

VESSELS: STYLISTIC AND FUNCTIONAL
REFLECTIONS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD



*University
Art
Gallery*

State University of New York at Binghamton



Exhibition dates: October 20 – November 19, 1978

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A personal interest in prehistoric and ancient art as well as Old World archaeology led me to give attention to the ancient objects in the University Art Gallery Permanent Collection, which never have been formally assembled as an exhibition. It was from this restricted group that I formulated the vessel display, necessarily filling in some important stylistic and historic gaps with objects on loan from the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art in Ithaca, and with photographic panels.

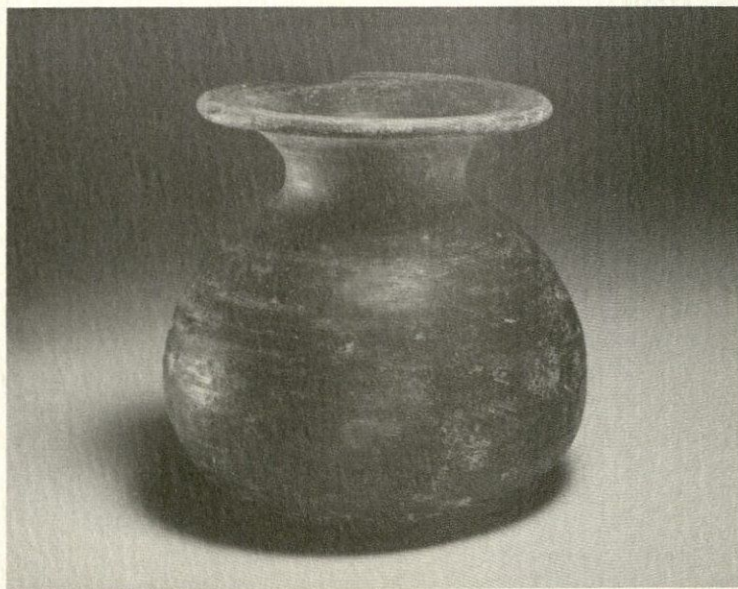
The coordination of this presentation of ancient art has been a valuable learning experience, providing the opportunity for a practical application of my academic background. I am grateful to Jill Grossvogel, Administrative and Curatorial Assistant, University Art Gallery, for offering me this opportunity as well as for her encouragement and guidance throughout the development of this show.

I would like to express my appreciation to Professor Katherine Abramovitz for her advice during the formative stages of my manuscript; to Elizabeth Evans, Assistant Curator, and Jill Aszling, Registrar, both of the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, for enabling us to enrich our exhibition with their generous loan; to Keith Metzler, Chief of Exhibit Design and Production, Verna Ezard and Ken Hay of the New York State Museum Exhibition Center, and Chris Focht, Photographic Specialist, SUNY — Binghamton, for producing the photographic panels. I thank Katherine Gleason, Walter Luckert, Rachael Sadinsky, Katie Busing and Jim Spano for offering their time and assistance in various ways.

Barbara J. Perkins
University Art Gallery Intern

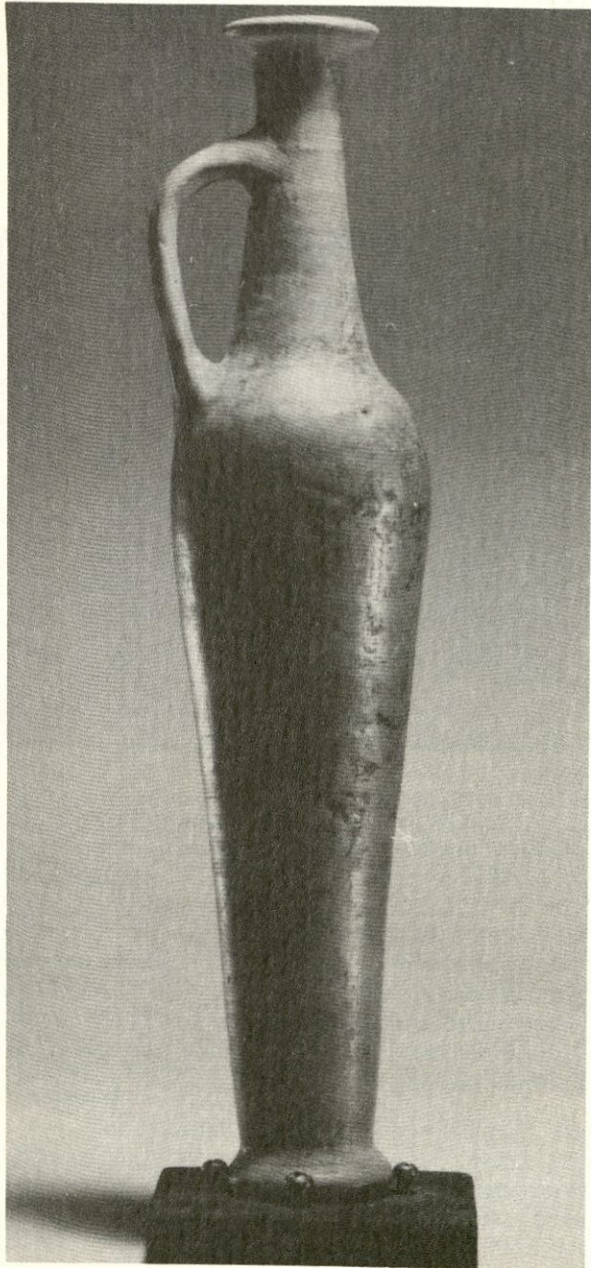


1975.42



1975.4

1975.41



Ancient vessels document the past. Shape, decoration, technical and functional aspects are clues to the history of a civilization. The vessels in this exhibition were chosen to reflect an historical sequence: Dynastic Egypt, the Aegean Bronze Age, Greek civilization, and the Roman Empire represent cultural stages along the way. The vessels on exhibit are examples of technological, sociological and artistic developments which demonstrate interaction among groups and the stylistic influence of one collective vision on another. This aesthetic positioning of civilizations, both simultaneous and consecutive, results in the gradual modification of the use and design of the artifact.

FOREWORD

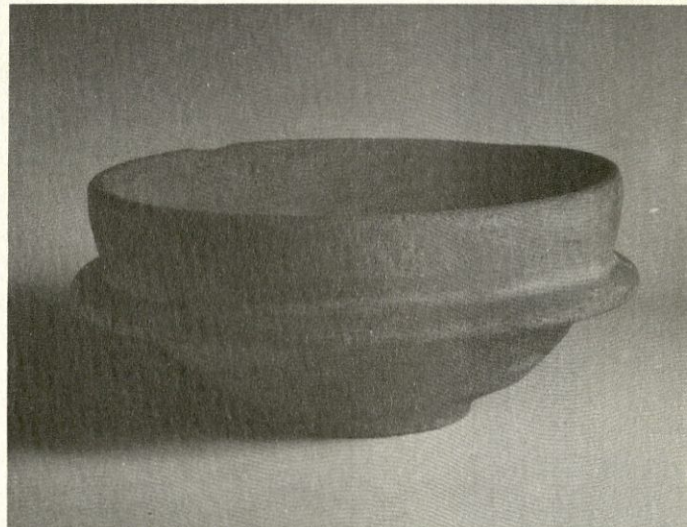
"Ancient lands, in all their prehistoric intactness: lake-solitudes hardly brushed by the hurrying feet of the centuries where the uninterrupted pedigrees of pelican and ibis and heron evolve their slow destinies in complete seclusion."

—Clea, Lawrence Durrell

The vessel, that hollow receptacle, contains within the confines of its walls a stilled history, an absence which is also the reminder of presence and plenitude. To us, the vessel is a metaphor: it is marked inside by that which it once held, and outside by the patina of the years enriching its surface texture. Its beauty is in the paradox that it is both empty and full.

Barbara J. Perkins, who prepared the material for this catalog in her capacity as Gallery intern, has been working on our modest collection of ancient artifacts and, as a result of her sustained investigation she has helped us rediscover the world which they represent. As part of an educational institution, the University Art Gallery may provide an additional outlet, another forum of learning, for students of art. We would like to believe that the accessibility of a working collection, curatorial research and conversations with donors as well as museum consultants, have contributed to this possibility. The academic community benefits from those individuals who listen closely to the voice of things and look carefully at what others may pass by.

1975.39



It is with pleasure that the University Art Gallery presents this exhibition of ancient vessels from its Permanent Collection. We are especially proud of those students for whom the Gallery signifies a different kind of space in which to work, a space whose vitality depends on their active participation. In turn, the Gallery endeavors to provide an alternative experience, a praxis for the complicated process of seeing and communicating what one sees.

J. E. Grossvogel
Administrative & Curatorial Assistant
University Art Gallery

I. During the Neolithic period (5000–4000 B.C.), the nomadic tribes of Egypt learned to domesticate plants and animals; simultaneously they established sedentary, agrarian communities. The people of these prehistoric settlements began to produce crude pottery and initiated formal burial practices, including the deposition of pottery, tools and jewelry in graves, which furnish evidence of an early belief in the afterlife.

Between 4000–3200 B.C., the Chalcolithic period in Egypt, predynastic cultures formed. This phase has been termed predynastic since indications of the developing dynastic civilization, (i.e. an early form of hieroglyphics and increasing artistic ability) begin to appear during the last phase of Egyptian prehistory.

These vessels are characteristic of the polished red and black ware found in the remains of predynastic settlements. Pieces, such as these, were produced after the conventional kiln came into use, and therefore display higher technical quality (i.e., even firing and lighter, more specialized shapes), than the pottery of Neolithic industries.

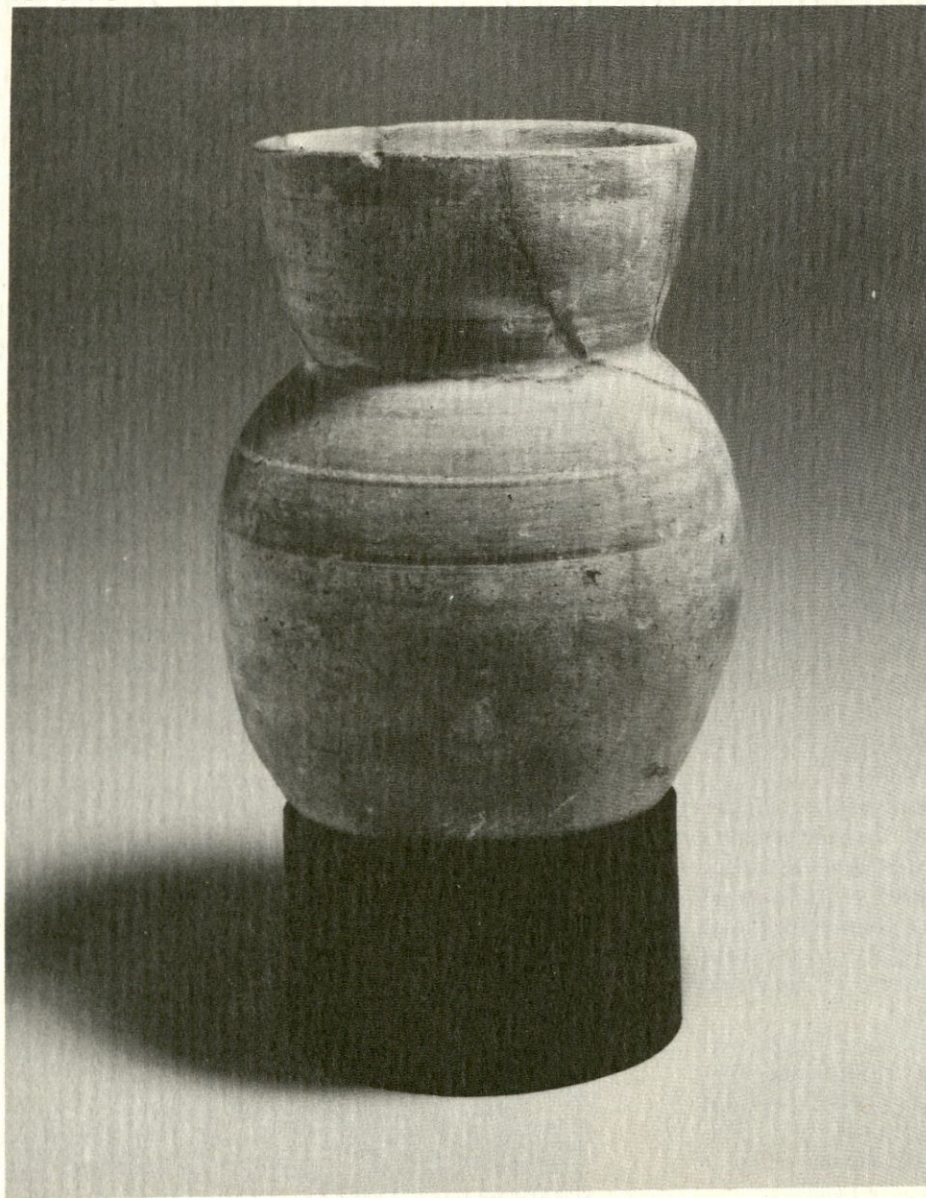
The earthenware of prehistoric Egypt was basically utilitarian, facilitating cooking and storage; but early predynastic pottery, differing from Neolithic ware, became a form of cultural expression when artists concentrated on the use of linear decoration for vessels.

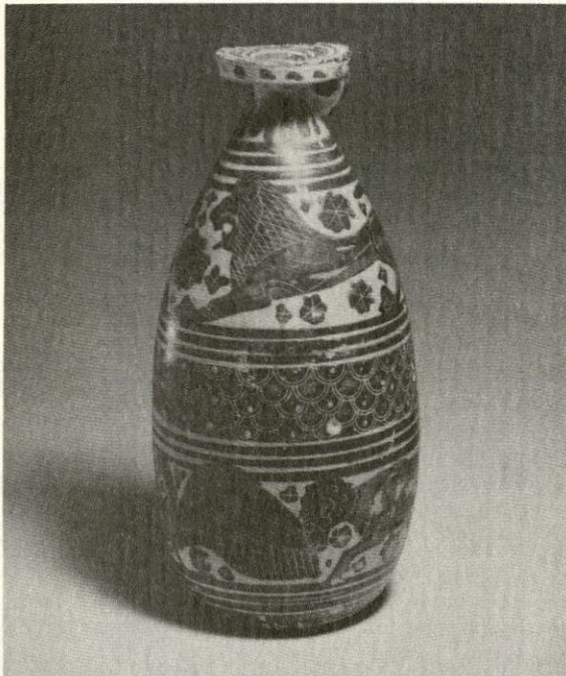
II. Toward the end of the fourth millennium B.C., Egypt emerged as a unified nation under the control of one absolute ruler. The hieroglyphic system of writing and record-keeping crystallized simultaneously with dynastic Egypt. Religious tradition was the very core of Egyptian civilization; this society was devoted to serving a God-King, worshipping a pantheon of practical deities and providing for the eternal afterlife of the soul. Egyptian art at this time existed as a function of religion (the pyramids, for instance, were mortuary monuments for the divine pharaohs; elaborate tomb art accompanied the deceased into the afterlife). Metallurgy was discovered, (ca. 2300 B.C.), initiating the Bronze Age and precipitating social change in and around the Mediterranean basin. The Egyptian Kingdom remained conservative, preserving its religious conventions for thousands of years, in spite of political and technological change.

The everyday pottery of dynastic Egypt, (see Acc. nos. 1975.4 and 1975.38) continued to be designed for household functions while higher quality, more decorative vessels were created for religious purposes. Vessels containing food were deposited with the dead as provisions for the afterlife, and offered ritually to the gods.

Ceramic technology advanced with the introduction of the potter's wheel in Egypt; thereafter the production of pottery was more efficient, the forms more refined.

1975.38





III. Crete provided a bridge between Ancient Near Eastern and Western civilization. The Minoans established a powerful maritime network between 2000 and 1500 B.C. Their society progressed from an agrarian to a mercantile economy. Cretan merchant sailors exchanged goods from Egypt, the Near East and the Aegean; Minoan trade introduced Eastern and Cretan influences into the Aegean world. These influences, consisting of artistic and technological developments, stimulated the rise of Mycenaean civilization on the Greek mainland. The power of Mycenae eventually superseded Minoan dominance in the Aegean (ca. 1400 B.C.)

Cretan potters crafted utilitarian vessels while at the same time demonstrating an awareness of artistic concerns in the decoration of their pottery; they thus anticipate the blossoming of Greek vase-painting. The shift from concentration on use to interest in aesthetic value is central in understanding the evolution of the vessel in ancient art.

IV. By 1200 B.C. the Bronze Age gave way to the Iron Age and a period of social upheaval. Massive migrations in the Aegean overwhelmed existing nations. Greece was left in a "dark age" from which it did not emerge until the beginning of the first millennium B.C. By the ninth century B.C., migrant populations had merged with the native society of Greece into a new, Greek culture.

Cyprus, located in the eastern Mediterranean, was surrounded by the Egyptian, Near Eastern and Aegean civilizations. Being rich in copper deposits, Cyprus supplied her Mediterranean neighbors with metal in exchange for pottery and luxuries. As a result of this commercial contact, Cypriot culture absorbed various artistic and technological concepts from the sophisticated Bronze Age Kingdoms.

The eclectic nature of Cypriot art is evident in its pottery. The trefoil mouth *oinochoai* type is derived from foreign models; the use of a pale slip echoes a Mycenaean mode of vase-painting; motifs painted in dull black and red are of Oriental inspiration.

V. Near the end of the eighth century B.C., an upsurge in trade opened a direct cultural bridge between Greece and the Near East. This is considered to be the period of Orientalizing art, since Eastern influences had a major and lasting impact on the Greek aesthetic.

Corinth was one of the important political and commercial centers in Greece during the Orientalizing period. This *alabastron*, an oil flask, is typical of vases produced there in response to Near Eastern influence. The tapestry-like effect, created by polychrome bands of animal processions filled in with ornamental forms, may have been inspired by Oriental textiles.

VI. The Greek ideal — in which man is the measure of all things — becomes evident in the passing of power from an absolute monarchy to the collective voice of the sixth-century Athenian citizenry. Anthropocentrism is also apparent in Greek mythological writings where the more accessible gods are endowed with human qualities rather than with the mysterious and obscure aspects of Eastern deities. Art began to enjoy a new place in Greek society: it was no longer merely a function of religion, but appreciated for its own sake.

The Greeks maintained commercial contacts throughout the Mediterranean, colonizing east and west. Alexander the Great expanded the sphere of Greek influence, both political and cultural, in the fourth century B.C. when he conquered the Near East.

In the mid-sixth century B.C. the Black-Figure vases of Athens dominated the pottery market. The Black-Figure technique consisted of painting a solid silhouette form, incising detail and painting in highlight colors. Black-Figure painters, along with other Archaic artists, concentrated on the representation of the human figure. Artistic idealization of the figure continually emphasizes man as the focus of the Greek vision. Pottery painting was a media through which Greek artists articulated aesthetic values and developed an expressive style.

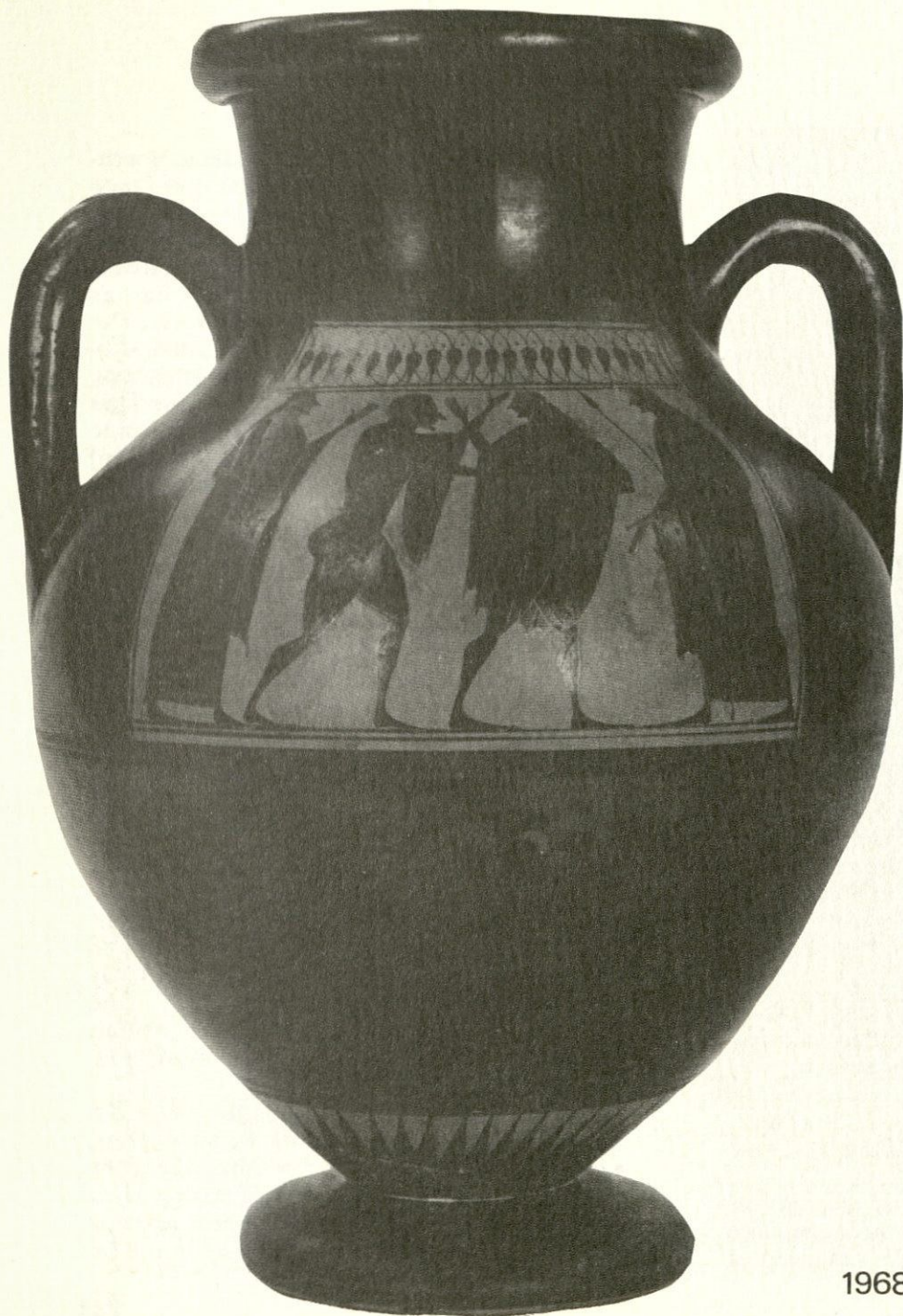
The Black-Figure amphora (Acc no. 1968.124 in the University Art Gallery's Permanent Collection), has been attributed by J. D. Beazley to an artist called the "Affector." His painting style is identifiable by the stiff, artificial movement of his figures; his vessels tend to be mannered variations of cliché forms. Modern scholars are able to identify other potters and painters specifically by name, such as Exekias, because artists of the time commonly signed their piece. Among the many styles in evidence during Antiquity, the art of Archaic and Classical Greece is particularly associated with known, individual artists.

VII. In about 530 B.C., the Red-Figure style supplanted Black-Figure technique, establishing a precedent for the next century of vase-painting. With the new method, the silhouette was left unpainted; black paint provided a background and detail was then brushed on the clay surface. This technique allowed the painter more freedom in drawing; stiff forms of Archaic painting became more graceful during the Red-Figure phase of painting. Attic Red-Figure vases, the vogue of fifth-century Greece, were imitated and exported throughout the Greek world.

Depicted on this Red-Figure cup is Eros, the god of love in Greek mythology, riding a fanciful ram (Acc. no. 1968.122).

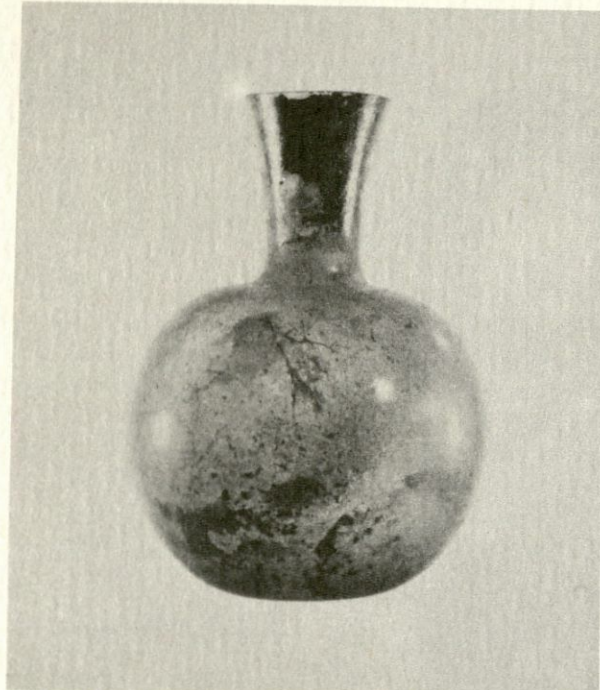
VIII. During the first half of the first millennium B.C., the Etruscans, a people of controversial origin, dominated Central and Northern Italy. Between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C., the Etruscans and other Italic populations came into contact with the Greek civilization through Greek colonies in Southern Italy. Etruscan culture was greatly influenced by its encounter with the Greeks, transmitting much of this influence to its Latin successors in Rome.

Although the Etruscans were more provincial craftsmen than fine artists, their buccheroware displays excellent workmanship and an elegant, unique style. Bucchero ware was derived from metal models and influenced by Greek ceramic shapes viewed during the age of colonization. This buccherro form is, in fact, similar to the Greek *kantharos*, a drinking vessel.



1968.124

1973.61



IX. Power struggles between the successors of Alexander the Great at the beginning of the third century B.C. left the Greek Empire divided into the Hellenistic monarchies of Egypt, Asia and Macedonia. The social conflict and political strife which characterized the Hellenistic world caused its eventual disintegration.

With the dissolution of the Greek Empire, many artists emigrated to the Italian colonies. Vessels, such as these, were produced by Hellenistic Greek artists in the South Italian province of Apulia for local markets. The *kylix* is a Greek wine cup; the bell crater was used for mixing wine and water.

The popularity and quality of painted pottery declined at this point; only those ceramics which imitated metal relief-ware remained in demand.

X. Trade with the Greek colonies in Southern Italy stimulated economic prosperity in Rome during the fourth century B.C. At the same time, Roman political power grew as her territorial control expanded throughout Italy. In the second century B.C., Rome replaced the Hellenistic East as the cultural hub of the Mediterranean world. The Imperial Romans conquered nations previously under Greek control, as well as those in Europe and Africa. From the first century B.C. until the fall of the Empire in the fifth century A.D., Rome was the central authority of a vast, international civilization. The Romans, who concentrated on military realities and civic life, produced art forms with practical functions of a utilitarian, often propagandistic nature.

Cinerary urns contained the ashes of cremation. The lid of this Etrusco-Italic urn portrays the deceased on her funerary couch. The Etruscans made urns prior to the invasion of their territory by the Romans. Provincial Late Etruscan craftsmen under Roman control continued producing urns, such as this second-century vessel. The Romans later developed sarcophagus relief-carving and portraiture from this tradition of funerary art.

XI. Although glass had been produced during the Egyptian Dynasties, it was a rare and expensive luxury due to the laboriousness of early techniques. During the first century B.C., the glass-blowing method was invented. Thereafter, glass became a mass-produced and more affordable item.

Blown unguentaria and bottles were designed to hold oils and perfumes. Common glass, such as this, has been found throughout the realm of Imperial Rome, from Syria to Spain. Their iridescent quality is due to a chemical reaction that occurs when glass has been buried in soil for some time.

1975.85 - .89



VESSELS: STYLISTIC AND FUNCTIONAL REFLECTIONS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

- I. a) SHALLOW BOWL
Egyptian (predynastic), ca. 6000–3200 B.C.

Terracotta
diam.: 11 in.
Gift of Mrs. Ruth Blumka
Acc. no. 1975.37

- I. b) BOWL
Egyptian (predynastic), ca. 6000–3200 B.C.

Terracotta
diam.: 5 in.
Gift of Mrs. Ruth Blumka
Acc. no. 1975.39

- I. c) UNGUENT BOTTLE
Egyptian (predynastic), ca. 6000–3200 B.C.

Terracotta
h: 6½ in.
Gift of Mrs. Ruth Blumka
Acc. no. 1975.40

- I. d) BOTTLE
Egyptian (predynastic), ca. 6000–3200 B.C.

Terracotta
h: 13 in.
Gift of Mrs. Ruth Blumka
Acc. no. 1975.41

- I. e) WATER JAR
Egyptian (predynastic), ca. 6000–3200 B.C.

Terracotta
h: 9 in.
Gift of Mrs. Ruth Blumka
Acc. no. 1975.42

- II. a) JAR
Egyptian (XVIIIth Dynasty), 1580–1320 B.C.

Terracotta
h: 3¾ in.
Gift of Mrs. Ruth Blumka
Acc. no. 1975.4

- II. b) JAR
Egyptian (XVIIIth Dynasty), ca. 1400 B.C.

Matte-painted terracotta
h: 9½ in.
Gift of Mrs. Ruth Blumka
Acc. no. 1975.38

- III. Potsherds (Handles, bases)
Cretan (Late Minoan I), 1600–1500 B.C.

Terracotta
Gift of Dr. Amy Gilbert
Acc. no. 1974.5

- IV. TREFOIL MOUTH OINOCHOAI
Cypriot, 1000–800 B.C.

Buff-slipped, painted terracotta
h: 9 in.
Purchase: Mathias Komer
Acc. no. 1968.123

- V. ALABASTRON
Greek (Corinthian), 600–550 B.C.

Painted terracotta
h: 9 in.
Purchase: Mathias Komer
Acc. no. 1968.121

- VI. BLACK-FIGURE AMPHORA
[attrib. to the Affector Painter]
Greek (Attic), 540–530 B.C.

Painted terracotta
h: 14½ in.
Purchase: Mathias Komer
Acc. no. 1968.124

- VII. RED-FIGURE ONE-HANDLED CUP
(Shape 8 in Metropolitan Museum Grouping system)
Greek (Attic), ca. 450 B.C.

Painted terracotta
h: 5¾ in.
Purchase: Mathias Komer
Acc. no. 1968.122

- VIII. KANTHAROS
Etruscan, early 6th c. B.C.

Black Buccheroware
h: 7 in.
Lent by the Herbert F. Johnson Museum
Acc. no. 64.4

- IX. a) KYLIX
Italian (Apulian), 5th c. B.C.

Terracotta
diam: 6 in.
Lent by the Herbert F. Johnson Museum
Acc. no. 59.159

- IX. b) RED-FIGURE BELL CRATER
South Italian, 3rd c. B.C.

Painted terracotta
h: 7½ in.
Lent by the Herbert F. Johnson Museum
Acc. no. 74.74.8

- X. CINERARY URN WITH LID
South Italian (Etrusco-Italic), 2nd–1st c. B.C.

Polychromed terracotta
h: 11 in.
Lent by the Herbert F. Johnson Museum
Acc. no. 74.74.9

- XI. a) UNGUENT AMPULLAE
Roman, 1st–3rd c. A.D.

Glass
h: 2¾–5 in.
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Stephen Major
Acc. nos. 1975.83, 1975.85–.94

- XI. b) BOTTLE
Roman, 1st–3rd c. A.D.

Glass
h: 4¾ in.
Purchase: M. Ayres
Acc. no. 1973.61



1968.123

