Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

LEKYTHOS AH 53

This ancient Greek vessel was made early in the fifth century BC. It is called a lekythos and was used for holding oil or perfume.

Greek pottery can be roughly divided into two groups by looking at the patterns - the black figure and the red figure. The black figure pottery has black silhouetted figures on a red natural background. The red figure pottery has figures outlined in black and the background painted black leaving red figures. Details were made with a fine brush and battles or tales of mythology were the usual subjects of the design.



You can see that this vessel is painted with a black figure design. The figure sitting on the horse is the Greek god Dionysus, who was the god of wine. The patterns behind him are grape vines and he is carrying a drinking cup. The female figure is called a maenad. The maenads were worshippers of Dionysus and were known to be fun loving, mad and wild. The name literally translates as 'raving ones'. The other figures are called satyrs, who were companions of Dionysus and are often depicted with the ears of a horse or goat.



The lekythos in this box would have been used in the home, but there was also a special type of lekythos with a white background, which was mostly used for funerals. The pictures painted on these vessels often showed women grieving. They contained very precious scented oils that were used to anoint the body. You can see an example in the picture on the left.

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