

# GREEK BLACK FIGURE AMPHORA WITH ULYSSES AND DIOMEDES

Attic, late 6th century B.C.  
Greek Ceramic  
H: 44.1 cm  
Reference: 19612



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The belly amphora (amphore à panse in French) is one of the most characteristic shapes in the Attic repertory; this example displays elements of the canonical type, with the body and neck entirely painted in black and the figural scenes adorning two large panels on either side of the vessel. The subsidiary decoration is confined to a frieze of languettes on the upper foot and of a series of leaves above each scene.

The two images are of a varying natures: one side of the vase features Dionysos, crowned with ivy, lowering his head slightly to drink wine from his large kantharos; in front of him, a maenad, dressed in a long chiton and a cloak, gazes at the god and lowers her hands in his direction. This central, static group is surrounded by two satyrs who, according to their movements, are performing a dance.

The opposite scene is more animated and probably more important: two warriors armed as Greek hoplites (Corinthian crested helmet, breastplate, shield, greaves, spear and sword) fight a duel in which Athena intervenes, recognizable by her usual attributes (Attic helmet, aegis, spear). The inscriptions indicate the names of the warriors, who are just ordinary figures: behind the goddess of war stands one of her favorite heroes, Ulysses, while his antagonist is his companion Diomedes. In an episode of the Trojan war, which was not told by Homer, the two heroes quarrel for the possession of the Palladion (the statue of Athena housed in her temple in Troy, which had been replicated at least twice, according to legend): according to an oracle, the Greeks had to steal this effigy from the Trojan citadel in order to win the war. They entered the enemy city and took the statue, but on the way back to their camp, a dispute broke out between Diomedes and Ulysses, the latter wanting to carry the statue back alone and thus claim all the merits for the feat.

This scene is very rare in the Attic repertory and is, so far, known only through a few red figure paintings from the early 5th century: the iconography of the legend varies from one example to another, but the main difference between our Archaic image and later versions is the absence of the Palladion here (or Palladions), which in red figure paintings enables to identification of the scene. Consequently, this painting, whose interpretation is established by the inscriptions, is the

oldest iconographic documentation of this episode in which the tide was turned in favor of the Greeks, a fundamental element for the denouement of the Trojan war.

One should also bring to attention the great artistic skill of these paintings, which while remaining completely archaic in their design and execution, are of remarkably high quality: both the rendering of Ulysses (see the detailed interior of the shield, the breastplate with the volutes to emphasize the pectorals and the short chiton with massed folds) and of his opponent Diomedes (see, for instance, the shield adorned with a war chariot painted in white) recall the finest representations of contemporary warriors.

Stylistically, this work can be linked to images of the Lysippides Painter, who was quite a controversial personality in the world of Attic ceramics painting during the late 6th century: Beazley assumes that the Lysippides Painter was the artist who decorated the black figure versions of the works of the Andokides Painter (the inventor of the red figure style), while other scholars suggest that he is in fact the same person.

## CONDITION

The piece is whole and practically intact, except for small chips on the lip.

## PROVENANCE

Ex-Private collection, C.W. Japan, acquired in Switzerland in 1976.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

On the dispute between Ulysses and Diomedes, see:

Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC), vol. III, Zurich, 1986, s.v. Diomedes, pp. 396-409 (especially pl. 286ff.).

MORET J.-M., L'Iliupersis dans la céramique italote, Les mythes et leur expression figurée au IVe s. av. J.-C., Geneva, 1975, pp. 71ff.

On this painter, see:

BEAZLEY J.D., Attic Black-figure Vase-painters, Oxford 1956, S. 254.

BOARDMAN J., Athenian Black Figure Vases, London, 1997, pp. 105ff.  
and Athenian Red Figure Vases, The Archaic Period, London, 1997, pp.  
15ff.