



A lekane with a knobbed lid decorated with a fashionable lady. c350BC. £395.



A bell krater decorated with two philosophers. 12 ins high. c400 BC. £3000.



A skyphos decorated with a nude bather. 4th century BC. £450.



A black glazed kylix with upturned handles. c350 BC. £250.



A flat plate decorated with a lady of fashion. c325 BC. £300.

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A small cup or dipper; a black glazed salt dish and an oil lamp. £85 to £125 each.

Collecting Greek Pottery - with price guide by Vincent McCarthy



A black glazed guttus (oil vessel) c300BC. £275.



A small bell krater with a head in profile. c350 BC. £550.



An ornately decorated oinochoe. Gnathian ware. £495.

To most people the 'golden age' of Athenian pottery was around the seventh and sixth centuries BC, when superb artists and craftsmen produced wonderfully elegant and decorative vases, examples of which can be seen in museums all around the world. The first type of figurative decoration was in black on the base red ground of the clay. We call these 'black figure' types, often with details added in white or perhaps incised or scratched into the clay.

Within a century or so there was a dramatic change when 'red figure' decoration was introduced. This entailed the figures being left in the basic orange-red of the clay whilst the background was almost completely filled in black. For around two hundred years Athenian pottery was exported quite widely and was highly prized by peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean and Southern Europe.

Classicists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries enthused over these early vessels and tended to ignore or even to dismiss the later wares made by the Greek colonies of Southern Italy. From around 400 BC, they produced a huge volume of pottery vessels continuing the forms and decoration of the earlier Athenian types, but also adding some large and exuberant forms on which the earlier Greeks might have frowned. Nevertheless this South Italian pottery was produced and decorated by Greek craftsmen and artists for a new market in Southern Italy and Sicily although there is little evidence of an export trade.

The main centres of production were in Campania (around Naples), Lucania, (towards the toe of Italy) and in Apulia on the east coast. The island of Sicily also produced pottery but not on the same scale as the mainland centres. For collectors this region is a 'Godsend' as the pots are quite readily available and at prices that should not send you humbly to the bank manager looking for a second mortgage. For this reason I am concentrating on these later Greek wares and hope to describe the types of pots and their uses as well as adding some comments on the decoration and importantly a rough idea of the prices you may expect to pay.

Most households would have used bronze and pottery vessels but as the metal was considerably more expensive, bronze probably accounted for less than ten per cent of the vessels in use. In the kitchen there would be cooking pots and frying pans of plain utilitarian form along with simple

jugs and mixing bowls for the preparation of food. These simple vessels are not encountered much so we must assume that they failed to survive and ended up in the waste pit. Table wares do survive in large numbers so we find dishes and bowls for soups and stews along with plates for meat and fish dinners. Collectors will find these flatwares, sometimes with a repair, for around £125 to £250 if plain black glazed; around double for a decorated piece.

Small plain black glazed dishes and stemmed bowls are also found. These were probably for such things as salt, garlic, vinegar and other seasonings; also for nuts, olives or dates. These simple little items can be had for around £100 or so and can be very attractive with a rich lustrous glaze.

The Greeks were fond of their wine and a whole range of pottery vessels were designed especially for this important libation. Large amphorae with lug handles were designed to carry the wine and wide necked kraters were used to mix the wine and water. These larger vessels can be highly decorated with figures, mainly in the red technique, and may depict scenes from mythology or daily life. Prices range from say £500 for a repaired piece up to several thousands for a large and intact item. Some of these of Apulian manufacture can be very highly ornate with volutes or masks on the tops of the handles. I personally find the decoration rather garish and OTT...but everyone to his own taste. They do often command very high prices in the saleroom!

We also find wine coolers, large wide necked vessels which were designed to stand in larger bowls of cold water. Bronze or ceramic dippers were used to ladle the wine into jugs for serving at the table. A simple oinochoe (jug) with a handle and red figure or floral decoration can be bought for between £200 and £400 in good condition. The wine was supped from cups of various types. The kylix was a shallow vessel on a delicate stem with elegant handles on each side. Very attractive and fragile so much in demand. Prices from £300 and up for well decorated pieces. The skyphos is a deeper and more robust cup sometimes plain but more often with figure or abstract decoration around the outside. Again these are sought after and can be £250 and more depending on the quality of the decoration.

An unusual drinking vessel is the kantharos, a kind of chalice with very large and ornate handles, often with a slender stemmed foot. Such vessels are very fragile and often turn up with a repair to one or both handles. Still very well worth buying though at prices from £500 and upwards.

Finally we come to simple mugs with a single small handle, probably for the use of travellers or workmen in the fields they are quite robust and are often found intact. The usual plain black glazed type can be bought for around £125 whilst a decorated type will as usual cost around double.

Most of the types described above are of roughly similar types with red figure decoration ornamented with key or laurel motifs. They were made throughout the late fifth and all of the fourth centuries BC in Apulia, Campania, Paestum and Lucania. A rather different style of decoration involving the use of added white and red pigment and commonly featuring bunches of grapes and vine tendrils is known as Gnathian ware after the site where they were first found. These vessels have a certain naive charm which some collectors cannot resist. Aside from food and drink the Greeks used pottery vessels in the bath house and the bedroom. Oil was used in bathing so we find a range of smallish vessels with narrow necks to restrict the flow of the liquid. These usually have a small ring handle or loop for suspension so that the bather could hang it from a cord around his or her neck. These lekythoi may be plain or decorated, sometimes with moulded designs of deities or animals. Prices run from around £200 to £350.

On the dressing table a Greek lady would have her trinket box and powder bowl. This might be a circular lekane with knobbed lid, often decorated with the profile of a fashionable lady, perhaps the Liz Hurley of her day. These are very desirable pieces but not too expensive. Perhaps £250 would buy a decent example. We might also find simple black glazed baby feeders with small teatlike spouts or cosmetic or perfume flasks of small size. Prices are reasonable at £100 to £150 each in good condition. Small open topped oil burning lamps can be had for less than £100 and even decorated loomweights and spindle whorls.

The range of types and prices should encourage collectors to think about forming a collection of Greek pottery. Try to buy intact pieces wherever possible but do not be afraid of a sympathetically repaired item if you like it and if the price is right. Our museums are full of restored and repaired pieces of pottery ...all of which have a story to tell.



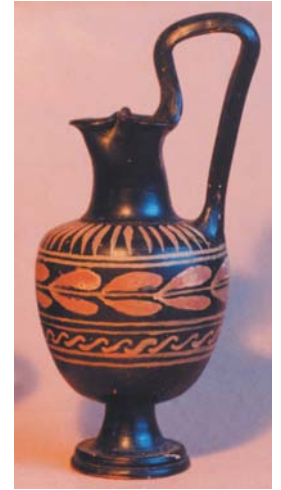
A Gnathia ware skyphos decorated with bunches of grapes. Late 4th century BC. £295.



A kylix decorated with a swan and laurel wreath. £300.



A small mug with owl motif. c350 BC. £195.



An oinochoe (oil vessel) with wreath design. c350 BC. £395.



A large black glazed skyphos. c350 BC. £275.



An ornate kantharos. 4th century BC. (minor repairs) £600.



A thistle shaped drinking mug. Gnathian ware c325BC. £225.



A Gnathian ware prochous with high flung handle. c325 BC. £435.



A 'net' lekythos for oil. 4th century BC. £345.