This larger lekythos (figures 1.2, & 4) was decorated with imagery that is so far unique to this painter: a pair of satyrs each dancing with a goat that stands on its hind legs and flanks a central satyr, toward whom the goats and other satyrs all look. Both dancing satyrs have placed their drinking horns on the ground at their feet, while the third satyr is in the center front of the vase and plays the pipes (double aulos). Satyrs, imaginary creatures who in 5th century BCE Greece were represented as amalgams of human men and horses, were companions and followers of the god Dionysus, the god of wine and intoxication. Satyrs were usually pictured in contexts relating to Dionysus, who was also concerned with the theater and closely associated with the development of Greek comedy and tragedy. Perhaps as a result, satyrs played a key role in ancient theater, too. In Classical Athens, tragic performances were followed by what was called a satyr play because the members of its chorus dressed like satyrs. These satyric dramas often included low-brow humor and irreverence and it is possible that the scene on this lekythos references one from a lost satyr play.

In order to find the date, artists and provenience of these Ancient Lekythoi, I looked towards experts in the field to first gain a better understanding of how specific artists created these objects. Many of them left “signatures” in the pottery’s decoration. Once the decoration was analyzed and it was matched with an artist, I could look through works attributed to them to find adequate comparanda. With a matching piece, I could then more concretely give these pots a date, artist, and location of origin.


Les récipients Céramiques des funéraires / by C. H. E. Enkvist Hespel... (travaux et mémoires des anciens membres étrangers de l’École et de divers savants ; fasc. 4). Paris: E. de Boccard.


Provenience

Date

470–450BCE

490–460BCE

Object number: UM2013.651

Object number: 2.1.4

Artists

The work of the Athena Painter has been identified by the addition of tendrils to the paintresses—five number around the shoulder—and a completely black neck; he often depicted original subjects in the main scene and this is one such example. The Athena painter began painting in the black-figure style (on a reddish-clay ground), as seen here, and moved to the white-ground technique later; as a result, this would likely be one of the painter’s earlier works. Based on the shape of this lekythos and the style in which it is decorated, it can be dated to 490–460 BCE. The main scene is very similar to a white-ground lekythos (illustrated below) that is also attributed to the Athena Painter.

This smaller lekythos (figures 5.6, & 7) is decorated in the white-ground style. The body of this lekythos is white-ground and, although it is difficult to see, decorated with rows of patterns that wrap around the vase: a Greek key running rightward at the top, and lattice or checker patterns that frame a tendril with ivy leaves and berry clusters. Pattern lekythoi were decorated with rows of patterns instead of figural scenes and included various floral or geometric motifs, or a combination of both; they were made in large numbers.

White-ground lekythoi are not found in domestic contexts and were specifically produced as grave offerings. This one may have been intended to be placed with the deceased during the burial process or as a subsequent funerary offering at the grave. The white-ground technique was first applied to lekythoi around 500 and continued to be used until about 400 BCE, while the Beldam Painter worked from about 470–450 BCE.

Figure 3 & 4. Left: Image of UM2013.651. Right: Image of UM2013.652. Right image (2) depicts the collar decorations characteristics of the Athena painter. Left Image (1) shows a side view of this lekythos’s decoration. Image taken with permission of University Museum.

Figure 5 & 6. Left (4) depicts close up shot of 2.1.4 decoration. Right (7) depicts side view of 2.1.4. Images taken with the permission of University Museum.

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