

# OINOCHOE

Greek, 4th century B.C.

Gilded Silver

H: 8.2 cm (3.2 in)

Reference: 21660



The wine jar has a trefoil mouth, concave neck and a high handle; the circular base is not preserved. The rim is decorated with a relief pattern (ionic kymation); another ornamental band, a guilloche, which is punched and gilded, runs on the shoulder. The handle got the most detailed and elaborate decoration. It consists of the upper attachment in the shape of a lion made in high relief; the animal's paws embrace the rim of the vessel. The mid-section of the handle is covered with an oak leaf ornament arranged in a symmetric order along the central axis. Below, there is a head of another lion, apparently from the lion's skin, as the shape is flattened. The eyes of the animal are closed, and the face has a somewhat mourning expression.

Vessels used as tableware often received masks, especially in the decoration of the handles of the jugs. The most popular were the masks of the god of wine and his companions, silenoi and maenads, but also that of Herakles. The lion's skin and lion's mask could be allusion to Herakles' first heroic deed.

The masks definitely had an apotropaic function. It is noteworthy that in the present oinochoe both the eyes and the mouth of the upper protome are open suggesting the representation of a living animal. This reminds of the protomes in the Greek fountain houses that provided with running water: the water conduits hidden in the rock behind the fountain wall terminated in animal heads made of marble or bronze. Especially popular were the lion's protomes, their fierce appearance suggested the protective powers.

The handle was made in the repoussé technique; most of its surface was gilded as well as the rim of the vessel and the ornament which was punched on the shoulder. The combination of several techniques employed for the careful execution as well as the use of precious metals make this oinochoe a very expensive object, a piece of luxury. Sets of the gilded silver ware are known for the feasts at the royal courts and the wealthy Greeks; since the ancient times the custom also

existed to use them during the funerary rites and to supply with them the deceased in the tomb.

## CONDITION

Surface is weathered, a few scratches, some tarnish on the upper part of the handle, part of the proper left jaw of the lower lion's mask is missing, also missing is the base (once made separately and soldered).

## PROVENANCE

Ex- European private collection

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

ANDRONIKOS M. et al., The Search for Alexander, New York, 1980, p. 184, no. 163.