

GREEK RED-FIGURE MINIATURE CHOUS

Greek-Classical, circa 420-400 B.C.

Greek Ceramic

H: 6.2 cm

Reference: 20609



Reference **20609**

The chous (an oinochoe type 3) is the most widely attested form of jug in Attic around the late 5th and early 4th century B.C. It has a globular body, a low neck that terminates in a trefoil lip, a vertical ribbon handle and a small ring-shaped foot. This miniature example belongs to a specific class of vessels, which were manufactured and spread almost only in Attic. The choes were given as gifts to the 3 years old boys who used them for their first wine tasting.

These rituals, which allowed small children to be admitted in the religious community of the City, were taking place during the Anthesteria, the Athenian festivals held late February in honor of Dionysos. During the second of the three days of the festivals, named Choes day, a drinking contest was organized for all adult males and for the young boys, who were drinking in the small jugs they had been given on that special day. The Anthesteria were also an occasion to celebrate the maturing of the wine which was traditionally opened on the first day of the festivities (the Pithoigia, the opening of the jars in which the wine was stored) and consumed during the various rituals.

Miniature choes were therefore an essential element in the conduct of these ceremonies and in the initiation of children to the religious life of the entire City. Archaeologists have excavated them mostly in children's graves of the necropoleis of the city in which they had been buried with their young owners who had died prematurely, but at least at 3 years of age.

The scenes depicted on these small jugs were closely related to the life of children and to the Anthesteria festival. Encircled with wreaths of flowers and/or wearing belts with amulets, the children are playing with trucks, with a ball, with animals, are eating ritual cakes, etc. The image

on our example shows a very "classical" motif; the boy, who is nude but provided with a shoulder strap with amulets, crawls to the left where lies a chous (placed on the ground in the corner of the composition). On the right is his brand new two-wheeled carriage while, above his head, a bunch of grapes that he looks at with admiration would symbolize Dionysos, the god of the vine, who held a particularly significant place in the life of Athenians.

CONDITION

The vase is virtually intact with some minor chips. It is decorated in the red figure technique, a method which was invented in Athens in the late 6th century B.C.. The glossy black paint almost entirely covers the surface (from the inner neck to the foot), while the decorations (which are not painted) were left in the red-brick color that is typical of Attic terracotta.

PROVENANCE

Ex-Louis-Gabriel Bellon (1819 ?-1899) Collection, France.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

MOORE M.B., Attic Red-Figured and White-Ground Pottery (The Athenian Agora vol. XXX), Princeton, 1997, pp. 41-42, 250, pl. 80.

On the Dionysian festivals in Athens:

HAMILTON R., Choes and Anthesteria, Athenian Iconography and Ritual, s.v., 1992.

VAN HOORN G., Choes and Anthesteria, Leiden, 1951, p. 87, n. 211, fig. 67; p. 96, n. 260, fig. 25; p. 126, n. 511, fig. 251; p. 127, n. 518, fig. 376(1).