

Pictorial Style

Zack Orefice, '09; Rachel Starry, '11

During the LH IIIA period, a new artistic element was introduced into Mycenaean vase painting. Prior to this period, stylized natural and linear motifs had been prevalent decoration, but around 1350 BCE, human figures became a commonly included element, especially on ceramic kraters exported to Cyprus. Despite their having been created on mainland Greece, most of the surviving examples of the Pictorial Style have been found on Cyprus. This style is definitively Mycenaean as the figures imitate the frescoes that elaborately adorned Mycenaean palaces. As the replicas in the *Ancient World Gallery* demonstrate, chariot themes were a favorite subject matter for Mycenaean vase painters using the this style.



Mycenaean pictorial krater, Metropolitan Museum of Art 74.51.966

(<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/74.51.966>)]

The figures drawn in the Pictorial Style tend to have similar characteristics. For instance, Mycenaean artists did not draw the ear of the figure; instead an outline was created using the hair. The earliest pictorial artists drew the eye as an oval that extended to a figure's forehead. Later, painters created circular eyes with a dot in the center. Men are always shown standing, and they either wear a long robe (an Eastern pictorial tradition) or are depicted in the nude. As in later Classical Greece, nudity was a visual symbol for

warriors in Mycenaean society. As previously mentioned, chariot scenes were a very common subject matter. Originally artists made an effort to depict both horses realistically, but eventually they were condensed to only one horse. This single horse was portrayed as having two tails and four sets of legs in order to indicate that two animals were actually pulling the chariot. Similarly, artists of the early Pictorial Style attempted to portray two heads in profile as separate entities. However, as with the horses, two heads soon became one head which was completely frontal. Another common image utilized in the Pictorial Style was the bull. Most often its full body was depicted, but sometimes an artist would include only the head and front feet. These images may have been inspired by Minoan depictions of bulls, though models existed in Assyrian and Egyptian art.

The Pictorial Style exhibits an emphasis on the human figure, which shows a value on narration not previously seen in Aegean Bronze Age pottery. This focus on storytelling was further

developed in later artistic periods and was prevalent in Classical Greek black- and red-figure vases.

For Further Reading

Higgins, Reynold. *Minoan & Mycenaean Art*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1967.

Lacey, A.D. *Greek Pottery in the Bronze Age*. Great Britain: Methuen & Co., 1967.

Mountjoy, P. A. *Mycenaean Pottery: an Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monographs, 1993.

Vermeule, Emily. *Mycenaean Pictorial Vase Painting*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.