



About Greek Vases

For the ancient Greeks, vases were mostly functional objects made to be used, not just admired. They used ceramic vessels in every aspect of their daily lives: for storage, carrying, mixing, serving, and drinking, and as cosmetic and perfume containers. Elaborately formed and decorated, vases were considered worthy gifts for dedication to the gods.

Every community produced utilitarian pottery, but only a few main centers created fine decorated pieces. Distinct regional styles of pottery emerged in the Archaic (700–480 B.C.) and Classical (480–323 B.C.) periods from Corinth, Lakonia, Ionia, South Italy, and especially Athens.

The skills of potting and painting were often handed down from father to son. Signatures on vases suggest that many potters and painters did not have high status, and some may even have been slaves. The creation of pottery was laborious, dirty work that generally took place outside the city limits because of the space needed to make the vases and the thick smoke produced by the kilns.



Amphora

An *amphora*, such as the one at left, is a two-handled storage jar that held oil, wine, milk, or grain. Amphora was also the term for a unit of measure. Amphoras were sometimes used as grave markers or as containers for funeral offerings or human remains.

Black-Figure Amphora
Painter of Berlin 1686, about 540 B.C.



Hydria

A *hydria* was a Greek or Etruscan vessel for carrying water. Made of bronze or pottery, a hydria has three handles: two for carrying and one for pouring.

Caeretan Hydria
Eagle Painter, about 525 B.C.



Side view showing
third handle



Lekythos

A *lekythos* is a tall flask that held precious oil and was used in funerary rituals. The vessels were then left on graves or buried with the deceased.

Girl Riding Satyr
Carlsruhe Painter, 470 B.C.

