

Marine Style

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The Bronze Age potters using the Marine Style during the LM IB period were especially interested in depicting sea creatures on their ceramic pieces. The motifs used during this era hardly ever distract from the predominantly marine subject matter and follow the Minoan decorative tradition established by earlier styles. Like Kamares Ware, the Marine Style was produced on Crete and celebrated naturalism by depicting sea creatures while simultaneously including free flowing, curvilinear motifs. A major difference between the two styles was the commonly created vase shape. While the favorite shapes of Kamares Ware were cups and jars, the Marine Style occurs most frequently on flasks and rhytons.

By the LM IB period, the Mediterranean had become the most efficient means of transportation of food and also a profitable food source for Bronze Age Crete. Both wealthy and poor members of society were directly affected by the sea. Members of the ruling class relied upon overseas commerce with neighboring settlements in order to obtain wealth. In addition, the common inhabitants of Bronze Age Crete relied on fishing as a primary food source and were therefore familiar with the sea and her bounty. For these reasons as well as the general fascination this society had with the ocean, marine plants, animals, and shells became the preferred thematic motifs for vase painters during LM IB.



Marine Style (LM IB) pilgrim flask from Palaikastro, Iraklion Museum, Crete]

The Marine Style replicas displayed in the University of Richmond's *Ancient World Gallery* show the octopus and nautilus as two of the period's favorite subjects. The image of an octopus provided Minoan artists with a flexible opportunity for decorating a ceramic vessel. With its malleable shape, the octopus could fit any surface; its spiraling tentacles allowed for a variety of positions which could be adapted to create a seemingly endless series of designs. As well, the octopus was valued for its skin, which was often eaten as a delicacy. Similarly the nautilus, essentially a spiral shell, was also important to Bronze Age society. The creature not only supplied food, but its shell could later serve as a trumpet. Like the octopus, the spiral shape of the nautilus allowed for a multitude of design possibilities. However, these were not the only two sea

creatures depicted in the Marine Style. Dolphins, sea-snails, cuttlefish, starfish, coral, seaweed, and anemones are also found adorning many ceramic vessels from this period. As evident from the vases in the *Ancient World Gallery*, the octopus motif frequently adorned jars or flasks, whereas nautilus images are often found on rhytons. However, the various marine creatures and motifs were suitable for many different vase shapes and adapted for use on a range of surfaces.

The Marine Style presents a truly unique phase in the long history of Aegean vase painting. Many scholars consider it to be the height of Minoan pottery, as its emphasis was on artistic spirit and imagination rather than the rigid and stylized designs that arise in the Palace style which follows the Marine Style chronologically.

For Further Reading

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