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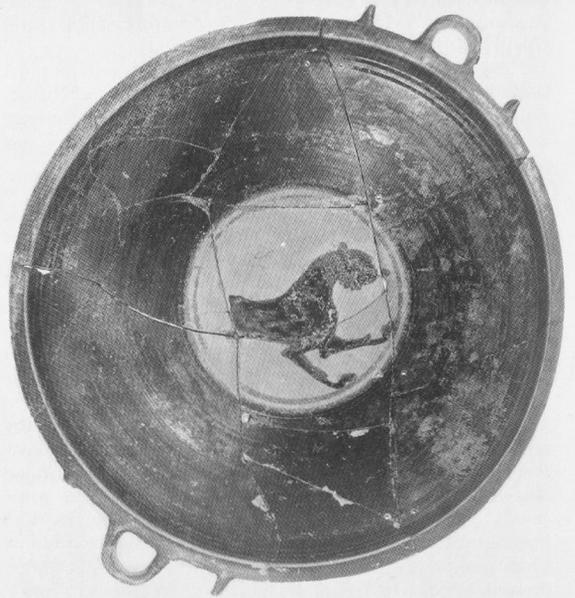
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An Assortment of Boeotian Vases

The brilliance of Athenian art is one of the major attractions of antiquity which draws us to the civilization of Greece and the origins of western culture. It is this brilliance, however, which occasionally blinds us to the provincial and often interesting art produced in other regions of Greece. One such area is Boeotia, located north of Athens and containing the city of Thebes. The Boeotians, like their Attic neighbors, produced vases of both figured and monochrome decoration. A collection of five vases in the Museum of Art and Archaeology at the University of Missouri-Columbia represents both techniques of decoration and typifies the more common as well as less frequent vase shapes made in Boeotia during the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.

The vase seen in Figure 1 is a Boeotian lekane decorated in the black figure technique.¹ Through stylistic comparisons of the painted decoration with other Boeotian and Attic black figure vases this lekane can be dated to about 530 B.C.² The lekane was a very popular shape at this time in Boeotia among black figure vase painters who followed the Attic Little Master cup painters in arranging animal scenes on their wares. The Missouri lekane displays a typically balanced arrangement of panthers, cocks, and floral ornaments on the vase exterior, although the dotted and stylized rosettes encircling the foot are quite unusual. The vase interior is adorned with a lone panther which, like its companions on the vase exterior, peers out at the admirer with large, open eyes. Unlike its companions, this panther is abbreviated in a protome form but still manages sturdily to support itself on the encircling purple bands. The shape of the lekane is broad and shallow with a low conical foot and two horizontally placed



1. Black figure lekane in the Missouri collection.
Above: view of the interior.
Opposite: views of the bottom (exterior) and side.





2. Left: *kantharos in the Missouri collection.*
3. Below: *Dionysos holding a kantharos, depicted on an Attic red-figure column krater, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, No. 07-286.73.*

ribbon-like handles. They allowed the vase to be hung on the wall, displaying the array of fauna and flora ringing the foot. The centrally weighted form with low flaring profile prevents the vase from easily tipping over. These characteristics in addition to its vertical rim make it suitable for holding liquids or serving semifluid foods. Its simple, open shape allowed it to perform a varied assortment of practical functions such as a container for shoe polish, a tray for mortar, and a receptacle for vomit.³ The lekane also lent its name to the practice of divination known as lekanomancy. The wide, round interior of the dish could be filled with water onto which oil was poured, creating a reflecting pool in which images were perceived⁴ or into which objects were dropped and the ripple action of the surface studied.⁵





4. *Kotyle in the Missouri collection exhibiting a mostly mis-fired glaze which was intended to be black.*

Another vase shape especially prevalent to Boeotia is a drinking cup known as a kantharos. The Missouri example (Fig. 2)⁶ is covered with glaze, which was intended to be black but has partially fired red. Stylistic comparisons of shape with other Boeotian kantharoi from datable contexts indicate a time of ca. 425 B.C. for its manufacture.⁷ The high swung strap handles and plastic ring stationed midway along the tall stem are characteristic features of the shape at this time. In constructing the kantharos the Greek craftsman would have shaped the footed stem in an inverted position for easy handling on a revolving potter's wheel. Attaching it to the bowl—which was thrown separately—with wet clay and centering it was a simple operation performed on the wheel as it turned. The handles, having been rolled into strips and flattened, would then be attached with wet clay to the vase. Glazed and fired, the well articulated kantharos was ready for the market. In Boeotia the kantharos served as a wine cup and was a particular favorite of Dionysos, Greek god of wine, who, according to Euripides,⁸ came to

Boeotia first in Greece on his travels from Asia Minor. He is frequently depicted (Fig. 3) carrying a kantharos in painted scenes on Greek vases.

Another drinking cup (Fig. 4),⁹ better called a kotyle or a skyphos than a kantharos,¹⁰ is roughly contemporary with the Missouri kantharos or a bit later. The shape, with its low foot, deep bowl, and vertical ring handles with struts attached, was the characteristic vessel of the Cabiran sanctuary near Thebes during the latter half of the fifth and early fourth centuries B.C. The Missouri kotyle was intended to be black monochrome. However, the vase decorator apparently changed batches of glaze during the course of painting the vase, thereby causing the kotyle to fire partly black and partly red in the kiln. The glaze, like the clay of the pot itself, is rich in iron oxide which is capable of firing red or black in color. During the firing cycle, oxygen is allowed into the kiln which is brought to approximately 800° C. The oxygen allows the iron oxide to turn the entire vase red in the intense heat. Following this oxidizing stage the



oxygen is reduced while the temperature is increased to approximately 950° C. This causes the iron oxide to turn the vase black and, most important, sinters the refined clay of the glaze, thereby sealing it off from the oxygen which is readmitted to the kiln in a third stage before the kiln is ultimately allowed to cool. The readmission of oxygen to the kiln turns the iron oxide in the vase red once again—but only those areas which have not undergone sintering. The sintered areas remain black. In altering batches of glaze on the Missouri kotyle the Boeotian artist unknowingly contributed to its ultimate bichrome appearance. The temperature reached in the kiln during the reducing stage of the firing cycle was sufficient to sinter the glaze in the area which colored black but insufficient to affect the majority of the glaze on the vase in a like manner, turning it red during the final oxidizing stage.¹¹ Although the Missouri kotyle is undecorated, except for the plain glaze, the shape appears with figured scenes or, more frequently, with ivy vines (Fig. 5),¹² symbol of Dionysos and suggesting the intoxicating contents which it once held.

5. Above left: *Boeotian kotyle with vine decoration. Athens, D. Goulandris collection No. 42.*
6. Above right: *tankard in the Missouri collection, reproduced at approximately 1/2 actual size.*
7. Below: *Boeotian tankard of the sixth century B.C. closely resembling the Missouri tankard. Thebes Museum, No. 49.280.*





8. *Lebes gamikos* in the Missouri collection

The Missouri tankard¹³ illustrated in Figure 6 is related to a similar shape known as a *karchesion*.¹⁴ The latter tapers at the waist like our vase, but the strap handles continue down to the base. The decoration and specific form of the Missouri vase make it unique and assist in assigning it a date. The footless shape with concave sides and plastic ring at the waist has a long history in the Aegean area going back to the Bronze Age.¹⁵ Monochrome Boeotian examples (Fig. 7)¹⁶ of the second quarter of the sixth century B.C. appear with the same characteristics in shape as our vase including the strap handles which join the vase walls immediately above the plastic ring. These examples, however, are more squat and, like other Boeotian drinking vessels, become taller and/or slimmer toward the end of the sixth and into the fifth century B.C.¹⁷ The slim proportions of the Missouri tankard and the unincised ivy vine decoration between the handles (like that on the *kotyle*, Fig. 5) allow us to date it in the fifth century B.C.

The last of our Boeotian vases is a well-made miniature *lebes gamikos* (Fig. 8).¹⁸ The shape, as the name indicates,¹⁹ was associated with women in their marriage ceremonies and probably held the bridal bath water. The Missouri vase, like other Boeotian examples,²⁰ is too small to serve in this capacity in a practical manner but still may have been used in a ritualistic fashion. Supporting this assertion is one Boeotian example²¹ with an inscription referring to marriage. The *lebes gamikos* in Figure 8 has a flaring foot, a plastic ring midway along the stem (like the *kantharos*, Fig. 2), and a sloping shoulder on the bowl leading up to a narrow rim. The vase originally carried a lid but, like other Boeotian *lebetes gamikoi*, was not invested with handles like most Attic models. The sole decoration on the Missouri vase is a design of branches and dots painted in white over the black glaze on the shoulder of the bowl. Added white decoration on otherwise monochrome black glaze ware is very common among Boeotian vases of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.²² A comparison in shape with other Boeotian *lebetes gamikoi* having figured decoration allows us to date our vessel in the fifth century B.C.

The assortment of Boeotian vases examined here is spread over a period of 100 to 150 years. Each vase has its own modest peculiarities and thereby contributes to our knowledge of the pottery industry in Boeotia. Together they form an interesting collection of provincial Greek art produced in the late Archaic and Classical periods.

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- ¹Acc. No. 59.71. Provenience unknown. Height 8 cm., width 33.5 cm. Mended. Four pairs of ancient repair holes. Two pairs of purple bands in the interior; one near the rim and one bordering the tondo. Black vertical bars on the side of the rim. On the underside of the foot are four bands circling a black dot; the first, second, and fourth are purple; the third is black.
- ²A. D. Ure, "Boeotian Orientalizing Lekanoi," *Metropolitan Museum Studies* 4 (1932) 18-38. The Missouri lekane can be added to her second group of vases which includes a lekane in Athens, National Museum No. 13919 (p. 31, fig. 21), with a painted style very close to but distinct from that of our vase.
- ³Aristophanes, *Wasps*, line 600; *Birds*, lines 840 and 1143; and *Clouds*, line 907. References noted by Ure, op. cit., 18.
- ⁴W. R. Halliday, *Greek Divination* (London 1913) 145ff.
- ⁵A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité* (Paris 1879) Vol. 1, 185.
- ⁶Acc. No. 59.33. Provenience unknown. Height to rim 19.5 cm., height to crest of handles 25 cm., width 15 cm. Intact except for repaired handle joints. Shoulder is carinated with a high, flaring rim; strap handles are nearly flat; stem is hollow. Vase is covered with black glaze (fired red in places on both sides) except under the foot which is reserved.
- ⁷Compare the similarly shaped kantharos, Thebes Museum No. 123.2, illustrated in *Sixth and Fifth Century Pottery from Rhitsona*, P. N. Ure ed. (London 1927) pl. 10, No. 123.2, from grave 123, which is dated by its contents to ca. 430-420 B.C.; B. A. Sparkes, "The Taste of a Boeotian Pig," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 87 (1967) 130.
- ⁸Euripides, *Bacchae*, lines 20-25.
- ⁹Acc. No. 59.26. Provenience unknown. Height 11.5 cm., width 11.5 cm. Intact. Glaze has fired red on the interior and most of the exterior of the vase. Underside of foot is reserved except for one thick band and one thin one circling a dot, all fired red.
- ¹⁰G. M. A. Richter and M. J. Milne, *Shapes and Names of Athenian Vases* (New York 1935) 26-28.
- ¹¹Interpretation of the differences in color of the glaze courtesy of J. V. Noble in a letter of July 7, 1961. For an analysis of the firing process of Greek vases, see J. V. Noble, *The Techniques of Painted Attic Pottery* (New York 1965) 31ff and 77f.
- ¹²Athens, D. Goulandris Collection No. 42. Height 11.5 cm., width 12 cm. Intact. Side not illustrated is slightly worn. Glazed interior fired red. Thick black band around rim of vase and three thinner ones below ivy vine pattern in the handle zone. Underside of foot is reserved. I am grateful to Mrs. D. Goulandris for permission to publish this vase and to Dr. L. Marangou of the University of Ioannina for assistance in obtaining information about it.
- ¹³Acc. No. 59.48. Provenience unknown. Height 11.5 cm., width 12 cm. Partial restoration of base. Ivy vine pattern with dots in the handle zone. Black glaze applied to strap handles (nearly flat), vase interior, and lower exterior except for a reserved band above a ring base. Underside of foot is slightly concave and reserved except for two black bands circling a black dot.
- ¹⁴I. C. Love, "Kantharos or Karchesion? A Samothracian Contribution," *Essays in Memory of Karl Lehmann*, L. F. Sandler ed. (New York 1964) 204-222. Most recently on this shape see J. Boardman, "The Karchesion of Herakles," *JHS* 99 (1979) 149-151.
- ¹⁵Love, 218f and fig. 6.
- ¹⁶Thebes Museum No. 49.280, from grave 49 at Rhitsona. Height 8.5 cm. R. M. Burrows and P. N. Ure, "Excavations at Rhitsóna in Boeotia," *Annual of the British School at Athens* 14 (1907-1908) 255. For the date (ca. 560-550 B.C.) of grave 49, see Sparkes, op. cit., 128. It is a pleasure to thank Miss A. K. Andreiomenou, Ephor of Antiquities for Boeotia, for permission to publish a photo of this vase.
- ¹⁷Thebes Museum No. 12.49, from grave 12 at Rhitsona. Height 9 cm. R. M. Burrows and P. N. Ure, "Excavations at Rhitsona in Boeotia," *JHS* 29 (1909) 319, fig. 7 center. For the date (ca. 500 B.C.) of grave 12, see Sparkes, op. cit., 129.
- ¹⁸Acc. No. 59.40. Provenience unknown. Height 15 cm. Lid missing but otherwise intact. Interior of bowl and underside of foot reserved. Stem is hollow.
- ¹⁹Richter and Milne, op. cit., 11.
- ²⁰A. D. Ure and P. N. Ure, "Boeotian Vases in the Akademisches Kunstmuseum in Bonn," *Archaeologischer Anzeiger* (1933) 31f, No. 5 and fig. 27, where eight examples are cited.
- ²¹R. Pagenstecher, "Dated Sepulchral Vases from Alexandria," *American Journal of Archaeology* 13 (1909) 393f, figure 3.
- ²²P. N. Ure, *Black Glaze Pottery from Rhitsona in Boeotia* (London 1913) pl. 7.

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