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GREEK POTTERY AH54C



When archaeologists find Greek pottery today they can often get some idea of the trade routes used by the ancient peoples. Greek colonies (cities of Greek people in different countries) grew up all around the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. At *Emporia* in Spain, *Massilia* in France (Marseilles), *Tripolis* in Libya (Tripoli) and *Olbia* (Odessa) in Ukraine and in the many Greek cities of Sicily and *Magna Graecia* (southern Italy) the Greeks traded with the native populations for locally produced materials. *Emporia* means 'market', *Olbia* means 'prosperity' and *Massilia* was ruled by rich merchants, showing how successful these trading posts were.

This map shows the Mediterranean and Black Sea as we know it today. You can see Greece in the centre with Spain and France on the left, Libya at the bottom and Ukraine on the right.

Trade is a two-way process. Different localities specialised in providing different goods and in return took different products from Greece. One of the most important exports from Greek cities such as Athens and Corinth was pottery. Pottery turns up in many locations across the Greek world and beyond, and allows us to trace the old trade routes. Sometimes pottery was traded for its own sake, sometimes it was used as containers for other goods. The pottery included in this box was traded for both reasons.

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The tall jar is a lekythos, an item traditionally placed in graves. It is a slim and graceful jug with a single handle at the top. It was a container for oil (usually olive oil), which had many uses in the ancient world, such as anointing the body, food preparation and fuel for lamps. This lekythos has simple decoration: a typical black section at the bottom and a chain of black palmettes painted against the red background. The slender white outer petals of the lotus arch over the palmettes. This vase is typical of those produced in Attica (the land around Athens) in the fifth century BC. This example dates from 500-475 BC.



The small round vessel with the tiny mouth is a much earlier form of lekythos. It shows similarities to the aryballos pot, which is a very common find at Greek sites. You can see an example of an aryballos in the picture below on the left. These vessels were a popular form of oil or perfume container manufactured in huge quantities and traded by Corinthian potters. The perfumes were renowned all over the Greek world. Pliny (a writer of the time) talks about the fame of Corinthian perfumes, which probably came, by trade, from Egypt or the Middle East and then were bottled and sold on from Corinth. This particular lekythos was decorated with concentric circles, parts of which can still be seen but which handling has mainly worn away. It is rather poor quality and would not have cost much to buy.





The small phial with the long neck was found at a Greek cemetery site but is probably not of Greek manufacture. It is most likely a piece of Cypriote or Roman redware, designed to hold perfume. This phial is a good example of goods being traded *into* Greece.

