

## BELLY-HANDLED AMPHORA

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Greek, 750 B.C.

Ceramic

H: 68.8 cm (27.09 in)

Reference: 17183



This type of amphora, impressive in scale, is a tour de force of the potter's skill. It demonstrates the wide-ranging influence that Athens and the Greek mainland exerted over the artistic styles and social customs of the Cycladic islands. The shape of the Melian amphora, featuring elegantly curved, double-arc handles, was borrowed from the Attic repertoire. The amphora's robust, ovoid body rises from a slightly flaring foot to shoulders that are emphasized with a decorative zone between the handles. The tall, elegant neck is slightly concave and ends at a low molding at the top, which anticipates the transition to a broad, horizontal lip.

The painted decoration, primarily on the neck and handle zone, reflects Attic models with regard to overall scheme and individual motifs. The use of compass-drawn concentric circles in panels at the handle zone is typical of the belly-handle amphora, but while Attic examples feature two sets of circles, versions from the Melian type use three sets. On this amphora the concentric circles are decorated at the center with a cross shape, and star rosettes fill corner spaces between the circles and lines forming the panels. The three panels are separated by a zone of stacked zigzags, rows of dots, and groups of triple lines. Above the handle zone, a band of double axes and vertical lines encircles the shoulder. The neck is decorated with a large meander, above which is a band of alternating, short vertical lines. Groups of reserved bands on the body, shoulder, and neck added a pleasing contrast between the lighter, decorative zones and darker, solidly painted areas.

The belly-handle amphora was the standard cremation vessel for women during the Protogeometric period, but by the end of Early Geometric it apparently was used exclusively for women of high social rank. The form reached its peak during the production of the Dipylon Master in the Late Geometric period, a time in which this famous

Geometric artist produced his masterwork, the monumental amphora, Athens 804, which ranks among the finest examples of Geometric pottery known. Cultural contact between Athens and Melos undoubtedly brought the shape to the island during the Early Geometric period, when it became a specialized form of local production. It is unknown if the shape was used exclusively for the burials of women on the island, but being such a popular form produced by Melian potters, it is likely that these vessels were used for the cremation burial of both men and women. The exportation of these amphorae from Melos to other Cycladic islands for use in cremation burials reinforces the view of a homogeneous Cycladic culture during the Middle Geometric period, and suggests that island inhabitants may have been influenced by the prestige associated with this type of amphora used by high-ranking Athenians.

### CONDITION

Intact with worn painted surface

### PROVENANCE

Ex – French private collection, 1960's – 1970's;

Ex – European private collection, 2004

### EXHIBITED

PAD, Geneva, 2019

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

For Cycladic Middle Geometric: Coldstream 1968, 167-68;  
Coldstream 1977, 90-92.  
On the shape in Attic pottery: Coldstream 1977, 55, fi g. 13b;  
Smithson 1968, 77-116; Whitley 1991, 133-34.  
For similar amphorae: Langdon 1993, 217-218, no. 87; Munich  
6166, Coldstream 1968, pl. 34m, and Schweitzer 1969, pl. 79;  
Louvre A266, CVA Louvre 16, 8-9 with extensive bibliography,  
pl. 2.1-2.  
For Melian burials : Coldstream 1977, 91 ; BSA 2 (1895-1896)  
70.