

# [Cypriot in, copper. the greek word for](https://assignbuster.com/cypriot-in-copper-the-greek-word-for/)

Cypriot Ceramics of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages8 March 2000Cyprus, or Kypros in Greek, is one of the largest islands in theMediterranean. It is situated about forty miles south of Turkey and abouttwo hundred and forty miles north of Egypt. To the east it has the mountainrange of Lebanon on the mainland and to the North that of Taurus. The nameit bears is derived from the mineral that it is so rich in, copper. TheGreek word for copper is kypros. It was also celebrated in antiquity as thebirthplace and favorite dwelling of Aphrodite, the goddess of love in Greekmythology, and was known for its wealth beauty and decadence. In the second millennium BC the Eastern Mediterranean was full ofturmoil because of the conflict with the Hyksos who ruled Egypt.

But whenthe Hyksos were expelled in the middle of the sixteenth century BC therewas a period of peace and growing trade and equally growing urban centers. Many harbor towns soon sprung up on the southern coast of Cyprus. The mainpoints of trade at this time were the Aegean and the Near Easterncountries. These years of peace caused unprecedented wealth for the island. The island witnessed a lot of cultural innovation, advances in ceramics aswell as strengthening of ties with the Greek civilization. The Cypro-Minoanscript developed in this time. But although Cyprus did not play a majorrole on the political front with her neighbors, she suffered from raidsfrom migrating conquerors during the latter half of the thirteenth centuryBC.

These invasions were not only problematic to Cyprus but also to manyother peoples that they crushed along the way, such as the Hittites andUgarit, until, in 1191 BC they were stopped and defeated by Pharaoh RamsesIII of Egypt upon attempt to invade his domain. Also since the island wasso rich in natural resources and was so strategically geographicallyplaced, it was subject to raiding by the Assyrians, the Egyptians, thePersians and others. When these hostilities came to an end, a great deal of MycenaeanGreeks came to settle on Cyprus, approximately 1200 BC – 1100 BC. Apparently the Greek writers of later times attributed this mass exodus tothe Trojan War, saying that many of the heroes that fought in it now cameto settle on the island.

The influence was very powerful especially on thelanguage and the arts and so the culture has remained predominantly Greeksince those times despite the later conquests of other cultures. From the eleven hundreds to the middle of the eighth century BC iswhat later came to be called the Early Iron Age. And as the people becamepredominantly Greek so did the artwork. The ceramics of the time showAegean influence in both shape and technique, but they differ from theirmainland neighbors in their slight influence from the orient. Religious andburial traditions and beliefs started to change closer to those of theGreek. And fashion was influenced as well with the introduction of thesafety pin.

This time was also marked by many earthquakes and natural disasters, which led to massive destruction and the abandonment of many cities. Thefirst hundred years of the Iron Age, also known in this geographic regionas the Cypro-Geometric Period, some of the destroyed cities were rebuiltand many new ones were established as well. During the ninth century BC there was an influx of Phoenicians, whoare assumed to have been running from their home in modern day Lebanonbecause of the harassment they endured from the Assyrians. They dominatedthe city of Kition, which was to become their most powerful stronghold. Thecities of Salamis, Paphos, Curium and Amathus also thrived during thatperiod. The Phoenicians influenced a wide range of things includingreligion, pottery shapes and ornament design. Their main influence, however, was the alphabet, which was introduced to the Greeks in the eighthcentury BC but somehow did not become functional on Cyprus until the fourthcentury BC. The pottery of this time on Cyprus as well as on Crete seems to havea much influence from the Orient as it does from Greece, specifically thatof Central Asia Minor.

After the turmoil that the Eastern Mediterranean hadendured in the centuries past the Mycenaean culture withered out onmainland Greece as well as on Crete, and Cyprus was the only place that itwas preserved in. Cyprus thrived during these years as opposed to Greecewhich entered a “ Dark Age” that was to remain for centuries until finallygiving way to the Classical Greek civilization. In the Late Bronze Age andthe Early Iron Age the Cypriot potter was still producing hand formedpottery without the help of a wheel, although many of the civilizations onthe mainland, on both sides, were already advanced enough to create apotter’s wheel or a more primitive form of the process where the artistused both hands to work on the piece and the assistant turned the piece forhim. This area of the world was not a unified one since there was a largeamount of diverse peoples and they lived in diverse economic and geographicregions. But with the flourishing of trade in the second millennium BC thecultures began to accept the accumulated technical skills of theirneighbors.

The pottery that served religious purposes remained largely thesame in shapes and patterns, since the purpose that it served did not callfor anything more. In secular pottery, however, shapes were changed andrefined with time and influence from neighbors. Aesthetically speaking, Cypriot pottery was known for its freedom of form and imaginative imageryeven if it was greatly stylized at times. Cyprus was the only place wherethe conservatism of the Early Bronze Age was broken and a great variety ofincised ornament and plasticity was added to the works. Patterns rangedfrom completely organic shapes and naturalistic images to bold geometricpatterns, with minimal subsidiary detail. And although the pottery of thetime on Cyprus is still technically inferior to that of many of itsneighbors in technique, it carried an aesthetic creativity and fluiditythat put it amongst some of the best creations of its time in the NearEast.

Some of this imaginative yet incredibly varying design is oftenattributed to the multi-racial influences of the Iron Age migrations. When it came to decoration, Cyprus is known for its White Slip waresthat are closely allied in their decorative element to that of Cappadocianpainted ware but the form of the pottery itself was the age-old Cypriotdesign. There was a frequent use of bichrome decoration, a techniqueemployed by potters of Tell Halaf over three thousand years earlier but theexperts agree that the invention of the process was completely independentfrom that of its previous users. The ware utilized was very fine, gray orbrown ferruginous clay, and it was fired to an almost metallic hardness inkilns capable of heat that often partly vitrified both paint and pot, andusually covered with a thin polished slip. When it came to shape, many cultures in the early days ofcivilization used organic materials that were readily available to them, such as animal skin or gourds or some similar vegetable that could serve asa container when carved out. In early pottery the inspiration from suchcontainer can be witnessed in their shapes.

In Cyprus these forms werecopied as early as circa thirty five hundred years BC, and remained thebasic inspiration for household pottery until the end of the Early Iron Agein circa one thousand BC. Later, at the end of the Iron Age, the Cypriotpotters were the first to attempt large-scale sculpture out of clay. Thesepieces were larger than life human figures that were made in such numbersthat they could have comprised whole armies.

The piece that is the subject of this report is a Cypriot winepitcher. It is dated to be of the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Ageapproximately twelve hundred to six hundred BC. It was found in Hebron, probably getting there through ways of trade. The height of the pitcher isthirty-three centimeters and the diameter of the spherical bottom isseventeen centimeters. It is a hand built coil pot since wheels were not inuse until later times on Cyprus. The clay was a highly refined gray ware, kiln fired to a very high temperature. The piece was then covered with athin matte cream slip with matte brown and black decoration.

Since thepitcher was a domestic piece used for culinary purposes of every day life, the shape itself is not very imaginative and is hardly representative ofthe outrageous shapes that Cyprus is famous for. It is however of goodquality since it held out through the ages and is symmetrical in shape. Theglazes used to decorate it are assumed to be of a copper-lead base sincethe island was rich in those minerals and those were popular glazes of thetime. The pottery of ancient cultures is highly valuable right now and thispiece in particular is being sold at the moment for three and a halfthousand dollars. Works ConsultedAvery, Catherine B. (ed.).

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