Greek Painted Pottery

An Introduction

The Importance of Pottery

- Storage containers, cookware and dishes were as necessary for the Ancient Greeks as they are for us.
- Without much glass and with metal being expensive, clay was a very handy material.

Clay!

- Clay is inexpensive and readily available.
- It is weathered rock that has crumbled to dust.
- The impurities in clay give it varying colors.
  - For instance, red clay contains iron.

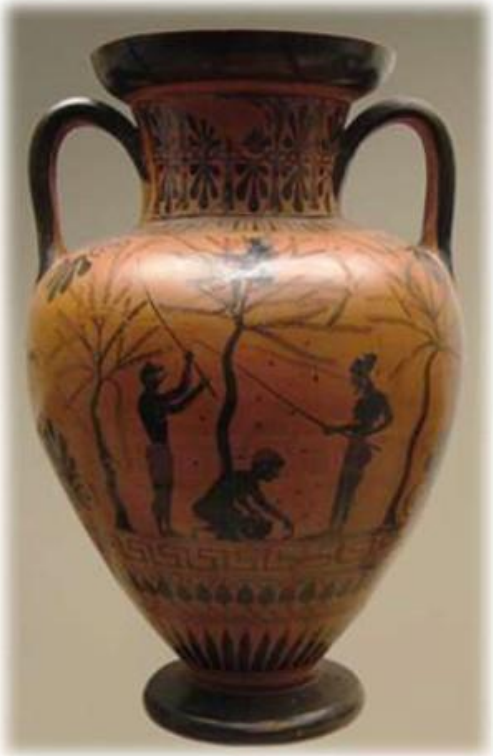
Wheel Throwing

- Clay is kneaded and thrown on a wheel.
- As the wheel spins, the potter shapes the clay and forms it into the desired shapes.
- Large pots are made in sections. Handles, feet and spouts were also created separately.
- Sections are glued together with a layer of thin, watery, clay, known as a **slip**.

Pottery Art

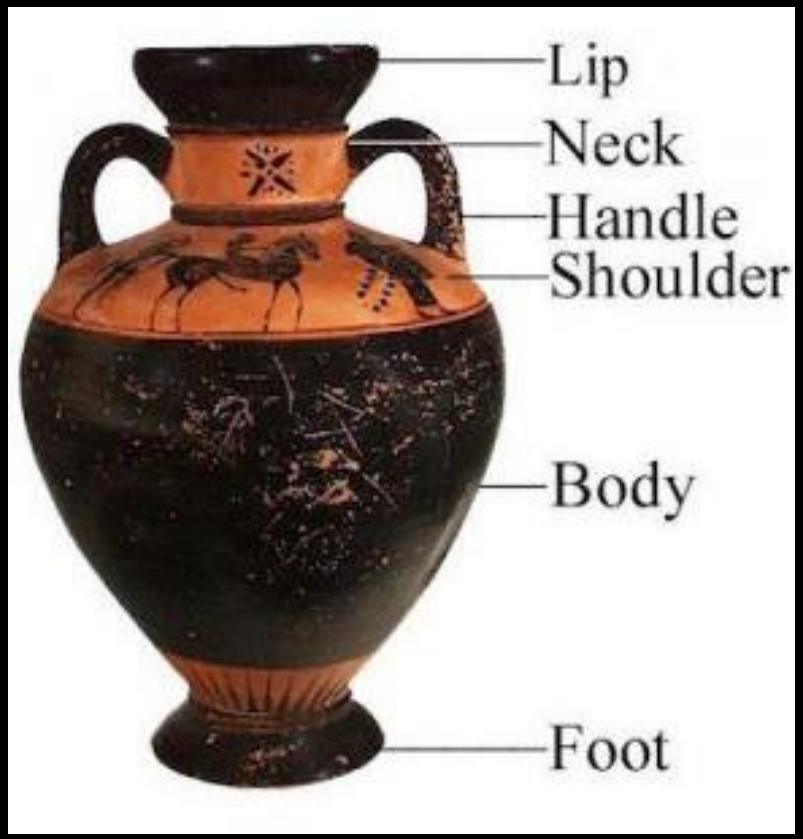
- Only men were allowed to make pots in Ancient Greece, though women were permitted to paint them.
- Pottery was frequently made by slaves.
- What survives is often not high art. Really valuable containers tended to be made of bronze, silver or gold. However, little of this survives because the metal was reused. Pottery fragments, having no real value, survive.

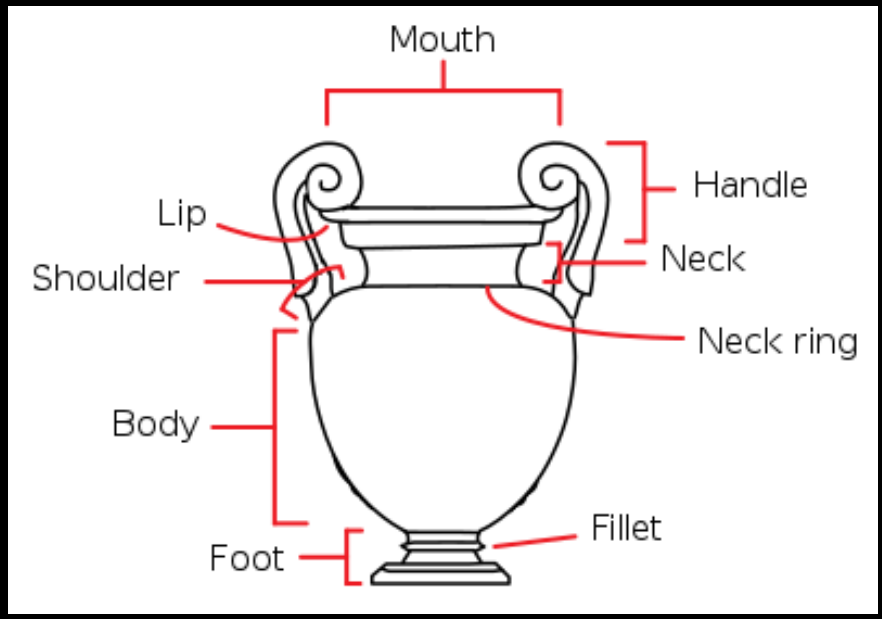
Pottery Art

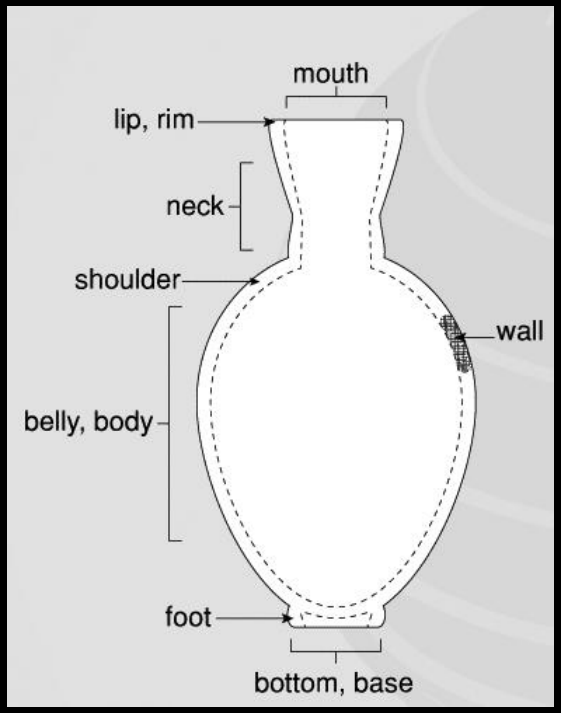


- Despite it being a lesser form than metal-craft, some excellent creations exist.
- Greek pottery and painting evolved into a significant art form.

Pottery parts







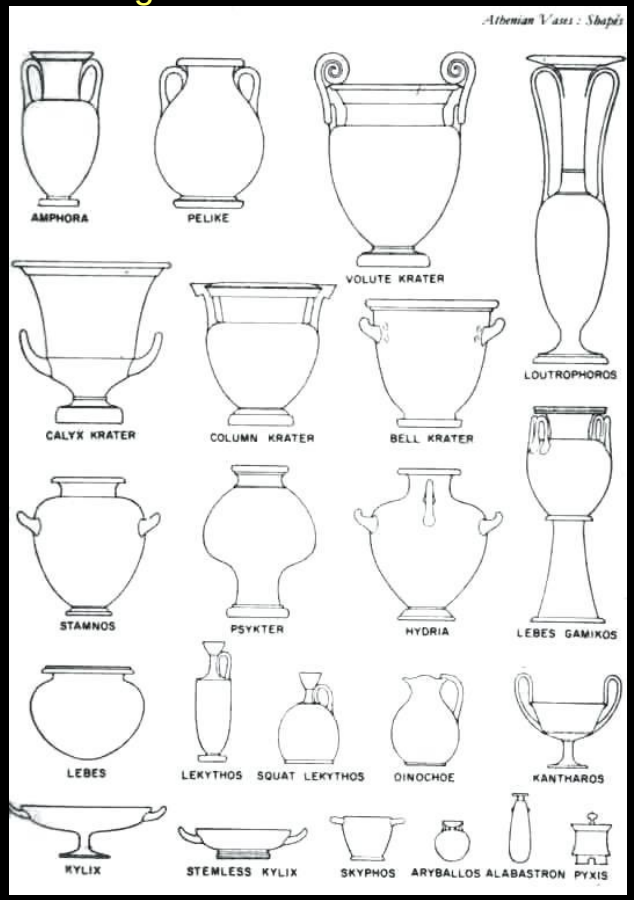
Greek Vases

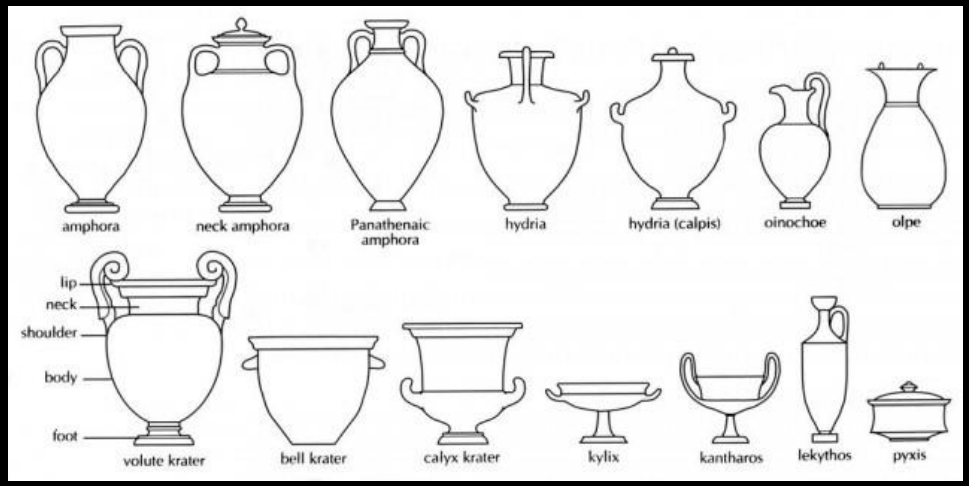
Most of these names are just modern conventions.

The use of these names in antiquity is not certain and the small evidence that we have suggest that:

- Some of these names are clearly wrong
- Some other names were used by the Greek in much more generic sense and not for specific vase types.

In any case, scholars still keep on using these names since they are so well-spread in the academic community that using them makes sense.

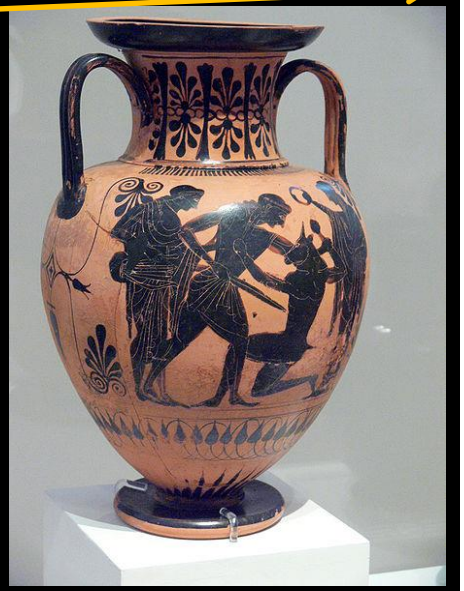


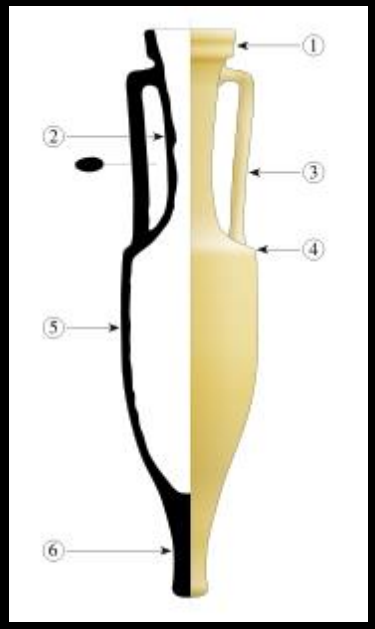


When in doubt, check here:
https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/tools/pottery/shapes/

Main transport and containing types

- **Amphora**
- **Pithos**
- **Hydria**
- **Kalpis**
- **Stamnos**
- **Peliké**





Amphorae (painted types)

An amphora (pl. amphorae; from Greek *amphi* - on both sides, *phero* - carry) is a two-handled pot with a neck that is considerably narrower than the body. It was used for the storage of liquids and solids such as grain. Undecorated 'coarse' amphorae, with their lower part tapering to a point, were the standard transport containers in the Mediterranean.
They are frequently depicted in symposium scenes. Panathenaic prize amphorae are perhaps the closest in shape, but the majority of painted amphorae are grouped into two main types, the one-piece belly-amphorae, and neck-amphorae, which have a clearly-marked neck. The pelike, another two-handled storage vessel.

Belly-Amphora

The belly-amphora has a continuous profile from lip to foot. It is usually lidded.

Neck-Amphora

The neck-amphora is identifiable by its clearly defined neck. The shape is old, since it started in the Geometric period

Pelike

It seems to have been invented after the introduction of the red-figure technique, although there are examples in black-figure. It continues to be produced into the fourth century.

Panathenaic Amphora

broad body, narrow neck and foot of Panathenaic amphorae gives a shape reminiscent of transport amphorae. They served as prizes in the Panathenaic Games, containing oil for victors.

The Hydria

An early shape, with precursors in the eighth century, the hydria (pl. hydriai; compare Greek *hudor* - water) is a water-jar with three handles, two for carrying and one for pouring.

The application of the name to the shape is reasonably certain, although such vessels were not only used for the carrying of water. We know, for example, that hydriai held votes in ballots and ashes in cemeteries.

The Stamnos

•The stamnos (pl. stamnoi; possibly connected with Greek *histemi* - I set up) is a broad-shouldered, round-shaped vessel, with a low foot and a low neck. Its two horizontal handles usually curl upwards to some degree.

•It is produced from the late sixth century into the later fifth. Most have been found in Etruria. The name might have been used for this shape in antiquity, but not necessarily exclusively, and it may also have been applied to other storage vessels, such as amphorae.

•Some examples have lids, suggesting that they were used for storage. From illustrations of the shape in use, it is clear that stamnoi could also be used for the serving of liquids, and may be considered alongside lebetes and kraters.

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Symposion-specific vases

- **Krater**

(for mixing water and wine)

- **Dinos**

(for mixing water and wine, an ancient type possibly derived from the imitation of bronze cauldrons)

- **Psykter**

(for wine cooling, to be put inside a larger krater)

Column-Krater

Named for its column-like handles, the column-krater is first known from Corinthian examples dated to the late seventh century. It is regularly produced by Athenian potters from the first half of the sixth-century until the third quarter of the fifth. It seems from graffiti on Athenian red-figure examples that the vessel was referred to as *Korinthios* or *Korinthiourges*.

Volute-Krater

The volute-krater is named after its handles.

The François Vase is a famous and early example, but the typical Athenian form occurs only later in the sixth century, with the handles tightly curled so that they look like the volutes on Ionic columns.

The shape is also found in metal.

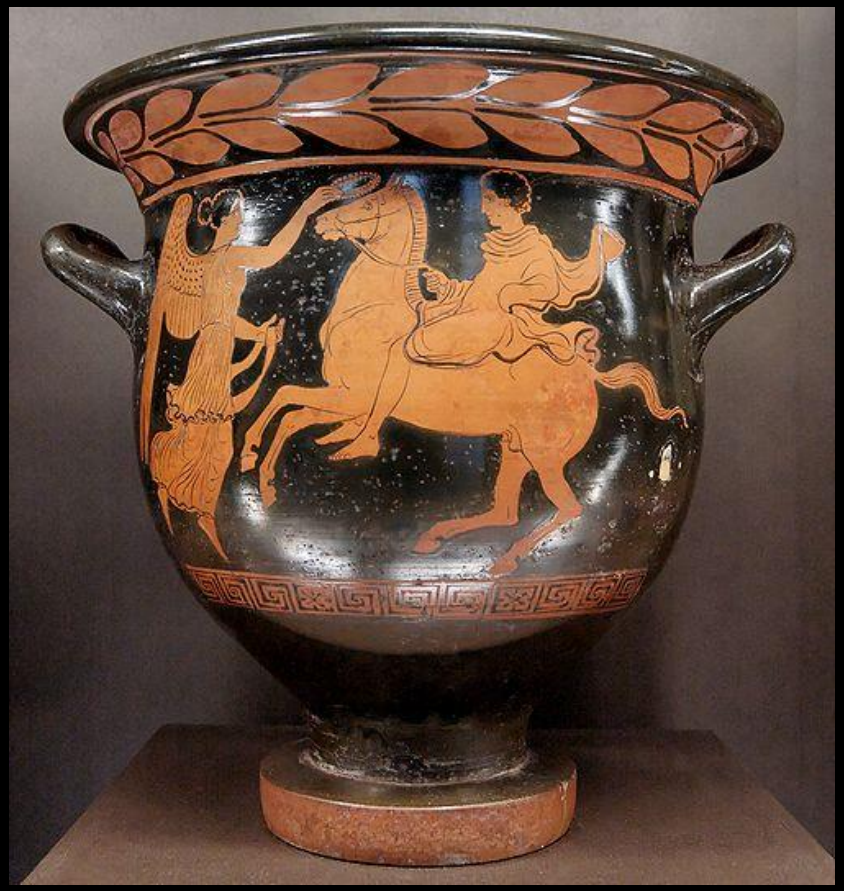
Over the course of the fifth and fourth centuries, examples become slimmer, and Apulian volute-kraters from South Italy are particularly elaborate.

Calyx-Krater

The handles of the calyx-krater are placed low down on the body, at what is termed the cul. Their upward curling form lends the shape an appearance reminiscent of the calyx of a flower, hence the name. The earliest known example was possibly made by Exekias in the third quarter of the sixth century. It continues to be produced, mainly in red-figure, becoming more elongated over the course of the fifth and fourth centuries.

Bell-Krater

Of the four krater-types, it first occurs in the early fifth century, and is not found decorated in black-figure. It is named for its bell-like shape, perhaps originating in wood. It has small horizontal upturned handles just over halfway up the body. Some do not have a foot, and earlier examples may have lugs for handles. Over the course of the fifth and fourth centuries, the shape becomes slimmer.



Lebes or Dinos

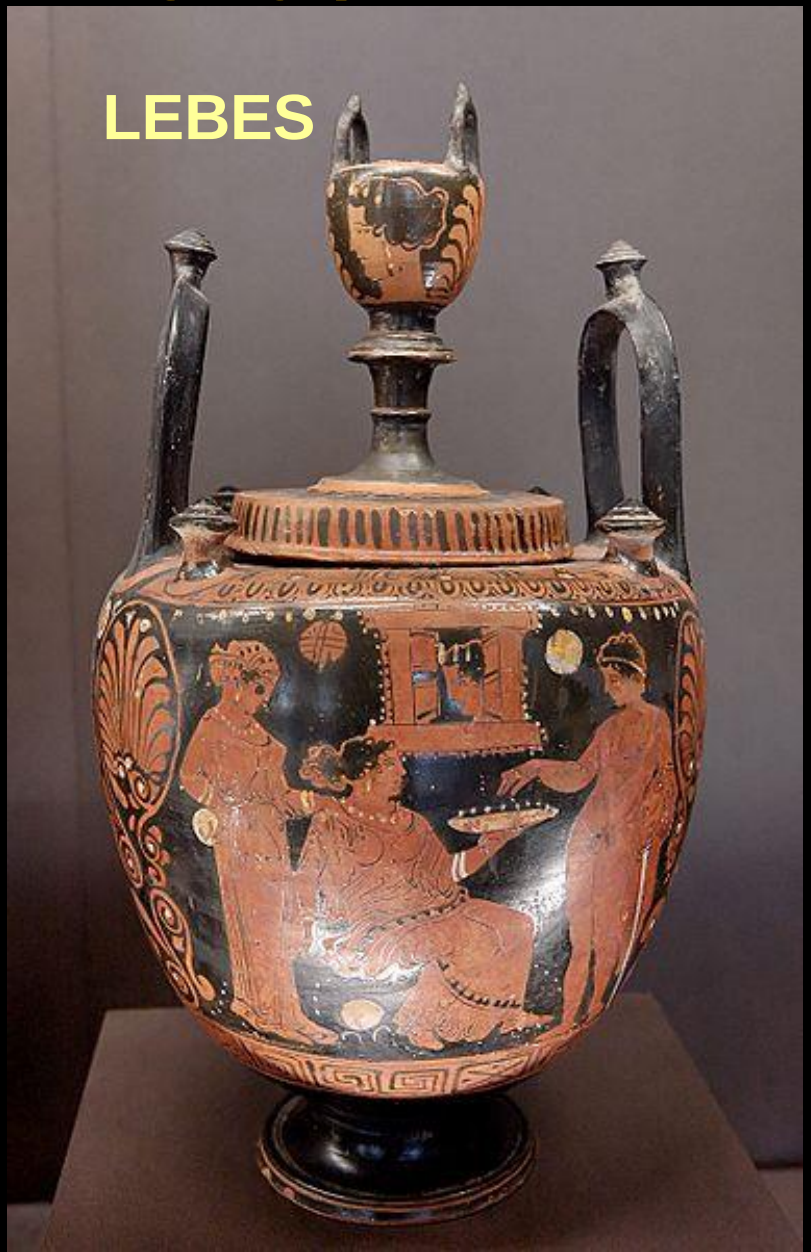
A lebes (pl. lebetes; Greek *lebes* - bowl) is a deep bowl, usually handleless and with a low neck.

The shape is one of the oldest in Athenian black-figure, and continues to be made into the fifth-century. It has no foot, but may be mounted on a stand. In vase-paintings, the shape is shown in use as a mixing-bowl in the symposium. Lebetes are also preserved in metal, and the shape can be incorporated into a tripod. There are many references to lebetes as prizes. The Greek word dinos (pl. dinoi) is sometimes used today for the shape, but is not known securely for it in antiquity.

A version with upright handles, a lid, a more distinct neck and often made in one piece with the stand is known today as a lebes gamikos (pl. lebetes gamikoi; Greek *gamein* - to marry). Examples continue to be made into the fourth century. It is usually associated with marriage rituals, both in excavated contexts and as depicted on vases, including the shape itself.

Ritual containing types

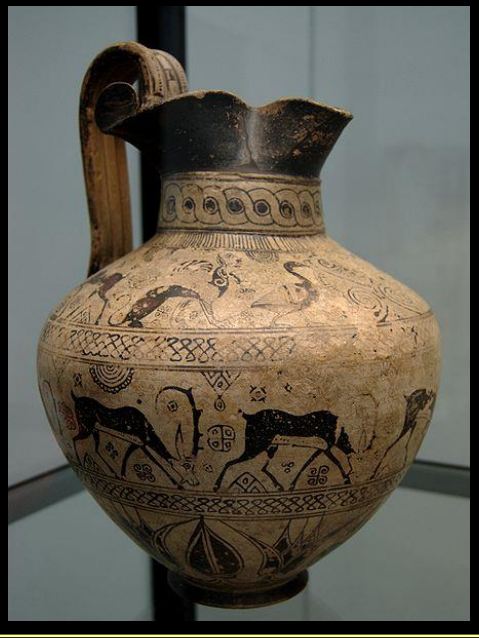
LOUTROPHOROS



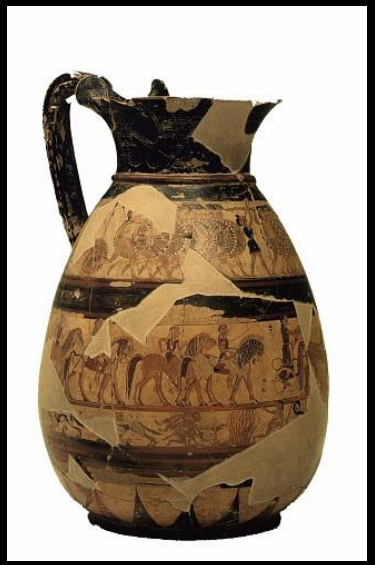
LEBES

Pouring vases

- **Oinochoe**



- **Olpe**



Epichysis

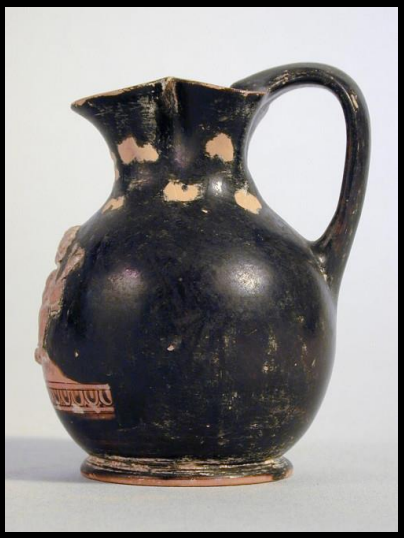
Lagynos

Oinochoe and Chous

The Oinochoe (pl. oinochoai; Greek *oinos* - wine and *cheo* - I pour) is appropriate to this shape and illustrations of it in use, and appears to have been used in antiquity. It is a single-handled vessel, usually taller than it is wide. Beazley identified ten types, based on variations of profile, mouth-type - such as trefoil (like an ivy leaf), round or beaked - and handle-form.

One such is the chous (pl. choes), a plump shape with a smooth profile and trefoil mouth. Miniature versions are often found in children's graves, invariably decorated with scenes involving young children. They were probably used in Athens during the Anthesteria. On the second day of the festival, named Choes, the newly-opened wine was drunk.

Chous



Chous

Oinochoe

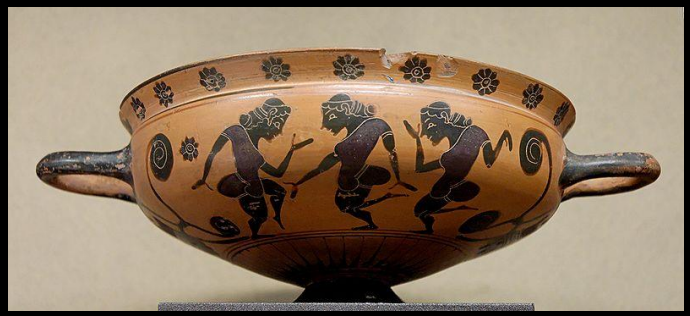
Oinochoe

Drinking Vessels: the Cups

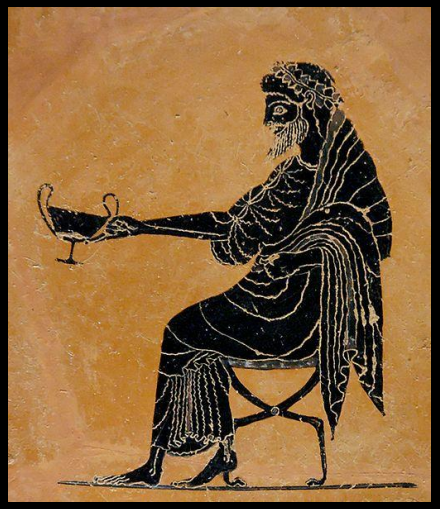
Consistent features for drinking cups during the sixth to fourth centuries B.C. are the relatively shallow shape, a foot that is connected to the bowl by a stem (except in the case of stemless cups) and two handles. The Greek name *kylix* (pl. *kylikes*) seems to have been used for the shape in antiquity, although it was probably applied to other drinking vessels too.

Modern classifications such as Komast-, Siana-, Little Masters, and Types A, B, and C are useful for bringing to light the general course of the shape's development, which is broadly chronological. But not every example fits neatly into each type, and scholars have identified further variants, such as Cassel and Droop cups. In all cases, the handles are horizontal, often swinging upwards. Handles that meet at a point, such as those found on so-called Merrythought cups, are named 'wishbone handles'after the skeletal feature that they resemble.

Deeper vessels, such as the skyphos, mastos and kantharos, are also considered here, as are the rhyton, head- and figure-vases. Many are depicted in use, most obviously in symposium scenes. In particular, the kylix is used for the game of *kottabos*, which involved flinging the dregs of one's drink at a target. 'Mugs' are discussed under pouring vessels, but phialai are included here, for they were occasionally used as drinking vessels.



The kantharos (pl. kantharoi) is a deep vessel with two distinctive high handles. The stem of the foot is often tall.
The form can be traced back to the eighth century, and kantharoi - perhaps metal versions- are frequently depicted on black- and red-figure vases, held by Dionysos or Herakles. Although the name is ancient (Greek *kantharos* - dung-beetle), it is not clear how precisely it was connected with this shape, and it seems that kotyle could have been used as well.
In the fourth century, the 'cup kantharos' is common. Its handles project horizontally, and do not return to join the body.



Kantharoid Cup-Skyphos

Skyphos, mastos and mastoid cup

The skyphos (pl. skyphoi) is a deep-bowled drinking vessel with a low foot and two short handles that are usually horizontal. It is regularly depicted in symposium scenes. Shallower versions of the shape, with a concave lip, are termed 'cup-skyphoi'. In the fifth-century, some skyphoi have a vertical handle. These are regularly decorated with an owl, an Athenian symbol, from where the name *glaux* (Greek for owl) is derived. The term *skyphos* is ancient, although it seems also to have been used for cups (kylikes).

Another term that is often used for deep straight-sided drinking vessels is the Greek *kotyle* (pl. *kotylai*), but this too seems to have been used in antiquity for cups of all sorts. Likewise, *kylix* also seems to have been used to refer to the shape we today term the skyphos.

A variation on the shape, the mastos (pl. mastoi; Greek *mastos* - breast), is named for its breast-like shape, which terminates in a nipple. Examples with a flat base and offset lip are termed 'mastoid cups'.

Corinthian Skyphos

Kotyle

Cup Skyphos

Mastoid Cup

Oil and parfume containers

Lekythos

Aryballos

Alabastron

Askos

Other oil/spice/parfume containers

PYXIS

LEKANIS

Exaleiptron

Ritual vessels

KERNOS

Greek Painted Pottery

The origins: from the Protogeometric to the Orientalizing productions

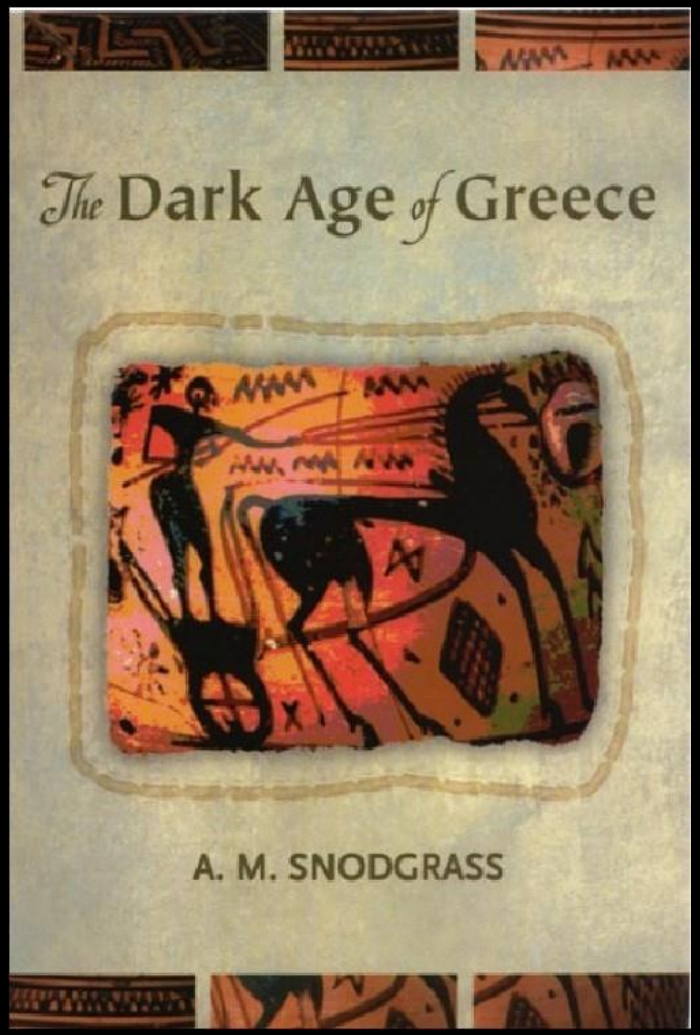
The Greek «Dark Ages»

(Rough) Chronological limits (broader view):

- Late 13th century BC: Twilight of the Mycenean palatial culture
- Circa 800 BC: beginning of the «Geometric» period.

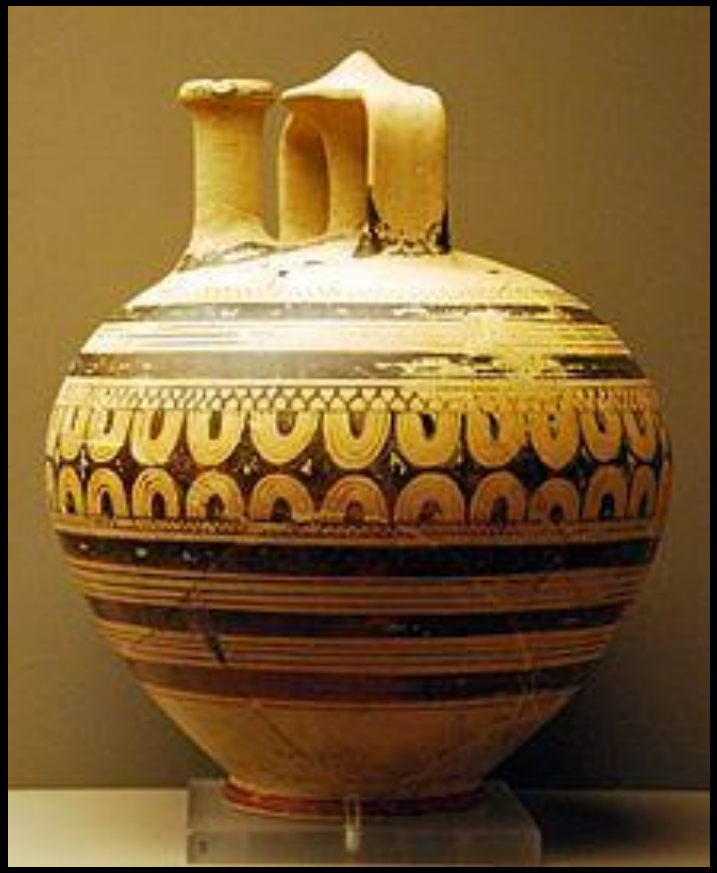
Sub-periodization

- Circa 1200 BC – 1000 BC: Sub-Mycenean
  - The long twighlight of the Mycenean civilization.
  - Collapse of the old power structures
  - Smaller comunities.
  - Archeology cannot detect many signs of trade with the wider Mediterranean world. Trade links are definitively diminished since the Bronze Age
- Circa 1000 BC – 900 BC: Protogeometric
  - Iron-smithing technology becomes more widespread, firstly in Anatolia and then in mainland Greece.
  - A new world slowly starts to rise
  - New communities appear
  - First Signs of more elaborate buildings (Lefkandi, Nichoria, etc.).
  - Increasing signs of trade with the wider Mediterranean world.



Sub-Mycenean Pottery

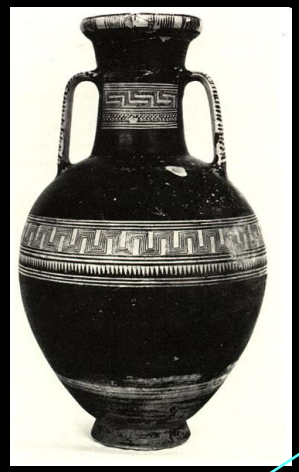
Submycenaean pottery is a style of ancient Greek pottery. It is transitional between the preceding Mycenaean pottery and the subsequent styles of Greek vase painting, especially the Protogeometric style



Sub-Mycenean Stirrup Jar

Periods of Geometric Pottery

More complexity over time



Proto-Geometric 1050-900 BC

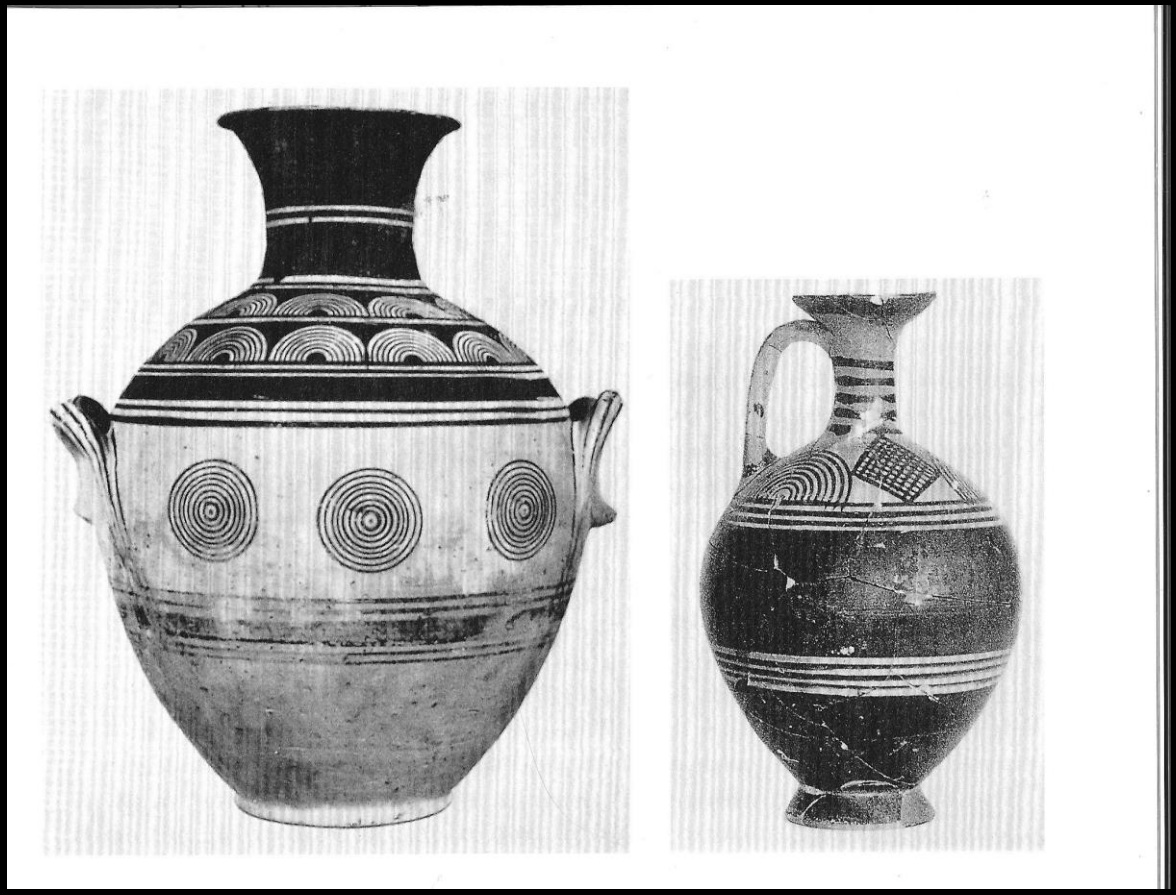
Early Geometric 900-850

Middle Geometric 850-800

Late Geometric 800-700

Proto-Geometric Pottery

- 1050-900 BC
- Made on a wheel
- Decoration on pots: black bands, wavy lines, simple geometric shapes.
  - Principally concentric circles and half circles.
- Careful attention was given to relationship between decoration and shape of pot.
- Signaled a reawakening of technical proficiency in Greece
- Euboea and Attica seem to be the most important centers of production



Protogeometric Amphora

Kerameikos, Athens

10th century BC

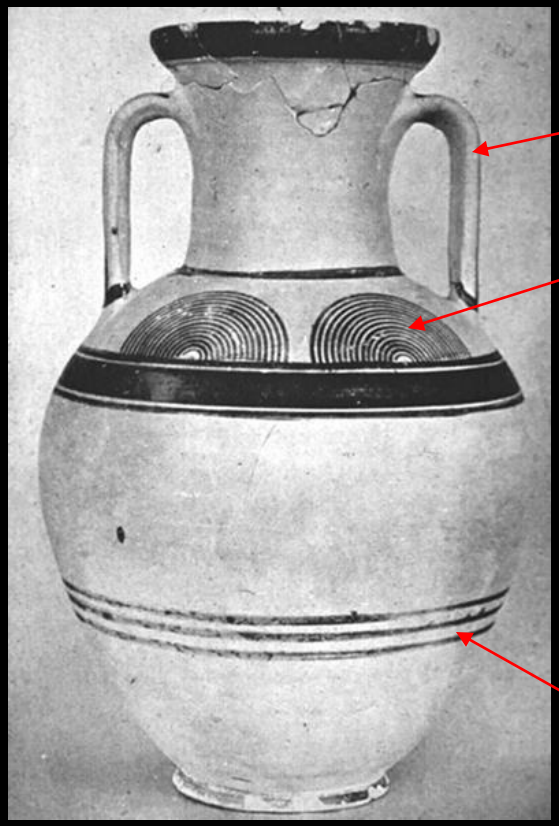
Protogeometric Jug

Kerameikos, Athens

10th century BC

PROTO-GEOMETRIC STYLE: 1050-900 BC

Proto-Geometric neck handled amphora



Neck handle

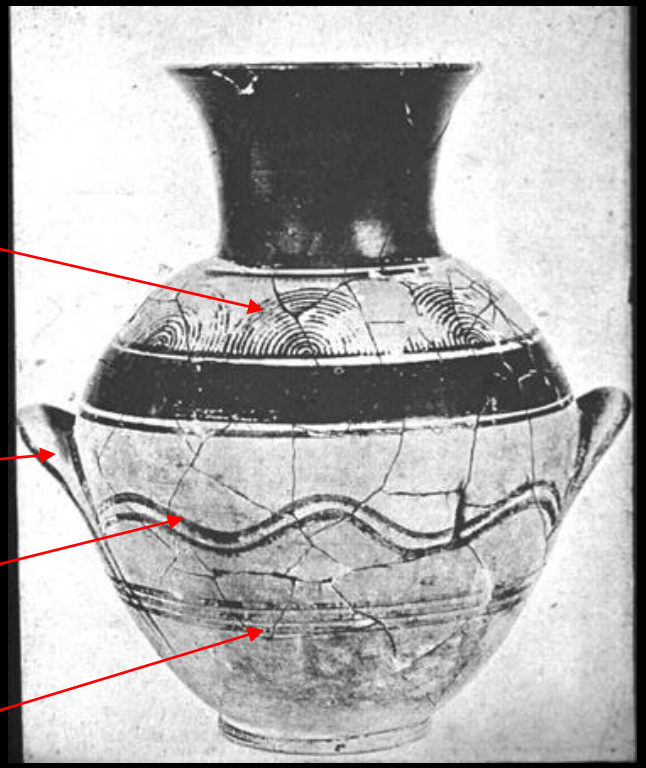
Half circles

Belly Handle

Wavy Lines

Simple bands

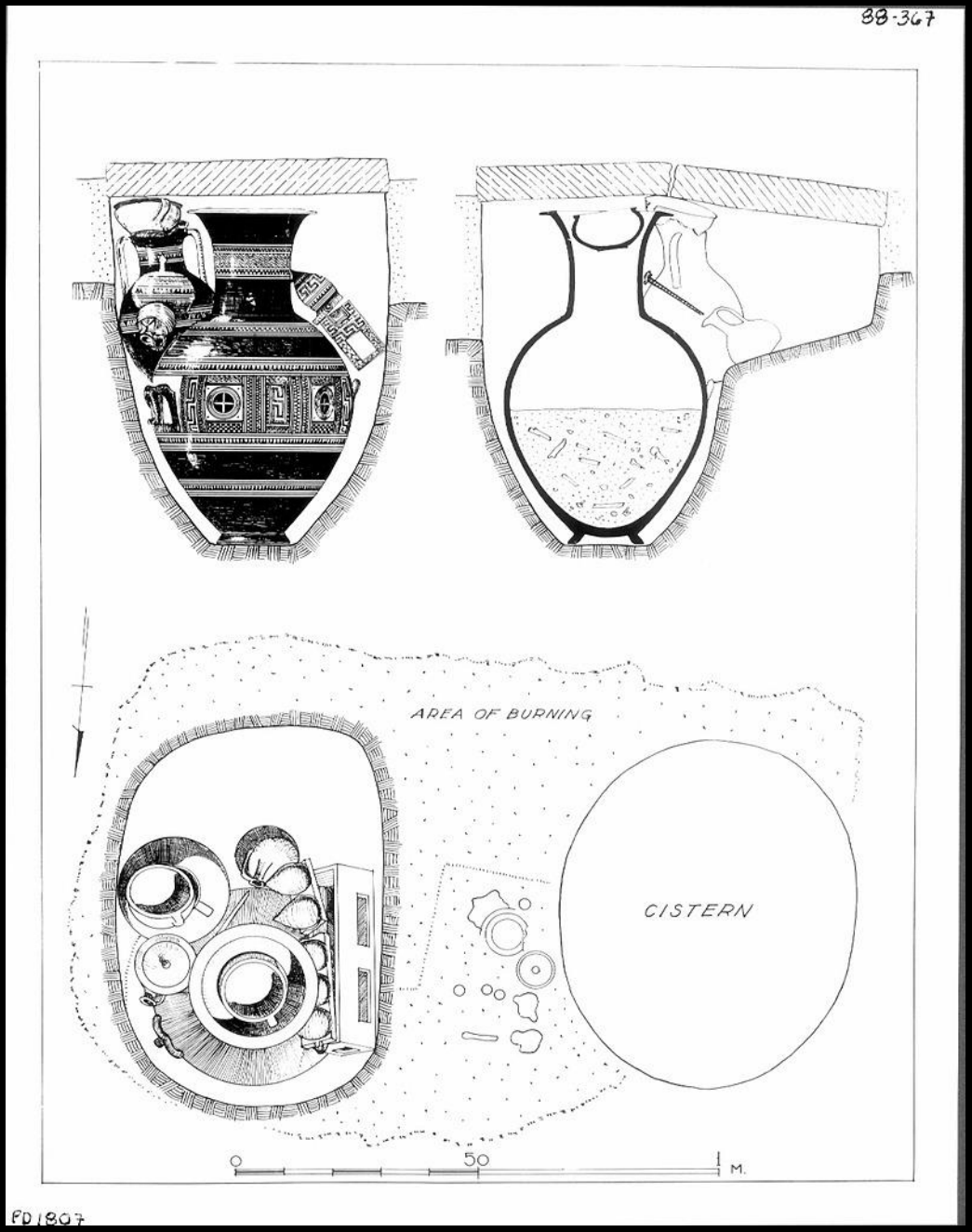
Proto-Geometric belly-handled amphora



GEOMETRIC POTTERY

- 900-700 BC
- Increasing variety of design on pots
- More coverage on pot. Lots of lines and patterns.
- Complexity of design increases: simple figures of animals then later, humans appear.
- Bodies and limbs represented by triangles.
- Some patterns recall those on baskets, clothes, a “weave pattern”.
- Shapes: zig-zag, cross-hatched, triangles, the meander and swastika.
- General rule: size of figure denotes its importance.

Cypriot Dish showing a loom. Possible clue about the original inspiration for Geometric styles?



Athenian cemeteries are the best contexts where to study these vases.

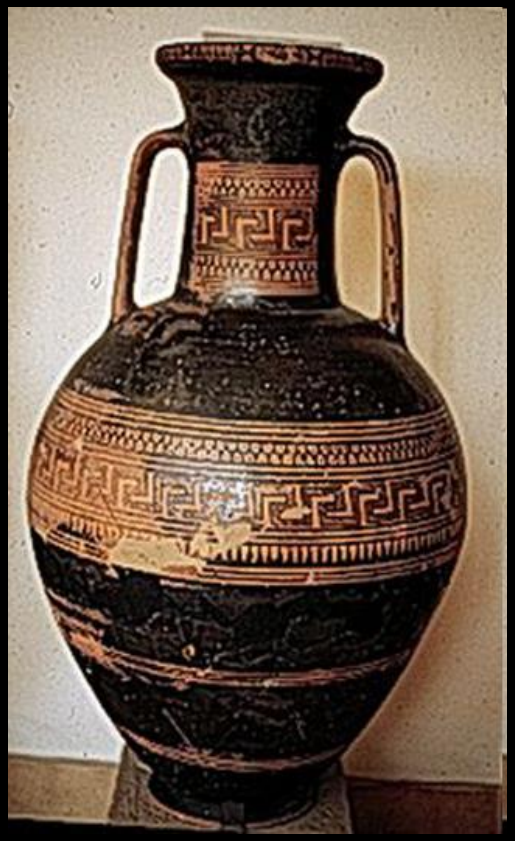
Cremation was still the prevalent burial ritual (unlike the later Greek Practice) and therefore pottery vessels were needed to host the burnt remains.

In the Athenian cemeteries the vase types are divided according to a genre differentiation:

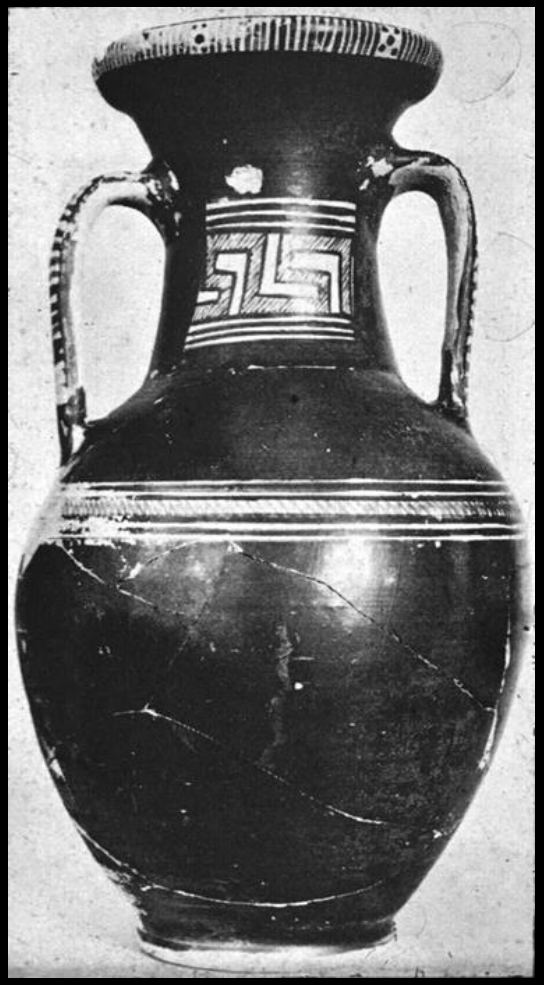
- **Neck-Amphorae and Kraters are for male burials**

- **Belly-Amphorae are for female burials.**

Some Kraters served as grave monuments or "Semata".
Holes at the bottom allowed the liquid poured in to seep into the ground for the dead.



Early Geometric Style:
900-850 BC



Middle Geometric Style: 850-800 BC

MG Belly handled Amphora (850-800 BC

MG Horse handled Pyxis

Notice the growth and variety of shapes

Geometric Style: Late Geometric 800-700 BC.

The "Dypilon Painter" is the first, great artist whose style has been identified by the scholars.

Diplyon amphora/grave marker 760-750 BC

Triangular human figures

Funeral scene

Battle scene

Diplyon Krater/grave marker 750-740 BC

- Human figures redendered in simple geometric forms
- Common mourning scenes (dependant on the vases' context).

Chariots & Horses

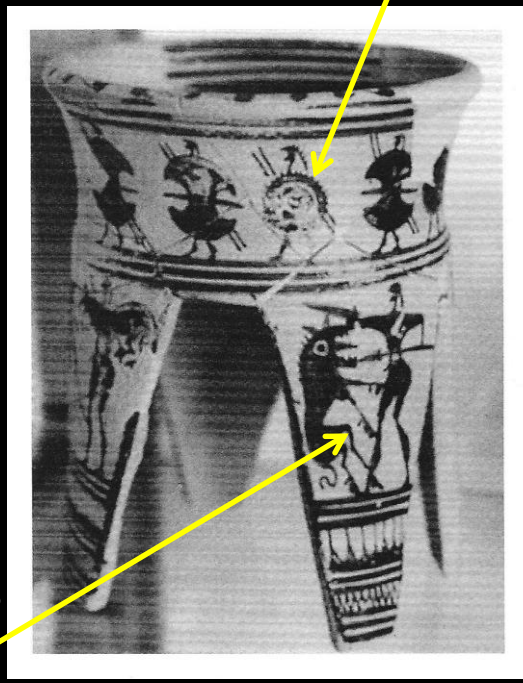
Heroic references?

Funerary games?

The “Dypilon shields”

- Contemporary wicker shields?
- References to Heroic/Bronze Age equipment?

Hoplite shield?



First attempt at telling a myth?

Herakles fighting the Lion?

Attic, geometric tetrapod stand

Other geometric pottery and the Mediterranean Trade

- **The “Sub-protogeometric” cups (about 800 BC) are an important class**
- **The spread of Euboean pottery (Al-Mina in Syria, Southern Italy) is a marker of Greek Colonization at an early date.**

- **The “Cup of Nestor” (750-700 BC) from Ischia (Pithekoussai).**
- **Rhodian or Euboian production**
- **First evidence of Euboian alphabet in the west**

Νέστορος [....] εὔποτ[ον] ποτήριο[ν]·
ὃς δ’ ἂν τοῦδε π[ίησι] ποτηρί[ου] αὐτίκα κῆνον
ἵμερ[ος αἱρ]ήσει καλλιστ[εφάν]ου Ἀφροδίτης.

(??) Nestor’s cup, good to drink from.
Whoever drinks from this cup, him straightaway
the desire of beautiful-crowned Aphrodite will seize.

- **Possibly a joking comparison between the legendary cup of Nestor and the poor cup. It may also testify the merry ambience of Symposion at such a early date**

Shipwreck depictions on Euboean-styled productions from Pithekoussai

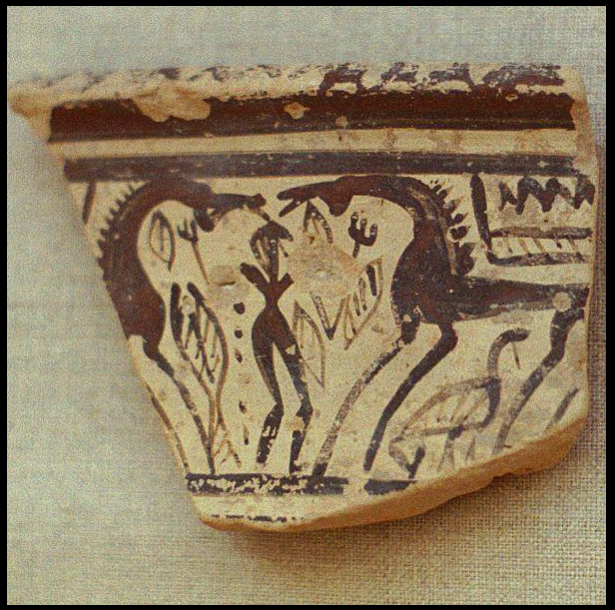
(Late 8th century BC)

Corinth develops a much more sober style where one can firstly see a love for miniaturistic animals and vegetation, meant as decorations.

This is possibly an anticipation of later Corinthian tastes, as well as a proof of cultural and commercial links with the Eastern Mediterranean.

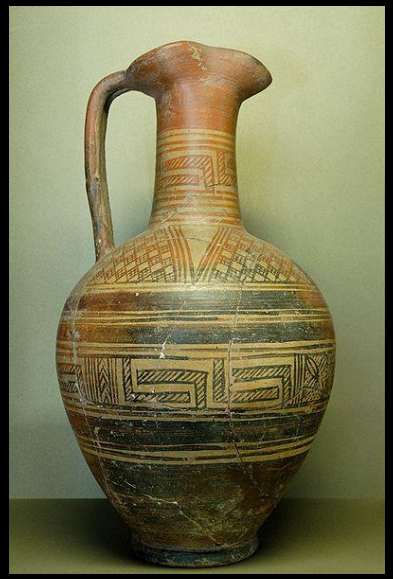
Vases crafted in Argos often show horses in their decorations.

Homer used to call Argos «Horse-rearing».



Cycladic

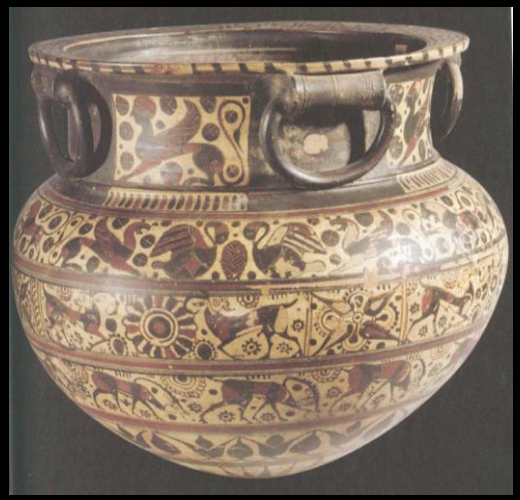
Boiotian



Rhodian

Cypriot

The Orientalizing Revolution
730 – 600 BC



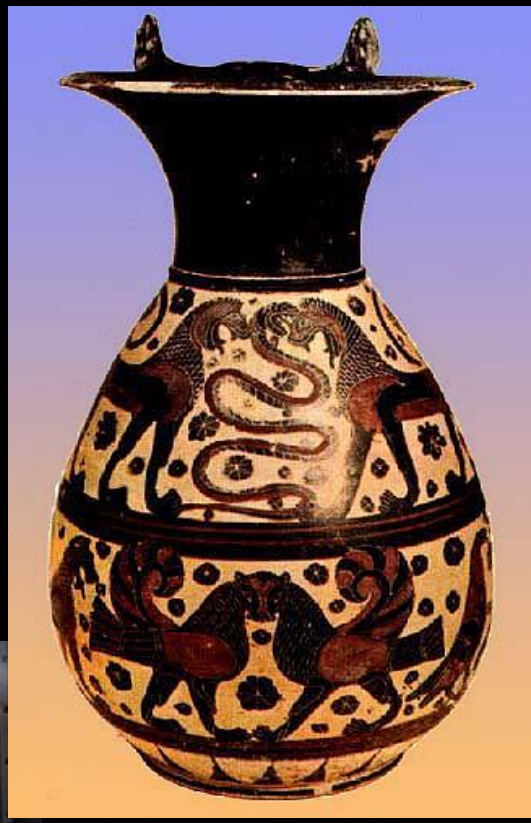
The Greek colonization spreading throughout the Mediterranean and the increase in trade between Greece, Egypt, Syria and Levant augmented Greek interest in anything "Eastern".

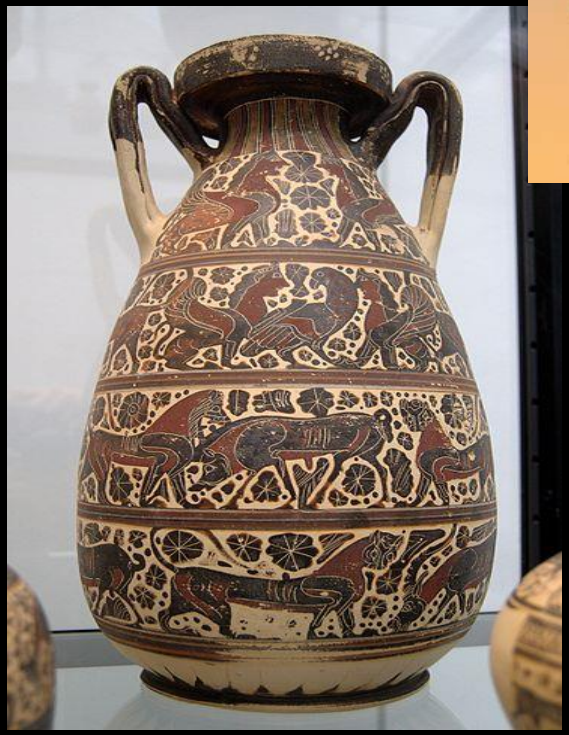
This caused the cultures to borrow ideas from each other and the Greek pottery reflected this, hence the name "Orientalizing", referring to the Middle East and Egypt.

What's the difference?

Main Traits

- Greeks keep dividing the vase into organized spaces/bands (in continuation to the Geometric period) but each space is now completely filled NOT with geometric decorations but with multiple figures .
- Animals and mythological creatures (e.g. Sphinxes) become common, recalling Middle-Easterner archetypes (although the Easterners rarely paint pottery, which is more a Greek art).
- There is a more realistic rendering of creatures and humans on the pots
- The original inspiration is possibly to be seen in the imitation of precious Imported Oriental metalwork.
- There are countless production centers but the Corinthians and the Attic craftsmen seem to have been particularly successful, developing the “Protocorinthian” and “Protoattic” styles.
- Many of the known vases of this time period come from Etruscan tombs since they were particularly active in importing such pieces and even starting their own productions.





Proto-Corinthian Pottery (730-600 BC)

- Preference for small vessel types (e.g. the Aryballoi), possibly in connection with the trade of parfumed oils and eastern spices.
- Tendency to paint small figures and details which completely fill the available space.
- Love for Polychromy with red and sometimes yellow paint in addition to the usual black.
- Decorative attitudes (narrative attitudes are less frequent).
- Proto-Corinthian pottery, most of which is miniature in size, was the first to be decorated in the black-figure painting technique: figure silhouettes drawn in black and filled in with incised details.
- The principal motifs, which mirror Middle Eastern styles, are animals in procession and human figures, sometimes in mythical scenes.
- During the Orientalizing period the Protocorinthian productions dominate the trade with the West. Greek colonies and Etruscan tombs have revealed an incredible amount of Protocorinthian pottery.

A Protocorinthian masterwork: the Chigi Olpe (630-615 BC).

Museum: Rome, Villa Giulia
Size: 26.2cm.
Function: convivial. Jug (round mouth and bulbous body) for pouring. Olpe
Technique: black-figure with an unusual use of polychromy
Style: miniature figures in friezes (Late Protocorinthian)
Decoration: dark-ground bands have florals and animals. Light-ground have: warriors, with round hoplite shields, kept in step by pipes-player; lion hunt and (under handle) Judgement of Paris with Paris and the three goddesses named; hare hunt with dogs (lower frieze). 'Orientalising' flora and fauna.
Analysis: unusual techniques of decoration, fine potting and painting, and multi-theme figure decoration suggest a special piece. Hoplite warfare was introduced at about the time this vase was made. Lion hunts that were known to have taken place in the East are copied. The hare hunt would have been common in Greece. Masculine themes suggest the vase was for men. It was exported in antiquity to Etruria.

Other Examples of Protocorinthian productions

Proto-Attic (700-600 BC)

Main differences with the Protocorinthian

- The protoattic style began later and was influenced by the proto-Corinthian .

- Conservation of some geometric designs of the last period (although in minor, decorative positions).

- Creation of new motifs and images (as opposed to stricter imitation of Eastern ideas, although the graphical rendering is sometimes no as refined as in the Protocorinthian.
- Interest in Monumentality (as opposed to miniaturism in Protocorinthian:

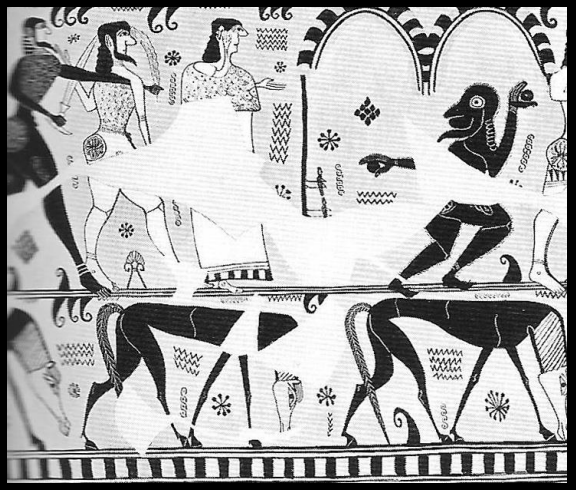
Tendency to use a “Metopae-like” design with a large scene in prominent position.

From 675 BC onwards:

- Interest in Narrative scenes (as opposed to the more decorative attitutudes of Protocorinthian):

First, elaborated myth narrations.

Early Protoattic krater



Death of Agamennon (Protoattic krater from Aegina)

Early Protoattic phase.

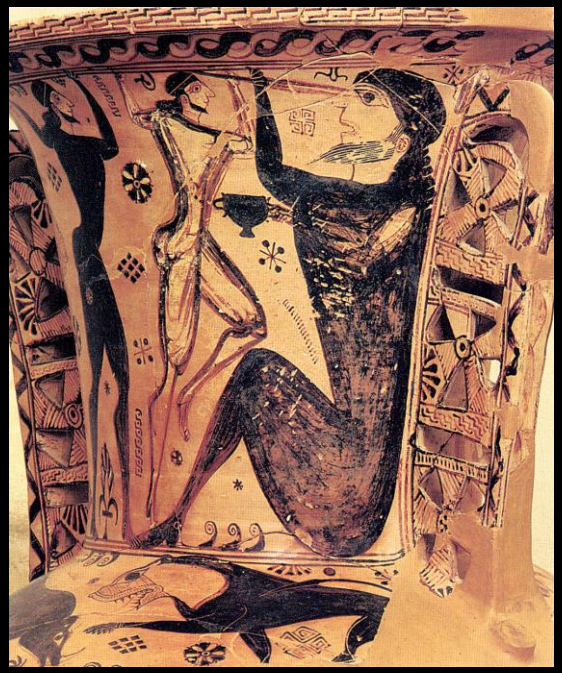
No Narrative image yet, but there is a sense of monumentality

The **Analatos Painter** was one of the main proponents of the shift from the Geometric aesthetic to that of the Orientalizing Period.

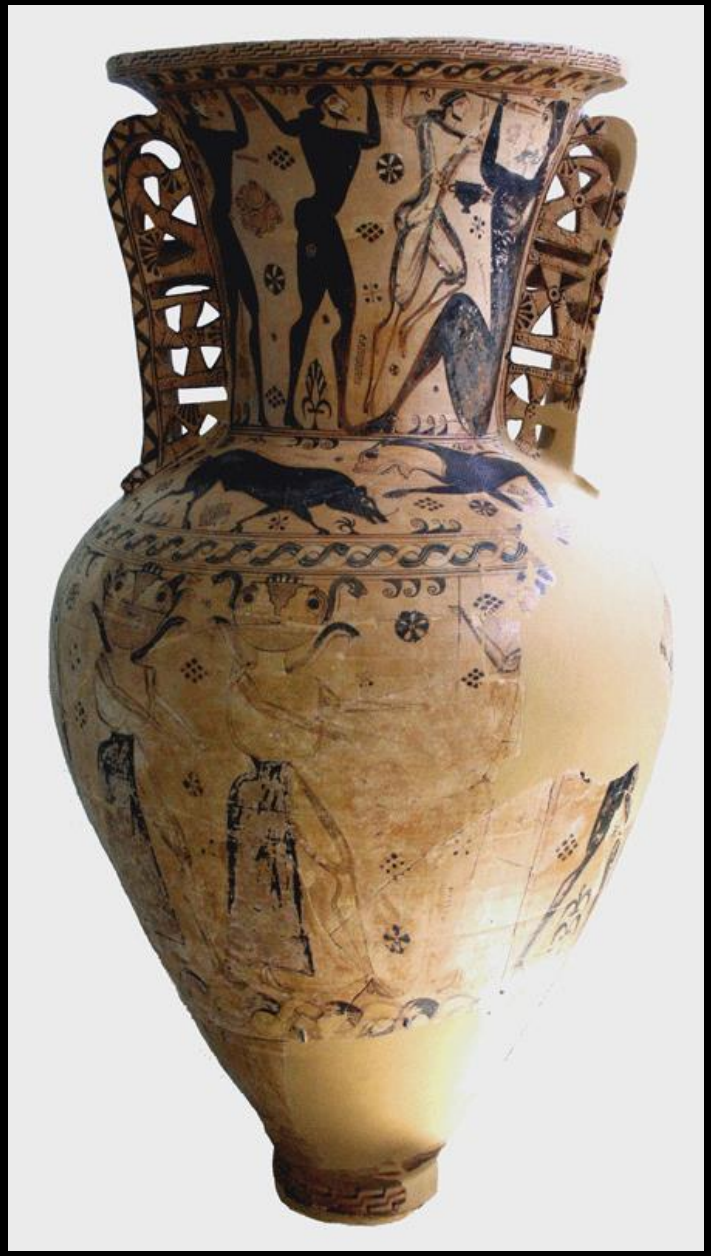
Within a rigorous framework, his use of line drawing brings the human figures to life. This long-necked amphora (also called a loutrophoros) is decorated in superposed registers in which appear sphinxes, dancers, and chariots drawn in silhouette or in line, with various curvilinear and vegetal motifs between.

Amphora/Loutrophos by the Anatolos Painter

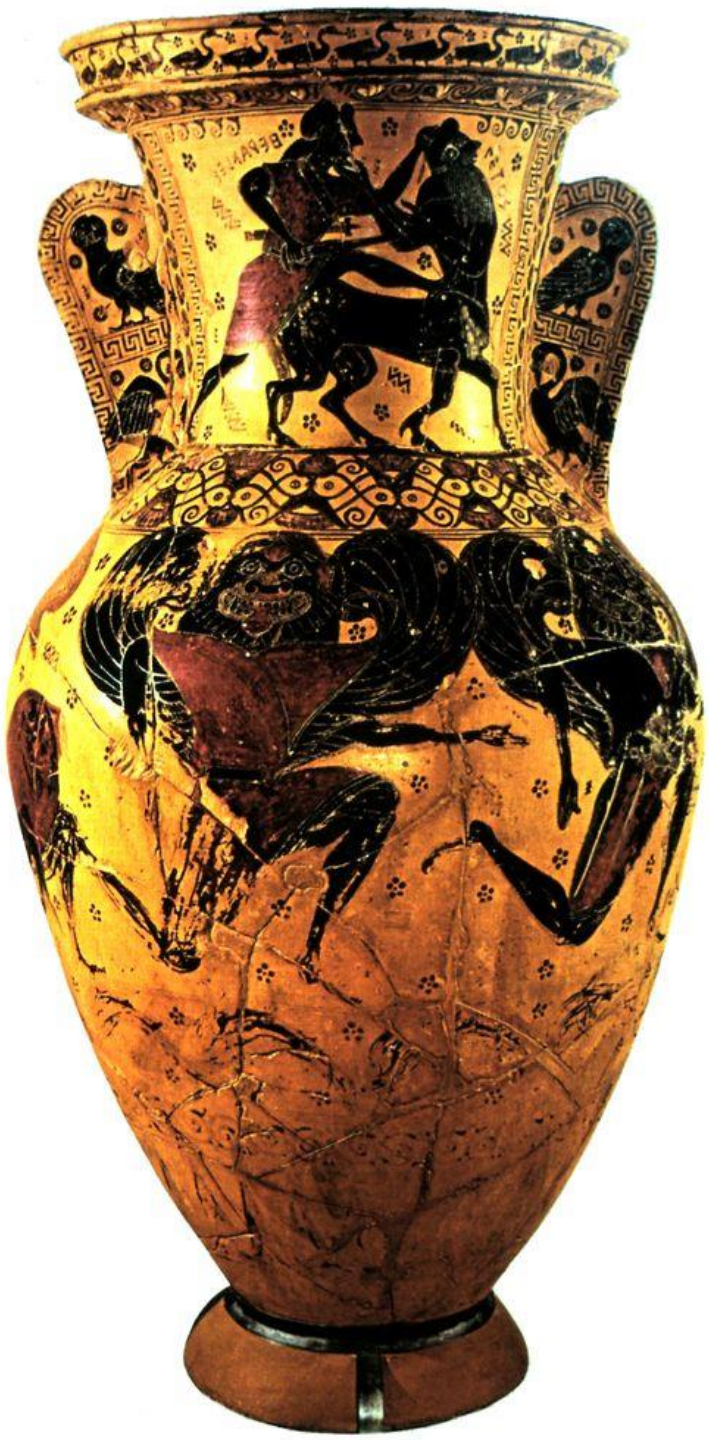
Eleusis Neck-Amphora (650 BC)



The Blinding of Polyphemus



The Gorgons



The Nessos Painter, Amphora
(Late 7th century BC)

OTHER ORIENTALIZING PRODUCTIONS: the Islands

Parian (once called «Melian») productions, mid 7° century BC

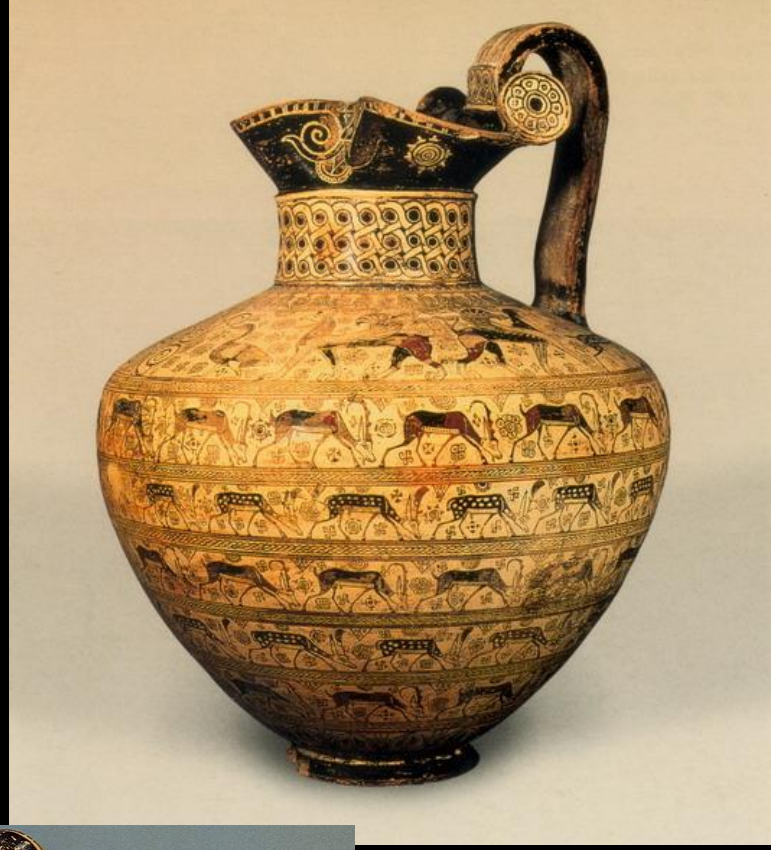
The Wild Goat Style is a modern term describing vase painting produced in the east of Greece, namely Ionia and southern and eastern Ionian islands, between c. 650 to 550 BCE.

Examples have been found notably at the sites in Chios, at Miletus and in Rhodes.

The style owes its name to the predominant motif found on such vases: friezes of goats. The style developed the technique introduced during the Orientalizing Period of rendering the heads of figures in outline by applying it to the whole of a figure. Thus where previously an image was a silhouette, the Wild Goat Style allowed a greater representation of detail and marked a step forward in the progress towards naturalism.

Goats are not the only creatures depicted on such vases; in common with other Orientalizing pottery, hares, lions, hounds, griffins and sphinxes are also to be found along with favoured in-filling devices like intertwining lines and dots or a checker pattern.

The variety of ornamentation makes a careful distinction of a number of phases in the development of the style possible which in turn has been used to date the founding of Greek colonies in the Levant and North Africa.



EXCEPTION: pottery vessels like these suggest not to take a too strict approach!

The East Greek Bird Bowl developed around 700 BC, probably in northern Ionia. Although they are subgeometric in style, they belong to orientalising period.

On average, the cups have a diameter of 15 cm. Usually, they are decorated with three rectangular metope-like panels. The central, elongated one holds the depiction of a diagonally hatched bird. The side panels are decorated with hatched rhomboids. The earliest bird cups have a small ledge under the rim and additional row of dots under the decoration, below which the body is painted in solid black.

Around 675 BC the ledge and dots were abandoned, from about 640 onwards, the originally black-painted bottom of the bowl was left in natural clay colour, but often decorated with a star or five rays. The hatched rhomboids were also replaced with small ray or tongue patterns. Around 615 BC, the separating lines between the metopes or panels disappeared. Around the same time, the ring base was replaced by a flat base with a concave centre. The production of bird cups ended after about a century, around 600 BC.