

Kamares Ware

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Kamares Ware is a style of Minoan pottery characterized by its floral and/or geometric designs painted on top of a black slip which covers the whole vessel. The style received its name from the Kamares cave located on the southern slope of Mount Ida. In 1913, an archaeological excavation at this cave uncovered the first Bronze Age pottery depicting this decorative style. Kamares Ware uses a polychrome design incorporating several colors, including white, red, and orange in order to accent the black background. The creation of Kamares Ware began during the MM I period after the invention of the potter's wheel, reaching its height in MM IIB and eventually falling out of use during MM III. The style is further subdivided into four phases over the following periods:

Pre-Kamares

The initial use of a polychrome Minoan pottery style predates the invention of the potter's wheel. The inclusion of red and white colorants to decorate the surface of ceramic vessels can be traced back to the MM IA period. These works display simple motifs which are mostly linear. However, the use of curvilinear forms began to appear during this time, providing a transition between the first and second phases. The most typical Pre-Kamares Ware shapes were ridged cups, straight-sided cups with concave sides, and circular cups. Rounded, bridge-spouted jars with thin walls appear at the end of the MM IA period.

Early Kamares

The introduction of the potter's wheel marked the beginning of the Early Kamares phase. This invention allowed potters to create a variety of new shapes, thinner walls, crisper lines, and more curves in their ceramic pieces. Additional details, such as handles, were also added to some vessels. Spiral motifs prevail as design elements during this phase. However, unlike the individual curvilinear designs depicted on Pre-Kamares Ware vessels, the Early Kamares Ware pots often portrayed a series of interconnected running spirals.

Classical Kamares



Kamares Ware beak-spouted jug, Archaeological Museum of Herakleion (Photo: Janmad, Wikimedia Commons)]

The Kamares Ware replicas displayed in the University of Richmond's *Ancient World Gallery* are examples of ceramic works from the Classical Kamares phase. These pieces represent the height of Kamares Ware dating from MM IIA to MM IIB. While there is evidence that this style of pottery existed in remote areas of Bronze Age Crete, most scholars consider Kamares Ware to be a style popular with palace-dwelling patrons that was mostly concentrated and developed in Phaistos, Mallia, and Knossos at palatial workshops. As in the two previous phases, the spiral motif

is continued and further embellished with the addition of coils and petals. Also, natural forms such as flowers and grass begin to make an appearance. These spiral and natural motifs were often combined in diverse and unique ways in order to create a truly innovative design, one which was frequently repeated on both sides of a vessel.

Post-Kamares

While the use of a polychrome style continued into MM III, the production of Kamares Ware declined in this period. White becomes the preferred color of paint, while red only provides accents in the form of subsidiary bands or dots. The complex spiral motifs common in the previous phases are now replaced with simple white ornamentation, usually taking the form of smaller spirals, grass clumps, or foliage. In addition, a pictorial style is found on some Post-Kamares pottery. Many of these ceramic vessels depict naturalistic scenes, perhaps reflecting palatial murals from the same time period.

While these four phases delineate the development of Kamares Ware throughout the MM period, these divisions did not begin or end abruptly. There was an overlapping of artistic designs between each phase, and categories serve to classify groups of Kamares Ware with similar aesthetic characteristics. Because of its long and diverse tradition, Kamares Ware contains a wide variety of ornamentation. The main decorative characteristics are:

Polychromy - the use of different colors like red, orange, yellow, and white applied to a dark slip or bare clay, allowing for a variety of aesthetic effects

Flora and Fauna Motifs – the incorporation of plant and animal designs (with Kamares Ware the first Minoan style to do so)

Complex Ornament – the depiction of multi-lined, geometric patterns which include curvilinear shapes and flowing lines, as opposed to simple, strictly linear patterns

Complex Syntax – the arrangement of a variety of motifs across the surface of a vessel in a harmonious manner, including such effects as twisting, flowing, and swirling linear movement

Inventiveness – the nature of Kamares Ware which defies a complete cataloguing of its ornamentation, as excavations continually uncover new examples of its use, making creativity appear to be a driving force behind the production of this kind of vessel during the MM period

As a style, Kamares Ware is known for its graceful designs and varied color schemes. Many consider these works to be ceramic masterpieces, and their style characterizes the period in which they were created. The pottery's polychrome nature displays a more creative approach to decoration, explaining the fact that Kamares Ware occasionally receives greater praise than other Minoan pottery styles.

For Further Reading

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