

SCENES FROM MYTHS AND DAILY LIFE

# ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN POTTERY

FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF THE  
PHOEBE A. HEARST MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

## Campanian red-figure bell krater

350–325 BCE

attributed to the Cumae 'A' Painter

Southern Italy

terra-cotta, gloss

8-3814; L2009.1001.025

*On this krater, a nude youth with a spear is depicted seated on a drapery-covered rock. He converses with a woman who holds a wreath and phiale, a libation dish used to pour wine or other liquid offerings to gods.*



## Scenes from Myths and Daily Life: Ancient Mediterranean Pottery from the Collections of the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology

Ancient Mediterranean painted pottery, a remarkable craft from classical antiquity, continues to captivate viewers thousands of years later. Pottery is more commonly excavated and preserved than any other early art form. Scenes depicted on Greek and Etruscan vases reveal many of the cultural practices and daily lives of these ancient peoples. Ceramic vessels explore a wide variety of subject matter including myths, gods and demons, warriors at battle, animals, social gatherings, athletics, and the roles of men and women in society.

Clay, which was plentiful in many parts of Ancient Greece and Italy, served as the primary material for most vessels. Although the affluent owned some precious metal containers, nearly every household possessed a range of pottery both coarse and fine for storage, cooking, and dining. Pottery was also used for ceremonial and religious purposes.

Imagery on pottery often illustrates the way the vessels were used. A variety of cups and wine-mixing bowls portray scenes of symposia or male drinking parties. Vase paintings also show women filling water jars called *hydriai* at fountain houses and using *alabastra*, small containers that held plain or scented oils. The same vases that were used domestically were often placed in tombs and used as funeral offerings.

A coastal people, the Ancient Greeks prospered in maritime commerce and developed a rich and complex culture. The Greek world eventually extended beyond Greece to settlements throughout the



Mediterranean and Black Seas. Greek arts flourished from 700 to 300 BCE. During this time, two of the main ceramic centers in Greece, Corinth and Athens, exported the distinctive and highly sought-after painted pottery throughout the Mediterranean region.

The Etruscans inhabited north-central Italy, a region in classical times referred to as Etruria. They developed a taste for Greek painted pottery, which they imported from Corinth around

630 to 540 BCE. By the second quarter of the sixth century, the Etruscans purchased an increasing number of vessels from Athens. These imports inspired Etruscan potters to locally produce black-and red-figure wares.

The black-figure technique was developed about 700 BCE in Corinth. Artisans applied a black slip to depict figures and ornamental motifs against the clay's natural, reddish-orange background. The details were either incised or added in colors; female skin was typically painted white.

### Attic red-figure lekythos

450–425 BCE

attributed to the Bowdoin Painter  
Athens, Greece

terra-cotta, gloss

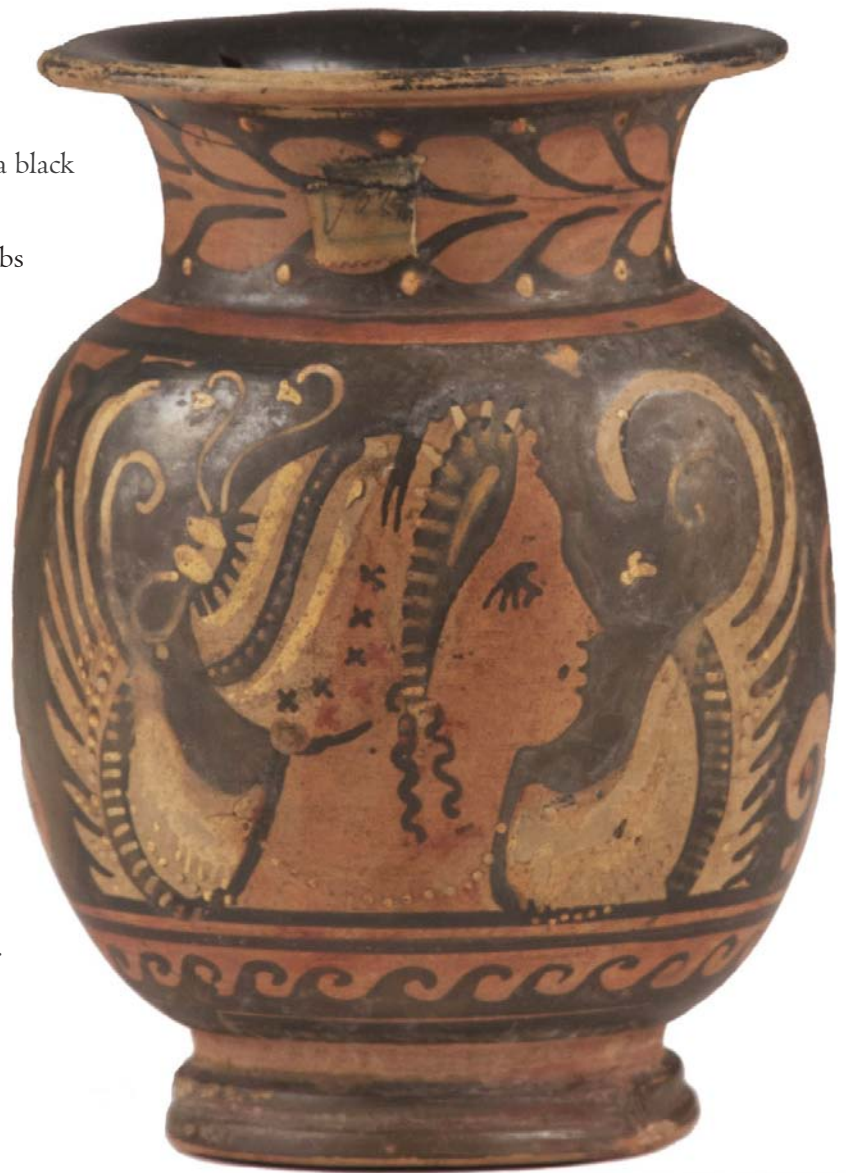
8-7572; L2009.1001.039

*Nike is the goddess and personification of victory, in war and athletic contests. She is frequently portrayed in vase paintings with wings holding a victory wreath. Here, she is depicted flying above an altar; in her right hand she holds a phiale, a vessel for pouring out libations.*

The red-figure technique was invented in Athens about 530 BCE and gradually became the predominant style. It is the reverse of black-figure: the figures appeared in reddish-orange, with figural details applied in black lines against a black background.

Greek vases were first uncovered in Etruscan tombs in Italy in the 1700s and early 1800s and were erroneously attributed to Etruscan painters. One of the most important developments in classical archaeology during the nineteenth century was the opening of Greece to major excavations. Once Greece was liberated from Ottoman rule in 1829, archaeologists and scholars soon discovered major pottery production centers in the country and began to classify works according to region.

This exhibition explores black- and red-figure pottery of Ancient Greece and its colonies, as well as Etruscan wares. From drinking cups intended to ward off the “evil eye” to pots that depict famous Greek heroes and gods such as Heracles and Zeus, *Scenes from Myths and Daily Life: Ancient Mediterranean Pottery* showcases a spectacular range of vessels.



### Etruscan red-figure mug

mid-4th century BCE

Italy

terra-cotta, gloss

8-3813; L2009.I001.024



## How to Use this Teacher's Guide

This guide was designed for K–12 teachers and students to familiarize themselves with the material on display prior to a field trip to the exhibition *Scenes from Myths and Daily Life: Ancient Mediterranean Pottery*. This educational packet may also be used by teachers and students who are unable to view the exhibition at the Airport. A bibliography can be found on page 22. Field trip information is also included on pages 23 and 24.

**Objectives:** Students will look at examples of Greek and Etruscan vases and learn about their forms, functions, and vase paintings.

Students will learn about pottery production and design and how ancient artists are identified. They will also discover Ancient Greek myths and gods, and explore aspects of Greek daily life such as the role of men and women in Greek society and the use of perfumes.

Students will then understand the forms, decorations, and functions of containers used to serve and hold Greek beverages, liquids, and dry goods. They will also be able to discuss a variety of Greek myths, gods, and heroes. In addition, students will come to realize how much can be revealed about Ancient Greek society by studying vase paintings on vessels.

*All objects are from the collections of the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley.*

### Apulian red-figure skyphos

450–400 BCE

Southern Italy

terra-cotta, gloss

8–7962; L2009.1001.041

*The owl and olive branch are symbols of the goddess Athena. Following the Persian withdrawal from the Greek mainland in 479 BCE, owls began to appear on Attic cups as a symbol of Athena's contribution towards the Greek victory. The owl skyphos was soon widely imitated throughout the Greek world.*



## Ancient Greek Historical Periods



### Lucanian red-figure bell krater

late 5th century BCE

attributed to the Amykos Painter

Southern Italy

terra-cotta, gloss

8-3822; L2009.1001.027

*The Amykos Painter is named after the vase in which he depicted Amykos, the King of the Bebrykes, being punished. The Amykos Painter was the most prominent of the early Lucanian artists, and more than two hundred vases have been attributed to him.*

### Archaic: 700–479 BCE

Greek city-states prosper and Greek colonies develop throughout the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions. Commerce and the arts flourish; the cities of Corinth and Athens grow and democracy begins to develop. The Greeks defeat the Persians who threatened to extend their control to the Greek mainland.

### Classical: 479 BCE–323 BCE

During the classical era, Athens reaches its greatest political and cultural achievements: the development of a democratic system and the building of the Parthenon; the creation of the tragedies of Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides; and the founding of the philosophical schools of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Alexander the

Great brings the Eastern world to the Indian subcontinent under his control before dying at the age of thirty-two in 323 BCE.

### Hellenistic Period: 323–31 BCE

Following the death of Alexander the Great, his kingdom is divided into three by his generals: Macedonia, including much of mainland Greece, the Seleucid Empire, including the Near East, and Egypt. The Hellenistic period is an international, cosmopolitan age. By the second century BCE, Rome becomes the dominant force; Romans conquer Macedonia in 168 BCE, destroy the city of Corinth in 146 BCE, and capture Athens in 86 BCE.

## Heracles Kills the Nemean Lion

Heracles is one of the most famous heroes in Greek mythology. His image is depicted on countless Greek objects from vase paintings to sculpture and coins. The hero was born as a result of an affair between the god Zeus and Alkmene. Hera, the wife of Zeus, despised her husband's illegitimate child and tormented Heracles throughout his life. When Heracles was a baby, Hera sent a pair of giant snakes into his cradle, which he bravely strangled.

Hera caused Heracles to go mad when he was an adult, and he killed his wife and children. In order to make amends, Heracles was required to perform a series of labors. The first labor required him to slay a monstrous lion. He hunted the beast armed with a bow and arrows, a sword, and his club.

*He shot a flight of arrows at it, but they rebounded harmlessly from the thick pelt, and the lion licked its chops, yawning. Next he used his sword, which bent as though made of lead; finally he heaved up his club and dealt the lion such a blow on the muzzle that it entered its double-mouthed cave, shaking its head—not from pain, however, but because of the singing in its ears. . . . Aware now that the monster was proof against all weapons, he began to wrestle with it. The lion bit off one of his fingers; but, holding its head in chancery, Heracles squeezed hard until it choked to death.*

**The Greek Myths**, Robert Graves, 1960

Following his successful termination of the beast, Heracles skinned the dead lion with its own sharp claws and wore the pelt as armor and its head as a helmet. This ensemble became one of his trademarks.

### Attic black-figure lekythos

6th century BCE

attributed to the Phanyllis Group

Athens, Greece

terra-cotta, gloss

8-3339; L2009.I001.014





### Attic black-figure lekythos

c. 510 BCE

attributed to the Edinburgh Painter

Athens, Greece

terra-cotta, gloss

8-16; L2009.1001.002

*The painting on this lekythos portrays a chariot in battle; behind the chariot, are two warriors, one of which has been overthrown. This type of lekythos was placed upon graves of the dead and contained the oil and perfume needed by the deceased in the afterlife. The chariot scene indicates that it may have been meant for the grave of a fallen warrior, perhaps a charioteer.*



## South Italian Painted Pottery



Trade and the desire for various goods, particularly metals, first brought the Ancient Greeks to southern Italy and Sicily. Eventually, the Greeks established many important colonies in this region known as Magna Graecia. For more than two centuries, South Italian and Sicilian Greek cities imported pottery from Corinth and then Athens.

During the late fifth century BCE, Attic imports ceased as the Spartans blockaded trade routes during the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE). In response, five areas in southern Italy—Campania, Paestum, Apulia, Lucania, and Sicily—began to produce red-figure vases. As many of the craftsmen were trained immigrants from Athens, these early South Italian vases were closely modeled after Attic pottery in both shape and design. The market for these vases was principally local. Regional styles soon developed, and in addition to scenes from daily life, painters drew inspiration from popular myths and legends. Many vases were crafted specifically for use in burials, and funerary scenes were common. In some cases, these myths were atypical of those depicted on Attic vases. South Italian pottery also featured scenes from Greek theater. Female heads, such as the one depicted on this krater, were another unique and lively motif found on vases from this area. Additionally, South Italian vase painters influenced and inspired their Etruscan neighbors.

The clay in southern Italy had less iron in it than clay from Athens; as a result, pots fired to a paler orange color. Vase painters often covered their undecorated vases with a thin wash of yellow or red ochre and then burnished the piece to enhance the vessel's hue.

### Apulian red-figure column krater

late 4th century BCE

attributed to the “Split Mouth Group”

(associates of the Amphorae and Armidale Painters)

Southern Italy

terra-cotta, gloss

8–2320; L2009.1001.011

*A female head appears on the front of this vase; on the reverse is probably Eros, the god of love and fertility, with a fan and cluster of grapes.*





## Gnathian Style Vase Painting



### Etruscan red-figure bell krater

probably late 4th century BCE

Italy

terra-cotta, gloss

8-3829; IL2009.1001.031

*About two dozen vases of this type are extant. Due to the peculiar style, and because none were found in a controlled excavation, experts are divided upon whether the vases are authentically ancient or modern forgeries.*

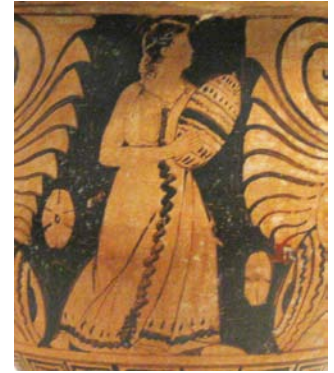
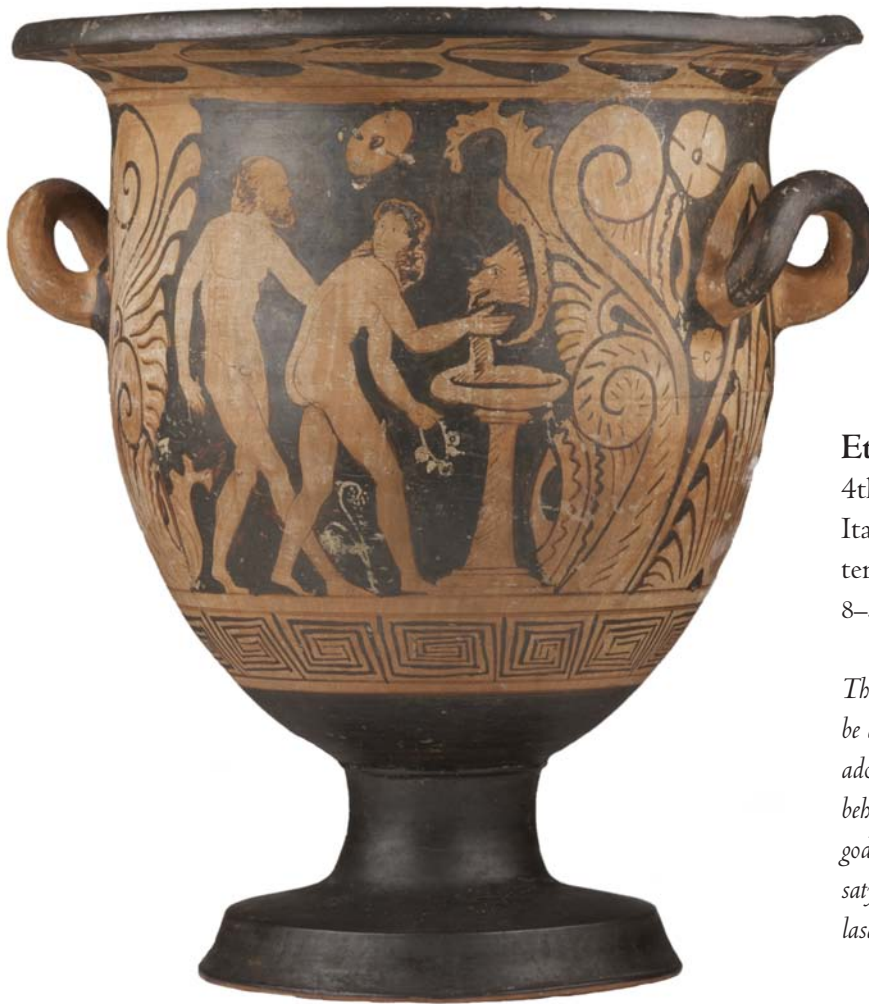
The “Gnathian” technique of painting was employed to create the unique imagery on this vase. This style, which was popular in southern Italy, entails painting all the decoration, often in multiple colors, onto the black, glazed surface of the vessel. The red figures are not rendered in the color of the clay; rather, they are painted on top of the black background with a red slip and then incised, creating a faux red-figure scene.

Depicted on this vase, two satyrs playfully dance on either side of a woman, perhaps a maenad, kicking their legs, pointing their toes, and waving their arms. One of the satyrs holds a small bow and arrow while the woman holds a pair of oversized laurel leaves. The figures’ spiky

caps are probably laurel crowns.

This three-figure composition and group of mythical characters first appeared on Greek vases in the sixth century; shortly after, Etruscan vase painters incorporated this theme. But these fantastical figures and their unnatural forms are a departure from the more literal scenes found on Greek painted vases. The curvilinear figures, with their hollow eyes and patterned bodies, appear to stretch and contort. Although unusual, the vase shows a deliberate and carefully conceived painting style. Unlike their Attic counterparts, Etruscan painted pottery tends to be more eclectic and whimsical.

## Etruscan Pottery



### Etruscan red-figure bell krater

4th century BCE

Italy

terra-cotta, gloss

8-3826; L2009.1001.030

*The nude female beside the fountain on this vase may be a lasa, a subsidiary deity associated with love and adornment. It is unclear as to whether or not the man behind her is a mortal or a satyr, a follower of the god of wine, known as Fufluns to the Etruscans. If a satyr is depicted, then perhaps the nude female is not a lasa, but a maenad, a female follower of Fufluns.*

The Etruscans were known throughout antiquity as a seafaring people who excelled at metallurgy. By the late eighth century BCE, foreign influences from the Near East and Greece began to impact Etruscan art, technology, and society. Traders from Greece, Phoenicia, and Syria came to Italy to exchange goods for precious metals. During the mid-seventh century BCE, Etruria gained considerable wealth and power. By the sixth century, Etruscans also exported pottery, metal utensils, arms and armor, wine, grain, and timber.

The Etruscans imported large numbers of Greek vases. Because so many Greek vases were excavated from Etruscan tombs in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, archaeologists initially assumed they were made in Etruria. When Greek inscriptions were found on pots, sources of pottery clays identified,

and styles better understood, scholars realized the extent of the import trade. As they became familiar with Etruscan tastes, Greek potters altered some of their pottery to appeal to Etruscan consumers. The Greeks imitated Etruscan shapes and painted vessels with popular Etruscan themes.

Following the influence of imported Greek pottery, and the immigration of Greek potters to southern Etruria around 510 BCE, Etruscan artisans began local production of black-figure pottery. In the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, again inspired by imported Greek pottery, Etruscan artisans produced a variety of uniquely styled red-figure pottery. The primary centers of pottery production included Cerveteri and Vulci, both in southern Etruria.



**Etruscan black-figure neck amphora**

probably late 5th or early 6th century BCE

Italy

terra-cotta, gloss

8-445; L2009.1001.008

*On this amphora, two bearded athletes race towards a judge who holds a crown.*



## Pottery Production in the Ancient Mediterranean



Men worked as potters and painters in Greek society. Making pots required clay, water, fuel, fire, and a kiln. Due to the mess and smoke, pottery workshops were usually located outside of city centers. The first stage in making a pot was to dig the clay out of the ground. The clay was then mixed with water in a basin, in a lengthy process called levigation, in which impurities were filtered from the clay. When judged to be sufficiently fine, the clay was left to dry out to the required consistency.

To make a vase, the potter kneaded a lump of clay of suitable size and placed it centrally on the flat surface of the wheel. As the wheel revolved, the potter drew the clay up into the required shape with his hands. Large pots were made in several sections and handles were added separately.

After the vase dried in the sun and the clay hardened, it was burnished. Sometimes a wash of red ocher was applied to the surface of the pot to enhance the natural reddish-orange color of the clay. The painter made a preliminary sketch on a vase, probably with a stick of charcoal. The painting was then completed with specially prepared clay slips or glosses, a mixture of purified clay and water. Incisions were also made at this time, in which designs were drawn on the surface of the pot with a sharp tool.

Pots were then wood-fired in kilns. By controlling the oxygen flow, the color of the clay pot and its gloss could be changed from red to black. An oxidizing or well-ventilated atmosphere produced red; a reducing or smoke-filled atmosphere, gray or black.

### Etruscan red-figure oinochoe

mid-4th century BCE

Italy

terra-cotta, gloss

8-3399; L2009.1001.022

*On this vessel, a goose—the symbol of Aphrodite, goddess of love—appears opposite the head of a satyr.*

## Identifying Artists

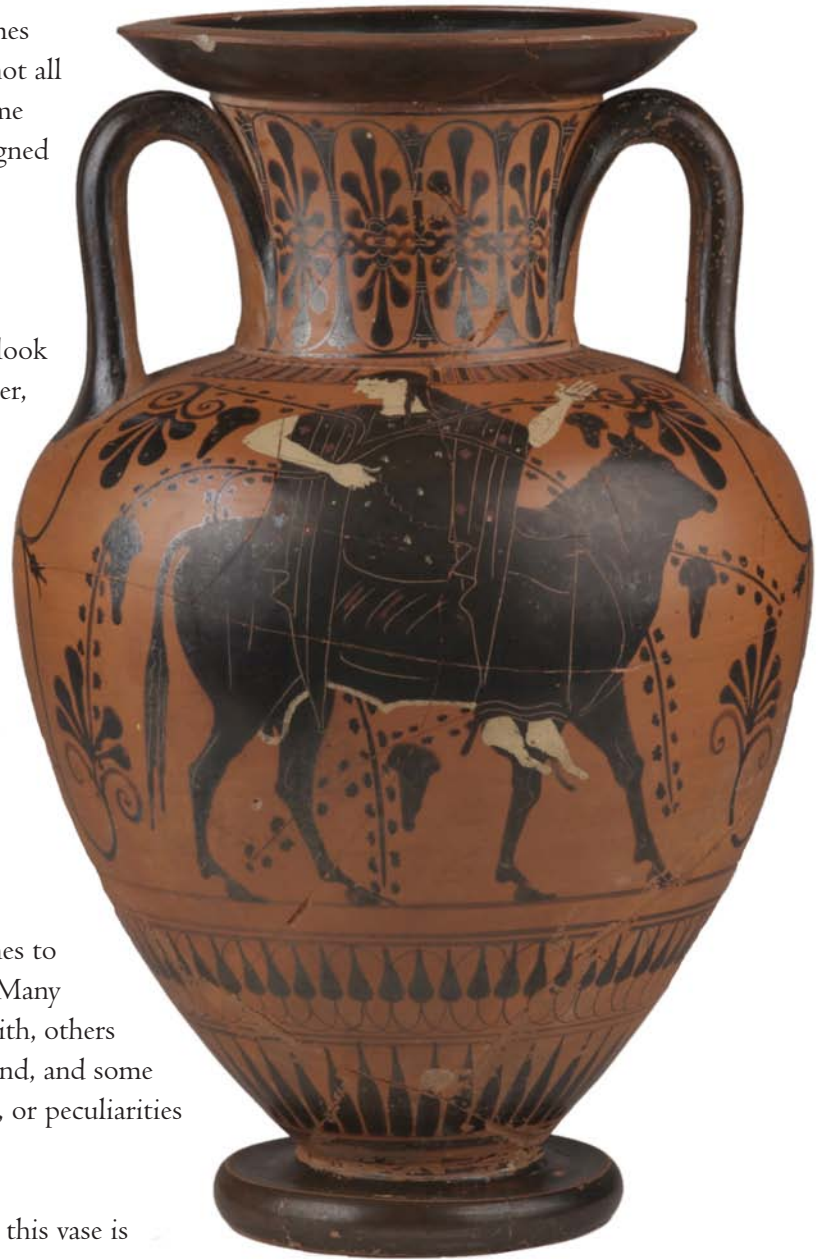
Potters and painters frequently signed their names on vases, especially those in Athens. However, not all painters or potters signed all of their work. Some painters apparently never signed vases, unless signed pieces by these artisans remain to be excavated.

By carefully examining fine stylistic details on unsigned vases, scholars are able to identify vessels produced by the same artist. Specialists look for unique characteristics of the potter or painter, which help to distinguish a body of work produced by the same artist or workshop.

Sir John Davidson Beazley pioneered the attribution of Athenian black- and red-figured vases to both named and anonymous painters in the twentieth century. He was a professor of classical archaeology and art at the University of Oxford (1925–56). Beazley identified the individual styles of Athenian vase painters and essentially traced the entire development of Attic vase painting.

Beazley and the other scholars gave various names to the anonymous painters whom they identified. Many are named after the potters they collaborated with, others are named by the region in which they were found, and some painters are named by the subjects they painted, or peculiarities of style.

The workshop of the Leagros Group, to which this vase is attributed, consisted of painters who decorated pottery in the black-figure technique in Athens around 525 to 500 BCE. Members of the Leagros Group were among the last black-figure painters. The group predominantly made large vases including hydriai, amphorae, and kraters.



### Attic black-figure neck amphora

525–500 BCE

attributed to the Leagros Group

Athens, Greece

terra-cotta, gloss

8–3852; L2009.1001.032

*In this vase painting, a maenad, a female follower of Dionysos, the god of wine, rides a bull and holds a grapevine in her hand. She wears a chiton or tunic, and a himation, a type of cloak, both popular garments in Ancient Greece.*

## Decorative Patterns on Vases

Repetitive, linear patterns and floral designs regularly appear on Attic, South Italian, and Etruscan vases. Ornamental patterns serve as borders and enhance figurative pictures on pots. The top pattern on this krater are referred to as palmettes and the bottom pattern are called upright lotus buds. Patterns may decorate large areas of vases, covering the neck, surfaces underneath the handles, and the space above and below the images.

Many of the patterns on painted vases can be traced to outside influences. For example, lotuses and palmette motifs originated in Egypt. These designs were introduced to the Greeks in the seventh century BCE through Near Eastern arts. Some of the patterns found on vases also appear on textiles, metal objects, and architecture. The majority of these patterns contain no symbolic meaning. Ivy and vine leaves, however, are affiliated with Dionysos, the god of wine, and frequently appear on vessels associated with wine consumption.



### Attic black-figure neck amphora

late 6th century BCE

attributed to the Group of Würzburg I99

Athens, Greece

terra-cotta, gloss

8-3853; L2009.1001.033

*This vase painting shows a man preparing for battle. He has already attached one greave and prepares to attach a second piece of shin armour to his left leg. The warrior's beard indicates that he is middle aged, in contrast to the beardless youth behind him and the young maiden in front of him.*



## The Role of Women in Ancient Greece and Etruria

Men and women played distinct roles in Greek society. Every female had a guardian, who was either her closest male-birth relative or her husband. Marriages were arranged, and women were betrothed around the ages of fifteen to eighteen. A woman's domain was her home. Females were largely responsible for bearing children, managing the household, and tending to chores such as spinning, weaving, and preparing meals. Many women could afford to have a female slave to assist them with these activities.

Some women worked in the marketplace and participated in agricultural fieldwork. Female slaves and lower-class women were typically responsible for retrieving water from the local fountain house, which gave them the opportunity to socialize with other women outside of the house. Women also tended the tombs of family members and brought offerings to the deceased. Special circumstances such as weddings, funerals, and religious festivals allowed women to participate in external activities. Ideally, in all public circumstances, women had to be accompanied by a slave or other attendant.

Etruscan women, on the other hand, enjoyed a great deal of freedom. Affluent women drove or rode carriages, and they hosted gatherings for female friends. Married couples drank wine, dined, and entertained together, and wives accompanied their husbands at banquets, practices that astonished early Greek observers.

### Campanian red-figure squat lekythos

350–325 BCE

attributed to the workshop of the

Cumae 'A' Painter

Southern Italy

terra-cotta, gloss

8–3345; L2009.1001.015

*Perhaps the topless female in this fanciful painting is playing the role of Aphrodite the goddess of love, beauty, and sexuality, or it may even represent the goddess herself. Most likely, Eros, the god of love and fertility, is shown at left.*



## Wedding Vases



Significant occasions, such as marriages, funerals, and births, called for specific types of pottery. A special range of shapes was made for weddings, particularly, the *lebes gamikos*, which first appeared in the sixth century and continued in production well into the fourth century. These wedding vases had an attached stand or a short foot, such as the ones displayed here. The name *lebes gamikos* comes from *lebes*, which means deep bowl, and *gamikos*, which means marriage. Paintings on the *lebes gamikos* portray love, bridal, and nuptial scenes. Also present on many of these vases are the Olympian gods Eros and Aphrodite, both associated

with love and fertility.

The bride and groom marked the departure from unmarried life to their impending unions with ritual baths prior to the wedding festivities. The *lebes gamikos* may have held water for ritual washing. Or perhaps the vessels held special wedding foods for the bride and groom in the bridal chamber such as sesame cakes, in which the seeds were ground, mixed with honey, and shaped. On vase paintings, these wedding vases are often shown being presented to the bride as wedding gifts or placed on the floor beside her.

### Campanian red-figure lebetes gamikoi

mid-late 4th century BCE

Southern Italy

terra-cotta, gloss

8-448a,b; L2009.1001.010; 8-447a,b; L2009.1001.009

*In the vase painting on the left, Eros, the god of love and fertility, chases a woman.*

## The Symposium

The painting on this krater illustrates a symposium: a drinking party attended by a host and his male guests. In addition to merrymaking, men often engaged in political or philosophical debates. Custom dictated that wives and daughters were excluded; though female courtesans or *hetairai* were allowed to attend. Hetairai were trained hostesses who were shown on vases playing musical instruments, participating in party games, engaging in erotic activity, and dancing with men. Slave attendants and young males were also present at symposia serving wine to guests.

Upon arriving at the host's home, participants removed their shoes and servants washed the guests' feet. Guests were anointed with perfumed oils and flower garlands. The symposium took place in the *andron*, an intimate, square room with a slightly raised floor in the men's part of the house. Men reclined on couches arranged around the sides of the room, and low tables for food were set in front of each couch.

Participants first offered a libation to Olympian gods. The symposiarch, or master of affairs, then selected the precise strength of the wine mixture, the number of bowls to be mixed, the size of the cups to be used, and the pace of the drinking for the evening. The wine was mixed with water in a krater such as the one on display, and then ladled into an *oinochoe* or similar type of jug by a slave. The server then poured wine into each guest's cup.



### South Italian red-figure column krater

late 5th century BCE

Southern Italy

terra-cotta, gloss

8-6685; L2009.1001.038



## The Evil Eye



### Attic black-figure olpe (left)

550–525 BCE

attributed to the painter of the Jena Kaineus  
Athens, Greece

terra-cotta, gloss

8–3379; L2009.1001.020

*Dionysos, the god of wine, is the central figure on this olpe. Four satyrs, his male followers, two of whom bear enormous wineskins which double as large eyes, accompany him. Wineskins, made from sheep or goats, were often used to carry wine and are frequently depicted on vases.*

### Attic black-figure kyathos (right)

mid–6th century BCE

attributed to the Partridge Painter  
Athens, Greece

terra-cotta, gloss

8–2; L2009.1001.001

The evil eye, a malign glance, which may cause harm or death to a person and destruction to personal property, is older than Greek civilization. A folk belief at least five thousand years old, the evil eye appears in India, the Middle East, and Europe. It is mentioned in the Bible in addition to Sumerian and other Ancient Near Eastern texts. Etruscans and Egyptians were known to paint eyes on the bows of their vessels as a charm to ward against the evil eye. Even today, some Greek fishing boats are painted with eyes on either side of the prow.

In Ancient Greece, eyes depicted on numerous vase paintings were intended to ward off the evil eye. As a guest was served wine from this *olpe* (left), he was protected by the powers of the eyes that faced away from him and towards his friend or foe. The *kyathos* (right), with eyes depicted on both sides, protected the user regardless of which hand was used to pick up the cup, as one eye would always face the drinker, while the other would be turned towards his companion.

## Perfumes

In antiquity, both men and women were fond of perfumes and scented ointments or unguents with which they adorned their bodies, hair, and beards. Perfumed oils were also used in religious and social rituals, and people placed perfume bottles in burials. Perfume shops in Athens conducted a great deal of business and were located in the *agora*, or market place. Perfumes were commonly stored and sold in *alabastra*. The city of Corinth produced some of the finest and most ornately decorated ceramic perfume and cosmetic containers.

Perfumes and unguents were highly prized luxury items purchased by the wealthy, and perfumers closely guarded the secrets of their trade. Throughout the ancient world, perfumes were made with the utmost care in small quantities using an assortment of natural ingredients, many of which were imported from South Arabia and the Far East. Today, perfumes are alcohol based; in antiquity, perfumes contained a vegetable oil base such as linseed or olive oil.

Perfumes and ointments were made using one of three processing methods: pressing or extraction, cold steeping, or hot steeping. Different plant materials were used to make perfumes and ointments, including flowers, leaves, herbs, fruits, and aromatic resins extracted from certain trees. Frankincense, jasmine, marjoram, narcissus, roses, lilies, iris, cinnamon, and rosemary were some of the many ingredients incorporated into perfumes. Unguents typically had a base made from vegetable oil or animal fat, to which various fixative materials were added such as milk, honey, aromatic resins, and perfumed beeswax.



### Etrusco-Corinthian black-figure alabastron

575–550 BCE

attributed to the Mingor Painter

Southern Italy

terra-cotta, gloss

8-6683; L2009.I001.037



## The Birth of the God Dionysos

The Ancient Greeks worshipped a pantheon of gods and goddesses, each with a unique personality and distinct realm. Greek myths explained the origins of the gods and their relationships with mortals. Ancient Greek art frequently incorporated scenes from mythological tales. The painting on this *hydria*, a type of water jar, details the birth of the god of wine Dionysos and the death of his mother Semele. Semele has an affair with the god Zeus and becomes pregnant. But her family does not believe that she is carrying the god's child. In one version of the myth, Zeus becomes angry with Semele and kills her with a lightning bolt. Zeus then takes the unborn child and sews the fetus into his thigh until the baby is ready to emerge from his leg. Contrary to the common version of the story, on this vase, Dionysos is shown leaping fully grown from his mother's womb.

Semele's family still believes that she lied. When Dionysos comes to Thebes he is shunned in his homeland. Dionysos decides to vindicate his mother and prove to her family that he is a divinity. He induces the city's women to abandon their homes and become his followers, driving them into a state of ecstatic frenzy. Dionysos also causes hysteria among Semele's sisters and Agaue, the mother of the king of Thebes.

In her insanity, Agaue tears her son Pentheus limb from limb, believing she is tearing apart a mountain lion. Agaue then carries her son's head back to her father, Cadmus. Shortly after, she comes to her senses realizing the atrocity she has committed. Dionysos's wrath, however, does not end there; he sends Agaue and her sisters into exile and turns Cadmus into a serpent.



### Attic red-figure hydria

c. 400 BCE

attributed to the Semele Painter; Athens, Greece;  
terra-cotta, gloss

8-3316; L2009.1001.013

*This vase is an outstanding example of misfired pottery. The red blotches throughout the vase make it easy to identify as such. Because the black gloss that the artist used to create the imagery on the piece was applied too thin, much of it burned away in the kiln during the firing process.*



## The Hero Theseus Slays the Monstrous Minotaur

The painting on this amphora highlights one of the most popular myths of Ancient Greece, the slaying of the Cretan Minotaur by the Athenian hero Theseus. The Athenians were forced to send seven youths and seven maidens to Crete to be fed to the Minotaur, a half-human, half-bull monster who dwelt in the labyrinth at Knossos. The two bystanders on this vase probably represent those destined for sacrifice.

Theseus, the son of King Aegeus, volunteered to destroy the Minotaur, and was aided by the Cretan princess, Ariadne, who fell in love with him. Ariadne gave Theseus a magic ball of thread to attach to the entrance of the maze, which he unwound into the Minotaur's chambers. The string also allowed Theseus to retrace his steps through the maze once he had killed the Minotaur. On this vase, Ariadne stands by Theseus while he slays the beast from behind.

In one version of the myth, Theseus flees with Ariadne and later abandons her. As for Theseus, he had promised to hoist white sails if his mission was successful. Absentmindedly, he leaves the vessel's black sails in place. Upon seeing the black sails, his father Aegeus imagines the worst and throws himself to his death from the heights of Acropolis.



### Attic black-figure neck amphora

late 6th century BCE

attributed to the Group of Würzburg I99

Athens, Greece

terra-cotta, gloss

8-3853; L2009.1001.033

## Athena: Virgin Goddess of Warfare and Craftsmanship

On this amphora, Hermes, divine messenger of the gods, is accompanied by Athena and the hero Heracles. Athena's mother was Metis, goddess of wisdom and the first wife of Zeus. Fearful that Metis would bear a son mightier than himself, Zeus swallowed his wife. Inside Zeus, Metis made a robe and helmet for her daughter. The hammering of the helmet caused Zeus terrible headaches and he cried out in agony. Hephaestus, his son, ran to his father's aid and split his skull open. From it, emerged the fully-grown, Athena, armed and wearing her mother's robe and helmet. Athena's trademarks are a helmet, spear, and the aegis, a breast ornament bordered by serpents and sometimes embellished in the center with a gorgon's head—a monstrous female figure.

Athena and Poseidon, the god of the sea, both coveted Athens. They each claimed the city, and so it was decided that the one who could give the finest gift to its citizens should have it. Poseidon struck the top of the Acropolis with his three-pronged spear and a spring welled up, but the water was salty. Athena gave the Athenians the more useful olive tree, and so was chosen as their preeminent deity.

Athena was not aggressive by nature, unless her country was attacked or when she came to the aid of heroes such as Heracles. Even so, like most Greek gods, she possessed the ability to become enraged and vengeful. When Athena, who invented spinning and weaving, discovered that the mortal Arachne could weave finer textiles than herself, the goddess turned the girl into a spider. On another occasion, the young hunter Teiresias saw the virgin goddess bathing nude; furious, Athena permanently blinded him.



### Attic black figure neck amphora

late 6th century BCE

attributed to the Leagros Group:

Munich I416

Athens, Greece

terra-cotta, gloss

8-3376; L2009.1001.018

## Pottery Shapes



**Alabastron** (pl. **alabastra**): bottles for plain or scented oils and perfumes



**Amphora** (pl. **amphorae**): general-purpose containers that held liquids such as honey, milk, water, oil, and wine



**Hydria** (pl. **hydriai**): water jars



**Krater** (pl. **kraters**): vessels used for mixing wine and water



**Kyathos** (pl. **kylikes**): a container used as a ladle to serve wine from a krater



**Lekythos** (pl. **lekythoi**): a container, which held various types of oil and were used by men and women at sanctuaries, graves, in the kitchen, and at the bath; they were also commonly used as burial offerings



**Lebes gamikos** (pl. **lebetes gamikoi**): a vase used for matrimonial occasions though its specific function is uncertain



**Olpe**: like the oinochoe, the olpe served as a pitcher or water jug that was frequently used as a server or ladle for wine



**Oinochoe** (pl. **oinochoai**): a pitcher or water jug that was frequently used as a server or ladle for wine; Greek potters traditionally made some vases in the form of people and animals



**Skyphos** (pl. **skyphoi**): a deep drinking cup with two handles, it was one of the most common Greek cup forms produced



# Decorative Patterns on Vases

How many different types of patterns can you identify in the exhibition?



Palmettes



Upright lotus buds



Hanging lotus buds



Unnamed pattern



Broken key



Crossing meander



Ivy with corymbi



Laurel leaves



Rays



Palmette-lotus chain



Palmette-lotus cross with upright lotus buds

## Activities and Review

1. Many different pot types existed in ancient Greece, each with a name and function. Discuss the shapes, names, and styles of pots. What were some of the vessels used for?

2. Ask students to think about today's containers. How are liquids and beverages currently stored? What types of materials are used today? How do they compare with ancient Greek vessels and manufacturing techniques?

3. Ask students to sketch a design of their own pot. Students should think of the overall shape, function, handle design, decorative patterns and figurative scenes, and the use of color, either red-figure or black-figure.

Ask students to explain what their pot is used for. Are the shape and handles appropriate for the use? What does their vase painting reflect about Ancient Greek society?

4. Discuss the vase paintings seen in the exhibition. Greek vase paintings help us understand many things about Ancient Greek daily life and mythology. Ancient Greek pots were often decorated with detailed figurative scenes and designs. What were some of your favorite vase paintings and why? What type of stories do the pots reveal about life in Ancient Greece? Why do you think Ancient Greeks decorated their pots?

### **Additional questions/things to look for in the exhibition**

What type of animals are depicted on some of the pots?

What gods are featured on some of the vases?

What heroes are represented on some of the vessels?

# Vocabulary

**Acropolis:** an outstanding Ancient Greek architectural achievement, a citadel in the city of Athens, a shelter or defense against enemies located on a high spot

**Affluent:** wealthy

**Antiquity:** ancient, former ages

**Archaeology:** the scientific study of historic and prehistoric peoples through the study and excavation of artifacts

**Athens:** a city in Greece

**Attic:** refers to the city of Athens, including its people, art, and various goods

**Betroth:** to arrange for the marriage of

**Black-figure:** a decorative pottery technique developed about 700 BCE in Corinth; Artisans applied a black slip to depict figures and ornamental motifs against the clay's natural, reddish-orange background; the details were either incised or added in colors; female skin was typically painted white

**Commerce:** an exchange of goods or commodities

**Corinth:** a city in Greece

**Incise:** to cut into, to form marks, or line drawings

**Courtesan:** an escort, hostess

**Eclectic:** made up of different sources, combining different elements

**Dionysos:** the ancient Greek god of wine

**Excavate:** to remove by digging out of the ground

**Magna Graecia:** the coastal areas in southern Italy and in Sicily, which were colonized by the Ancient Greeks

**Malign:** evil, injurious

**Libation:** the pouring of a liquid offering in honor of a god or as part of a religious ritual



**Literal:** true to fact, following very close to the original

**Maenad:** a female follower of the god of wine, Dionysus

**Mythology:** a set of stories, traditions, or beliefs associated with a particular cultural group

**Nuptial:** of or pertaining to marriage or the marriage ceremony

**Ocher:** natural minerals ranging in color from pale yellow to orange and red

**Pantheon:** the gods of a particular mythology considered collectively

**Red-figure:** a decorative pottery technique, which was invented in Athens about 530 BCE and gradually became the predominant style; it is the reverse of black-figure: the figures appeared in reddish-orange, with figural details applied in black lines against a black background

**Satyr:** a mischievous male follower of the god of wine, Dionysos

**Slip:** a mixture of clay and water

**Subsidiary:** secondary

**Whimsical:** playful, fanciful

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## Your Visit to San Francisco Airport Museums

*SFO is a great destination for your class!*

Museum and Library admission, educational programs, and tours are offered at no charge. Education programs and tours can be customized for higher grades, mixed-ages, and special needs-students.

### You Can Extend Your Visit

- Bring lunch and sit in the public dining areas adjacent to the aviation museum or select from the many restaurants at SFO.
- Take a tour of the airport ( by prior arrangement and availability), and ride the AirTrain.
- Meet the trained dogs of the SFPD Airport K-9 Unit and see them in action (by prior arrangement and availability).
- Visit other museum exhibitions in the International Terminal. Please check [www.sfoarts.org](http://www.sfoarts.org) for updated information on current exhibitions.

### Public Transportation

- Take BART directly into SFO International Terminal, where the aviation museum and library are located.
- Take SamTrans Routes KX and 292 directly to SFO.
- Take Caltrain to BART for service to SFO.

### By School Bus/Charter Bus

- Parking for buses is available at no charge by prior arrangement only.

### By Car

- Groups booked for educational programs can park in Airport garages, and Airport parking tickets can be validated at the Aviation Museum at no charge.

For more information on transportation to SFO, visit [www.fllysfo.com](http://www.fllysfo.com)

Since 1980, the San Francisco Airport Museums has featured exhibitions throughout the Airport terminals, which display a rotating schedule of art, history, science, and cultural material. Exhibitions change throughout the year in an effort to provide an educational and cultural experience for the nearly thirty million passengers who use the Airport annually. Most exhibitions are located pre-security and admission is free.

The San Francisco Airport Commission Aviation Library and Louis A. Turpen Aviation Museum features a permanent collection dedicated to the history of commercial aviation.



photo: Gabriel Branbury

The Aviation Museum and Library is housed within an architectural adaptation of San Francisco's original 1937 airport passenger lobby. Public educational programs are held in this unique facility, which is also available for private events. Open hours are 10:00 am to 4:30 pm Sunday through Friday;

closed Saturdays and holidays. The Museum is located pre-security and admission is free.

To schedule educational programs and tours please contact:

Gabriel Phung  
(650) 821-9911  
[education@fllysfo.com](mailto:education@fllysfo.com)

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For the location of the aviation museum and library, visit [www.sfoarts.org/about/directions.html](http://www.sfoarts.org/about/directions.html)



## Scenes from Myths and Daily Life: Ancient Mediterranean Pottery

This is a free, hands-on educational program designed for junior high and high school students, which focuses on the current exhibition *Ancient Mediterranean Pottery*. This program includes directed looking, exploring pottery production techniques, painting styles, subject matter, and regional variations. Educational programs and tours can be customized for lower or higher grade levels, mixed-ages, and special-needs students.

The program is guided by experienced museum and library staff. The tour runs 35 minutes. Tours of *Ancient Mediterranean Pottery* can accommodate approximately 30 students at a time. Special arrangements can be made for groups larger than 30.

### Program Plan

- Students arrive at the Aviation Museum and Library to deposit jackets and bags
- Staff introduction, welcoming remarks, and description of the program
- 30 minute docent tour of the exhibition
- Conclusion and wrap-up

*Ancient Mediterranean Pottery* is on view from October 2009–March 2010 in the International Terminal in gallery G2.

### International Terminal

