

# ROMAN FAIENCE AMPHORA WITH ACANTHUS LEAVES AND ROSETTES IN RELIEF

Ro-Imperial, 1st century A.D.

Faïence

H : 22 cm

Reference: 11510



11510

The amphora has an ovoid body with a high cylindrical neck that flares into a molded lip; the disc-shaped base and the vertical handles were applied to the upper belly and just below the lip. The decoration in low relief is entirely based on the plant world and imitates in many details the patterns that were made famous by precious metal vessels: the body is decorated with three elegant slender acanthus leaves on each side of the body; a rosette with six heart-shaped petals is placed at the base of the central leaves.

On the handles, where the composition is very elaborate, are a palmette, some volutes, and a lotus flower, while a triangular leaf, probably from a wild grape, is imprinted at the base of each handle. Although there are other examples of ovoid amphoras, the form is rather rare in the repertoire of glazed pottery produced by the workshops of Asia Minor (the most common vessel-types were skyphoi and one-handled jugs). The manufacturing technique for this piece (quality of the terracotta and glaze) and the decorative motifs are similar to those that characterize the productions of one of the most important workshops of the first century A.D., located in Tarsus, an ancient port city in Cilicia. This example differs from the others mostly because of its rich and diversified decoration, which makes it one of the most remarkable pieces in this series. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, several workshops in Asia Minor, and later in Italy, adopted the oriental technique of leaded glazing on the terra-cotta surface, certainly in order to imitate the shiny appearance of metal vessels.

This method required two phases of firing: one to fire the clay and the second, at lower temperatures, to fix the glaze. As was the case for other groups of terra-cotta vessels in the early Imperial period, the competition of glass, an easy-to-work material, available everywhere and easily reusable, prevented glazed pottery from achieving great

commercial success, even though the quality of the glazed pottery was good and the distribution wide.

## CONDITION

The amphora has been reassembled and shows some restorations; the glaze is partially erased. The beige terra-cotta is coated with an ocheryellow glaze on the inside and a dark green glaze on the outside of the vessel.

## PROVENANCE

Acquired on the Swiss art market in 2000.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

On glazed pottery in the Hellenistic and Roman period:  
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HOCHULI-GYSEL, A., *Kleinasiatische glasierte Reliefkeramik* (Bern, 1977).

Several parallels:

CAUBET, A., (ed.), *Faïences et matières vitreuses de l'Orient Ancien: Étude physico-chimique et catalogue des oeuvres du Département des Antiquités orientales* (Musée du Louvre) (Paris, 2007), p. 257, no. 284 (the same as in CAUBET, A., ed., *Faïences de l'antiquité. De l'Égypte à l'Iran* [Paris, 2005], p. 597, no. 529).

YFANTIDIS K., *Antike Gefässe: Eine Auswahl* (Kassel, 1990), p. 289, no. 216.