

Cypriot in, copper. the  
greek word for



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Cypriot Ceramics of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages<sup>8</sup> March 2000 Cyprus, or Kypros in Greek, is one of the largest islands in the Mediterranean. It is situated about forty miles south of Turkey and about two hundred and forty miles north of Egypt. To the east it has the mountain range of Lebanon on the mainland and to the North that of Taurus. The name it bears is derived from the mineral that it is so rich in, copper. The Greek word for copper is kypros. It was also celebrated in antiquity as the birthplace and favorite dwelling of Aphrodite, the goddess of love in Greek mythology, and was known for its wealth, beauty and decadence. In the second millennium BC the Eastern Mediterranean was full of turmoil because of the conflict with the Hyksos who ruled Egypt.

But when the Hyksos were expelled in the middle of the sixteenth century BC there was 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 main points of trade at this time were the Aegean and the Near Eastern countries. These years of peace caused unprecedented wealth for the island. The island witnessed a lot of cultural innovation, advances in ceramics as well as strengthening of ties with the Greek civilization. The Cypro-Minoan script developed in this time. But although Cyprus did not play a major role on the political front with her neighbors, she suffered from raids from migrating conquerors during the latter half of the thirteenth century BC.

These invasions were not only problematic to Cyprus but also to many other peoples that they crushed along the way, such as the Hittites and Ugarit, until, in 1191 BC they were stopped and defeated by Pharaoh Ramses III of

Egypt upon attempt to invade his domain. Also since the island was so rich in natural resources and was so strategically geographically placed, it was subject to raiding by the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Persians and others. When these hostilities came to an end, a great deal of Mycenaean Greeks came to settle on Cyprus, approximately 1200 BC - 1100 BC. Apparently the Greek writers of later times attributed this mass exodus to the Trojan War, saying that many of the heroes that fought in it now came to settle on the island.

The influence was very powerful especially on the language and the arts and so the culture has remained predominantly Greek since those times despite the later conquests of other cultures. From the eleventh century to the middle of the eighth century BC is what later came to be called the Early Iron Age. And as the people became predominantly Greek so did the artwork. The ceramics of the time show Aegean influence in both shape and technique, but they differ from their mainland neighbors in their slight influence from the orient. Religious and burial traditions and beliefs started to change closer to those of the Greek. And fashion was influenced as well with the introduction of the safety pin.

This time was also marked by many earthquakes and natural disasters, which led to massive destruction and the abandonment of many cities. The first hundred years of the Iron Age, also known in this geographic region as the Cypro-Geometric Period, some of the destroyed cities were rebuilt and many new ones were established as well. During the ninth century BC there was an influx of Phoenicians, who are assumed to have been running from their home in modern day Lebanon because of the harassment

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they endured from the Assyrians. They dominated the city of Kition, which was to become their most powerful stronghold. The cities of Salamis, Paphos, Curium and Amathus also thrived during that period. The Phoenicians influenced a wide range of things including religion, pottery shapes and ornament design. Their main influence, however, was the alphabet, which was introduced to the Greeks in the eighth century BC but somehow did not become functional on Cyprus until the fourth century BC. The pottery of this time on Cyprus as well as on Crete seems to have a much influence from the Orient as it does from Greece, specifically that of Central Asia Minor.

After the turmoil that the Eastern Mediterranean had endured in the centuries past the Mycenaean culture withered out on mainland Greece as well as on Crete, and Cyprus was the only place that it was preserved in. Cyprus thrived during these years as opposed to Greece which entered a “Dark Age” that was to remain for centuries until finally giving way to the Classical Greek civilization. In the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age the Cypriot potter was still producing hand formed pottery without the help of a wheel, although many of the civilizations on the mainland, on both sides, were already advanced enough to create a potter’s wheel or a more primitive form of the process where the artist used both hands to work on the piece and the assistant turned the piece for him. This area of the world was not a unified one since there was a large amount of diverse peoples and they lived in diverse economic and geographic regions. But with the flourishing of trade in the second millennium BC the cultures began to accept the accumulated technical skills of their neighbors.

The pottery that served religious purposes remained largely the same in shapes and patterns, since the purpose that it served did not call for anything more. In secular pottery, however, shapes were changed and refined with time and influence from neighbors. Aesthetically speaking, Cypriot pottery was known for its freedom of form and imaginative imagery even if it was greatly stylized at times. Cyprus was the only place where the conservatism of the Early Bronze Age was broken and a great variety of incised ornament and plasticity was added to the works. Patterns ranged from completely organic shapes and naturalistic images to bold geometric patterns, with minimal subsidiary detail. And although the pottery of the time on Cyprus is still technically inferior to that of many of its neighbors in technique, it carried an aesthetic creativity and fluidity that put it amongst some of the best creations of its time in the Near East.

Some of this imaginative yet incredibly varying design is often attributed to the multi-racial influences of the Iron Age migrations. When it came to decoration, Cyprus is known for its White Slip ware that are closely allied in their decorative element to that of Cappadocian painted ware but the form of the pottery itself was the age-old Cypriot design. There was a frequent use of bichrome decoration, a technique employed by potters of Tell Halaf over three thousand years earlier but the experts agree that the invention of the process was completely independent from that of its previous users. The ware utilized was very fine, gray or brown ferruginous clay, and it was fired to an almost metallic hardness in kilns capable of heat that often partly vitrified both paint and pot, and usually covered with a thin polished slip. When it came to shape, many cultures in the early days of civilization used organic

materials that were readily available to them, such as animal skin or gourds or some similar vegetable that could serve as a container when carved out. In early pottery the inspiration from such container can be witnessed in their shapes.

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

The piece that is the subject of this report is a Cypriot wine pitcher. It is dated to be of the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age approximately twelve hundred to six hundred BC. It was found in Hebron, probably getting there through ways of trade. The height of the pitcher is thirty-three centimeters and the diameter of the spherical bottom is seventeen centimeters. It is a hand built coil pot since wheels were not in use 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 a thin matte cream slip with matte brown and black decoration.

Since the pitcher was a domestic piece used for culinary purposes of every day life, the shape itself is not very imaginative and is hardly representative of the outrageous shapes that Cyprus is famous for. It is however of good quality since it held out through the ages and is symmetrical in shape. The glazes used to decorate it are assumed to be of a copper-lead base

since the island was rich in those minerals and those were popular glazes of the time. The pottery of ancient cultures is highly valuable right now and this piece in particular is being sold at the moment for three and a half thousand dollars. Works Consulted Avery, Catherine B. (ed.).

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