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A Mycenaean Kylix

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Greek, Mycenaean, Late Helladic IIIA2
ca. 1300 B.C.

Kylix

Terracotta
h: 17.2 cm; 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.

Provenance

Private Collection, acquired in Paris in the mid 1960s.
Christie's, London, *Antiquities*, 27 October 2009, Lot 197.
Private Collection, New York.



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The wide rim and softly rounded bowl of this elegantly shaped vessel is balanced by a body tapering into a solid stem and flat base. Delicately arched semicircular handles accentuate the breadth of the stemmed cup while drawing focus to the central decoration that stretches between them. The motif along the central band depicts an abstract pattern, perhaps based on plant life, where three lines move vertically upwards from right to left, and the central line splits in three and curves in on itself, with its splits curling around the peripheral lines and redoubling their curves.

This stemmed cup was created during a time of Mycenaean cultural expansion. Its transitional form is a continuation of earlier mainland ceramic styles but also foreshadows later shapes of Greek pottery. While several contemporary examples feature much taller stems, this particularly elegant vessel's low stem gives it a more solid foundation and is more reminiscent of later Greek kylixes than the others.

Popular shapes in their own time, such stemmed cups were commonly ornamented with vegetal, floral, and marine motifs. These decorative programs owe their inspiration to the preceding Minoan culture, but the Mycenaeans masterfully innovated and improved upon their predecessors' work. A particularly fascinating aspect of Mycenaean painted pottery is the increasing interest in abstraction, as seen on this vase, as well as the intentional eliding between different sorts of representation: there are several particularly fascinating vases where octopuses morph into flowers at the ends of their tentacles, and flowers bloom with nautili and cuttlefish tentacles. This vase, as an example of pure abstraction, is evidence of the Mycenaeans' visual innovations, as well as an example of their ordered style, where the motif is exactly repeated and symmetrically duplicated along a central sight line.

Comparanda



New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 06.1021.1

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Private Collection. Exhibited: Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, *Kunst der Antike: Schätze aus norddeutschem Privatbesitz*, 21 January-6 March 1977.

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