## ANCIENT GREEK VESSELS

PATTERN AND IMAGE



#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

It is my pleasure to acknowledge the many individuals who helped make this exhibition possible. As the first collaboration between The Trout Gallery at Dickinson College and Bryn Mawr and Wilson Colleges, we hope that this exhibition sets a precedent of excellence and substance for future collaborations of this sort. At Wilson College, Robert K. Dickson, Associate Professor of Fine Art and Leigh Rupinski, College Archivist, enthusiastically supported loaning the ancient Cypriot vessels seen here from the Barron Blewett Hunnicutt Classics Gallery/Collection. Emily Stanton, an Art History Major, Wilson '15, prepared all of the vessels for our initial selection and compiled all existing documentation on them. At Bryn Mawr, Brian Wallace, Curator and Academic Liaison for Art and Artifacts, went out of his way to accommodate our request to borrow several ancient Greek vessels at the same time that they were organizing their own exhibition of works from the same collection. Marianne Weldon, Collections Manager for Special Collections, deserves special thanks for not only preparing the objects for us to study and select, but also for providing images, procuring new images, seeing to the documentation and transport of the works from Bryn Mawr to Carlisle, and for assisting with the installation. She has been meticulous in overseeing all issues related to the loan and exhibition, for which we are grateful. At The Trout Gallery, Phil Earenfight, Director and Associate Professor of Art History, has supported every idea and initiative that we have proposed with enthusiasm and financial assistance, without which this exhibition would not have materialized. James Bowman, Registrar and Preparator, was a constant source of reassurance with all matters regarding preparation, didactics, design, and installation. Jennifer Kniesch, Visual Resources Curator for the Art & Art History department, lent her much-needed expertise with scanning and photoshopping the large map included in the exhibition. We have greatly enjoyed working with Heather Flaherty, Curator of Education, who will be conducting several exciting programs for diverse audiences. Finally, Stephanie Keifer and Rosalie Lehman have kept the day-to-day operations of The Trout Gallery running smoothly throughout the process, and we thank in advance our Gallery attendants, Satsuki Swisher, Catherine Sacco, and Rosalie Lehman. I must extend special recognition here to Sarah Eisen '15, who approached me a year ago with the idea of undertaking this curatorial independent study, and which has now culminated in a very fine exhibition and catalogue. Her dedication, industry, and expertise is evident throughout all aspects of this project, and they are qualities that will serve her well in her future studies. It was a pleasure to work with her.

Melinda Schlitt Professor, Art History William W. Edel Professor of Humanities Dickinson College

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Cover: Cypriot Oinochoe. Geometric, Black-on-Red Ware. On loan courtesy of the Barron Blewett Hunnicutt Classics Gallery/Collection. Hankey Center, Wilson College.

Back cover and opposite center: *Black Figure Lekanis*. Attributed to Polos Painter. On loan courtesy of Bryn Mawr College Art and Artifact Collections.

Title page: (l) *Cypriot Bowl*. Early Geometric. Black-on-Red ware. On loan courtesy of the Barron Blewett Hunnicutt Classics Gallery/Collection, Hankey Center, Wilson College. (r) *Attic Red Figure Squat Lekythos* On loan courtesy of Bryn Mawr College Art and Artifact Collections.

# ANCIENT GREKVESSELS

With works from the Barron Blewett Hunnicutt Classics Gallery/Collection, Hankey Center, Wilson College and Bryn Mawr College Art and Artifact Collections.

May 22 – September 26, 2015







Curated by: Sarah Eisen

THE TROUT GALLERY • Dickinson College • Carlisle, Pennsylvania

#### GEOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The geographic location of Cyprus affected the shape and ornamental patterns of its ceramic vessels during the late Bronze Age (1625-1050 BC) and early Geometric period (1050-750 BC). The third largest island in the Mediterranean, situated off the south coast of Asia Minor, Cyprus was a key stop for sea trade in the Eastern Mediterranean, receiving immigrants, traders, and artistic works from various countries including Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Greece, and Crete. As a major exporter of both timber and tin, the latter of which was a necessary alloy in the bronze smelting process, Cyprus enjoyed a strong trade economy during the late Bronze Age. 1 Cyprus maintained a prominent international role in trade during the successive Geometric period of pot production, capitalizing on exports including oil, perfumes, and timber.<sup>2</sup> This high volume of trade required distinguishing goods from certain geographic locations, resulting in the development of specific shapes of ceramic vessels to signify an object's country of production and origin.<sup>3</sup> Simultaneously, this high amount of trade also had an effect on the visual patterns of the vessels, as new motifs were introduced to Cypriot ceramic workshops from foreign imports and the transmigration of artistic ideas. For example, the frieze of latticed lozenges, which can be seen in this exhibition on the neck and shoulder of a Cypriot amphora, is an Aegeaninfluenced pattern, introduced at the end of the Bronze Age and beginning of the Iron Age in Cyprus around 1000 BC [fig. 1].4 Foreign examples of ceramic art in the Early Iron Age were most likely prompted by mass waves of immigration from Greece, following a series of events including earthquakes that contributed to the decline of the Mycenaean kingdoms that forced populations to relocate.

Although the Cypriot vessels in this exhibition can be dated to the Late Bronze Age and Early Geometric period, the vessels from Greece were crafted at a later period in time. A majority of the vessels here come from the 5th and 4th centuries BC and were produced in the region of Greece around Athens, which is called "Attica" by Classicists and Archaeologists today. During this time, Greece was experiencing what can be called a "golden age," characterized by the flourishing of writing, philosophy, and art. In defining Greek cultural identity, which was focused around the "polis" (city), religion and ideology permeated art and vase painting, which, at this time generally represented idealized figural imagery and perfected, standardized ceramic construction. Athenian ceramics were distinguishable by the specific clay used from the region of Attica, which was rich in iron and produced a rusty-red color. In fact, ceramics produced in other locations in Greece, such as Corinth, were sometimes painted with red ochre or an additional slip that would imitate the color of Attic clay. The reason for this practice was not only for the sake of aesthetics – the clay from sources outside of Athens usually

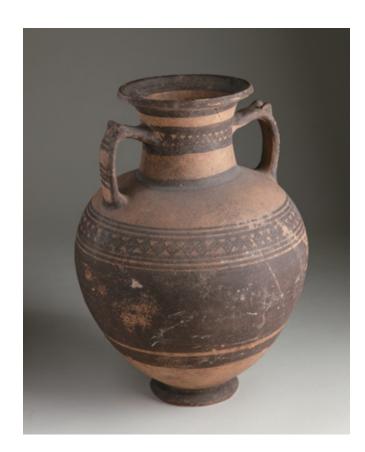


Fig. 1. *Cypriot Amphora*. Late Bronze Age, ca. 1000 BC. On loan courtesy of the Barron Blewett Hunnicutt Classics Gallery/Collection, Hankey Center, Wilson College.

required an additional layer of slip added to the exterior surface of vessels in order to render the walls smooth enough to be suitable for decoration.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the presence of ceramic workshops all over Greece and the larger Greek-colonized Mediterranean, Athens held a monopoly over fine exported ceramic-ware in the 5th and 4th centuries BC. The ceramic production center in Athens was located in a section of the city called Kerameikos, located northwest of the agora. Archaeological excavations there have revealed a high concentration of potsherds, whole vessels, and a number of kilns and structures resembling workshop quarters. Although the quality of ceramics from 5th-century BC Greece that have been excavated in archaeological projects varies because of the high quantity of vessels and sherds found widespread throughout the Mediterranean, it is logical to assume that specialization in craft was highly developed, and artisans were both potting and decorating vessels with great care and training.

Despite the elaborate detail, imagery, and time invested in the painting of patterns, figures, and narratives, Greek ceramics at their core are functional objects of art. The shape of these vessels was formed in a way that would aid in the function intended for each vessel. This begs the question: what were the functions of specific ancient Greek and Cypriot ceramics? Did decorative design interplay with shape and function, and if so, how? The physical evidence of vessels and their imagery argue that the function of a vessel affected the motif or figural imagery depicted on it, with the decoration somehow relating back to its intended use and purpose. Furthermore, the shape of the vessel provided the painter with guidelines and limitations that affected pattern and design.

#### **OINOCHOE**

A shape that was specific to Cyprus during the late Bronze Age/Proto-Geometric Period (1225–1050 BC) is the trefoil mouth, which can be seen on the large "basketball" oinochoe in this exhibition [fig. 2]. This vessel functioned as a wine pourer (as its etymology suggests) coming from the Greek words oivo $\varsigma$  (wine) and  $\chi \acute{\epsilon} \omega$  (pour). The neck and trefoil mouth would aid in controlling the flow of liquid out of the vessel, while the belly would hold a large volume. This



Fig. 2. Cypriot Oinochoe. Geometric, Black-on-Red Ware, ca. 950–750 BC. On loan courtesy of the Barron Blewett Hunnicutt Classics Gallery/Collection, Hankey Center, Wilson College.

oinochoe has a thick handle and sturdy walls, indicating that the potter intended this vessel to have strength and endurance. The thick walls also suggest that this oinochoe was a vessel intended for use, and did not have a decorative function, which would have much thinner walls. The oinochoe is wheel thrown, bi-chrome ware, with dark brown paint added for decoration in concentric rings on both horizontal and vertical axes. These circles were added onto the vessel with the help of a compass that held many brushes, allowing the painter to maintain a consistent distance between the numerous, circled lines. The artist would hold the compass in one place while the vessel was turning on the wheel, requiring extreme precision of hand. John Boardman suggests that the compass technique might have been introduced to Greece from Cyprus.<sup>7</sup> The placement of the circles around the belly emphasizes the shape and prominent curve of the vessel.8 The circle zones also emphasize the articulation between parts of the vessel – two horizontal ring groups surround the neck and the shoulder, and vertical concentric circles distinguish the body.

The shape and size of the oinochoe were determined by the need for a vessel that could hold and dispense a large amount of liquid. There was no superfluous ceramic design every part of the vessel (handle, neck, body, spout) is functional. Decoration was not the first priority of the painter; rather, it served to emphasize the shape and size of the vessel as it had been determined by the intended function. However, this prioritization does not mean that the decoration was added as an afterthought or without careful planning. The decoration is a sophisticated and intentional geometric design, which required the painter to possess mathematical skills and pay meticulous attention to detail. Circles are placed where the vessel swells in order to emphasize the curvature of the oinochoe's belly, and lines define each part of the vessel (i.e., lines separate the spout, neck, shoulder, belly, and foot of the vessel) allowing the viewer to appreciate how the individual parts of the vessel come together to form a whole. The design of the decoration is carefully planned and placed on the vessel to complement its shape.



Fig. 3. *Cypriot Bowl*. Early Geometric, Black-on-Red ware, ca. 950–850 BC. Clay. On loan courtesy of the Barron Blewett Hunnicutt Classics Gallery/Collection, Hankey Center, Wilson College.

#### BOWL

Similar patterns can be seen on a Cypriot bowl, the function of which was intended to hold either food or objects [fig. 3]. The bowl has steep sides and tapers to a ringed foot. In addition to parallel lines circumnavigating the vessel, this bowl also has 6 sets of small concentric circles, spaced evenly around the bowl and divided into two groups of 3 by handles. After the clay of the vessel had air-dried to a leather-hard state, it would be tilted and propped on the wheel used to throw the vessel. While the wheel was spinning, a compass-brush tool similar to the one used to create concentric rings around the body and a dark brown matte paint would be utilized to make perfect circles. The motif of small concentric circles frequently occurs on ceramics of various geographic origins in the late 11th and early 10th centuries BC, indicating the movement of design by means of trade and contact and the importance of the compass tool. The concentration of the exterior decoration on the handle zone draws the viewer's attention and places emphasis on this part of the vessel. On the interior of the bowl, a variety of thick and thin parallel line ring the walls, and emphasize the curve and tapering of the vessel.

The placement of lines and circles on this vessel was precise and mathematical. A great deal of planning went into crafting proportions between the shape of the vessel and the pattern. The imagery displays the importance of symmetry in ceramic painting around the Proto-Geometric period, and the meticulousness in the placement of design indicates that a master artisan would often add painted decoration to ceramics.

#### **LEKANIS**

The black-figure lekanis in this exhibition is attributed to the Polos Painter (575–565 BC), who produced vessels of mediocre artistic quality and was named after a diagnostic crosshatched "polos" crown, worn by women, sirens, and sphinxes that often appear in his imagery [figs. 4, 5]. These crowns are easily seen on the numerous figures on this vessel, which John Beazley identified as sirens. A close examination of the incised decoration in the black-figure style reveals the lack of finesse – lines are over drawn in a careless manner [fig. 6]. The lower quality of his work indicates that this vessel and others from this painter were intended for what Boardman calls, "less-discriminating" buyers. In other words, the vessels created and decorated by the Polos Painter were less expensive than vessels produced by artisans who invested more time and





Figs. 4 and 5. *Black Figure Lekanis*. Attributed to Polos Painter, Archaic, ca. 575–565 BC. Clay, 2 3/16 x 8 1/4 x 7 in. (5.5 x 20.96 x 17.78 cm) On loan courtesy of Bryn Mawr College Art and Artifact Collections.



Fig 6. Detail, *Black Figure Lekanis*. Attributed to Polos Painter, Archaic, ca. 575-565 BC. Clay,  $2\,3/16\times8\,1/4\times7$  in.  $(5.5\times20.96\times17.78$  cm). On loan courtesy of Bryn Mawr College Art and Artifact Collections.

precision into their craftsmanship. The lower cost of the vessel made it accessible to the population of lower fiscal income, who could not afford to "be discriminating" and purchase vessels from the elite vase-painters. In addition to a clay slip that was incised as a medium for decoration, a matte brown paint was also applied for tonal variety.

A lekanis is a shallow, footed dish with two horizontal handles, in this case, ribbon handles. <sup>12</sup> The archaeological record indicates that the lekanis became a popular ceramic shape in early black-figure painting around the early 5th century BC. Some lekanis were lidded, although few lids survive in the archaeological record. Lekanis functioned primarily as holding vessels, which it turn dictated the shape and size of the vessel; a deeper dish with more vertical walls could hold food, while shallower lekanis would hold small items like thread, spices, or dressing and grooming objects for women. The shape was also associated with nuptial ceremonies and occasionally a wedding procession would be depicted on lekanis. <sup>13</sup>

The bowl-like shape of the lekanis, which was determined by its intended holding function, consequentially affected how the vessel could be decorated. The specific curved shape of the lekanis created zones of decoration, which included the foot, the exterior and interior curves of the body, and the handles. On the Polos Painter lekanis, these distinct zones are emphasized with different decorations, motifs, and patterns – a frieze of sirens on the exterior body, plain black gloss on the interior with a single siren in the tondo, and a dotted pattern on the rim. <sup>14</sup> A majority of the figural imagery occurs on the exterior part of the bowl-shaped body, possibly because the inside was intended to hold objects, and therefore the visibility of imagery in the interior of the body would be obscured. The exterior curvature of the lekanis also naturally supports a long, frieze-like decoration. A ray pattern is present on the base of the

vessel, possibly included to make the transition from the body of the vessel to the foot less abrupt. This pattern was common at the foot of black-figure vessels. <sup>15</sup> While the location and extensiveness of the painted and incised-gloss decoration is partially determined by shape, the subject matter for this vessel was most likely determined by the consumer market. The Polos Painter is notable for selling vessels to buyers in the Eastern Greek world (i.e., Syria, Turkey, Egypt), and, therefore, would choose to paint topics and images relevant to his consumers. <sup>16</sup> Animal friezes, while not as popular in vase painting in Mainland Greece during the 6th century BC, were abundant in places like Rhodes, famous for its wild-goat style friezes, as well as in Egypt and Syria, where "exotic" animals like sphinxes and sirens are commonly depicted in stone relief and jewelry. Therefore, the decoration seen on the lekanis was marketable.

Overall, the function of the vessel affected the shape and location of the decoration. Even though the lekanis has elaborate figural imagery, decoration was not the first priority to the maker. Rather, shape was the most important aspect of the ceramic, which was determined by its intended function



Fig. 7. Attic Red Figure Squat Lekythos. Classical, Third quarter of 5th century BC. Clay, 4 1/8 x 2 5/8 in. (diameter) (10.5 x 6.7 cm). On loan courtesy of Bryn Mawr College Art and Artifact Collections.

6

and genre. Because the lekanis did not have a single religious or metaphysical function, the subject of decoration was not pre-determined. The interests of the targeted consumer population in the eastern Mediterranean most likely determined the figural imagery of this specific lekanis.

#### **SQUAT LEKYTHOS**

A lekythos is a shape with perhaps one of the most specific intended purposes; it is an oil flask. The seriation of this vessel type is well documented in the archaeological record, allowing us to date examples based on their proportions quite accurately. The lekythos in this exhibition is a squat lekythos, characterized by the short, bulbous body, and dates to the late 5th century BC. [Fig.7] Squat lekythoi, while first present in the archaeological record during the late 6th century, do not become a popular shape until the late 5th and early 4th century, and are most common in the red-figure style. 18

Lekythoi are associated with funerary rites and would be deposited in graves as offerings for the dead. Consequently, the archaeological record has a vast number of preserved lekythoi, and many have funerary scenes depicted in the figural decoration. However, lekythoi were also used in everyday life to hold oils. Around 490 BC, lekythoi began to include false bottoms at the base of the neck of the vessel, so that it held less oil and consequently was cheaper as a funerary gift. <sup>19</sup>

The squat lekythos in this exhibition is decorated in the red-figure style; a brush was used to paint a clay slip rich in silica oxides directly onto the surface before firing in the kiln.<sup>20</sup>

A panther is depicted on the vessel, with an ornamental pattern bordering the animal, which archaeologists have named "cymation".

The small size of the vessel limits the type of imagery and decoration; a large narrative or multi-figural scene could not fit on a vessel that is only approximately four inches tall. However, the artist's choice to depict a panther is intriguing, as animal imagery was rare in Attic red-figure vase painting, but it is possible that the panther was painted to allude to Dionysus. Iconographically, panthers are the symbolic animal of Dionysus, and are depicted on numerous other vase paintings as either reclining with the god, or with Dionysus wearing a panther skin, recognizable by the spots on the hide. These spots are present on the panther on our squat lekythos.<sup>21</sup> However, the question arises - why does an allusion to Dionysus occur on a squat lekythos? Dionysus is the god of wine and frenzy, but he is also associated with a secret cult in Ancient Greece concerned with extracting pleasure from life and connected with death and resurrection cycles. The cult was particularly popular with wealthy families and women, and Dionysiac imagery in vase painting increased significantly from the 5th century onward following the increase in popularity of the cult.<sup>22</sup> Because of the god's role in metaphysical cult rituals, it seems appropriate that an allusion to Dionysus occurs on a vessel that is commonly used as a funerary offering; the imagery relates to the function of the vessel.

-Sarah Eisen

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- 7. John Boardman, Early Greek Vase Painting (New York: Thames and Hudson,
- 8. William R. Biers, *The Archaeology of Greece: An Introduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 106.
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- 10. J.D. Beazley, Attic Black-figure Vase-painters (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 43.
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- Andrew J. Clark and Maya Elston, Understanding Greek Vases: A Guide to Terms, Styles, and Techniques (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2002), 112.

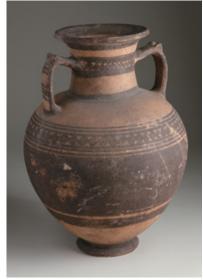
- 13. Clark and Elston, Understanding Greek Vases, 112.
- 14. A tondo (in ancient art) is a round area of design frequently found on the interior base of Greek ceramic vessels with bowl-like or holding function.
- 15. Clark and Elston, Understanding Greek Vases, 121.
- Robert Manuel Cook, Greek Painted Pottery, 2nd ed. (London: Harper and Row, 1972), 79.
- 17. Seriation is a relative dating technique based on the chronological evolution and change of stylistic attributes or frequency of objects the same cultural context.
- 18. Cook, Greek Painted Pottery, 231.
- 19. Cook, Greek Painted Pottery, 113; The ancient Greek metaphysical beliefs included an afterlife in the underworld, Hades. Complex death and burial rituals and ideology, which will not be described in detail here, were an integral part of Greek life. Funerary gifts dedicated both during inhumation and afterwards would include libations and food offerings for the dead to have in the afterlife. In addition to the deceased's possessions being buried with them, other objects, such as oil flasks, would be buried with them. Oil was used in life, and also would be required in death, for activities such as bathing and athletics.
- 20. Clark and Elston, Understanding Greek Vases, 96.
- Cornelia Isler-Kerenyi, Dionysus in Classical Athens an Understanding through Images, trans. Anna Beerens (Leidon: Brill, 2015), 215.
- 22. Biers, The Archaeology of Greece, 240.

#### **CYPRIOT VESSELS**

On loan courtesy of the Barron Blewett Hunnicutt Classics Gallery/Collection, Hankey Center, Wilson College.



Cypriot Bowl
Early Geometric. Black-on-Red ware,
ca. 950–850 BC. Concentric circles. Clay
Height: 5.11 in. (13 cm)
Width/Rim Diameter: 8.86 in. (22.5 cm)
Foot Diameter: 2.75 in. (7 cm)
Width, Handle-Handle: 9.84 in. (25 cm)



Cypriot Amphora
Late Bronze Age, ca. 1000 BC. Clay
Height: 15.35 in. (39 cm)
Width/Belly Diameter: 10.24 in. (26 cm)
Neck Diameter: 6.10 in. (15.5 cm)



Cypriot Bowl
Early Geometric, Bichrome I ware,
ca. 1050–950 BC. Clay
Height: 3.64 in. (9.25 cm)
Width/Rim Diameter: 6.10 in. (15.5 cm)
Foot Diameter: 2.36 in. (6 cm)
Width, Handle-Handle: 7.68 in. (19.5 cm)



Cypriot Oinochoe
Geometric. Black-on-Red Ware,
ca. 950–750 BC. Clay
Height: 13.39 in. (34 cm)
Width/Belly Diameter: 9.84 in. (25 cm)
Spout opening Length: 3.94 in. (10 cm)



Cypriot Two-handled, shallow Dish with wish-bone handles
Proto-Geometric. Bi-Chrome II
ware, ca. 950–750 BC. Clay
Height: 1.77 in. (4.5 cm)
Width/Rim Diameter: 11.02 in.
(28 cm)
Foot Diameter: 7.87 in. (20 cm)
Width, Handle-Handle: 14.37 in.
(36.5 cm)

Cypriot Bowl
Early Geometric. Black-on-Red
ware, ca. 950–850 BC. Clay
Height: 2.56 in. (6.5 cm)
Width/Rim Diameter: 7.48 in.
(19 cm)
Foot Diameter: 1.77 in. (4.5 cm)
Width, Handle-Handle: 8.46 in.
(21.5 cm)

8

#### **GREEK VESSELS**

On loan courtesy of Bryn Mawr College Art and Artifact Collections.



Black Figure Lekanis
Attributed to Polos Painter. Archaic, ca.
575–565 BC. Clay, 2 ¾6 H x 8 ¼ W x 7 D in.
(5.5 H x 20.96 W x 17.78 D cm)



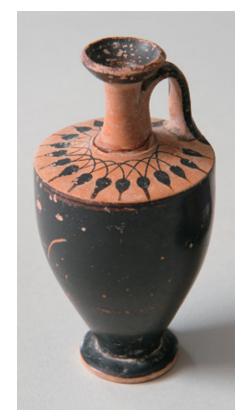
Attic Red Figure Squat Lekythos Classical, Third quarter of 5th century BC Clay, 3 % H x 2 ½ W in. (diameter) (9.9 H x 6.4 W cm)



Attic Red Figure Squat Lekythos Classical, 430–400 BC, Deer Clay, 4 1/8 H x 1/4 W in. (diameter) (10.4 H x 0.7 W cm)



Attic Red Figure Squat Lekythos Classical, Late 5th century BC, Panther, Clay, 4 1/8 H x 2 5/8 W in. (diameter) (10.5 H x 6.7 W cm)



Attic Black Gloss Lekythos Archaic, ca. 520–500 BC Clay, 4 H x 2 ½16 W in. (diameter) (10.2 H x 5.3 W cm)



Attic Black Gloss Cup
Greek, Athenian
Classical, ca. 410–401 BC
Clay, 3 3/16 H x 3 3/4 W x 4 3/8 D in.
(8.1 H x 9.5 W x 11.1 D cm)



Black Gloss Kantharos
Greek, probably Attic
Classical, 375–350 BC
Clay, 3 H x 5 ¾ W x 3 % D in.
(7.62 H x 14.61 W x 9.21 D cm)



Attic Black Figure Kylix
Late Archaic/ Early Classical,
ca. 500–450 BC
Clay, 2 <sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> H x 6 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> W in.
(6.8 H x 16.5 W cm)



Attic Geometric Mug Geometric, ca. 900–700 BC Clay, 3 7/16 H x 3 13/16 W in. (diameter) (8.7 H x 9.7 W cm)



Transport Amphora
4th–2nd century BCE
Ceramic, 29 % H x 17 W in.
(75.25 H x 43.18 W cm)
1996.1.1
The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College
Gift of Richard Stuart

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### THE TROUT GALLERY

THE ART MUSEUM OF DICKINSON COLLEGE