, 1942). I shall refer to this as the 'aha! moment', where either incongruity is recognised or resolved. This particular criterion is important for identifying humour in ancient, animatable objects as it is the moment of engagement where humour may occur. Keith-Spiegel (1972) suggests that in jokes, it is the "abrupt transferring from the first frame of reference [of a joke- the setup] to the second [the punchline]" (phrased in Martin & Ford 2018:56). Thus the essence of humour is found in the "simultaneous activation of two contradictory perceptions that is the essence of humour" (Matin & Ford, 2108:56). That being said empirical research has struggled to support this hypothesis with mixed results on whether predictable or surprising jokes were funniest (Kenny, 1955; Pollio and Mers, 1974; Jääskeläinen et al, 2016). Perhaps, then, the nature of the 'aha! moment' is the instinctive element of humour, something innate that is hard to isolate within a controlled study.

It is important to note that incongruity itself contains many components that are necessary for humour but that incongruity alone is not sufficient. For starters the situation must be considered relatively safe, if it was threatening then

the reaction may be of fear or panic, we thus need a ‘humour mindset’. This is achieved by ‘cues’ that set up humorous communication and often activate a conversational attitude of levity (Mulkay, 1988). This humour mindset includes a relaxing of rules of logic and expectations of common sense, one’s information-processing strategies tend not to be applied, as would be done in serious communication (Mulkay, 1988). In later theories such a mindset is labelled *paratelic* by Apter (1982) and associated with a playful, non-goal orientated state of mind. Alternatively this mindset could be characterised as ‘fantasy assimilation’, as opposed to ‘reality assimilation’, the default mental process used in problem solving in daily life; within ‘fantasy assimilation’ reasonable, logical resolutions to incongruous events are not required (McGhee, 1972). What is more, during the fantasy assimilation mindset, the incongruity is not longer a puzzle to be solved but a “game to be played” (Martin & Ford, 2018:95). These cues used to set up the humour mindset encourage the resolution to be considered amusing, suggesting the incongruous material should be interpreted through a non-serious, humour mindset (Rothbart, 1976). The incongruity becomes not a matter of problem solving but rather entertainment and fun. Such cues also reduce the threat of aggressive or disparaging humour, encouraging a playful interpretation (Gollob & Levine, 1967), this idea is applied by Peter Gray to explain how it is used to maintain social correction in egalitarian hunter-gatherer tribes. When presented with a critique in the form of humour, regardless of how it is responded to, the message is ultimately received effectively (Gray, 2014). It was also found that violent behaviour was enjoyed more when presented as humorous and therefore non-serious (Mannell, 1977). Whereas when the violent elements were explicitly focused on, the material was found to be less funny, perhaps because the analysis would require switching back to the “reality assimilation” mindset (Gollob & Levine, 1967). Interestingly the stimulus used for Mannell’s experiment was depictions of animals acting like humans, similar to the Ancient Egyptian satyrical papyrus from Deir el-Medina, made in 1250-1150BCE (fig 2.1).

Fig. 2.1 *Animal Papyrus* (British Museum No. EA10016,1)

Within this papyrus the animals behave like humans, playing games of senet and herding goats and geese. This incongruity is then explained with the animals also acting against their natural roles, with predators *protecting* prey in the role of goat-herds and sitting together playing games like peers.[6] The general idea results in this whole scenario taking place in a “topsy-turvy” world where this is the new natural order (British Museum, N.D), in order for this to be understood, one must then adopt the 'fantasy assimilation’ where this is the case.

Secondly there is an element to solving the incongruity, from which we may derive pleasure; however this is not always necessary for the enjoyment of humour. This was proposed by Shultz (1972) and is called ‘incongruity-resolution theory’; in order for this theory to be applicable the ‘punchline’ of the humour event has to, to an extent, solve the initial incongruity. In this way humour acts as a problem-solving task, however it is the resolution and appreciation of an unexpected or surprising incongruity that produces mirth, rather than the incongruity itself. Incongruity theories in general tend to ignore the ‘tendentious’ content of jokes when present, suggesting they act more to inform the resolution of the incongruity (Suls, 1977). Schultz, when testing this hypothesis, found that

[6] Although the scene is often understood as the Lion winning the game, and then celebrating the win in the bedroom in the next scene, further questioning any ‘natural order’ as understood by the viewer.

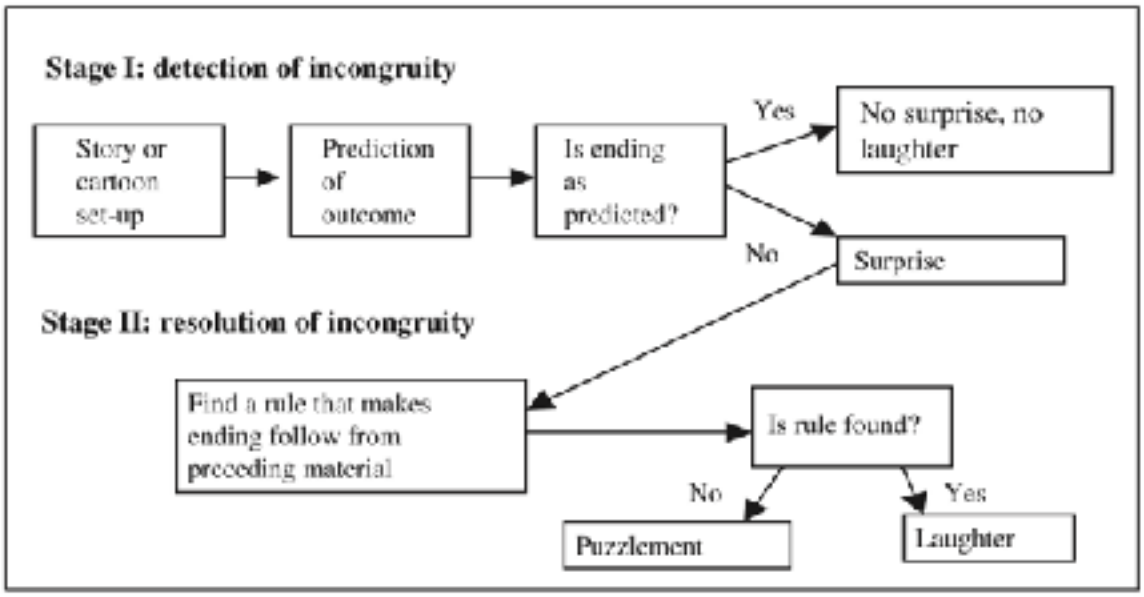

***Fig.* 2.2** *Suls' (1972) Incongruity Resolution Model* (adapted in Martin & Ford, 2018:57)

the details needed to resolve incongruity were often noticed later than the incongruous elements (Shultz, 1974), supporting the idea of a two stage incongruous-resolution model (fig. 2.2). Later studies by Shultz & Horibe (1974) found that incongruity with resolution in jokes is generally found to be the funniest form of humour, followed by incongruity without resolution, with jokes without incongruity the least funny. Similar was found for cartoons and riddles, suggesting incongruity is a central element of humour, regardless of how it is communicated. However the incongruity may be negated by the removal of the resolution (Pien and Rothbart, 1977) and the general humour appreciation may be depleted according to how difficult it is to resolve the incongruity (Pien and Rothbart, 1976). In terms of brain processes, the detection of incongruity has been found to occur very rapidly, *after* which mirth is experienced (Hildebrand and Smith, 2014). In detriment to the incongruity-resolution theory, researchers have also found that the greater the discrepancy or incongruity, the greater mirth is derived (Nerhardt, 1970,1976). Such experiments (Nerhardt, 197) also benefited from using weight discrepancy from expectation to reality, avoiding verbal cues and literary based humour, thus such a theory may be more applicable to ancient material objects as stand-alone bodies of humour. This experiment also proved that resolution is not necessary for eliciting humour, though perhaps the ascertaining of the object's true weight was in itself a form of resolution. What was proved by such experiments, however, was the necessity of

instilling a playful frame of mind or humour mindset before humour can be experienced.

Overall, incongruity has been recognised as a fundamental part of humour; however its exact function within the mechanism has yet to be agreed on as resolution is not always required to derive amusement. Although the highly personalised influence on the perception and appreciation of humour may explain why it is hard to find a one-size-fits all explanation for how and why humour works, rather we can just identify working elements. After all, incongruity has been treated as separate from social contexts that often frame the humour experience, the removal of the humorous material from its context may increase initial puzzlement at the incongruity, delaying or reducing derived amusement (Norrick, 2003; Wyer & Collins, 1992). This can be partially mitigated by invoking the "humour mindset", ("did you hear the one about….") which in turn often makes listeners more actively involved in expecting incongruity.

Contemporary Theories

The increase in 'positive psychology' since 2010 has led to all of these classical theories being revised, reworked and expanded upon to try and improve their explanatory capacity. This has partially been done by conducting research to answer narrower questions related to the humour experiences, by breaking it up into the many to explain the whole. From this revival three main contemporary theories have emerged: Reversal Theory, Comprehension-Elaboration Theory and Benign Violation Theory. It is important to reiterate that although the mechanisms of humour may be recognisable, humour itself remains subjective and therefore the specific triggers cannot always be predicted.

Reversal Theory

Reversal theory was proposed by Michael Apter in 1982 as a general theory to explain how personality and motivation may provide a framework by which humour can be explained. The fundamental tenet of which is the assumption that

people fluctuate between two motivational states ('meta-motivational states'): the telic and the paratelic state.

In the *telic* state, people are serious, sensible, task orientated and often focused on the future, they are conscious of their behaviour (Apter, 1982, 1991). When people are in the *paratelic* state they are more spontaneous and playful, the focus of their attention is on seeking excitement and fun within the present. Apter suggests that the perception of pleasure is affected dependent on whichever state a person is in and in turn affects the preference for arousal levels. He proposed that during the *telic* state, people prefer low arousal levels, remaining relaxed or calm, alternatively when in the *paratelic* state people prefer to feel higher levels of arousal, as experienced through excitement and fun, and may seek to increase their arousal (1992). High arousal when in the *telic* state is experienced as anxiety and is unpleasant whilst low arousal in the *paratelic* state is not sufficiently stimulating and thus results in boredom.

This also has a snowball effect as people within the *paratelic* state often seek activities that increase their levels of arousal, as such they may engage more in humorous activities. Indeed humour may be very effective in transitioning from *telic* to *paratelic* states as it contains cues within them and their social contexts that prompts a person to adopt a *paratelic* state of mind and increase the arousal that the person within that state will feel (Berlyne 1972; Gray and Ford, 2013). This would explain why there are often emotionally arousing elements within humour as embodied in sexual and aggressive themes (the tendentious elements as Freud would label them), these enhance the arousal making the joke appear funnier. It also explains why, when in a *telic* state, the same themes are not considered funny. Indeed it was found that people who are more likely to be in the *paratelic* state at any given time are also more likely to laugh and smile more frequently as well as perceive humour in an environment and utilise it to manage stress (Martin, 1984). Further experiments have proven the efficacy of humour material in inducing the *paratelic* state in typically *telic* people and that the more such a state was induced, the funnier the material is perceived (Svebeck and Apter, 1987). This inducement of the *paratelic* state can be achieved by pre-modelled openings to a humorous scenario, the most timeless classic being the "X walks into a bar….", a motif so effective it has been

in use for thousands of years, as demonstrated by the following joke from 1700BCE:

> *"A dog walks into a bar and says, 'I cannot see a thing. I'll open this one.'"*[7]
>
> *-Sumerian Proverb, Nippur, c. 1900-1600BCE (Russel, 2022)*

This theory does not negate the incongruity model, in fact it suggests the involvement of cognitive synergy between the two contradictory stimuli. Cognitive synergy does not resolve the incongruity but rather achieves a form of *'bisociation'* (Koestler, 1964) where the meaning of both stimuli remains, one is not negated by explaining the other. Apter consider that this synergy also occurs within creativity, such as artistic expression and the enjoyment of aesthetics, the only difference between that and humour is that within humour the secondary stimulus is diminished from the first interpretation (2013). This diminishment is thought to be necessary for the incongruity to be funny, which may be why disparagement humour in Superiority Theories may be appealing. However disparagement does not necessitate aggression, rather it can just be the rendering of something as more mundane than assumed and therefore induces a shift to the *paratelic* state of mind (Apter & Desselles, 2012). Within this theory it is believed that the punch line of a joke creates multiple incompatible interpretations and that humour is perceived funnier the more of such associations are created within a short period of time. It was found by Mio and Graesser (1991) that this cognitive synergy where the first interpretation is diminished by the second is necessary to the humour experience.

Context also plays a key role in a humour event and Apter recognises that humour can occur in a broad range of social contexts. Reversal Theory suggests that within such contexts, cues are presented for people to adopt a *paratelic* humour mindset. This thus frames how such an event is interpreted allowing them to experience humour, making enjoyable what might be otherwise be seen as inappropriate. The theory also explains how pleasure is derived from nonsense humour where there is no specific humour content to reinterpret, rather

[7] Although not a direct translation, this one adheres more to the colloquial opening of modern jokes, thus adhering more closely to its semantic integrity.

it is the reinterpretation of the humorous context as mundane or trivial that invoked mirth (Wyer & Collins, 1992).

To conclude, this theory has incorporated some of the ideas of the classical humour theories but expanded them into a more applicable theory that also explains the role of personality and motivation in the humour experience. It also explains the role of emotional aggregates such as sexual or aggressive themes in humour as emotional stimuli that are nonetheless experienced in a playful frame of mind. The evocation of the *paratelic* state is in itself a motivation to generate and seek humour as the mind-frame allows for the enjoyment of play. The theory also provides an explanation for how humour can be used to cope with stress (Svebak & Martin, 1997). Perhaps by inducing a *paratelic* state, problems that would otherwise cause stress are experienced as challenges to be met in a playful way, they are therefore no longer deemed serious threats (Martin, Kuiper, Olinger & Dobbin, 1987). Similarly, the diminishment utilised in Reversal Theory may also be applicable to reframing anxiety causing events so that they appear less stressful (Kuiper et al. 1993). Reversal Theory explains how the overlap between play, humour and creativity, as an incongruous narrative in play, often leading to unexpected interpretations and problem solving (Martin and Ford, 2018:80). However this theory does not explain how difficulty in comprehending events in humour elicitation occurs (Wyer & Collins, 1992) and it does not completely describe the cognitive processes of humour, although the latter is not entirely necessary within this research. It is nonetheless an effective theory in explaining how an event, such as those around the interactive objects, can instil a *paratelic* frame of mind and thus cause a humorous event and may likewise be socially desirable.

Comprehension-Elaboration Theory

Wyer and Collins (1992) developed the ‘Comprehension-Elaboration Theory’ to extend Reversal Theory and Incongruity-Resolution Theory to better communicate the cognitive mechanisms involved in the interpretation and reinterpretations of stimuli whilst adding the cognitive process (elaboration) to explain how humour is derived from it.

Comprehension comes from the initial interpretation of the stimulus event, this is often based off one's preexisting knowledge structures (schemas), from which we organise knowledge and form expectations, a process largely done by the subconscious (Mandler, 1979:263). These internally constructed schemas are used to fill in missing details and form expectations about potential outcomes, knowns as ‘scripts’ (Abelson, 1981; Schank and Abelson, 1977), which are often also informed by the scenario in which they occur. These scenarios inform expectations so that when concepts are introduced that requires knowledge external to the activated ‘script’, incongruity occurs and elaboration is needed to make sense of it (Wyer & Collins, 1992). The theory also suggests that the amount of humour one experiences is a result of this comprehension process, dependent on the degree to which the event is diminished in importance by the reinterpretations and the type and amount of cognitive elaboration generated in response to this reinterpretation (Wyer & Collins, 1992). Finally the comprehension of the humour event must be relatively easy to understand, if the comprehension is too difficult, the satisfaction of understanding it is negligible and pleasure cannot be derived (Wyer & Collins, 1992). In agreement with Apter, the diminishment of the critical feature of first interpretation must occur, this is done through trivialisation which initiates the perceived funniness, however the extent of it is dependent on the extent of elaboration used for comprehension (Wyer & Collins, 1992). Elaboration requires the activation of schemas to generate interpretation beyond the given stimulus, within the case of a humour event, these elaborations are typically generated consistent with humour-relevant schemas. Such elaborations can either be self-generated or prompted by others with these externally prompted elaborations still eliciting humour in the same way as the self-generation ones (Wyer & Collins, 1992:676). Such a method of humour instigation can be seen in one of the three satirical papyruses from Ancient Egypt, this one showing rats or mice being served by cats.

The papyrus (fig. 2.3), from Tuna el-Gebel, is incongruous but in a way that makes sense by, again, obviously inverting the prey-predator dynamic. Cats, who are renowned predators of mice and rats, are depicted not only serving the rodents, but one is even seen carrying the child of the rat in a role of servitude and protection. Through comprehension-elaboration, our previously internalised

Fig 2.3. *'Satirical papyrus depicting a rat being served by cats'. Ca. 1550-1069 BCE.* (The Egyptian Museum Cairo (EMC)

schema of 'cat hunts rat' is turned topsy-turvy, introducing incongruence and forcing us to elaborate the logic of this inverted world, perhaps through the changed power dynamic being communicated through servitude rather than hunting. There is a further social incongruity that the rats are 'foreigners' whereas the cats are 'Egyptian', therefore locating the social power outside of Egypt, a contradictory message to most Egyptian art (EMC, 2022). Through it all we perhaps forget the most apparent incongruence of animals acting like people, although in the figurative world of Ancient Egyptian art, where all gods have animal embodiments, this may not be such a bizarre image. Regardless the only way to make sense of this image to accept an 'opposite-world' schema where the relationships are intact, if reversed, the cat and the rats are still interrelated, but the power dynamic is inverted.

The benefit of the elaboration part of this theory is that it explains why amusement can be and is found in everyday events. Despite the absence of incongruity at the time of the event, within this theory it is the events themselves that are elaborations on past reinterpretations. Secondly it explains why some repeated jokes can still hold comedic value despite the lack of surprising incongruity or new reinterpretations, this is because of what Wyer & Collins (1992) referred to as 'elaboration potential'. Elaboration potential in jokes means that people can generate many humour-relevant thoughts in response to them, therefore jokes with high elaboration potential may still be considered funny

despite many repetitions, as new material may still be generated. Importantly they also propose that too much difficulty in comprehending the event can diminish reinterpretation and therefore how much mirth is derived, whereas moderate difficulty is needed to be perceived the most funny (Wyer & Collins, 1992). Moderate difficulty is needed to enable people to feel more challenged, therefore any 'success' in the reinterpretation would be rewarding, however too much difficulty may result in an unsuccessful reinterpretation or understanding from which to generate elaborations. Likewise too little or too much difficulty to comprehend would likely fail to generate significant humour-related elaborations.

This theory has had mixed support from empirical research, suggesting more is needed (as discussed in Martin & Ford, 2018:84-87). However its ability to more extensively describe a cognitive processes underlying humour experiences from different types of stimuli makes it a promising theory. In a more anthropological theoretical sense, I propose the person enters into a 'conversation' with the humour prompt, generating their own input (elaboration); it is important to remember that the goal of this *paratelic* interaction is 'play', thus demonstrating the stimulus' agency to act as a conversational partner and instil a paratelic state in its beholder.

Benign Violation Theory

What has been previously suggested, but not directly addressed by incongruity theories, is explored by Warren and McGraw (2015) and the rendering of the incongruity as harmless. As previously discussed the joke or humour event must be rendered safe, it cannot be a direct attack on sensibilities but rather it must be immediately recognisable as humorous and therefore allowing us to enter the *paratelic* state so as to enjoy it. But how is this done? According to Warren and McGraw (2015), the incongruity acts as a 'violation' that is mutually 'benign' and therefore harmless. This theory is therefore more applicable than incongruity as it addresses instances where the incongruity is not resolved and yet from which humour is still derived. It also provides a better criteria for distinguishing things that are funny from those which aren't, considering that 'incongruity' as a criteria can be applied to many, non-humorous experiences.

According to Benign Violation Theory, humour begins with the perception of the violation, a stimulus that can seem threatening or wrong (Veatch, 1998), either to ones safety, dignity or social norms, in short, ones views on how things should be, it is thus not just unexpected but some form of threat. The experience of negative emotions is then avoided by aids to the interpretation that renders it harmless, allowing the person to then perceive the stimulus as both a violation and benign simultaneously. This collective *bisociation* is thus necessary for the perception of humour, what may be referred to as 'the sweet spot'. The defusing of the stimulus to a benign state can be achieved if the circumstances or collective values simultaneously justify the violation as acceptable. For example if the norm being violated is not significant itself or if there is enough psychological distance from the self (McGraw and Warren, 2010; Warren and McGraw, 2015). If we take the example of the Sumerian Joke:

"*Something which has never occurred since time immemorial: a young woman did not fart in her husband's lap.*"

-Sumerian Proverb/Joke, 1900BCE (McDonald, 2008)

The violation, the fart in a person's lap, is not directly violatory towards us, we are not the husband, thus the distance from the subject of the joke makes such a violation benign. Such strategies by which these criteria are met can be done in two ways, as proposed by McGraw and Warner (2014), either the mundane can be escalated into violations or the by deescalating the seriousness of violations by presenting them in a way that minimises their gravity, thus achieving a benign state. Within the Sumerian proverb, I propose that it is initially the latter, with the fart happening to someone else in a hypothetical scenario. That being said there is a second dimension to this joke provided by time that this ancient proverb rediscovered in a modern age is ultimately about flatulence, humanising our perhaps revered ideas of the past. This theory benefits from being able to reduce all forms of comedy and humorous material to the same general cognitive-perceptual experience, providing perhaps the most applicable, universal theory for humour.

Overall this theory is a strong explanatory tool for most humour-experiences, including such events as tickling which is often disputed as to its nature as humorous. It also links the preceding of humour with its consequences, something usually considered independent (McGraw et al. 2012). The transformation of the unpleasant or threatening into benign experiences generating humour explains why humour is used in lots of positive interpersonal and personal experiences. Furthermore the theory allows for personal subjective perception and interpretation of the stimuli whilst still explaining the working mechanism of the event itself. This theory does not explain all humour experiences, such as puns (Hurley et al. 2011) where the comprehension-elaboration theory may be more applicable, therefore in the overall study of humour, it is best to apply models to relevant stimuli, especially as none of them are mutually exclusive.

What came first, humour or the *homo sapien*?

The evolutionary foundations of humour are still being debated and researched to this day, with researchers (such as Viana, 2017; Polimeni & Reiss, 2006; Storey, 2003; Billig, 2005) quibbling its origins as being distinctly human or even older; perhaps with its foundations in shared ancestors with other great apes nearly 14 million years ago (Dawkins, 2004). It is impossible to ascertain specific origins for what is considered a uniquely human behaviour when quasi-humour behaviour is being identified in non-human apes. Therefore it is not identifying the root of humour that is important but rather how it has accompanied, influenced and facilitated the evolution of the modern human mind, both socially and cognitively. In summary, it is apparent how humour is intrinsically human and laughter an instinctive behaviour.

The Social Role of Humour

Humour permeates our lives, in particular our social interactions and this may be because laughter, a signifier of humour, has its roots in social grooming. With the expansion of hominid group sizes, the much needed social cohesion provided by

physical grooming had to be expedited. Dunbar (1993) has proposed that this was done through language as a tool for social grooming. If we consider laughter as a signifier as humour, the first instance in which humour may have been used was to evoke laughter, with later connotations being developed, then such a behaviour can be likened to the 'open-mouthed' display demonstrated by primates during play (Van Hooff, 1972). Therefore, perhaps the original function of humour was to instil a play mindset, or rather mirthful mindset when pertaining to humour, in others as well as a display of an individual's willingness to play; demonstrating a physical application of Apter's *telic* & *paratelic* states in the Reversal Theory (Apter, 1982). This behavioural triggering of a shared, mirthful state proves that humour can be used for sympathetic alignment whereby individuals not only take on a shared physical but also mental state, that of being playful, with the associated relaxations of logic and social rules (Mulkay, 1988).

There are many reasons a mirthful mindset may be desirable. For starters laughter can be seen as the 'feel good' emotion, it has physiological effects on the brain, manipulating serotonin and dopamine and can release endorphins (Yim, 2016), making it the literal 'feel good' emotion. It has further been suggested that laughter in social grooming releases endogenous opiates (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002) and therefore we may have a physical drive to achieve this, often through humour if we consider its primary function to be the evocation of laughter. In turn such release of opiates has been theorised to increase pain tolerance and manage stress (Zweyer et al., 2004; Nevo et al. 1993; Lefcourt, 2001; Lefcourt & Martin, 1986). It has also been proposed that a playful or humorous mindset may increase the efficacy of persuasion through the *peripheral route,* a route that relies on heuristic cues such as the likability of the communicator (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). However evidence of this does not draw consistent proof (as reviewed by Eisend, 2009, 2001; Gulas & Wienberger, 2006; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992).

That being said, the other roles of humour within humanity are often seen as more nuanced and rooted within deeply social environments, reflecting the duality of the role of laughter itself. Explained as *duchenne* and *non-duchenne*, laughter has been categorised into the genuine expression of joy, associated with playful mindsets, that is emotionally driven an often involuntary (*duchenne*),

and a form of social punctuation, often being used strategically (*non-duchenne*) (Ekman, Davidson & Freisen, 1990). Likewise humour has a dual role socially, it can be the social lubricant, its "glue character" (Viana, 2017:9) helping to form and maintain relationships but also a form of social sanctioning, often with the latter being done through ridicule and mocking. Indeed it is proposed that the humour that accompanies *non-duchenne* laughter is a later progression from *duchenne* laughter rooted in primal play and mirthful interactions (Gervais & Wilson, 2005). Likewise this utilisation of social, persuasive *non-duchenne* laughter is linked with the critical and mental control of social contexts (Viana, 2017:7) which may have been facilitated by this joint evolution with extended empathy (as we see in Theory of Mind) (Tomasello, 2008; 2014). Social sanctioning through humour is perhaps best summarised by Peter Gray's assessment of its use in hunter-gatherer tribes, where humour is used to address undesirable behaviours, he argues that regardless of how the critique is responded to, it is nonetheless effectively received and has a higher chance of being acted on (2014:207). We can therefore see how humour started and continued to be a central element of communication within humanity.

Incongruency, Humour, Language and the Foundation of Humour

So how does incongruence first emerge in humour? There are two theories that might explain this, one is that it is through the juxtaposition of "quasi-agression" enacted through play (Butoskaya & Kozintesv, 1996) that mimics Benign Violation Theory, where there is supposed harm and threat but it is never serious. Alternatively but similarly, early laughter call's may have co-optated with the "false alarm theory" (Ramachandran, 1998), by which a perceived threat is then communicated as non-serious, again resonating with Benign Violation Theory. It is thus-wise that incongruity may be introduced to cognitive patterns and associated with arousal-followed relief, if not pleasure, in a way that may have encouraged its development.

The ability to manipulate the type of laughter expressed co-optated with the development of articulate language. If we consider the first voluntary control of breathing as origin of language (exhibited through laughter and sobbing) (Deacon, 1997), then the consequent developments into more refined, explicit

expressions as we recognise today succeeded laughter and potentially humour (Viana, 2017). As previously explained, incongruity is a central element to the functioning of humour, the ability to hold two discordant ideas and manipulate an individuals reasoning to make sense of the source is argued to be the cause of mirth (Koestler, 1964). However it is this level of symbolic thinking that is theorised to be linked with language development as well as the origins of language itself (Gervais & Wilson, 2005). It is through laughter and humour we see the marrying of the biological, social mind, and the complex, cognitive processes we associate with the modern mind. That being said, laughter precedes language and therefore it can be assumed that early forms of humour, done through imitation & exaggeration, may have done so as well, as best evident by that fact that “one does not need words to convey humour” (Polimeni & Reiss, 2006:359).

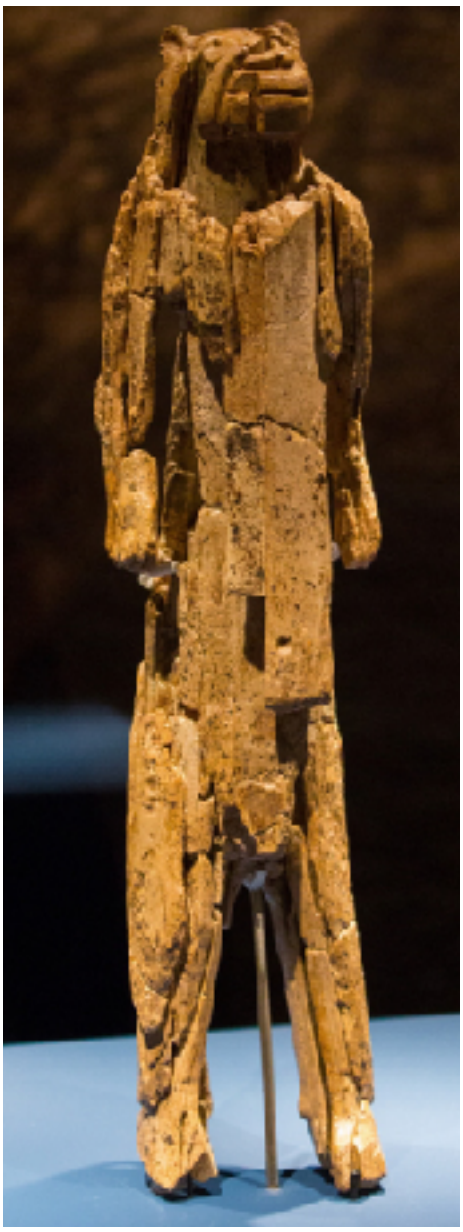

Fig. 2.4 *The Lion Man* (Museum Ulm)

Perhaps the evidence that humour does not need language can best be demonstrated by comedic exaggerations of facial expressions and similar pantomiming as evidenced in slapstick comedies. This is reflected in the development of humour in children, often assumed to be a direct comparative reflection of the evolution of humour behaviours within humanity, which often is exhibited through mimicry of parents and caregivers (Shultz, 1976, 1997; Apte, 1985). Humour and language may be interrelated, but neither is dependent on the other, rather both share their origins in social interpersonal behaviours (rather than problem solving) and the interpretation/reinterpretation of symbolic prompts. This relationship between symbolic thinking and prompts overlaps with early

evidence of ritual. After all both require the figurative reinterpretation of stimuli (Boyer, 2001). This is best, and earliest, evidenced by the Ice Age 'Lion Man', a figurine carved with the body of a human male and the head of a lion (Fig. 2.4). Such an object is often interpreted as the first material representation of a god, an embodied spirit or some other personification of a more-than-human idea (Mithen, 1996); however Polemni & Reiss (2006) convincingly argues that this could just as likely be perceived as the first 'joke' by marrying two incongruent concepts within a single material object. Just as much as we are tempted to associate the lion with strength, ferocity and perhaps therefore protection, this is also from a time when they represented fairly immediate danger to humans. Therefore marring the predator to a human body creates a similar dichotomy to that seen in the rat/cat papyrus (fig. 2.3). This difficulty in distinguishing humour from ideology (and indeed ritual) will be forever present when bizarre objects cannot be identified correctly by their contemporary cultures.

The complex cognitive thought required to perceive, process and understand humour may have been an indicator of mental fitness and therefore considered a desirable trait in chosen mates (Miller, 1998, 2000, 2007). Such an evolutionary driven theory is corroborated by studies into humour and attraction (such as by Li et al, 2009) that have found an overall positive correlation between the perceived funniness of an individual and how attractive they are considered. Even within non-romantic interactions, expressions of humour has been found to make individuals considered more likeable (Mettee et al. 1971; Sherman, 1988) and is often enacted upon meeting strangers. There are three instances where humour is utilised to bridge social gaps has been noticed by anthropologists. The first instance is when the anthropologists Schulze (1891) and later Chewings (1936) first interacted with an aboriginal tribe in Australia, where both parties made joking remarks and laughed. This instance also provides us with a minimum threshold for when humour evolved as the group had been genetically isolated for at least 35,000 years. It also demonstrates that humour is universal both geographically and perhaps temporally (O'Connell & Allen,1998). Secondly we have Apte's study into 'joking relations' (1985) whereby he discovered that within certain communities, the more distant to the family nucleus one is, the more likely they are to be the subject of jokes, with the trend being towards 'in-

laws'. Finally, there are the parallels Gray drew between the bonobos, who lived in bands where the females left to find mates, and hunter gatherers (2014:197). Through this comparison he notes how the females of this species were more playful and that this may have been used to expedite forming strong intense social bonds. Likewise humour, as a form of social play, can be similarly used to form bonds which may facilitate a group's acclimation and cohesion within hunter gatherer societies, where members are free to leave and join bands at will.

As previously, briefly discussed, laughter and therefore humour have their origins in ancient calls of the Great Apes with early laughter and potentially the 'false alarm' call, preceding *homo sapiens*. Overtime this behaviour became increasingly rooted in social exchanges, in particular this 'grooming' that lead to speech (Dunbar, 1993). Humour as it developed therefore had a correlational relationship with complex cognitive thought. The root of this behaviour may have been within the social aspect of human lives, but its refinement into the recognisable behaviour of today required extensive cognitive processes, multifaceted applications and permeates almost every aspect of our daily lives.

Conclusion

This chapter has summarised some aspects of the past and current research into the psychology of humour, a field that is increasingly growing with more disciplines adding to the literature every year. That being said it acts as a comprehensive foundation from which to scaffold our understanding of humour, how it works through incongruity, benign violation and the arousal of emotions, often with sexual or aggressive themes. It also provides insight into why humour is not only important but also very common in daily lives, in particular how it is a universal behaviour, something particularly applicable when looking at ancient, distant lives. It is worth noting, however, that despite these models being tested and proven to different extents, they do not account for abnormal psychology wherein people may not respond to the same stimuli or be able to perceive humour at all, often due to psychopathologies (such as schizophrenia, see Polimeni & Reiss, 2006b). Therefore although humour has been proven to be universal, accounting for abnormal psychology means some individuals must be

exempt, creating the dichotomy of ‘humour is everywhere, but not everyone will laugh’. This is also true if one cannot understand the joke, as summarised in comprehension-elaboration theory, although because of such social cues and the general structure of humour, it can often be identified almost instinctively, regardless of understanding (see Hildebrand and Smith 2014 study on incongruity recognition). It is therefore likely that when humour can be identified, it is because there are humorous elements. Furthermore the social applications of humour are extensive, it is a safe way to broach new topics, taking place in a protected atmosphere where the ‘seriousness’ of subjects is flexible. It has many physiological effects, relaxing ones social and logical boundaries, releasing ‘feel good’ endorphins and is also a contagious behaviour, promoting group cohesion on an instinctive level. Within our own development, both evolutionarily and from childhood, humour understanding and production is closely linked with our own understanding and ability to form complex, figurative thoughts, it has been a close cognitive companion since before we even had the language to write dissertations on it.

Humour is therefore a universal construct, however there needs to be criteria for 2 types of humour: immediate socially driven and premeditated, executed humour (banter and the joke), similar to Duchenne and non Duchenne laughter. Material objects and visual representations of humour strictly would then be from the second type as physical manifestations of jokes that may encourage the former humour behaviour, however the primary drive may inform the *making* of such objects. Through the studying of the psychology of humour, I believe it is possible to understand the general mechanisms of its working and therefore identify these physical jokes with such criteria as:

- Incongruity
- Reduced violatory ideas
- Superiority-enforcing ideas (in particular the making of others into ‘fools’)
- Aggressive or sexual themes
- Elaboration potential for humorous scenarios

Through its application to anthropology we can further add the criteria of frameworks to assist in this identification, in particular ‘social objects’, through their agency in their contemporary societies.

Chapter 3: Identifying Humour in Archaeology: Carved Clowns and Clay, the First 'Jokesters'

Not all jokes made have to be verbal. In modern times we might recognise these physical jokes as 'novelty' items, embodied incongruities such as googley-eyed 'pet rocks' and rubber ducks, the inanimate anthropomorphised. However humans have been making material culture long before the invention of the rubber duck and therefore ancient 'joke' objects may be an overlooked part of archaeology. Objects can be highly social. They can act as social agents (Gell, 1998) and throughout their biographies (Kopytoff, 1986), their enmeshment with human interaction and observation means their semantic frameworks are limitless (Hodder, 2014). So how can this be narrowed down into definitive 'funny objects'? To clarify by jokesters,[8] I mean something primarily intended to be used for humour, to enact a humorous scenario or to prompt a mirthful response. Because all the objects looked at are from periods of prehistory there is little to no contemporary literature and limited cultural information to allow us to understand the humorous scenario fully. As such we need to establish criteria for identification and understanding of humorous objects; these can be provided by multiple disciplines. As discussed in Chapter 2, it has been demonstrated that the psychological mechanisms triggered to elicit mirth require the following:

- Incongruity
- Reduced violatory ideas
- Superiority-enforcing ideas (in particular the making of others into 'fools')
- Aggressive or sexual themes
- Elaboration-potential of humorous scenarios

[8] 'Jokester' itself means someone who makes jokes, in this regard it is more applicable to *something* that can make a joke.

The anthropological and archaeological criteria focus on the social and material aspects of these objects, this includes:

- ‘Social objects’ which can be identified using such archaeological information as find contexts, social significance (such as whether such objects are seen in feasting scenarios or rituals) as well as their ability to ‘act’ within a social setting
- Lack of symbology - some animals and objects appear to be closely linked with ritual or have strong symbolic connotations, as such their humorous agency may be less likely, *unless* humour can be part of that ritual.
- Does the amount of effort expended on the creation or understanding of the object negate its humorous potential? We associate frivolity with humour - because of the protected atmosphere it provides (‘I was only joking’). We tend to take humour and therefore humorous material less seriously, supported by comprehension elaboration-theory, a joke cannot be too hard to ‘get’ and be funny. Likewise it should be considered whether the object was too difficult to ‘make’ and how this would affect a humorous interpretation.

Further criteria comes from the comedy documentary episode ‘Visual Comedy: a Lecture by Rowan Atkinson, MSc (Oxon)’ (‘Laughing Matters’, 1992) on the comedy of physical objects, these are:

- An object can be funny by behaving in an unexpected way
- An object can be funny by being in an unexpected place
- An object can be funny by being the wrong size

A final criteria is one added by myself, based of the need to recognise an incongruity within a certain amount of time, what has been referred to as:

- The ‘Aha’ moment

Ultimately humour by its nature is multifaceted and therefore its application can be multifaceted too, therefore there may be multiple criteria triggered within the same object.

Forever the Fool: Superiority humour in ancient art in the Harvester Vase

The making of any object has two main influences: the creator and the intended audience. Therefore when considering making depictions of comedy it is important to consider where the humour originates from, whether it is the creator's humour or the audience's. The two may be mutually inclusive, the artist may find mirth in making the funny-object for the viewer, just as a viewer may notice the creator's humour at work and likewise experience mirth. The nature of the humour may also be subtle, perhaps an addition that results in the humour being overlooked to explain the bigger picture. I believe that such an addition may explain the scene of the 'fallen man' on the Minoan stone rhyton, the Harvester Vase (fig. 3.1).

Fig. 3.1 *Harvester Vase (AE 184), a stone rhyton from the Neopalatial Period, found at Agia Triada, Crete. The surviving section stands at 10.1cm but would have been 18cm tall originally* (pictured in German, 2018)

The Harvester Vase was found in Room 4 in the Minoan Agia Triada villa, near Phaistos, Crete, although it is believed to have initially inhabited the upper floors, along with other prestige objects and dates to around the Neopalatial period (c. 1600-1450BCE) (Watrous, 1984:126). It would have been 18cm tall and 11 cm in diameter, based off reconstruction from its remaining fragment (which is

Fig. 3.2 *The scene from the Harvester Vase, featuring no fewer than 27 male figures* (Brouwers, 2019)

10.1cm tall), carved from black steatite with a hole at the base for 'pouring libations' (Brouwers, 2019). It is carved in bas relief where the images are carved around to make them stand out of the surface. This is a more visually responsive method and requires more skill, despite the relative softness of soapstone. It is not just the work intensive material of this object that makes it an elite object, but what the shape of it refers to: an ostrich egg rhyton (Archaeological Museum of Heraklion, Kelder, 2018, German, 2018). Such rare and exotic rhyta were made from hollowed ostrich eggs from Egypt that were then adorned with decorative rims at the top and bottom of the egg (German, 2018). Carved in bas relief around the rhyton is a scene of a procession of 27 men, presumed to be mostly agricultural labourers, lead by a robed male and with a trio of singers and a sistrum player in their midst (Fig. 3.2). Such imagery has lead to the interpretation of the vessel as a 'Harvester' vase although the long handled tools carried by the workers could just as likely be used for sewing seeds as threshing (Müller, 1915; Hutchinson, 1968; Logue, 2004). Stylistically "what the Harvester Vase lacks in imported luxury, it makes up for in sheer sculptural power" (German, 2018), often being attributed to displaying political or social control, emulating imported ostrich eggs' luxury with extensive artistic and material skill (Colburn, 2008). That being said, this object is not alone in style nor material, suggesting a trend in carved, steatite rhyta on Neopalatial Crete, similar objects include the Boxer Rhyton and Chieftain Cup, the latter with which the Harvester Vase was found (Watrous, 1984).

There are potential Egyptian influences in this cup along with iconographies of emerging Minoan elitism. Firstly, the emulation of an ostrich egg rhyton, the inclusion of the sistrum, an originally Egyptian instrument, and the idea of agricultural workers being overseen by officials have been proposed as borrowed emblems of power from Egypt (Borowka, 2020). However carved steatite vessels depicting scenes of male rites of passage and ritualised displays

are recurrent themes within Neopalatial Minoan stone vessels associated with centres of power (Koehl, 2016; Logue, 2004). The role of Agia Triada as an administrative centre places the vase geographically at the centre of local power and control, especially as such places may have distributed food in exchange for labour (Watrous, 1984). Therefore these objects are clear emblems of prestige in an increasingly cosmopolitan environment of the Bronze Age Mediterranean, where not only personal power and identity was being renegotiated but also cultural identities, in the face of increasing cross-cultural contact, which may have been communicated through material culture.

Fig. 3.3. *The man turned man, and the fallen man* (Tausch, 2018)

The interpretation of this vessel comes from its imagery of an agricultural scene but is definitely influenced with its location within an administrative centre, where it would have depicted scenes from locally recognisable events (Watrous, 1984:129) . Such associations with agriculture and power coloured its meaning, with some scholars suggesting that it depicted a practice of obligatory labour (Hitchcock & Preziosi, 1999). The inclusion of a sistrum player also suggests a religious or festival procession is being depicted, as suggested by Hood (1978:65). Other interpretations apply more militant applications to this procession (Rumpel, 2007; MacGillivray, 2024), links with potential male rites of passage (Koehl, 2016) or ritualised activities (Logue, 2004). Although I should note that rhythm, music and singing has a long historic link with labour, therefore

the sistrum players may be leading a work song; the application of music and singing to pass the time and keep the morale up during labour or tedious tasks has been discussed by Fendin (2006). Overall the general consensus tends to support the agricultural nature of this scene.[9] Further interpretations regarding the ages of the processionals, the exact garments as well as the specific of the use of the tools has been debated. However I believe this level of analysis may put intentional depictions over stylistic choices made to make image 'work' with the material. The image was carved into a small, hard surface, therefore choices would have had to been made as to what was important to include, what could be stylistically 'abbreviated' or perhaps manipulated to better fit within the shape of the surface. Therefore the inclusion of what is referred to as the 'fallen man' and his companion who turns to shout our laugh at him (fig. 3.3) is an interesting, deliberate and perhaps socially commentative decision by the artist.

Explanations of this fallen man may have been tied to the sistrum, an instrument that may have been widely recognised in Neopalatial Crete (Brogan, 2012). The instrument, used in both Egyptian and Cretan festivals and processions, has been suggested to reflect a budding interest in Egyptian culture and customs amongst the emerging elite that would have been associated with such administrative centres as Agia Triada (Borowka, 2020). Such reproductions of Egyptian ideas may also have included the Cult of Hathor, known as the "Lady of Drunkenness" (Graves-Brown 2010: 168), whose festivals included participants achieving a euphoric state of drunkenness with dance, music and beer in tribute to the goddess (Bleeker, 1973). Such an interpretation aligns with the interpretation of the Vase as a reproduction of an Ostrich Egg Rhyton. Therefore by Borowka's reasoning, the fallen man is a reference to the revelries of the cult of Hathor, perhaps building on the interpretation that the man fell due to his own drunkenness (Forsdyke, 1954; Pendelbury, 1939:213; Hood, 1978:143). Alternatively this could be procession linked to the male rite of

[9] Although significant arguments are being made for an alternative interpretation in support of changing perspectives on Minoan culture as potentially more militant than such assumptions were based on (as discussed in Rumpel, 2007; MacGillivray, 2024; Koehl, 2016; Logue, 2004).

passage, a ritualised display or agriculture or military force, a key theme in Minoan steatite vessels, (Kohl, 2016; Logue, 2004) by both reasoning the procession is thus given association with ritual behaviours. The protected environment of ritual, provided by the exceptional circumstance of that particular moment, may permit abnormal social behaviour, such as drinking to excess. As such, when falling into a festive procession because of such drunkenness, the act may not be considered as much a violation to the ritual and therefore considered humorous in itself. This therefore raises the question as to the representational nature of this fallen man, is he a drunken character himself or placed there to represent a drunken aspect of such a festival?

I believe such an interpretation is dependent on the extent to which this parade is a direct emulation of the festivals of Hathor and how much it adapted the idea of it, if at all. After all we do not know the way in which this was intended. Whether the 'spirit of drunkenness', which may be considered a necessary part of festivals in Egypt, was this known and understood in Crete, or if it was an idea included as part of the festive formula, but adapted to suit the Neopalatial social environment. The Harvester Vase is understood to emulate an ostrich egg rhyton and yet it is also stylised like the other steatite drinking rhyta, with bas relief figures in profile seen elsewhere in Crete. Therefore I propose we are seeing ideas from the Cult of Hathor reproduced in a local stylistic dialect, in particular the drunken revelry of agricultural festivities that would have been seen in the local environment (Watrous, 1984). As previously stated this object is from a time with increasingly distinct social stratification, evidenced by the parade being lead by a man in a cloak, similar to that from Ebla in the Near East (Jones, 2019), another example of 'borrowed' icons of power (MacGillivray, 2024). I believe that this establishing social stratification is the driving factor for the 'fallen man' and it is achieved through humour.

The fallen man is isolated, towards the rear of the parade (fig. 3.4), physically and spatially distant from the 'leader' of the group. This physical distance from power may be representative of difference in social power as well an an intentional inclusion as a way to demean the workers by including a drunk within the depths of their ranks. He is away from the leader and religious aspects of the procession, thus enacting superiority affirming imagery. What therefore

may be being communicated is social differentiation within the dual protected environment of ritual and humour, by singling out an individual, in what may be read as the lower ranks of this procession.

Fig. 3.4 *drawing of the relief from the Harvester Vase (in MacGillivray, 2024), own highlighting*

I propose however that the fallen figure himself is not the indicator that this scene is taken non-seriously, but rather his companion who has turned back to shout at him, a reprimand from his peer. By turning to shout at him, he singles out and reacts to the fallen man, providing the social context that firstly, his inclusion was planned and not a mistake during carving or use of space. Secondly the supposed reprimand (or shout of surprise) highlights the mistake that the fallen man made. It was clearly an accident and not one taken seriously, as demonstrated by the men behind the fallen man who continue marching but stop singing to watch (fig. 3.4). Through these peers the artist and observer are provided a framed reaction to the fall as unserious.

The scene is also not disruptive to the rest of the procession. It is an isolated event further diminishing the seriousness of the fallen man's event, trivialising, or as Veatch (1998) would argue, rendering benign the violation of the fallen man's stumble within a procession, especially if this is to be read as a festive scene. As previously mentioned, if the social tones of this festive scene are akin to the Cult of Hathor, the drunkenness itself to the point of mild disruption might also be considered a benign violation.

Further social overlays of the cult of Hathor may also inform the scene's interpretation, that is through the provision of alcohol and the expected elated drunken state at such festivals. If this scene is a depiction of deliberate drunkenness then this character may exemplify that being taken to excess, not just elated like his singing peers but to the point of being rendered physically inhibited by it. Stumbling, falling and general drunken behaviour has often been

taken as a source of mirth (and may indeed be seen in the Pierides man discussed later), with adult behaviour being reduced to that of a child. Likewise that person them self is then diminished to child-like capabilities and not capable of being considered overly serious. This incongruity of an adult being physically unable to act their age, forcibly regressed to a state of infancy, can therefore be considered funny, especially as it is only a benign incongruity due to the effects of alcohol being temporary. Additionally this may also provide an outlet for 'the lost laughter of childhood' (Freud 1905;22) that Freud associates with the comic. I propose therefore that the insinuation that this state is brought on by alcohol further promotes the humour within this scene.

I should like to note here that such an interpretation does not reduce the efficacy or credibility of an association with ritual, if there is one at all. Festivals can encourage drinking to excess to reach a state of mass ecstasy and heightened emotional state where in some cases (such as the Festival of the Valley) they believed they connected with their ancestors (Bell, 2005). Reaching such a heightened state probably includes humour to catalyse the process, laughing releases endorphins and also endogenous opiates, creating a natural high and 'feel good' sensation in our brains (Yim, 2016). Therefore it is within reason that anyone who had experienced this festival knew of the kind of high energy, laughing, social environments that accompanied it. Although it is my interpretation that we are seeing ritual motifs being reinterpreted to suit power-affirming needs of Neopalatial elites, this, I believe is corroborated by the social environment of the object. The Harvester Vase was believed to have originated in Room 4 of the villa, on the same level as the Boxer Rhyton, two prestigious objects associated with feasting. Access to such objects may be therefore restricted, with those viewing them being those close to power themselves, whether within the local environment or visiting. The members of the procession are interpreted as male, alike to those on other Minoan stone vessels and thus it has been suggested that these objects were intended towards a male audience (Logue, 2004). As such they may identify with the older, beaded leader figure amongst those in the scene, finding derision in laughing at the younger stumbling figure amongst the lower ranks of the procession.[10] Such an object

[10] inference of ages is informed by Koehl's discussion on hair and beard length (2016).

would thus have strong, power affirming agency and be able to act as an emotional conduit between elite members of Agia Triada's social environment as they laughed at the physically represented social differentiation. Furthermore it would prompt group affirming behaviour, of which humour is a major contributor and ritual may also have been utilised to achieve (Logue, 2004).

Visually there are two main prompts for humour. The first is the visual incongruity of a fallen man in a relatively standardised scene, especially as the figure is not immediately apparent. Secondly is the 'aha' moment provided by the vase, the shape of which prevents the scene being observed in its entirety. It has to be rotated, as such the fallen man may come across unexpected or surprising, with the longer between seeing the vase for the first time and spotting the fallen man enhancing the humour experience. This could be explained by the comprehension-elaboration model as the 'potential elaboration' narratives constructed around this scene gets exponentially expanded when the fallen man is observed, reacted to and incorporated with the new reconstructed narratives.

In favour of a humorous interpretation of the scene, the social context of an emerging elite that validates its position through ritual (Logue, 2004) may utilise humour to affirm such differentiation. Therefore any lack of overt symbology may align the interpretation of this object as one of power affirming elite activities, taking precedence over ritualistic significance. In regards to other criteria, the effort expended in the making of this object does not exceed its humorous potential. Soap stone is relatively soft and one of the easier substances to carve, although it should be noted great skill was still required to develop the intricate image.

The criteria for identifying humour from 'Laughing Matters' can also be met within the Harvester Vase. Firstly an object being funny by behaving in an unexpected way is fulfilled by a prestige object mocking or laughing at members of a populace associated with its social environment. Usually when humour is used in ancient art to deride others, it is what is considered an 'out' group, people usually recognisably 'other', such as the depiction of the Queen of Punt

from Deir el- Bahri.[11] It is therefore interesting that the subject of this derision is amongst, and therefore indicative of an 'out group' that makes up the majority of the scene. Secondly if an object can be funny by being in an unexpected place then perhaps the placement of the image on the object, especially when in contact with other iconographies of power such as Chieftain Cup, is unexpected by depicting a disrupted otherwise standardised scene. In this sense the unexpected aspect is provided with the assumed context of the other prestige, steatite vessels and is therefore incomplete.

The above argument addresses humour as intended for the consumer with the subliminal message communicated being of power affirming derision of labourers. However there is a secondary interpretation in favour of the expression of the artist. As previously stated there are potential links with the Cult of Hathor and the fallen man is well hidden within the larger scene. I propose his inclusion could have been deliberately obscure as a form of rebellion against an increasing pressure to adopt Egyptian ideas or participate in activities to promote the emerging elite class. In this sense his inclusion may have been a satirical response to the drunken aspect of the Cult of Hathor, reproduced in Crete, and how disruptive it could be, albeit in a subtle way. Similarly it could be an intentionally included 'flaw' in the standardised image to express malcontent with such ritualised processions. There is therefore a chance that because such a scene was only viewed in sections, the fallen man was intended to be missed as the focus was directed towards the leader and sistrum player within the procession. As such the social commentary is therefore reduced in its violation of an otherwise prestige object.

Overall the Harvester Vase is not just a depiction of local agricultural scenes but a representation of local attitudes. As an object made by an artist for a consumer, it is an enactment of local judgement which becomes apparent once accounting for humour to be included within its interpretation. Through the incongruity of a fallen character within a relatively standardised, processional

[11] Now on display at the Museum of Cairo, Gallery 12 (Available online at: https://egyptianmuseumcairo.eg/artefacts/four-fragments-of-queen-hatshepsuts-expedition-to-the-land-of-punt/)

scene and benign violation of such public intoxication not only carved within a prestige object, but within a depiction with ritual and power associations, the triggering mechanisms of humour can be identified. Furthermore the social agency the object is representative of superiority affirming humour within the dual socially-protected environment of a ritual depiction containing a humorous scene. As such the Harvester Vase has the agency to sympathetically align the viewer with the people laughing at fallen character, in particular if it is viewed within the restricted access, administrative centre villa's upper floors. Therefore seeing an object making a fool of someone who probably didn't have access to the vessel may result in taking on their prejudices and sense of superiority over the fallen man, reprimanded by his peers within an otherwise organised procession. I therefore propose that the Harvester Vase utilised humour and borrowed emblems of power to affirm elite social statuses of those associated with the Agia Triada Villa.

'It just let out a little wine...'

The perception of humour is almost immediate (Hildebrand and Smith, 2014). If we incorporate the evolutionary grounds of humour of it being the recognition of the non-threatening absurd then this is perhaps best demonstrated by zoomorphic and anthropomorphic vessels. Such objects also embody jokes as according to Suls' (1972) model, that requires a set-up and a punchline that subverts our predicted outcomes, creating incongruity. Humour comprehension can come from a two-stage process of recognising the incongruity and resolving it (Suls, 1972, fig. 2.2). If this engaging activity triggers a humour stimulus then it can perhaps be seen in interactive vessels in the ancient world. I propose that such objects act as 'set-up' and that when liquid is involved, the focus shifts to its flow as it delivers the 'punchline,' making full sense of the object and triggering the mirth response. There are three main examples of such objects I shall be using, the Chalandriani Hedgehog, the Pierides Man and anthropomorphic Rhyta.

1. 'The Very Thirsty Hedgehog'

The first object that embodies this physical punchline joke is the Chalandriani Hedgehog from the island of Syros in Greece. It dates to the second phase of the Early Cycladic period from the Keros-Syros culture, dated to between 2800-2300 BC (Ashbacher, 2017) and was found at a funerary site in 1970 (Caskey, in Thimmes, 1977). Made from clay it is a decorated zoomorphic vessel that is often interpreted as a hedgehog[12] (fig. 3.5). It is seated and holding up a bowl with a channel between the cup and vessel allowing liquid to flow from one to the other.

Fig. 3.5. *The Zoomorphic Vase* (National Archaeology Museum, Athens 2024)

The vessel is very small, only 10.8cm tall and is covered in a yellow slip, decorated with dark grey-brown lines (Hekman, 2003). The lines across the front of the animal's torso may be indicative of it rolling up unto a ball (Gimbutas, 1989), whilst the grid pattern on the back if often taken to be the hedgehog's quills. The small squares effectively communicate a two-dimensional rendering of three-dimensional vertical spikes. There are further stripes down the arms and legs which I believe are representative of movement or flexing joints, as seen at the 'ankles' and along the 'arms' of the hedgehog. The lines along the cup are not symmetrical, with them being angled diagonally down on one side and

[12] Although sometimes it is called a 'bear,' such as by the National Museum of Athens

running parallel to the rim of the cup on the other, which when viewed directly from the front could suggest different weaves of a woven bowl. Therefore the cup may instead be a clay representation of a basket. On the face of the hedgehog are two excessively enlarged eyes, drawing focus to the face of the hedgehog and perhaps thus placing visual emphasis on its face and the bowl. The size of the object has lead to interpretations of it as a toy (Caskey in Thimmes 1977:523), probably because its size is best suited to small hands. However the visually stimulating decoration and relative complexity of making a hollow vessel with a single hole in a cup has resulted in archaeologists preferring a ritual interpretation (Koehl, 1981; Ashbacher, 2017).

Wear patterns on the body (torso) are non-existent, if any they are on the cup and the lower patterning of legs, perhaps where it has been partially worked into the ground to secure it. The preservation of the markings suggest two potential interpretations, either the object was not handled much during its lifetime, or it was deposited shortly after completion, either indicate a biography of intimate use and entanglement with few individuals. Even if the hedgehog remained sedentary and its main engagement was with filling the bowl, such a bowl would have had to been emptied within only a few instances of filling. A fragment from a comparable hedgehog was found in Ayia Irini (Caskey 1972:363, pl.77: B1), the intact state of the Chalandriani hedgehog therefore promotes the idea of a short usage biography prior to deposition or it was treated with care.

The symbolism of hedgehogs in the Ancient Mediterranean remains uncertain and left to speculation. If we superimpose the Ancient Egyptian belief that the hedgehog was a symbol of death or regeneration, due to their hibernation during certain months, then the object's inclusion within a grave may be thus explained. That being said not all hedgehogs hibernate, often depending on food availability and temperatures each year (Greeceme, 2024) and therefore such an interpretation may not be applicable if the behaviour in the animal is irregular. Zoologically other interpretations of the hedgehog include the bravery and natural resilience to predators, in particular poisonous snakes to which they have a certain degree of immunity from their venom (Leonard, 2000). Their ability to roll into a spiked ball to withstand attack has lead to some interpretations of

hedgehogs as protective emblems (Leonard, 2000; Buchholz & Karageorghis 1965) and therefore the image of the hedgehog may have had medicinal or magico-religious applications (Landsberger, 1934:103-104). It has been theorised by some archaeologists (such as Broodbank, 2000) that this object was used to hold and dispense a set amount of liquid (Koehl, 1981). Koehl even suggested it was filled prior to being brought into the ritual space and used, thus suggesting the hedgehog acted as an embodied deity bringing forth or producing the liquid. Ashbacher (2017) suggested that it would have been filled with clean, fresh water, whereas Leonard (2000) supports the idea of it being a special oil. Such an idea explains why the vessel is richly decorated and has remained in tact, it must have been special and visually enchanting. However as previously commented on, the lack of wear on the decoration suggests such an object was rarely handled.

Stylistically it is of note that it is likely that the same artist who made this hedgehog also made one that ended up in Ayia Irini (Caskey 1972, 363, pl. 77: B1). Although only fragments remain, the head that does survive is almost identical suggesting that not only was the maker skilled enough to have an established style but also reproduce objects with relative uniformity. Regardless of its ritualistic interpretations, this object provides us with the first incongruity: an animal acting like a human, using a human object. Reminiscent of the satirical papyrus' from Egypt, we have a visual prompt for humour as we puzzle out why the animal is acting like a little person.

However I believe it is proper consideration of the physical limitations of how this object was used (rather than how it looks) that highlights problems with previous ritual-focused interpretations and instead supports its humorous potential.

The first interpretation for use of this vessel, that it was used for dispensing a set amount of liquid, as proposed by Koehl (1981), who suggested it is done by tipping the vessel to fill the bowl, then tipping it again to pour the libation. On reassessing the structure of the vessel reveals that such an act would be rendered defunct by the second tipping, at which point liquid in the vessel would pour once again into the cup (demonstrate in figs. 4.16 & 4.17). The hole and channel in the cup is low enough that one would not have to tip the

hedgehog much to fill it, even then not much liquid would then be able fill the cup before going back into the vessel once it was righted. This could be countered by plugging the hole, perhaps with a finger but the object is not ergonomic enough to allow this to be done easily, making this unlikely. Addressing Koehl's interpretation that this object was used to transport liquid into a ritual space and then decant liquid is perhaps an assumption that only looks at the execution of using the vessel and doesn't take into account the full process of using it. Such a theory, I believe, overlooks the structure of the vessel. The channel between vessel and cup is halfway up the wall of the cup, it is also the only hole to the vessel meaning that to fill it you would have to fill the cup first, whoever doing so is then knowingly acting in reverse to the proposed ritual behaviour. Alternatively it may also be filled by holding it under water until it fills. To fill the vessel so that there is no residual fluid in the cup, you would have to tip the hedgehog backwards and wipe out the fluid in the cup, perhaps to tip around an embodied deity may act in detriment to its integrity. There is another way of reading the hedgehog as an obscure drinking vessel due to the small bowl it is holding. The Chalandriani hedgehog is from a grave site however it is interesting that the exact find context, in particular the type of grave it was found in, is rarely commented on, although the excavator does liken it to a "teddy-bear" (Caskey, in Thimmes, 1977) suggesting its context may have been a child's grave to invoke such associations.

Similarly both theories only address the directionality of the liquid one way, with the liquid coming forth from the vessel. To do so it to disregard an entire half of its acting agency as well as the stance of the hedgehog. Its body is firmly planted, with two extended legs as if sitting splay legged, the bowl is upraised to its head, nearly touching where a hedgehog's mouth would be, as if the hedgehog itself is drinking. Its extended legs are partially pragmatic, providing a static, stable base for the vessel, however the stylistic effect is reminiscent of a teddy-bear picnic imagery. The spread legs is a very human way of sitting, in particular like that of an infant and suggests that in that moment, the animal is sedentary, not to be tipped, but maybe picked up. Furthermore the hunch of the back of the hedgehog may be indicative of it lowering its head to drink from the cup, whilst the enlarged eyes draw attention to the hedgehog's

face and what it is supposedly doing. I therefore propose looking at both directionalities of fluid flow as part of this object's enacted narrative. The posture of the animal as well as the position of the hole to the channel means that when it is filled the cup will first, at least partially, fill before it is siphoned off into the vessel through the channel. When combined with the cup being so close to the hedgehog's 'mouth', we are provided with the first narrative of the hedgehog drinking the fluid as it is channelled into the hedgehog's 'body'. If what goes up must come down, then what goes into a vessel must come out of it. The Chalandriani hedgehog has only one way in and out and so to empty it, the fluid must be tipped back into the bowl. This object is fairly tactile at 10.8cm tall, and can be picked up with one adult hand gripping the torso (see Chapter 4 for further observation), although it is probably better suited to being held by a pair of smaller, child-sized hands either side under the arms (again reminiscent of how children are picked up). However the channel between cup and vessel is much larger than perhaps accounted for in other theories, meaning that although some control on liquid flow can be enacted, it is highly limited. I therefore agree with Broodbank (2000), Koehler (1981) and Ashbacher (2017) that this object was used for dispensing liquid, but not a set amount and only as a secondary part of its use.

I propose that the liquid was meant to be drunk by raising it and drinking from the cup, an enchanting effect occurs. First, visually you are brought face to face with an almost cross-eyed hedgehog, whose eyes have been drawn enlarged and almost cartoon-like which I propose was intentionally done to enhance and reinforce comic associations. Secondly, upon drinking from the conical cup of the vessel you will find it is constantly refilled until the hedgehog vessel itself runs empty. I extend this narrative by proposing additional incongruity when the vessel is lowered, at which point the liquid will resume its usual depth, as if never drunk from or emptied (if the fluid was to be poured). We therefore have a multi-sensual trick being played, despite drinking from the vessel it is still full and appears to not have lost any volume. The portrayal of this trick is being performed by a small mammal with large, innocuous eyes provides an innocent and therefore benign rendering of the violation of liquid, and indeed the vessel, not behaving as it should. Although this object could be understood

to dispense seemingly unlimited liquid, within a few uses it will run empty and therefore such an idea has limited efficacy. I therefore strongly contend that such an object was intended to trigger a humour response as it was used. Such an interpretation does not preclude potential ritualistic interpretations. Instead it may provide symbology of the hedgehog as representative of a trickster character within the folk traditions of Early Cycladic culture. Thus when Broodbank (2000; pg.215) called it a "drinking hedgehog figurine", perhaps this is the most accurate interpretation, whether he meant the hedgehog itself was drinking or was to be drunk from.

Fig. 3.6. *The Zoomorphic Figure, holding its bowl* (Cheeseborough, 2024)

The [fragmentary] Ayia Irini hedgehog suggests that either the craftsperson who made them either travelled or their goods did. Regardless these pieces were made in an established style and therefore I propose that the attention was paid to the details of this piece. By reproducing and communicating the same ideas, it suggests some meaning was attributed to the vessel rather than it being a one off creative expression. I therefore suggest that the object was a representation of a common cultural motif that would have had recognisable connotations. Combined with the hedgehog's immunity to snake venom and ability to transform into a spiked ball that deters larger animals, they may have taken on a

more mischievous persona than protective. Such a motif could have thus been the foundation for Pliny the Elder's insistence that hedgehogs store food by rolling in apples so as to pierce them onto their quills before taking them back to their lair (Plin. NH, 8.56). As entertaining as such an image is, it is also improbable as fruit is not usually a part of the hedgehogs diet. Nonetheless it contains the undertones of a mischievous character who evades predators, steals from people, and occasionally, literally, goes to ground. [13]

To summaries the multiple ways the Chalandriani hedgehog communicates humour and holds the agency to invoke mirth, it firstly embodies numerous incongruities. The first is an anthropomorphic animal holding (and using) an human object (the cup/basket), secondly it makes liquid disappear, appear or reappear depending on how it is used. We therefore have both an object behaving in an unexpected way and a benign violation being communicated. The latter especially so if such a liquid used in the cup is intended for human consumption, at which point a small, inanimate hedgehog is thus either drinking it or consuming it, violating natural order, in which hedgehogs tend to avoid people. Furthermore the object may be seen as being in an unexpected place if used in daylight and around people, both of which are counterintuitive to a hedgehog's natural behaviour. Going by my suggested criteria we must therefore assess any superiority affirming behaviour, to which there is little besides its size. Holding the vessel may produce a cheirotic effect wherein holding a hedgehog (whilst not being prickled by its quills) may cause the holder to feel some kind of 'power' or 'mastery' over the hedgehog, and its associated meanings (Bailey, 2017). This would then trigger Benign Violation Theory and the relief aspect of humour as well, especially when intended pain is not delivered. The clear motif of the hedgehog in Early Cycladic culture and its deposition at a grave site suggests such an animal and object was highly entangled with human lives and therefore can be considered a 'social' object with the agency to effect human mindsets and associations (such as mischief). This social agency may also be more culturally recognised when taking into consideration the Ayia Irini Hedgehog, suggesting that either the object or the artist travelled widely. We

[13] Indeed such an animal may have had similar connotations to that which we have today of raccoons.

must then ask the question of whether the effort expended into making the object undermines or enhances its humorous potential, the reasoning here that objects that require extensive effort may hinder a humorous response (or to phrase it psychologically, the violation is less benign for the effort required to make it). That being said, the technical skill required to make the object enact the narrative may make such effort in the pursuit of humour justifiable. The object is made from clay, a widely available material and although requiring technical skill, in a world with widespread esoteric knowledge of pottery, its execution may not have been as enchanting as it is to modern audiences. The animation of this object once liquid is introduced provides us with multiple 'aha' moments, both when the liquid disappears into the vessel and when it flows into the cup. Such moments both solve the incongruity of 'why is the hedgehog holding a bowl' whilst adding further incongruity (and thus potential elaborations) of why and how the liquid is behaving as it is. If we are considering the hedgehog as drinking from the bowl then one of such elaboration may be that of 'feeding' the hedgehog, as such those engaging with the object may sympathetically aligning with the delight and humour in 'feeding' a seemingly inanimate clay object. We therefore may be seeing a form of play, materially scaffolded by this hedgehog. Humour itself is a form of social play (as discussed in Chapter 2) and by encouraging play with toys, they act as material scaffolding to influence a child's interest such as introducing mythological narratives (Sterelny, 2021). Therefore the cultural motif of the hedgehog may be linked with childhood, mischief and even carry undertones of protection, an emblem often attached to children by their caregivers.[14] Finally, if humour is nearly instantly recognisable then the Chalandriani Hedgehog's identification by Caskey as an 'example of Cycladic whimsy' (in Thimmes, 1977;523) suggest the object's strong agency for humour that transcended time.

[14] For examples as seen in Crummy, (2010) 'Bears and Coins: The Iconography of Protection in Late Roman Infant Burials'

2. The Pierides Man

Humour within prehistoric archaeology has been considered before when faced with bizarre objects as demonstrated by the Seated Gentleman in the Pierides Foundation Museum, who defies any interpretations as well as embodies an anomaly of Chalcolithic Cypriot material culture.

Fig. 3.7. *Side View of the Pierides Man* (MyGuideCyprus, 2024)

The figure, thought to be from the Chalcolithic site of Souskiou, in South West Cyprus, has a difficult biography as it was bought from a dealer in Switzerland, leading to questionable origins but it is usually treated as Cypriot (Hamilton, 1994). This difficulty in defining it as Cypriot is furthered by the lack of parallels among known local Souskiou material culture (Hamilton, 1994).[15] It is a relatively large figure at 36cm high, depicting a nude male made from terracotta, seated on a rectangular stool with his elbows on his knees, arm bent to support his head or in a gesture of hands on his cheeks so that it is bent back with his mouth open. The eyes are heavily emphasised, sometimes considered 'bulging' (Hamilton, 1994:302) and its opened mouthed expression has lead to its interpretation as a 'howling' man (The Pierides Museum, 2019); however it shall be referred to as the Pierides Man here. The figurine's torso and head are hollow, allowing for liquid to be poured in through the mouth, or the hole in the back of the head, and then flow out of its tubular penis. Whilst Hamilton is reluctant to include the flowing of liquid through

[15] Although it has been compared to the vessel KM 11449 of Kissongerga-Mosphilia, with which it shares stylistic similarities, the overall function, sex and gesture of the figure are so far unparalleled.

the figure as part of its function with certainty, the inclusion of a lot of stylistic choices encourage such an interpretation. Another explanation for its hollowness could be to improve the quality of firing, as with the terracottas from Erimi (Bolger, 1988:104). However the overall posture of the figure does lend itself to an interpretation where the object is 'drinking' and therefore the inclusion of liquid is likely. It is covered in a thin reddish-pink slip which is smooth and polished in areas around the torso (Karageorghis & Vagnetti, 1981), suggesting this is where it was most likely handled. The pigment could also be seen as emulating skin-tone. Its large size suggests it would have been an object of importance, but the lack of find context and contemporary parallels obscures the Pierides Man's exact meaning and significance. The preservation of the piece would suggest a mortuary find context but the lack of similar pieces makes the Pierides Man unlikely to have been a recognisable figure within Chalcolithic Cypriot culture (Hamilton, 1994:307).[16]

This object appears to be one of a kind, with few clear stylistic similarities either in the Cypriot Chalcolithic record, or the wider Northern Greek and Balkan seated figurine repertoire (Karageorghis & Vagnetti, 1981). However this motif of liquid pouring trough the head and coming out from genitals in clay figures has parallels within the Balkans and the Levant (Karageorghis & Vagnetti, 1981), such as the anthropomorphic rhyta discussed below. This was expanded by Christou (1989) who proposed that such Balkan parallels, in particular those in Thessaly and Romania, may have been the original source of this figurine, either conceptually or materially. However geographical distance and lack evidence for direct contact between the Balkans and Cyprus at this time makes this unlikely (Hamilton, 1994). Hamilton further proposes that the lack of any evidence to counter the Pierides Man's Cypriot origins is enough to cement its provenance, however such an argument may only hold water on pieces such as this due to

[16] Although there are examples of grimacing faces on some Chalcolithic Cyprus faces, few share the scale, sex and gesture of the Pierides man.

lack of wider academic exposure.[17] Nonetheless the object shall be treated as Cypriot.

Fig. 3.8. *Howling Man - Pierides Museum, Larnaca* (Amadon, 2009)

There are enough pieces from nearby Chaloclithic sites as Kissonerga-Mylouthkia, Kalavassos-Ayious, Ayious Theodorus and Kissongerga-Mosphillia to suggest that the Pierides man may have been part of a larger stylistic dialect. Similar large-scale, terracotta items include fragments from a seated figure (South, 1985:73, fig 3.2), a section of a clay 'mask' and 'grotesque' head (Karageorghis & Vagnetti, 1981, figs. 2 &3) lend credence to both the size of the Pierides figure, the posture of it as well as the style of its face being of Cypriot origin. Such similar objects may provide a framework within which to interpret this object, with limited efficacy, nevertheless even with this context, the function of the Pierides Man function is difficult to determine. Hamilton addresses this by questioning prior interpretations and establishing a more informed platform for interpreting the object, however as with previous research the focus is on the overall visual effect, disregarding how function may affect design.

[17] for example, the Phaistos disc's wider academic inspection has lead to extensive questionings of its authenticity (e.g. Vasiloudis, 2022)

The involvement of the penis has led many to interpret this object being related to fertility (Karageorghis, 1981:29.15; Morris, 1989:135), with Morris expanding meaning of the figurine as an embodied “primal scream” calling for divine assistance. Although both Karageorghis and Morris agree that the figurine is meant to depict straining, evidenced by the thick neck, and is thus representative of the male orgasm, it has been noted that their interpretations are founded on untenable connections with Balkan contemporaries (Hamilton, 1994). Furthermore such interpretations show the two main pitfalls of interpreting ancient material cultures, the first is the quickly adopted labels of ‘primal’ behaviours and ‘tribal acts of fertility’ (Morris 1985:135), both of which carry attached stigma. The second is the eager application of fertility ritual to anything with noticeable genitals, disregarding their more regular, biological functions as well as the role of the genitals in the overall piece. Such assessments also seem to focus on the overall stylistic information, rather than assessing the piece as the result of observation and construction. As such interpretations may miss how the physical function of the piece may influence its appearance as much as meaning. Upon inspection of higher resolution, coloured photographs from various angles, the bulging muscles alluded to appear to mainly be emphasised clavicles and a gullet, both of which can become exaggerated when drinking and swallowing. Indeed “bulging muscles” is a difficult claim to substantiate and may be the result of researcher bias. In order to make such a working, hollow vessel, building it would require space and structure to support the head (especially as clay morphs under weight whilst wet - see Morris, Peatfield & O’Neill, 2019 and Chapter 4). Therefore the neck may have been left thick to support the head whilst allowing the artists hands and arms to move inside the vessel whilst building it. We may therefore not be looking at a ‘straining’ neck but a structural reality of building a hollow human figure out of clay. Such interpretations seem to also focus on drawing comparisons with similar Balkan pieces, all of which date to 1500-3000 years prior to the Pierides Man and are distinctly ithyphallic whereas the penis on the Pierides Man is comparatively smaller. Hamilton proposes it is therefore too small to represent an erect penis and is instead intended to be a functional spout (1994:304). She further disparages fertility

interpretations by highlighting the overall lack of male fertility figures in Chalcolithic Cyprus (Hamilton, 1994: 302-312).

The main focus of prior interpretations has been the phallus and therefore its potential ithyphallic interpretations. The Pierides man shows a similar posture to the Sesklo ithyphallic figurine from Larissa, Greece (Karageorghis & Vagnetti, 1981:55) however whereas ithyphallic figurines usually have oversized and visually stimulating phalluses (Gimbutas, 1982: 220-223), the Pierides man does not. Hamilton does not interpret this penis as erect which further reduces the likelihood of a fertility interpretation. Further deviation from the ithyphallic style is the lack of hands holding or touching the penis (Gimbutas, 1982:220-223). Instead, despite the careful attention to its position, it is the empty space around the penis that draws attention to it rather than direct gesture from the figure itself. Furthermore it was modelled with care so as to be tubular and protrude perpendicular from the body, an angle which diminishes an erect interpretation but facilitates liquid flow (Hamilton, 1994:304). Hamilton extends this functionality of the penis being its main stylistic influence by suggesting that for the penis to 'hang more naturally' then the liquid flow would be both less visually obvious and interesting (1994:304). Such attention to the flow of the liquid may therefore have been a key determiner for the overall style of the object. Hamilton proposes the clearly indicated phallus is because the sex of the figurine was important to the maker or user of the object, but not the focus of the object, rather the flow of liquid out of it was the main focus of the object (1994:305). Due to the angle of the penis, how liquid behaves when poured and size of the opening, liquid coming out will either stream or trickle (depending on volume), behaving more like urination than ejaculation. Furthermore the open space around the penis not only draws attention to it but leaves space for the flow or trajectory of the liquid, enabling the object to be placed (or have objects placed) in relation to the deposition of the liquid. However visually stimulating the outlet of the liquid is, it is the highly expressive face that is the most striking feature of the figure.

The face is upturned, framed by hands on the cheeks with a gaping mouth and protruding eyes. The man's 'howling' and 'grotesque' expression has led to previous interpretations of ejaculation, once again disregarding functionality.

When observing the figure the angle of the face suggests it is meant to be looked at from in front of and slightly above, with the figure standing 36cm high, perhaps it was meant to be interacted within a seated environment. Secondly the head is presented as if resting on the hands, its mouth open in a gesture similar to that of a chick waiting for food, and thus perhaps the Pierides Man is waiting to be fed himself (fig. 3.9).[18] If the mouth and the action it invites is the focal point of this piece, then it may be that this figure was intended to be 'fed' some kind of liquid, such as beer or wine. The liquid's later emergence could then be an intended 'surprise,' a secondary result of the primary action, the first being the disappearance of the liquid. Much like the Chalandriani Hedgehog, the introduction of fluid animates this object. The "grotesque" features of the face may just be emphasised mimicry of human features, as such it would act like a three dimensional caricature, providing social cues that would frame it as an object of comedy[19]. Furthermore this object can be seen as intended to be an embodied incongruity, much like in the *weight judgement paradigm* experiment by Nerhardt (1970). One may already be building intended results (or internal schemas) from pouring wine in the object's mouth that get subverted by the results. The resultant stream out of the tubular penis may be at first unexpected but after that the trajectory itself may be both subject to change and capable of providing alternative discrepancies, perhaps by trickling or as a jet. As such the object not only embodies incongruity but is capable of enacting the comprehension-elaboration model due to its elaboration-

Fig. 3.9. *Left - a Sparrow Chick (Alexzeer, No Date), Right- the Pierides Man in profile, (MyGuideCyprus, 2024) own cropping and arrangement*

[18] it should be noted that although there is a secondary opening in the back of the head, this may be the result of accidental damage, or as an access point left over from construction or for internal maintenance (Karageorghis 1991, 3-7).

[19] especially considering mimicry, pantomime and exaggeration are all seen in early instances of humour (discussed in Chapter 2)

potential (not just for fluid output but also the colour of liquids used). Ultimately the best test for such potential would be through a reconstruction of the vessel, enabling a researcher to observe how liquid behaves and also how the object is best engaged with, such as from standing or seated near it. I propose that it was used within a seated environment, where the size, visual emphasis on the face and animation allowed the figure to not only act like a person but to appear as a peer within its social environment.

Hamilton also suggests a humorous or playful interpretation as a secular alternative to previous ritual ones (1994, 308), claiming lack of information in support for dividing the two. She highlights that such interpretations are often not generally accepted, though it is interesting to note that responses to these objects can be insightful. For examples Hamilton likens the Pierides Man to figures seen urinating in fountain masonry, or baby 'feed and wee' dolls; similarly the figure has been refered to as a 5,000 year old "Betsy-Wetsy Doll" (Amadon, 2009), showing an intuitive understanding of how this object may have been used.

The timeframe within which the Pierides Man would have been made was also one of extensive social reorganisation, with increased craft specialisation and female undertaking of activities such as pottery, agriculture and toolmaking, potentially freeing up the male members of society (see Ehrenburg, 1989:32-4,79-90,100-5). Therefore the Pierides man my be a response to or representation of an element of this social upheaval in a humorous way, in particular as a commentary on changing roles (Hamilton, 1994:309). This may also explain why the posture of the Pierides Man is reminiscent of birthing figurines and is seated upon a stool, representing either a crossing or defying of sex/gender divisions (Hamilton, 1994:310), an idea proposed to have been a representation of the male couvade (Bombardieri, 2017).[20] I would extend this interpretation that perhaps the blurring of sexual division and response to social upheaval may be mutually inclusive, where drinking to excess may make an individual a social obligation upon the community as one close to labour may be

[20] The discussion of which founders due to lack of comparable objects or known practices within Chalcolithic Cypriot culture (Bombardieri, 2017)

and is thus presented using such motifs. The Pierides man may thus be a satirical representation of the recreationally drinking male who sits on a birthing stool, but the only thing to come out of him is urine from his drinking. The posture of the figurine is entirely laissez-faire. He holds his head up, mouth open, inviting or perhaps even expecting to be served a drink that is then immediately spilled out at the providers lap or feet. It could be argued that there is an overlap between satire, miniaturisation and the cheirotic approach where the power is shifted to the appreciator/beholder and as such miniaturised objects may naturally be a form of superiority-enforcing ideas.[21] The ability to hold something in your hand(s) makes ideas not only attainable and containable but often makes the person holding the object feel more in control of the object and its ideas (Bailey, 2017). Likewise humour makes the absurd non-threatening and thus is a way of framing scenarios that can make the laugher feel more in control of the situation. If the object also requires to be fed, as suggested by the demeanour of the Pierides Man, then one may feel further power over the smaller object by feeding it. The psychoanalytic approach would explain this as an outlet for aggressive libidinal impulses. After all to withhold food is to cause suffering and so there is an inherent power over life given to those providing food. This in particular may be a response to changing power dynamics in Chalcolithic Cyprus, especially as by the Early Bronze Age society is shifting towards male dominance and an established male power base (Hamilton, 1994:310; Bolger, 1996; Peltenburg, 2011). We therefore may be seeing a material response to changing senses of control, expressed through a miniaturised, satirical representation of the male figure.

The overall lack of identifiable symbology or practical application behind the Pierides Man promotes the idea that the object's agency was mostly social. I propose this is furthered by its ability to play visual illusions due to its size, colour, emphasised (but relatively proportional) features and ability to become animate, meaning it holds high agency to be regarded as a person. Humour is an inherently social behaviour and therefore this high social agency may be to

[21] Although the Pierides man is considered fairly large for a ceramic figure, it is nonetheless a miniaturised rendering of a person.

enable humour perception from what is ultimately an object behaving like a person.

The main hinderance to a humour interpretation is the complexity of building such a figure. As will be discussed in Chapter 4 and by Morris, Peatfield & O'Neill (2019), building out of clay can be a difficult, timely process where each part needs to dry enough to hold its shape and support the next addition. It would be worth considering how it was built, whether it was an individual or a group production and how much drying time would have been needed to prevent warping under the weight of new sections to the figurine between building instalments. In addition it would answer questions about the thickness of the neck and the hole in the back of the head, in particular whether it was a secondary opening for liquid to be poured in or a constructional necessity.

That being said, the lack of clear interpretation of the object does leave it open to not only speculation but also alternative approaches to its assessment. Between its high social agency and its ability to enact the 'aha' moment through the introduction of liquid to the primary focus point that then exits through the secondary focal point, the tubular penis, the humour potential for such an object is high. Such agency has resulted in an object that acts as a conduit for sympathetic alignment millennia after its creation, with its comparison with "drink-and-wet" dolls suggesting it not only embodies an idea still in use in modern material culture, but is also a recognisable motif that enables the viewer to immediately understand how it was used. I therefore propose that the Pierides Man was intended as a source of mirthful entertainment, especially in response to the changing social environment and power dynamics of Chalcolithic Cyprus. However experimental archaeology would enable a better understanding of the object; until the difficulty of its construction can be ascertained, its complexity may still lend credence to a more ritualistic interpretation.

3. Anthropomorphic Vessels

In cases where supporting information is lacking it can be difficult to interpret objects, however by identifying the mechanisms of humour one can gain insight into social agency.

Narratives and establishing them can be crucial in interpreting jokes. If we apply the incongruent-resolution model as well as the comprehension-elaboration model both involve making sense of the scenario and filling the gaps to complete the metaphorical, what-one-hopes-to-be-funny, picture. The narrative needs to make sense, but in a way that can be inferred, if it is too obvious the obscurity of it and incongruence is less effective, therefore context and subtext are necessary. Humour exists in a sweet spot between understanding and nonsense, where the incongruity of both and neither is paramount. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the anthropomorphic rhyta from the Near East and Ancient Thrace.

All of these vessels are symbolic representations of the human, male body in a way that suggests they are urinating, especially when provided the context of their relationship with a liquid. That being said all of the following vessels are relatively unpublished, with the Thracian Anthropomorphic Vessel receiving some academic attention passingly in general papers on early Thracian art or general mediterranean rhyton practices;[22] the other two are entirely unpublished, as far as I am aware, because they originate from an auction house.[23] Unfortunately two of the objects which I will be using for comparisons of the art style are from a private auction house and therefore have obscure histories with the find contexts lost, as are their proper assessments of date, styles and purpose. Such a trade and encouragement of private ownership of another countries history and culture consequently fosters illegal excavations, looting and destruction of heritage sites. Ironically this practice, that some redeem as a way of preserving

[22] for Thracian art see Venedikov (1977) in which the rhyton is used exclusively as an illustration.

[23] Although I did reach out to the auction house for further information on the objects I received no reply and therefore all information has to be taken at face value from their listing pages.

history, more often leads to its destruction. As such when discussing these objects, I am using them as representations of a style or execution of an idea rather than the objects themselves. Therefore none of these objects shall be discussed as established historical practices of their cultures but rather as representatives of an art style and the human behaviour behind it.[24] Furthermore all below objects appear to be unique with no available comparative objects from their contemporary cultures, I am thus relying on my own interpretation and assessment. Nonetheless they demonstrate how we may use psychological theory to scaffold archaeological interpretations when there is a lack of context available due to the humour mechanisms triggered by social objects.

Fig. 3. 10. *Syro-Hittite Vessel, Side Facing (*Christoph Bacher, N.D)

Fig. 3. 11. *Syro-Hittite Vessel, Front Facing (*Christoph Bacher, N.D)

The Syro-Hittite Vessel (SHV) (figures 3.10 & 3.11) dates to the early 2nd millennium BCE from the Levant and is made from terracotta (Christoph Bacher, N. D.). It also appears to have been covered in a pigmented slip, potentially red coloured judging by the remnants around the neck, however this could also be residual oil from handling. The shape of the vessel and the fact that that it contains a secondary hole at the base leads me to interpret this object as a rhyton, similar objects including zoomorphic rhyta with three legs (MET 59.95) or the pottery rhyta from the Cypro-Archaeic period (BM

[24] Any analysis of objects such as the SHV are entirely speculation on my own behalf through comparative research.

1876,0909.19). It was identified as belonging to Syro-Hittite artistic style[25] and was therefore possibly a reproduction of Assyrian art, however lack of supplementary publishing or information makes this impossible to conclude. If we indulge this interpretation, however, then its use could be expanded to have been within the social environment of a Hittite trading settlement of an Assyrian post, especially as this object was dated within the colonial period of the emerging Hittite Empire (Holmes, 2021). I thus propose that this object could have been used as an icebreaker within feasting or meal contexts, moreover it would act as a conversation point. This is because the object plays on at least two psychological models for humour perceptions.

The first and foremost mechanism that this object triggers is Benign Violation, after all to drink from this vessel is to drink its implied urine. The posture, with both hands holding the genitals does suggest that of a man standing and urinating and with my interpretation of the vessel as a rhyton then the liquid dispensed by the vessel would be intended for consumption. As a general rule it is relatively safe to assume that the idea of consuming another person's urine is instinctively violative to most people.[26] This violation is then rendered benign by reducing the offending male figure to a faceless, obviously clay figurine that is made even more fantastical by having three legs. Furthermore the rhyton is small, standing at only 10cm high and is therefore easily held in a single hand, providing the holder with a sense of power over the object and therefore control over the situation (Bailey, 2017). This may therefore

[25] upon further research it became clear that the label 'syro-hittite' and the dating are inconsistent with one another however it is uncertain which identification is incorrect. Due to stylistic similarities with the MET 59.95 Rhyton I am inclined to place this rhyta within the Iron Age, which would have been late 2nd millennium BCE, early 1st millennium BCE.

[26] Although it is important to avoid assigning lables of 'normal' and 'abnormal' psychologies out to the resultant effect repercussions of attaching such labels, it is also important to recognise when behaviours are normative and otherwise to be able to indicate personal health. Abnormal psychologies and different personal tastes are not mutually exclusive but neither are they mutually inclusive.

provide a superiority enforcing narrative depending on how drinking from the object is considered. If to do so is derogatory then to control who is to drink from it could be to control group attitudes and perceptions, even if the person doing so is the self. This object shares similarities with others, given the universality of humour, we may therefore be seeing a universal joke, or humour stimulus.

Fig. 3. 12. *Anthropomorphic Vessel (*Christoph Bacher, N.D)

Viana said "g*estures, objects and the body have probably been the fertile land from where metaphorical and metonymical information have been extracted"* (2017;3) in particular relating to figurines. However the same can be said for anthropomorphic rhyta which, when combined with the metaphorical and figurative nature of humour, may rely on gesture to communicate the appropriate social cues for humour. As previously stated this gesture suggests urination, I propose this is done with a hand on the penis. Unlike the Pierides Man and SHV, the following vessels may not have an outflow for liquid to inform this narrative, relying on context and gesture to communicate the humorous scenario. The first of these objects is a vessel from c.1000-500BCE Anatolia, possibly Syria (Christoph Bacher, N.D.). It stands at 13.5cm high, made from clay and represents a man holding his penis with his left hand and crosses his right arm across the chest to rest on the left shoulder (fig. 3.12). The penis, if there was one, is missing, its existence only

Fig. 3. 13. *Ceramic Anthropomorphic Vessel (*K, Georgiev N.D)

referenced by the gesture. Like the SHV it rests on three legs, with a similarly shaped foundation vessel. The shoulder placement is also similar along with the neck of vessel being drawn out to be used as a suggested head and face. Unlike the SHV the Anatolian Anthropomorphic Vessel (AAV) does not have a secondary hole to serve as an outflow of liquid, it also has a face built out, with a large nose and incised eyes. Judging by the clay surface I would propose that the clay used itself was relatively coarse, the lack of decoration and minimal styling further proposes that such an object may have been a craft object (rather than art) and not one with prestige or elite connotations. Another similar object is the Thracian Anthropomorphic Vessel (TAV) (fig. 3.13) from the Chalcolithic Period (c.3000BCE) in Gabarevo, Kazanluk, Bulgaria (National Archaeological Museum, 2023; cat. No.57). Venedikov identified it as a rhyton and comments on the similarities between Thrace and Anatolia at this period (1977;9). The vessel is reconstructed but the neck appears to be more highly polished than the body suggesting that it was extensively handled around the neck. Standing at 15cm high and 10cm wide, it would have fit easily inside an adult hand. It shares similarities with the AAT regarding gesture, although the resting hand is on the abdomen not the shoulder. Like the SHV it lacks an identifiable head, instead having it suggested by an extended neck, it may also have had a functional outflow through the penis, judging from the channel revealed by partial fragmentation (fig. 3.14). Unlike either of the Near Eastern vessels, this rhyton stands on only two legs, something also seen in an

Fig. 3. 14. *Ceramic Anthropomorphic Vessel, cropped to reveal the potential outflow chute (*K, Georgiev N.D)

Fig. 3. 15. *Akkadian Anthropomorphic Vessel (*British Museum, BM125497)

Akkadian vessel (BM125497; Fig. 3.15). It is therefore difficult to determine the extent to which Anatolia influenced the Thracian vessel or vice versa due to inconsistencies within the timeframes of these vessels and their convoluted provenance, nonetheless they are all representative of the same overarching theme and share a certain degree of visual similarities.

Because of the incomplete nature of the gesture and social framework we subsequently cannot rule out an alternative connotation of ejaculation, masturbation and fertility related ritual. That being said all these objects seem relatively unique in their contemporary culture which would suggest lack of a symbolic framework from which such images would be understood or recognised, similar to the Pierides Man. I therefore propose a social meaning to these objects would be more applicable and that such a social meaning would be tied to daily, human occurrences which would explain the widespread motif of these vessels. As previously stated the implicit meaning of these figurines is that of urination, in particular the urination of a fluid to be consumed.

Such objects provide this metaphor through gesture, with either one or both hands on the penis, the other at rest somewhere on the body. The narrative is then completed with fluid, either flowing forth from the vessel or by being held within it, its presence cementing the meaning. Although ejaculation and fertility may be a possible interpretation, I propose this is mitigated by the outflow on the SHV as well as sensory cues from the volume of liquid being held in these vessels, the noises made by the liquid's movement which would be reminiscent of relieving oneself. Therefore a social, secular interpretation would be more applicable. As earlier discussed with the SHV, there are two main mechanisms triggered by these rhyta: Benign Violation and Superiority Affirming Behaviour (applying Gruner's theories). However they also embody incongruity by representing a small, clay, often faceless human that acts like a real biological one. The size of these objects may provide superiority over both the objects (through the cheirotic approach) and the group, through enacting what may be a derogatory behaviour towards others. They also hold the agency for transcendental humour, encompassing both sexual and aggressive themes due to both the communication of the superiority enforcing narrative and the visual

emphasis on the genitals. Functionally they would have been social objects as rhyta, used at meals or within group settings to dispense liquid. Their visual enchantment makes a group setting more likely, although it is arguable that their social agency to elicit humour would still be effective to an individual. Thus regardless of the group size they are interacted with within they hold the same agency, perhaps even to act as an individual themselves due to their anthropomorphic appearance. The lack of known symbology around these pieces, both due to incomplete histories or comparative material from their own contemporary cultures, does lend credence to a more secular interpretation, despite the phallic representations. In regard to their making, each of these objects is made from clay, a ready available resource that was widely used for daily objects and all are made with relatively simple techniques that would be utilised on vessels. I therefore propose these are craft objects, made for ultimately useful ends (Firth, 1994:16) and possibly were made as creative expressions during a standard practice, as discussed on Chapter 4. All of these objects further meet every single 'laughing matters' criteria, firstly they behave unexpectedly, both as rhyta and as anthropomorphic depictions. As rhyta they depict an image contrary to fluid consumption, that being its expulsion; as anthropomorphic vessels they subvert our expectations of their behaviour by enacting biological human behaviour, thus creating incongruity (Wyer and Collins, 1992). Secondly all these objects are fundamentally the ‘wrong’ size in the sense that they depict male human forms at a miniature scale and it can finally be argued that all of these objects may have been used in an unexpected place. If they were rhyta and therefore used for consumption, the use of a vessel in the form of a urinating figure may be an image that is unexpected for that social environment, thus in the ‘wrong’ place. There may even be a form of sympathetic alignment through such social objects depending on the social attitudes around the gestures. If they are intended as a method for delivering derogatory humour then it may be delivered through such an object’s use and its observation, the group may align their attitudes with whoever it controlling the vessel. Even if the vessel is used as a ‘joke’ vessel by which the user makes themselves the butt-of-the-joke by drinking from such a vessel, viewers who ‘get’ the joke may be more inclined to like the joker through sympathetic

alignment.[27] Finally, as with previous examples, these objects necessitate the inclusion of liquid, which animates the object and solves the incongruity, in particular in relation to the SHV, which may create the 'aha' moment. All of this suggests that such objects may be a reflection of a shared sense of humour at the human self and how material aids can help utilise of laughter in social settings.

The problem with such objects is the lack of information. As such the application of humour criteria to scaffold an interpretation can be used to assess objects but ultimately they cannot be interpreted due to lack of general information. In particular the lack of find context means the social meanings of such objects will forever be limited to modern perspective and speculation, the obscurity of each object's biography means loss of understanding how, why and where each object was deposited. A further object (BM125497) that may belong to this group of anthropomorphic, urinating vessels may be Akkadian pottery vessel of a fat nude male in the British Museum that appears to have a secondary hole where the genitals may be and would warrant inspection (Mallowan 1937: 128-9, fig. 9.18). The seemingly individuality of each object within their contemporary setting suggests they may be intended to have a laic interpretation that does not necessitate symbolic frameworks to interpret. Their practicality as rhyta further proposes a social use whilst their metaphorical depiction of a violatory behaviour in a benign way all suggests their social agency may be directed towards eliciting a humour response.

Conclusion

Humour is rooted in social behaviours, therefore the creation of these semi-animated clay figures that can act alive allows these objects to actively partake in making jokes. After studying all of these objects one thing has become apparent and that is the lack of alike objects in their contemporary cultures, even the Chalandriani Hedgehog's nearest comparable doppelgänger was found on another island. The Harvester Vase may share a stylistic language with the Chieftain Cup and the Boxer Rhyton but the flawed scene of order appears to be

[27] likability and sense of humour were found to be positively correlational in Sherman, 1988

an irregular occurrence. The anthropomorphic rhyta, though evident of a cross-cultural idea, lack parallels within their contemporary areas, and the Pierides Man appears to be a relative anomaly altogether. This begs the question of the nature of humour in material culture. On the one hand humour needs to contain enough references to cultural frameworks to inform solving the incongruity (or reduce alarm in response to it), on the other it has to be an effective incongruity. This duality of being similar enough to be decoded as humour whilst having the mirth producing obscurity may explain the seemingly one-off nature of such objects. Social agency of these objects have all transcended time, with them baffling, amusing and enchanting archaeologists and those that come to see them on display.[28] I therefore propose that such highly social objects must therefore rely on a universal cognitive process to be so timelessly effect, that process being humour. This is achieved by triggering such cognitive mechanisms through incongruity, benign violation and stimulating alternative interpretations through comprehension-elaboration.

Further considerations to the interpretation of humour in archaeology is that ritual is not mutually exclusive to daily life, but also the importance of daily life should not be obscured by ritual elements, likewise with humour. It can enhance ritual and therefore it can be an object for ritual, that does not mean that humour isn't part of it. A final consideration is should humour be identified in archaeology? These objects hopefully demonstrate how humour can provide a much needed insight into the social elements of these objects, however this will be discussed further in chapter 4.

[28] Such as by Cheeseborough, S. J. (2024). https://medium.com/@cheesebrough.sj/why-you-should-care-about-ancient-greek-pottery-the-cycladic-hedgehog-1b12595226f6 [Last Accessed: 26/09/2024]

Chapter 4: Still Laughing Now? These Objects in the Modern Reception

This chapter examines whether humour still come through when the source is removed from its contemporary context and can a modern audience recognise it. Research into the recognition of incongruity and social cues of humour (such as by Hildenbrand & Smith 2014) would suggest our brains are hardwired to perceive humour even if we cannot understand it. It therefore stands to reason that even millennia later, objects that embody humour would still trigger such mechanisms in the modern brain. However the cultural frameworks that are required to interpret and understand have changed, even within a culture they tend to be personalised by age, social status, gender, economic status and so forth (Gillespie, 2003). Therefore the efficacy of the humour stimuli may be reduced, instead coming across as 'bizarre' rather than funny. What is more, the distance in time between object and audience itself may be what provides the humorous element. The ancient Sumerian proverb, the world's oldest joke (in Chapter 2), isn't very funny at first appearance until it reached the word 'fart'. It is this contrast between what is often portrayed as an austere past and the relatable, human impulse to laugh at flatulence in inappropriate settings (despite what those settings are) that provides the first instance of humour, rather than the prompt itself. As such when looking for the funny in ancient objects, it is important to ask 'is it just funny to us?' And likewise, especially in a modern world where comedy is often over communicated with bright primary colours, cartoon or caricature exaggerations with catchy taglines to frame the punchline, we must ask 'do we just not get it?'

More than Meets the Eye:

The lack of cultural frameworks for ancient objects makes ritual interpretations the safest a way of applying meaning when not knowing precisely what the meaning is (Gillespie, 2003). Indeed such a title as 'ritual object' is often very

beneficial for making people think about such objects, however it is a double edged sword as it can also encourage the application of modern understandings of the word. Further discussions on the parameters of applying 'agency' to non-contemporary objects by Tim Ingold (2013) highlights the difficulties in 'interpreting' ancient art, or any art, limits its meaning by often only pertaining to the effect on viewers. By further framing the object as ritual, we risk imposing modern associations of 'rituals' and confining the agency of the object within the modern understanding of 'ritual', as is understood from experience; for most these rituals are provided by religion which can be decidedly unfunny at times. We therefore risk applying our own meanings over such objects by applying labels that, ultimately, try to explain that the object *had* meaning, not what that meaning was. Ritual and humour can be mutually inclusive, as discussed in the previous chapter, both within the festive/religious sense (as with the cult of Hathor) and ritual engagements with humour, such as with 'joking relations', (Apte, 1985). How can we therefore explain objects that more than meets the eye?

As previously stated, there are certain cues to humour, mainly incongruity, that are almost immediately recognisable. Although incongruity does not necessitate humour, it can be an indicator that the object is meant to be engaged with socially and taken at more than face value. What is more the incorporation of humour and the social agency of objects within interpretive schema may have multiple benefits. Firstly humour's provision of a protected atmosphere has long been utilised to explore controversial ideas or social critique (Mulkay, 1988), therefore by identifying humour we may also identify a method expressing social critiques, alternative ideas or even dissent. Secondly humour's ability to shape ideas has also been used to persuade masses, as such its identification in prestige goods, monumental architecture (in particular reliefs) or general mass material culture is valuable insight into promoted social attitudes.[29] The main reason, however, to identify humour in the past is to maintain the initial integrity of pieces as well as providing a direct connection with past peoples through shared emotional engagement with social objects. By making ancient people

[29] This element of humour has already been identified and discussed, in particular within Egyptian material (in Chapter 1 & 2)

relatable we may encourage modern engagement with archaeology, decreasing any distance that may lead to indifference.

'Seeing through Making'

When something is made into a smaller, portable object, especially one that fits within the hand, stylistic choices have to be made by the maker as to what is included, omitted, simplified and emphasised (Bailey, 2005). As such each object represents deliberate decisions as to what was needed. This reasoning is the foundation of experimental archaeology, such as that done by Morris, Peatfield & O'Neill (2019), it provides physical insight into choices as well as the method of making such objets. By making such objects myself I aimed to understand why such choices were made, either due to physical limitations, time or just most effectively communicating the intention behind the piece.

I have attempted to recreate two of the objects to better understand how they were made, how they work, as well as their effect on the maker and to have a demonstrable copy for modern audiences. The two objects I chose had to be relatively simple to recreate as I lack the esoteric knowledge of these objects' original creators and some of the objects such as the Harvester Vase require working with materials that would be too inaccessible to me (stone and carving of it are both difficult and would require learning a completely new skillset). Therefore I selected the Chalandriani Hedgehog and the Syro-Hittite anthropomorphic vessels because they are both easier to recreate than, say, the Pierides Man.

Although the Syro-Hittite vessel is made from terracotta I have used stoneware clay.[30] Similarly I made modern concessions, making these on electrically powered wheels, firing in electric kilns, using synthetic tools (such as sponges made from plastic) and using pre-made slip/pigments and glazes. Otherwise I tried to remain as true to the making process as could be achieved, I

[30] Although stoneware makes for more durable pieces (which is beneficial to reconstructions and experimentation with use), it is not a realistic rendering. In future experiments using more authentic earthenware clay may give insight into how easily pieces may break and how this may shape interactions with them.

avoided using too many modern pottery tools, relying mostly on my fingers, finer stick-like tools and sponges. This was erring on the side of caution as the full extent of what was available to potters at the time. I was further limited by copying from photos, both of these objects are not able to be handled and closely inspected by myself, so most of the making process was through guessing how it was made and also responding to the material, ie what it 'allowed' me to do (Ingold, 2013).

The Making Process (the Chaîne Opératoire)

So how would one make these objects? I believe these objects were initially composite objects, made from separate vessels that were then hand built to form the characters, in the hedgehog's case these vessels were joined prior to building. However the pottery wheel was rarely used, even towards the end of the Early Cycladic Period and therefore the foundation vessels may have been built to a high finished standard, rather than thrown. Each object was made differently, although the Syro-Hittite Vessel (SHV) was much simpler and quicker to make. Allowing for the plasticity of clay, they would have to be made over the course of several hours, if not days, as the natural shrinkage of clay as it dries can cause cracks if done too quickly. Similarly, building on top of the vessel cannot be immediately done, rather one would have to wait for the clay to reach the 'leather hard' phase, where clay can retain its shape when handled but is still wet enough to respond quickly to water, allowing for additional pieces to be stuck to it.

It is also worth noting that with each piece I had an end result I was aiming for, I had to match the original object which added an alternative motive and criteria for the making practice that reduced the fun and creative elements of each piece. This included measuring and estimating shrinkage, neither of which inspired much mirth, except maybe at the irony of doing something so serious in the name of humour. It was not truly 'making something' but solving the puzzle of how something was made. Regardless it provided much insight into how something can be made, in particular made functional, as well as how a vessel like this can become animated. For each object I made a duplicate to both

practice making, experiment with alternative methodology and as a spare in case of accidents in the kiln.

'The Original Stanley Cup'[31]

When making this vessel I had a pretty clear idea on which order to make it, which was:

1. Wheel thrown Vessel
2. 3 legged supports added
3. Opening the hole at the base and attaching a chute
4. Attaching arms at the shoulders and then shaping them onto the chute
5. Making the pellets then attaching them, punching them to form the nipples

Deviation from this order is possible with perhaps the legs being added as a final stage, however I found it more beneficial to get the base sorted so I could focus on making the flow of liquid through the vessel right.

First things first, I made a small jug shape (fig 4.1), making sure to bring in the neck, extend it then expand it into a broader, panel like lip that would form the suggestion of the head. I then let it dry until the top was stable before turning it upside-down and trimming away the base into the finer, tapered point[32]. I then modelled the three legs by rolling out clay and pressing one end into the table to form the 'feet', before attaching them with slip.[33] I let the clay dry a little more, to the 'leather hard' consistency before turning it right side up (fig. 4.2). I now had a relatively stable base on

Fig. 4.1. *Thrown base for 'Stanley' Cup (Bull, 2024)*

[31] this title is a play on the current viral trend to own 'Stanley cups', thermos travel cups. Although this rhyton was not used to transport fluids, it is made to look like a man and therefore I applied the title 'Stanley cup to it'.

[32] This step could be avoided by 'throwing off the hump,' a method used by more skilled potters to make vessels with fine bases and throw many items in a single wheel sitting.

[33] 'slip' is a paste of water and clay.

Fig. 4.2 *'Stanley' Cup with legs attached, drilling the hole (Bull, 2024)*

Fig. 4.3. *Attaching the chute (Bull, 2024)*

working legs from which I could finish the modelling. For the channel I poked through a small hole that I carved wider. Then I added a ring of clay that I had modelled earlier and had let dry on stick so that it would maintain its shape whilst being attached, again I glued it on with slip and used a thin coil of soft clay to 'anchor' it in place (fig. 4.3). I found the best way of smoothing the joints out was with a very wet finger to let the water to the job for me. Once the tube was attached, extending the channel, I ran a trial of water through it to make sure it worked and that the fluid ran unobstructed. Up until this point the vessel had remained relatively inanimate, looking like a jug on legs with a liquid chute, its effect was humourless and at most 'quirky' or 'fun'.

I then rolled out more clay, smoothed into the more flat shape like in the original object and attached the arms, in the posture so that it was holding the chute. This implied the image of a human male urinating in a way that an observer would be aware of when the narrative would be later completed once liquid was introduced. I added the pellets to the armpits and punched holes in the centre that are supposedly nipples, although I do not think this enhances or diminishes from the narrative implied. For example I think it is clearly an anthropomorphic male regardless of nipple inclusion, however it provides an additional, aesthetic element that perhaps gives the piece a more decorative appearance (fig. 4.4). Upon making the object I gained further understanding for the nipple placement, which is under the armpits rather than the chest area, deviating from reality. I propose that the nipples were intentionally placed in the 'armpits' because the surface of the clay there would have been

Fig. 4.4. *finished vessel, unfired (Bull, 2024)*

wetter and therefore easier to adhere to. The clay on the surface of the main body may have been too dry and smooth, therefore the clay pellets may have come off upon firing. Furthermore their far apart placement may have enhanced the objects bizarre appearance and therefore humorous potential. Before being fired, I covered it in a slip (pigment mixed with diluted clay). However the pigments I used did not fire to the colour I hoped so I used a single thin layer of brush on glaze to achieve the final look (fig. 4.5). Judging by the image the piece was not glazed, at most it was burnished around the 'neck', probably from excessive handling in use.

Overall I found the skills needed for this project, although relatively technical and not suited to beginners, were simple and with enough time I believe could be done by anyone. Secondly it is not very aesthetic and therefore I suggest this was a craft object, potentially even a joke played by someone taking an unfinished rhyton base and up-cycling it into this anthropomorphic vessel. That is not to say symbolism and stylistic motifs were not perhaps included as well to inform the end result (as discussed in Chapter 3).

Fig. 4.5. *The finished vessel, front and side (Bull, 2024)*

In a different climate to an indoor studio in Britain the turnaround on this object could be quicker, where such initial stages as drying a wheel thrown vessel can be done quickly. Alternative to my method (and worth testing in future), a leather hard vessel, if inverted could be transformed into the anthropomorphic vessel in one sitting and fired almost immediately. Admittedly turning it right way up to continue working was a precautionary step on my end to make sure the legs were stable and that I could get the flow angle right. Allowing for the craftsperson who made this vessel to have been more familiar in the making of rhyta, they might not have needed such a step which does prolong the making time whilst waiting for the legs to dry enough to support the vessel.

Upon completion of this object I ran two main trials on its use, using dyed water to show clearly in photos. The first was placing the object on a surface and holding a cup beneath, running liquid through the rhyton (fig. 4.6). This did not fill the cup as the liquid was channelled out as quickly as it was poured in. I then experimented with plugging the chute with a thumb and removing it to see how watertight it would be and how doing so would affect the trajectory, it was also the only way in which to fill the vessel if it was filled by pouring liquid in. Although this increased chances for spilling if the cup were misplaced, the liquid trajectory changed or the rhyton got knocked over, it was a more visually engaging way of interacting with the vessel.

The other was of filling it was by submerging it in the liquid (fig. 4.7). Once it was taken out it immediately started draining, although again a thumb could be used to stopper the outflow. I then experimented with simulating drinking directly from the chute by bringing the vessel to my mouth and moving my thumb to release the water. I found not only can the object be easily held in one hand, but it can be held in a way with the thumb easily covering the tip of the phallic-chute. As such the outflow of the liquid can be easily controlled and directed straight into the mouth. The latter way of using the cup is easier, cleaner and more ergonomic, although the drinker is less aware of the visual effect, it may create for a more amusing scene within a group setting as they watched the rhyton being used this way. I found the tapering shape of the vessel very ergonomic, fitting easily within my hand, by placing a finger being the neck and cooling

another between the third leg and the front two, it was easy to stabilise the vessel in a single hand whilst moving the thumb to cover the hole. Therefore the physical shape and material agency of the object supported its use as a rhyton from a tactile perspective.

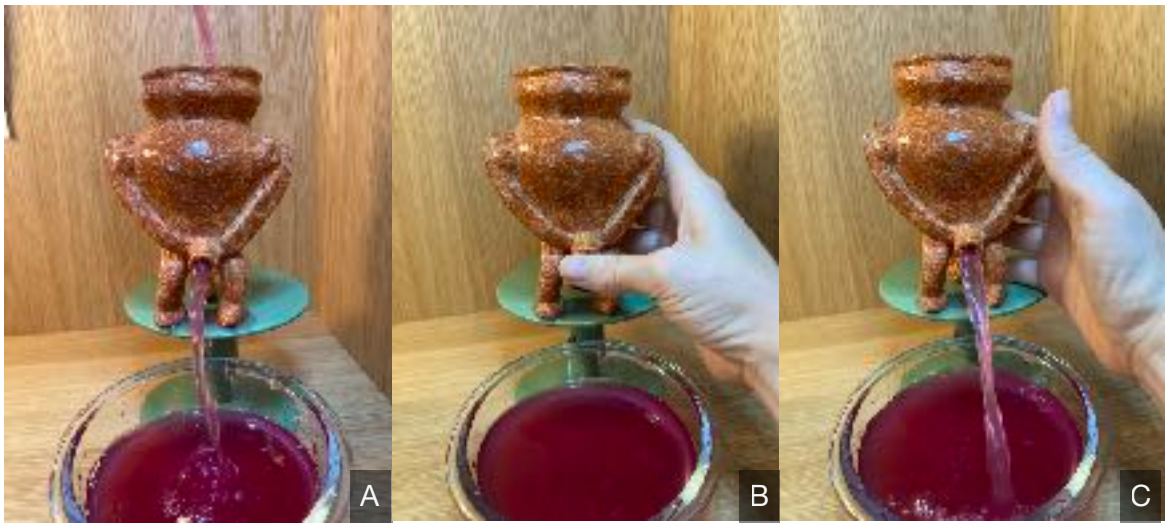

Fig. 4.6. *First Experiment with the cup on a stand. Photo A shows the flow whilst liquid is poured in. B shows how a thumb can be used to stopper the outflow. C shows the trajectory once the stopper is removed and the cup full. (*Bull, 2024)

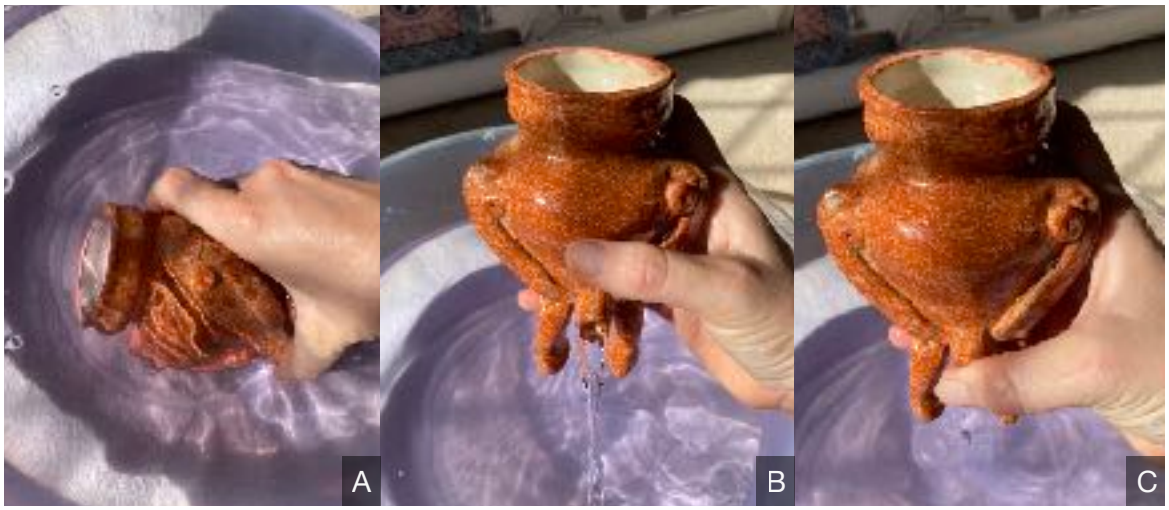

Fig. 4.7. *Second experiment with holding the cup. Photo A shows submerging it with the thumb as a stopper B shows how a thumb can be moved to allow outflow easily whilst holding the vessel in one hand. C shows holding the vessel whilst full and plugging the chute with a thumb.* (Bull, 2024)

More than Meets the Igel[34]

As previously noted, the potter's wheel was not widely used in Early Cycladic II period, Syros, therefore the foundation vessels were probably hand-built, possibly with the coil method. For my recreation I used a wheel to throw a conical bowl, and a larger, tall vessel which I then squeezed into an oblong prism, more like the hedgehog's body (fig. 4.8). This was for two reasons, the first was to achieve the well-finished result of the hedgehog (my hand building skill of vessels cannot achieve results to a comparable standard) and secondly was for the sake of saving time. In future attempts to recreate the object it would be worth doing it without a wheel to fully appreciate the effort going into such an object, but a skilled, experienced craftsperson might not recognise the effort to the extent an amateur, 21st century potter does so such a comparison would be limited.

As with the Syro-Hittite vessel I had to wait for the thrown piece to dry to leather-hard before inverting it, anchoring it to the wheel and trimming the bases. Again this process does not necessitate a wheel if one is skilled at getting even,

Fig. 4.8. *The foundation vessels, trimmed and leather hard* (Bull, 2024)

Fig. 4.9. *Legs attached to the torso* (Bull, 2024)

[34] The interpretation of the Chalandriani Hedgehog was probably influenced by "Old Europe" fertility connotations due to the word 'igel' being both the word for a cow's uterus and a hedgehog (Gimbutas, 1989;256). The title is also a tribute to the challenge of reconstructing the vessel.

precise results although such a skill is one I am still developing. Once it was dry I left it covered to finish later on, retaining its moisture. At the hand-building stage I started with attaching 2 legs, each made from a rolled out coil of clay with a thicker end and a thinner end that then got bent upwards and shaped into a 'foot' (or 'paw'). These were attached with slip and an anchoring coil (fig. 4.9).

When I initially started planning how to make this vessel I had thought to make the hedgehog first then attach the bowl, I quickly realised this would be a struggle to so and the better option was to attach the bowl before closing over the neck and attaching the head. As such after attaching the legs I addressed the bowl. Firstly I marked out on the body and the bow where they would meet, this is as easy as lightly wetting the clay and pressing them against each other so that when removed there is a textured area where the two surfaces pulled at each other. I then drilled a small hole with a stick in each and enlarged it to about 2cm, lining them up I used slip to glue the two together. With one hand I supported the bowl and with the other I carved the hole until it was as big as it was in the picture. Once this was done I found a supporting object for the conical cup (luckily I had a smaller side-project pot to hand which made an ideal prop). I rolled out a small panel of clay that I formed into a channel and left to dry for a few hours (on a warm day) to reach leather hard. I then lined it up with the vessel, where I carved the end to sit flush against the conical bowl and attached all three with slip and anchoring coils. Once attached I had to pay attention to smoothing out the centre of the channel so that no liquid would be caught in any grooves once it was used for pouring. Unlike the Syro-Hittie vessel, I could not practice pouring and liquid through it as it would require holding liquid within the wet clay for too long and this was too fragile a piece. Instead I rolled out and attached the arms, here I ran into one of the main problem with recreating objects from photos online. Not matter how I tried to anchor them on the torso, the

Fig. 4.10. *Bowl and arms attached, drying on a prop* (Bull, 2024)

arms appears much longer than in the photos in order to sit half way along the cup. However I secured them, pushing the paws into the cup and smoothing them down, leaving it to dry on the support whilst I built up the shoulders (fig. 4.10).

Fig. 4.11. *Coil method for 'shoulders' of the vessel, seen from inside*(Bull, 2024)

For the shoulders/neck I built them up using coils that I smoothed outside and inside as best as I could, with an increasingly narrow hole (fig 4.11). The figurine appears to have a slight hunch, perhaps to suggest the bed of quills on the hedgehogs back. Subsequently I had to build up the back of the vessel more than the front, using shorter, fatter coils. Once this was done and the neck hole was about 4cm wide, I let the clay dry to a harder-than-leather consistency so as to support the attaching of the head. In regards to forming the head I initially tried to model a hollow one, but realised it quickly deformed when trying to attach it to the shoulders, I then decided to try two methods of making the head.

The first was to make it completely solid out of clay, something that is risky as it is more likely to explode in the kiln. Regardless I had better control over the shaping of it and found holding a ball of clay, pinching and smoothing out the nose all very cheirotic, the ears could be pinched out as well and all formed a relatively stable head (fig. 4.12). Because the solid head was heavier, I had to wait for the shoulders to dry as much as possible without drying out completely, I then attached the head with the coil and slip method,

Fig. 4.12. *The solid head resting on the vessel, prior to attachment* (Bull, 2024)

smoothing it down. The warping under the weight of an added head is something previously noted by Morris, Peatfield & O'Neill (2019) with Minoan Peak Sanctuary figurines, whereas they found such warping could be corrected post-construction, the closed off but hollow nature of this vessel did not allow for that. To try and prevent any kiln-explosions, I let this figurine dry completely before firing which took just over a week in the British summer (daily temps c.20 degrees celsius).

The second model I tried to complete in a day, it was built almost entirely like the first except for the head, which I modelled from a solid lump before pinching out a hole in the skull base, with this method I ensured no part of the clay was thicker than 2cm, hopefully preventing kiln explosions. The head attached the same way, although because I didn't wait so long to let the shoulder's dry, it meant I had to supervise the drying after the head was attached, applying water to cracks as they formed under the 'chin' of the head. Unfortunately the joints between the arms, cup and torso of the second hedgehog were not allowed to dry sufficiently in the of 24 hour timeframe and so all joints unfortunately fell off or cracked upon firing.

Once the piece was 'bisque' fired, I applied underglaze to make it terracotta coloured, this was an additional step to compensate for using a different clay. For authenticity I could have just applied the yellow brown and black slip markings, dried the piece completely and gone straight to the secondary, higher glaze-firing, although this increases the likelihood of explosions and may cause different looking results. Therefore once the underglaze base was applied, I painted over with black underglaze to add the markings. This was markedly more difficult as the reference photos were only from mostly front showing angles and the markings were incomplete on the artefact, most likely due to time.

I therefore had to look at both sides of the piece to work out what was missing and fill in the gaps on both sides. The face and etchings on the back were the most difficult as attention had to be made to details, in particular the fine pupils and making sure they were balanced. The result (fig. 4.13) was not completely accurate, admittedly I focused on recreating the idea of what was there, making sure every marking was represented, if not exactly in place. To

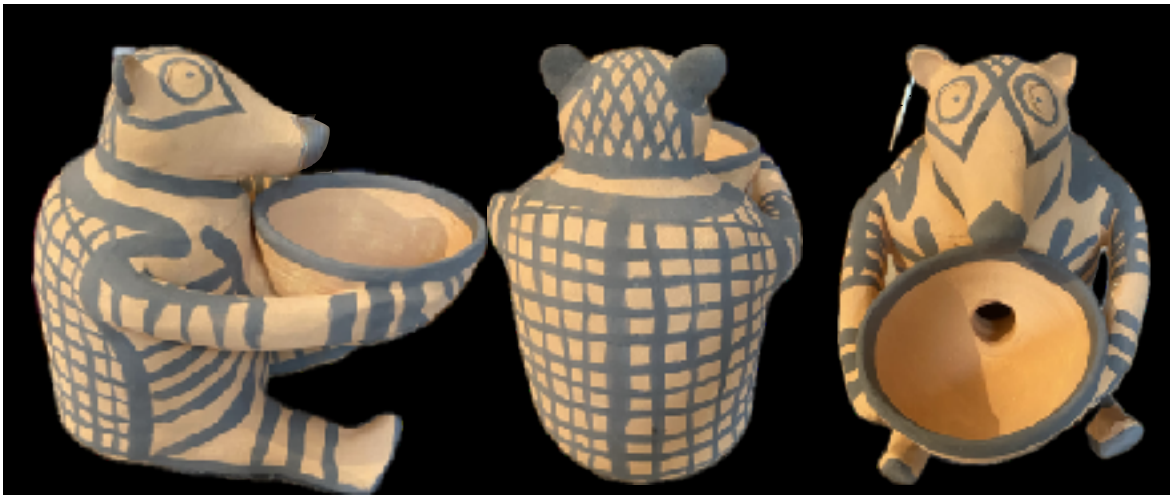

Fig. 4.13. *Markings before firing, showing right hand, back & front view* (Bull, 2024)

achieve the burnished effect of the piece (which is often achieved through extensive handling), I made another modern concession and applied a thin, clear glaze, which unfortunately clouded in the kiln (fig. 4.14) although it made for a strong, water resistant finish that allowed for experimentation with using it.

If I were to recreate this object again, I would focus on authenticity, making the vessels without a wheel and not relying on underglaze to recreate the image, I would also avoid using glaze to focus on how porous the clay was after a higher firing.[35] Secondly I would not focus so much on recreating the object, rather I would try to make something like the hedgehog but with attention being paid to the making rather than matching the result to something predetermined.

Fig. 4.14. *Finished vessel* (Bull, 2024)

To fill the vessel I attempted two approaches, the first was pouring a liquid into the cup (fig. 4.15 & 4.16). I found that when pouring quickly it in the cup there was a moment where the cup filled almost

[35] Especially because in hindsight to this experiment, I did not take into consideration how natural evaporation of the contained liquid may inform the use of this object, in particular the ‘feeding’ narrative where it would appear ‘consumed’ over time.

Fig. 4.15. *filling the vessel with quick pouring* (Bull, 2024)

entirely before flowing into the vessel, appearing as if it drunk. If poured slowly the liquid emptied into the vessel steadily, disallowing the cup to fill until the vessel filled first (4.16.a). The second method of filling through submersion was much quicker and more effective, although allowed for little interaction with the object (fig. 4.17).[36] The most efficient method of filling it was tipping it backwards (so that the hole was the highest point of the vessel) and placing it in the liquid (I used water) until it stopped bubbling. Upon removing it I had a vessel that filled the cup until the hole was covered by water and could dispense roughly 3 cups worth before having to tip the vessel extensively to fill the cup. It is worth noting that through this experiment I could better understand the object, such as proving the dispensing theory for the object as unlikely, evidenced in fig 4.17b that shows water pouring from the vessel, through the cup and out when tipped. Even when pouring from the vessel, despite knowingly holding the hedgehog myself, it appeared more as if the hedgehog was tipping the cup rather than being tipped along with it. Such an object may therefore had

Fig. 4.16. *First Experiment with pouring to fill the vessel. Photo A shows the flow whilst liquid is poured in. B shows the bowl depth level once the vessel is filled. C shows the liquid being tipped back out of the hedgehog vessel.* (Bull, 2024)

[36] In this experiment dye was added to the water after the vessel was filled to manage risk of dying myself and the filling area with large quantities of dyed water.

had a transference of agency of who was dispensing the liquid, from the person holding the hedgehog to the hedgehog itself.

Fig. 4.17. *Second Experiment with submerging the vessel. Photo A shows the vessel and cup submerged. B the liquid being poured back out, in particular how it flows from the vessel into the bowl and out again. C shows the liquid level in the bowl once uprighted.* (Bull, 2024)

The Social Context of Making

It is worth considering the social environments in which each piece was made. As previously noted, it is unlikely that either object could have been made in a single sitting due to the clay needing to dry in between building phases. Through reproducing the SHV, I propose such an object may have been made as more of a craft object as I did not find it needed more than basic pottery skills and tools, and had limited if any decorative slip. By craft object I am applying the Firth criteria of the application of technical skills in craft objects is towards useful ends (1994;16), although such a distinction is hard to define in history and can be regionally different where the distinction may depend on social (rather than aesthetic) parameters. Nonetheless this object can be made relatively easily and if the crafter is willing to work entirely upside-down, in which case it can be made within a day, once the foundation vessel is suitably dry. Conversely the hedgehog would require a more artistic techniques and was probably made by a specially skilled craftsperson with its enchanting decoration, especially when its intentional style was corroborated by a second hedgehog fragment from Ayia Irini (Ashbacher, 2017). Neither object could be made entirely in a single sitting,

therefore taking that the space used to make such objects into consideration may provide insight into its social life. Perhaps they were made in specific pottery making places where people would sit around as a group, making, talking and commenting on each others pieces, the social brain hypothesis (SBH) and Material Engagement Theory (MET)[37] would support this, proposing that material feedback, and the space itself, held influence over the objects' creation as much as its social input. As both pieces are from warmer climates than Britain (where the recreations were made in a more temperature controlled building in the evenings), drying times may have been shorter and working hours different (such as avoiding making them in the heat of midday). If these were made in evenings, in designated pottery areas, what then, did people say whilst making such apparently bizarre objects? How did it feel to view the SHV being built and coming to life? Or the Pierides man? If humour mainly occurs during conversational engagements, as proposed by Martin & Kuiper (1999), then were these products starters of conversations or results of them? Alternatively how was this changed with the Chalandriani hedgehog, whose origins were either outside of Chalandriani or the creator travelled, as discussed in Chapter 3.

As proposed with the SHV, I believe some of these objects could be the creative response to mundane items, such as standard rhyton bases, whereas the more thoughtful Hedgehog probably required focus and attention to details. Furthermore I would argue that the hedgehog was definitely intended to be a hedgehog from the beginning whereas the SHV could have been an impulsive decision. Nonetheless the process of animating clay into these interactive vessels, each with a narrative, forces the maker to engage with these objects as they think how best to represent an action, or best view the object when it is completed and used. If their intention was to be humorous then the maker would also have to interact socially with the objects whilst enacting Theory of Mind to the third degree to anticipate other people's responses to such objects. Therefore the creation of these objects itself is heavily imbued with empathy and sympathetic alignment of the maker, the object and the anticipated audience towards a mirthful reaction. They force the maker to sympathise with both object

[37] as discussed in Barona, 2021

and user in a way that would have been facilitated by humour as they think about joke delivery and reception.

Living with Objects

As previously stated all of these objects would need to have been made over the course of several hours or days, to reduce explosions upon firing their creators may have even waited a week or so for the clay to fully dry. This then raises the question of 'living' with such objects that are made to be emotionally and physically arousing, mentally engaging and potentially highly communicative. Their efficacy is limited when in stages of incompletion (such as before the arms are added to the SHV, or prior to the face being drawn on the hedgehog), but this may be mitigated by the creator's 'minds-eye' and knowledge of how it would look completed. Even when finished these objects are intended to be animated by liquid and therefore exist in-between living and clay, they are capable of acting alive (urinating, drinking) and yet when left un-interacted with, they remain inanimate. They also remain even when not in use, due to the fact they remained in tact, these objects would have been kept safe prior to deposition. How would it feel to 'live' with such objects, especially between interactions when they are inanimate but their potential to do so remains? This agency to *act* alive does not subside, especially once knowing how they act is realised. They therefore take on a new form of 'enchanting', unlike Gell's 'beautifully made, made beautiful' (1994; 40),[38] I propose their enchantment comes from their existence within a third state between 'object' and 'alive'. Furthermore how would this ability to stimulate humour be affected in periods of dormancy, or once agency was realised?

I theorise this third state of dormant life enhances responsiveness to the objects as their very nature stimulates elaboration of potential schema of their use, as such fulfilling the comprehension-elaboration model of humour perception.

[38] which gains its enchantment from its visual effect of the object

'Afterlives'

With the perspective of making and how these objects are used informed by physical agencies and limitations of hard copies, we can start to reconstruct the objects' biographies from creation to use (Kopytoff, 1986). They continue to hold agency upon and after excavation, with the Chalandriani hedgehog this was to instantly communicate connotations of "Cycladic whimsy" (Caskey in Thimmes 1977, 523) that would continue to baffle and enchant modern observers and inspire numerous potential elaborations around it. However for the Syro-Hittite Anthropomorphic vessel its afterlife biography is one of obscurity and ethical dilemma. Its providence is unknown, finding its way on to the modern antiquities market from a 'private collection', therefore its reemergence is unknown, whether it was smuggled from a dig or a result of looting of heritage sites.[39] Furthermore it is circulated within the private market, disallowing public observation and academic study, as such the practice of making such a vessel is subject to speculation that can only be informed through its recreation at this present time.

The nature of such animate objects themselves require handling and interaction. Restricting analysis to viewing them and theorising about their use prevents the reconstruction of complete narratives or allowances for their agencies. This therefore raises the question of how should we engage with these social objects from the past and whether they can be properly appreciated on display behind glass within museums or private collections. For the sake of the preservation of such objects, in particular in light of recent events,[40] it would be pertinent to prevent physical access to such objects. It may even be better to prevent framing interpretations of the object to allow for emotional response from viewers, especially if such objects trigger humour perception mechanisms, allowing for elaboration-potential and incongruity. However this may risk the

[39] I should note here that attempts were made to get in touch with the auction house in order to get more information on these objects however these went unanswered.

[40] This dissertation was written around the time of Burgess (2024) 'Boy accidentally smashes 3,500-year-old jar on museum visit' at https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckg2j2y20epo

humorous element of the object being lost, considered bizarre or alarming without the context to indicate humour. Therefore the object risks being misunderstood entirely. As such for these engaging objects, interactive models (made from a safe, resilient material such as resin) to allow for public (and researcher) handling would allow better understanding and appreciation for these social objects.

Through modern Eyes

These objects have all been treated differently by modern audiences than by their contemporary cultures. Due to the temporal distance between their deposition and reemergence into the modern gaze, they take on the additional filter of ‘ancient’. This heavily influences their interpretation, often encouraging the viewer to attach a deeper meaning to their existence than necessary. It may even lead to the attachment of new labels, such as ‘art’ as they are reinterpreted with new criteria. However, the same social mind that views them today made them thousands of years ago, as such these objects need to be interacted with as social agents.

To counteract this ‘ancient’ filter, I interpreted an adaption of each object within modern, contemporary culture. I made two versions of each object as a precaution against accidents in the kiln, once they survived the bisque firing I decided to finish a version of each object allowing for modern tools and materials. For the SHV I decided to apply a black glittering glaze, with a secondary one around the top to run down, providing a more distinct separation of ‘head’ and ‘body’ (4.18.a). I glazed the inside a shiny white for two reasons, the first contrast to the external glaze, and secondly because a shiny glaze finish is more sanitary for liquids. The end result was a dazzling object that invited the viewer to look closely at the effect of light on the surface. On the one hand this may have distracted from the overall image of a urinating man however I believe it added a non-tendentious element to this joke, inviting the eye to look before it had a chance to fully process what it was viewing.

With the Chalandriani hedgehog, I had no second figurine to physically reinterpret. However with the blank bisque base of the first model, I noticed that the figurine resembled Winnie the Pooh, a character from a children's story. Had the second vessel survived I would have decorated it as such, complete with a 'honey' bowl, hopefully keeping the semantic attitudes in which it was first believed to exist, as assigned by Caskey, of whimsy (Caskey in Thimmes 1977, 523). As such I believe the object remained as engaging as the hedgehog was and although this could be seen as a trivialisation of what may have been a ritual object, I believe it makes the object relatable to modern audiences, reminiscent of a childhood figure that may, if anything, reinforce a type of ritual of remembering such narratives.

In retrospect, reimagining these objects in a modern way encouraged engagement with them as they were related to modern schemas. This may have kept their semantic meaning within a modern framework allowing for a better appreciation of such objects.

Fig. 4.18. *Modern perceptions of the vessels. Photo A shows the second version of the SHV.* (Bull, 2024) *B & C shows a side by side comparison of the Hedgehog recreation* (Bull, 2024) *and an illustration of Winnie the Pooh* (Disney, 1990)

Conclusion

Perhaps these reworking of the images to a modern attitude superimposes researcher biases and ideas, catering evidence to reinforce my own interpretation of these objects as ones of comedy. However this tends to be a common problem with any interpretation of meaning within archaeology (as discussed in Gillespie, 2003). Indeed this general approach to looking for humour

in the ancient past could just be an effort to humanise a distant and dusty past which can be seen to have detrimental ramifications of trivialising it. This is a common critique of humour studies, that it holds non-serious connotations and therefore cannot be considered noteworthy (Palmer, 1994; Chapman and Foot, 1977). Such attitudes disregard humour's sympathetic agency, connection with complex, cognitive process as well as its efficacy within social applications, such as promoting group cohesion, communicating ideas and providing a safer environment for correction or contention. As an established behaviour it would have just as much application within an ancient environment as a modern one, therefore supporting its recognition throughout time.

Through recreating and reimagining these objects I hope to have proven how engaging with the past helps to understand both the objects and the people who made them. The resulting object can then be used to understand both the physical abilities and limitations of these objects, providing the material engagement available to past peoples and thus able to partially inform their landscapes. It was through interacting with these objects and observing them interact with liquid that provided insight into the effect they had on a viewer upon use.

Chapter 5: "...Funny Things Are Everywhere!"

-Dr Seuss, *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* (1988)

Throughout this dissertation I have questioned the ability to identify humour in material objects from the prehistoric world using the criteria:

- Presence of an incongruity
- Communication of reduced violatory ideas
- Superiority-enforcing ideas (in particular the making of others into 'fools')
- Aggressive or sexual themes
- Elaboration-potential of humorous scenarios, the higher the potential the more humorous the object
- Whether such objects are 'social objects', in particular are they capable of inducing or enhancing a *paratelic* state[41]
- A lack of clear symbology
- Whether the amount of effort expended on the creation or understanding of the object negates its humorous potential (otherwise knowns as whether the comprehension of the object mitigates its elaboration potential)
- An object behaving in an unexpected way
- An object being in an unexpected place
- An object being the wrong size
- If it was capable of an 'aha' moment

Through the application of my proposed criteria I believe this is not only possible to identify humorous agency within objects but to develop a useful tool for gaining insight into the social environments of objects. Through embodying

[41] Although not explicitly explored, this theory informed the perspective with which I considered 'social agency'.

humour they can act to promote social cohesion in multiple ways: they can communicate ideas in a protected environment (Mulkay, 1988), relax social boundaries and instil a ‘feel good' mindset by inducing a *paratelic* mind set (Apter 1982; Yim, 2016) as well as making those engaging in humour appear more likeable (Mettee et al. 1971). Furthermore if discussions[42] into the relationship between the human mind and the material world suggest a much closer relationship than originally supposed, then an object’s efficacy to instil such a social mindset as humour is conceivable. In particular if we consider how the interrelationship between SBH, MET and Entanglement suggests three fundamental things:

- Humans are inherently social to the point that their interaction with the material world is socially directed.
- Material objects are capable of informing cognitive processes in a feedback loops (e.g physical properties of a material may inform, limit and inspire the creator/user).
- Objects can therefore have social lives with people to the extent of influencing our social brains.

All of this is better understood through material engagement such as the making and use of recreations, in particular to better understand how the introduction of liquid better informs the object's narrative. Therefore when considering the highly social behaviour of humour through such interaction with them, it stands to reason that objects themselves can inspire and engage in humour, as well as inform their interpretation. As such they could be quite powerful emotional and social tools, the incorporation of humour into ancient social landscapes opens up many future avenues of research both within archaeology and heritage applications.

In regards to heritage, joking with the past may increase interest in the lives of past peoples. It requires rethinking and engaging in the past, in what may be a true study of social objects. This may therefore change how we present ancient artefacts, in particular where emphasis is placed and how social meaning

[42] Primarily by Barona (2021) and Ingold (2013).

is inferred. Further research could look into the relationship between humour and identity, maybe by identifying jokesters or how identity is communicated through humour. Although this has been looked at regarding personal identity within present societies (Turnbull, 1965;183),[43] this could also be applicable to the ancient world, such as with the negotiation between Egyptian influences and Cretan identities in the Harvester Vase. Another application for humour may be to communicate social stratification due to comic themes pertaining to 'in-groups' and deriding 'out-groups', suggested by Billig (2005).

The relationship between metaphorical or figurative concepts and humour has already been discussed (Apte, 1985), in particular how it may overlap with religion (Polimeni and Reiss, 2006). There are many applications where this could be extended into ancient rituals, such as the ecstasy of Egyptian festivals or its use in shamanic rituals (Apte, 1985).[44] Another application could be within medico-magical ritual due to laughter's effect as a pain relief (Yim, 2016). It is therefore within reason that humour could have been used in ancient rituals at which point it might be materially scaffolded, such as by the Chalandriani Hedgehog. The incongruence and incongruity solving process of humour may also be linked to innovation. The relaxing of social and logical boundaries of humour, its links with creativity and its occurrence in a protected atmosphere would facilitate innovation. This would be furthered by the figurative connections necessary for incongruity resolution and would warrant further investigation.

In regards to SHB and MET we may also gain insight into a new dimension of sympathetic relationships between objects, individuals and groups, in particular how they may be mutually effective. The application of humour may be a constructive way of doing so due to its strong social application and clear material indicators. Barona's paper (2021; 28-29) calls for a means by which the connection between the social mind and the environment is navigated and influences creativity, complex cognition and abstract thought. I propose this

[43] Who comments on 'designated clowns' within the Mbuti tribe, who's primary role was to act as a buffer between disputants, diverting any direct offences and taking the blame on himself thus absolving others.

[44] Who looked at 'ritual clowns' in some native North American Tribes.

would be best addressed through identifying and studying examples of humour due to its connection with all of those subjects. Therefore by establishing criteria with which to identify humour it may be possible to apply it cross-temporally as well as cross-culturally and therefore may facilitate the research within evolutionary archaeology.

Another area that could be studied is humour and gesture, how humour may be communicated through such gesture and whether it is possible to identify it as such within figurines. In particular I propose this is done through looking at studies into early models of humour, in particular mimicry, pantomime and exaggeration Shultz, 1976/1997.[45] Regarding the studying of humour within archaeology, evolutionary psychologists are already researching humour's link with language and early complex cognitive processes, this may be adapted to looking at humour's role in communication. As previously mentioned on the social role of humour, it has applications in opening up honest communications, relaxing boundaries, social cohesion, promoting likeability and cohesion. It therefore may have been a useful tool in the increasingly cross cultural world of the Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean as well as at times of changing social structure, such as with the Pierides Man.

As such the potential social insights provided through the studying of humour has many future applications all of which I propose can be furthered through such an interdisciplinary approach as exhibited by this dissertation.

The question remains whether we can successfully identify humour in prehistory? I propose the criteria discussed in this dissertations aids in identifying humour, however due to the role of personal and cultural tastes it is unlikely we will ever truly understand ancient humour. Similarly we may also miss when subjects are meeting such criteria due to the lack of a complete semantic framework, as such a meaning may be missed or interpreted as something else. That is not to say we should exclude humour when considering archaeological objects, due to its central role within human social lives and has multifaceted applications within all

[45] Schultz (1976/1996) argued that the exhibitions of humour in young children parallels its development in human evolution, the younger it is communicated in children, or the earlier models they understand then the earlier it emerged in our evolutionary behaviour.

areas of our lives. Through acknowledging such emotional agency it may also provide new insights as well as a new way of relating to the past through seeing the funny side of our ancestors. In short this dissertation hopes to have demonstrated that you can find the humour in ancient history without having to be there when the joke was first made.

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