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GREEK POTTERY AH54B

The first known civilisation of the country that we know as mainland Greece today was that of the Mycenaeans. They were an outward looking and often aggressive people, trading their local produce (olive oil, wine, wool, flax) for luxury goods such as copper, tin, gold and silver. From the fifteenth century onwards the Mycenaean civilisation spread throughout the eastern Mediterranean, even overturning the sophisticated Minoan culture on the island of Crete. It reached as far as settlements on the Turkish coastline. This map shows modern Greece with the island of Crete at the bottom and the Turkish coastline on the right.



Greek pottery can be roughly divided into two groups by looking at their patterns - the black figure and the red figure. The black figure pottery, made in the seventh and sixth centuries BC, has black silhouetted figures on a red natural background. The red figure, appearing towards the end of the sixth century BC, has figures outlined in black and then the background is 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.

Kylix

This is an example of the classic black figure drinking cup of the Athenians. The decoration shows a woman seated between palmettes, holding a garland. A man is walking away from her with a cloak over his arm. The cup dates from the second quarter of the fifth century BC.



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Aryballos



This flask is called a Corinthian ball aryballos, with its distinctive spherical shape and narrow neck. These flasks were used to contain perfume or oil and are often shown in vase paintings of Ancient Greece being used by athletes to anoint their bodies with oil after bathing. In these pictures, the flask is sometimes attached by a strap to an athlete's wrist, or is hung by this strap from a peg on the wall. The decoration on this example shows three warriors holding a large round hoplos (shield) and a spear. From the seventh century onwards it was often too expensive for cities to have a separate army, so the warriors (called hoplites) were farmers who doubled as soldiers in times of need. Usually they were rich farmers, who could afford their own uniform and weaponry. This aryballos dates from 575 to 550 BC.

Lekythos

Lekythoi were used for storing oil (usually olive oil), and have long slender bodies and narrow necks, with a single handle attached to the neck of the vessel. The oil was often used at burials for anointing the dead and many lekythoi have been found in tombs. They were also used in everyday life, for example when storing and pouring oils needed in food preparation. This one dates from 450 425 BC.

