Information sheet
In the Agora: Ancient Greek Pottery

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Greek Pots as evidence

Greek pots are interesting not only for their shape, but for the evidence of everyday life painted on them. Craftsmen at work, people doing everyday tasks, battle scenes and depictions of myths and legends can all be found. Archaeologists can also use the pictures to discover how objects they find were used in Ancient times, for example how jewellery was worn and how an object such as a strigil was used.

The pot on the left is an amphora. It shows Theseus slaying the Minotaur. The figures flanking Theseus and the Minotaur are Athenians who would have been sacrificed to the monster.
The pot on the right is a pelike. It shows a shoemaker at work. He appears to be drawing or cutting around a customer's foot. Both of these pots would have been used to store oil or wine.
The smaller oil jar below is called a lekythos. It shows men taking part in a strange ball game. The man on the right sits on the shoulders of a team mate and prepares to catch the ball.

These three pots are all black figure pots where black images are painted onto a reddish terracotta background.

The image on the plate belows is red on a black background.This style of pot decoration is later than black figure pots.

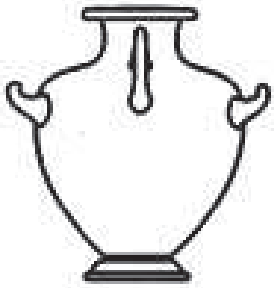
Pattern on Pots

Ancient Greek potters used the same patterns on many of their pots. Two of the most widely used patterns are shown here:

Greek key pattern

Egg and dart pattern

Some more common Greek pot shapes and their uses



Hydria

These 3 handled vessels were used to transport and store water. The third handle made it easier to pour the water out.

Stamnos

This is another style of large vessel for storing wine or oil.

Crater

There were many different styles of crater vessels which were used to mix wine and water.

Kantharos and kylix (left to right)

There were many different styles of two handled drinking cups in ancient Greece.

Oinochoe

The word oinochoes means wine pourer. Small jugs like this would have been dipped into a crater and the wine then poured into a cup.

Aryballos, alabastron and lekythos (left to right)

The Aryballos and alabastron were used to store perfumed oils. The Lekythos was used to store olive oil.

Pyxis

Pots like thish were used to store cosmetics and trinkets.

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