

**Attic pottery of the Archaic and Classical period
(Spring Semester)**

CASE STUDY: The 'François vase'

Dr. N. A. Harokopos

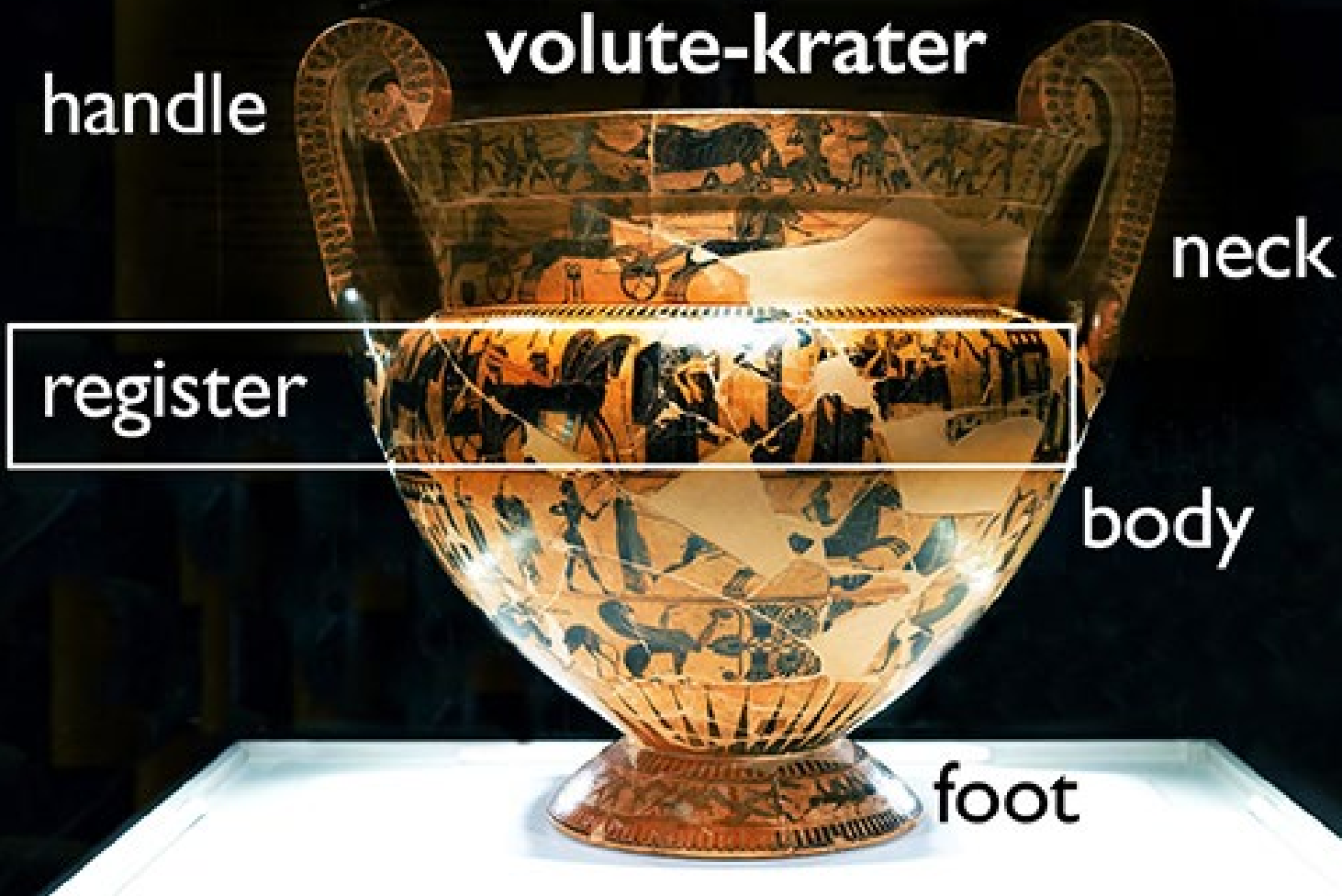
An Italian archaeologist named **Alessandro François (1796–1857)** found hundreds of fragments of the vase that now carries his name while excavating an ancient Etruscan tomb in Chiusi – in Etruria (Italy) in 1844. Though found in Italy, the François Vase was made around 570-560 BCE in Athens. In antiquity, thousand of Athenian vases were exported to Etruria, a region where consumers were eager to acquire Greek products.



In 1900 the vase was smashed into 638 pieces by a disgruntled museum guard by hurling a wooden stool against the protective glass!

It was later restored by Pietro Zei in 1902, followed by a second reconstruction in 1973



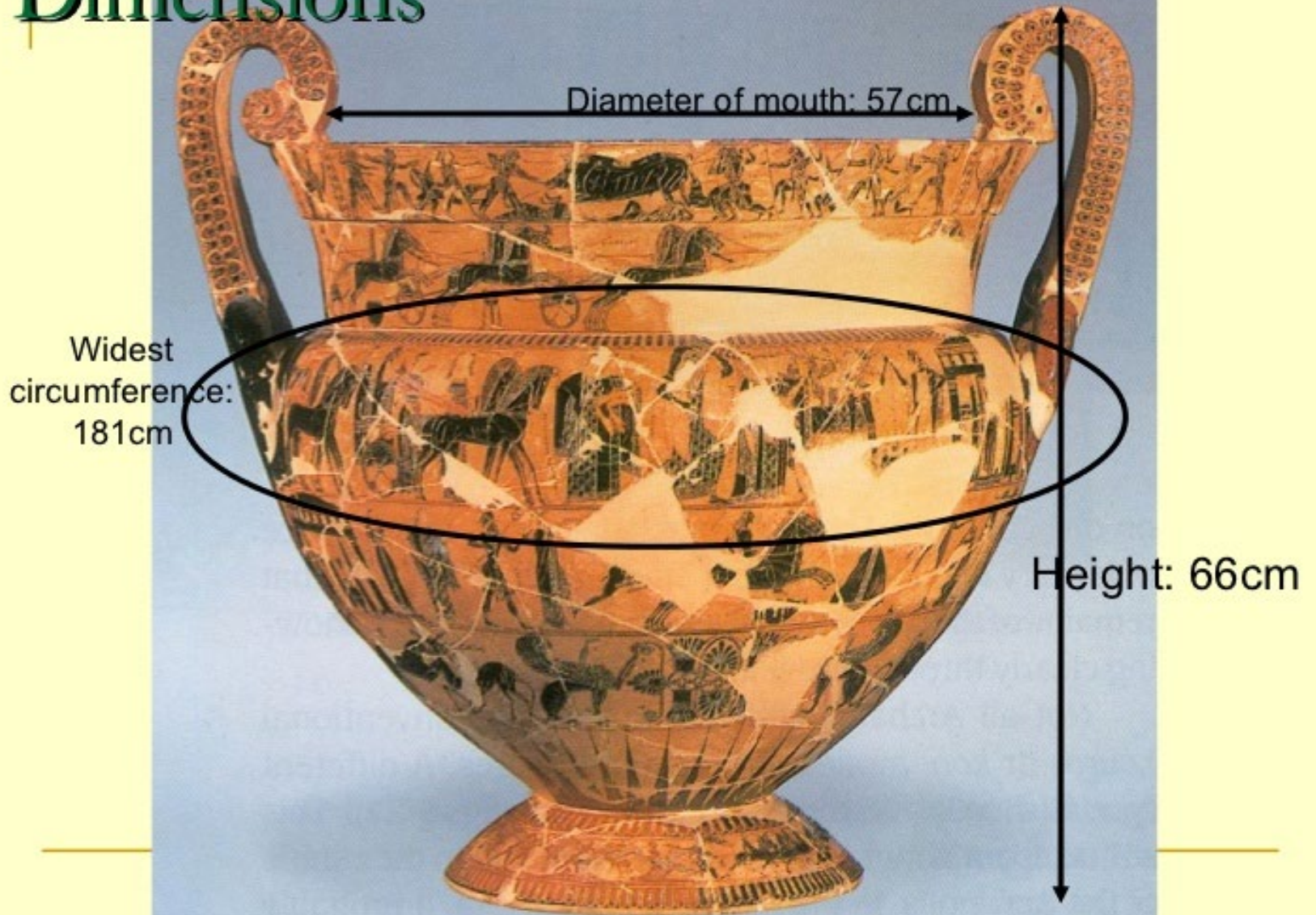


The François Vase is a **volute krater** (a vessel used for mixing water and wine with curling handles) and is likely one of the earliest vases of its type made in Athens. The shape of its handles and its particularly large size create more space for painted decoration.

THIS IS THE EARLIEST SURVIVING ATTIC VOLUTE KRATER

It is now in the [Museo Archeologico](#) in [Florence](#).

Dimensions

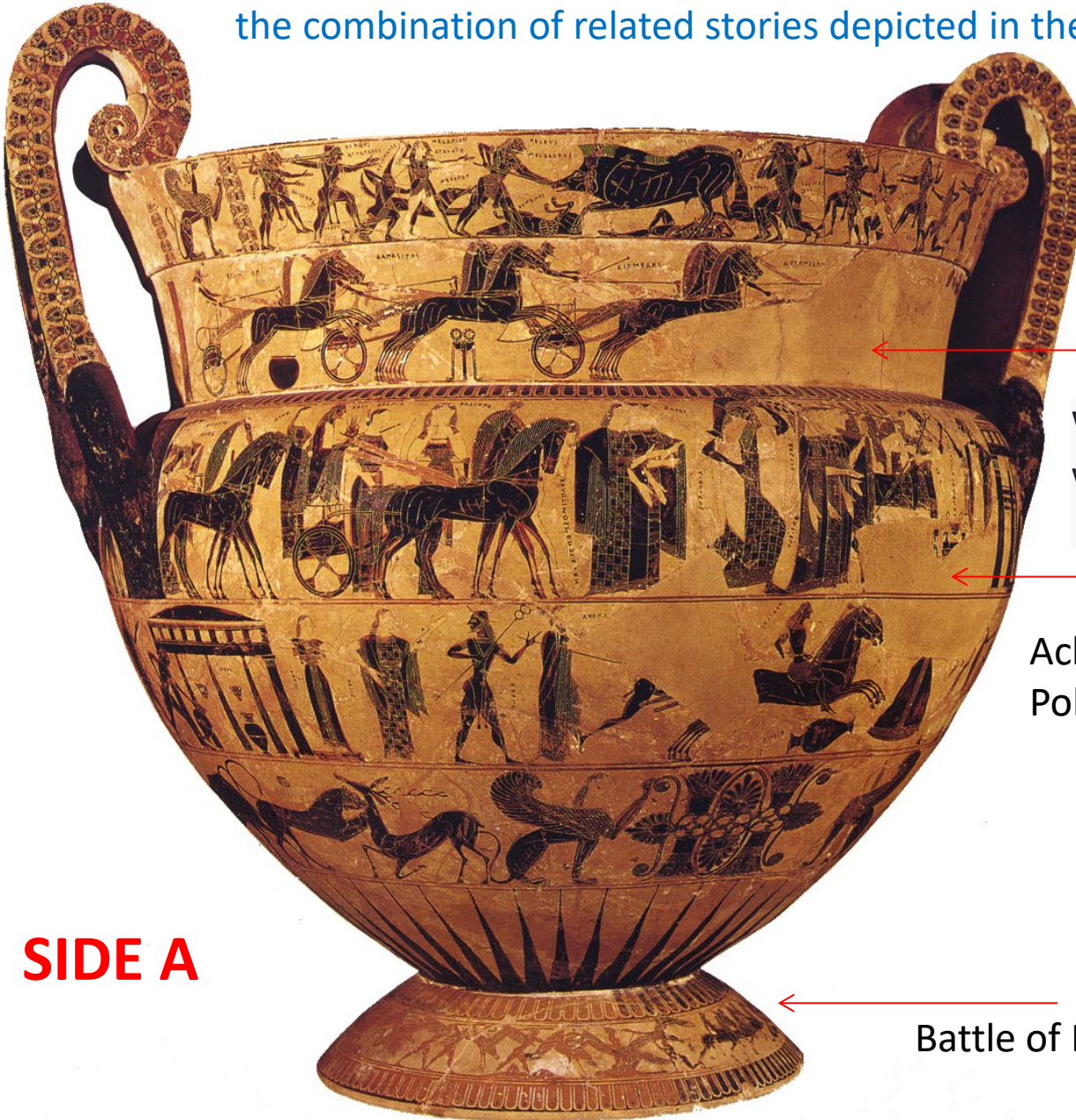




271 figures of men, women, gods, heroes, animals and objects.

The decoration may appear dense to modern viewers; however, ancient audiences—familiar with these mythological narratives through oral tradition and epic poetry—would have been able to identify each figure and object, aided by the **121 inscriptions/labels** that accompany them.

It is considered a milestone in the development of ancient Greek pottery and iconography due to the drawing style used as well as the combination of related stories depicted in the numerous friezes



Calydonian boar hunt



Funeral games for Patroclus



Wedding of Peleus & Thetis with a procession of gods, heroes, Muses, etc



Achilles chases Troilos and Polyxeni outside the walls of Troy

SIDE A



Battle of Pygmies with cranes

The François Vase is decorated in **friezes/ registers** (horizontal bands of decoration).

The main register appears at the center of the vase.

It is the tallest, and is one of only two, to show a single uninterrupted narrative around the vase's entire circumference (the other is on the foot of the vase).

This register shows the marriage of the hero Peleus to the sea-nymph Thetis, a celebrated event attended by the Greek gods.

This popular myth appears on several other vases of the Archaic period.



The fifth frieze shows sphinxes and griffins flanking lotus blossom and palmettes ornaments and panthers and lions attacking bulls, a boar, and a deer.



**Athenian black-figure lebes by
Sophilos,
c. 580 BCE**

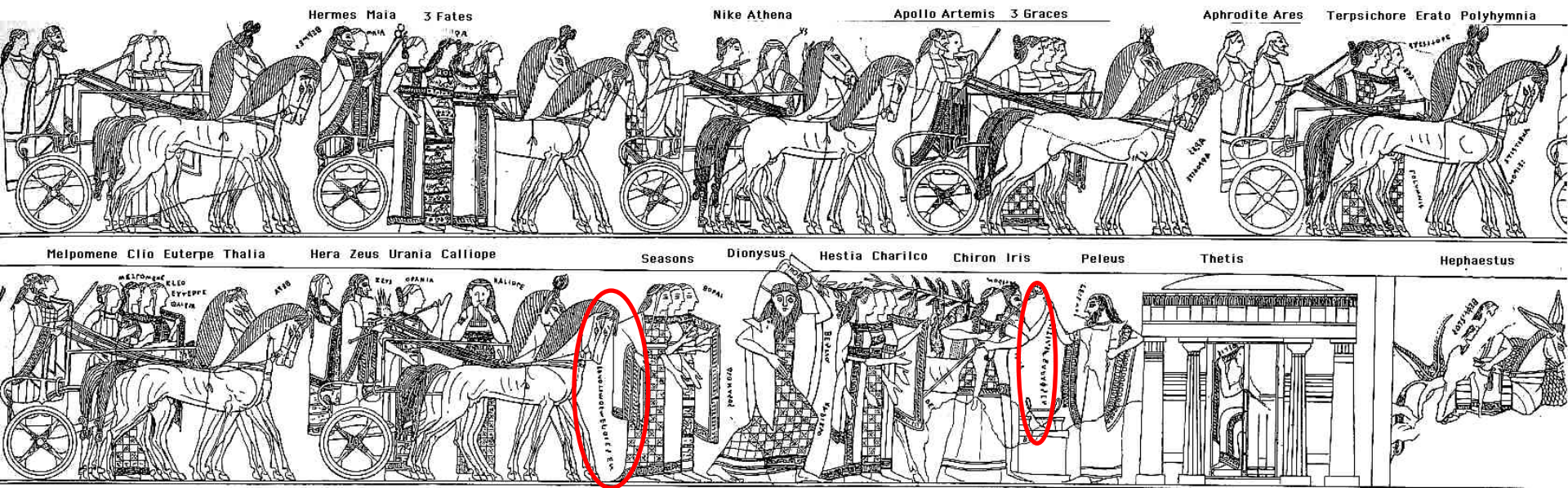


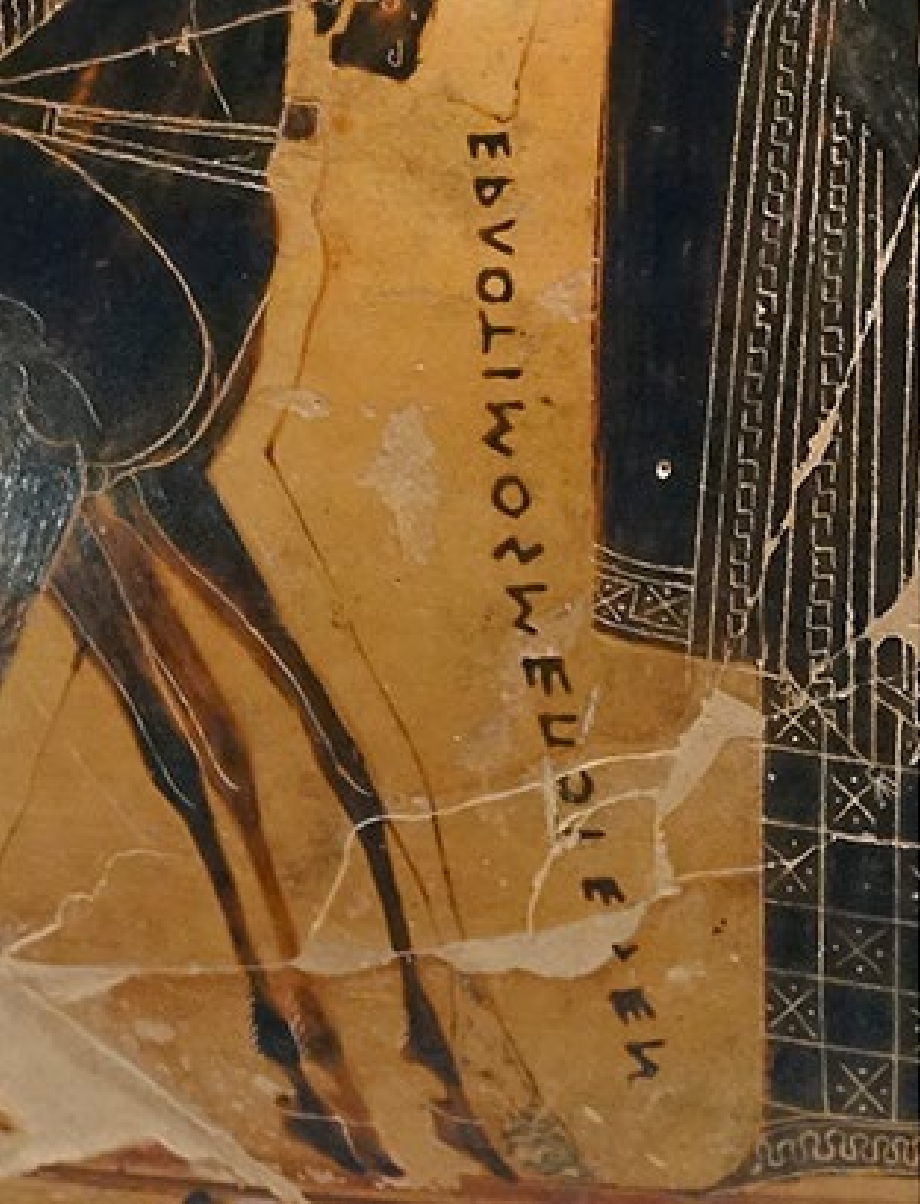




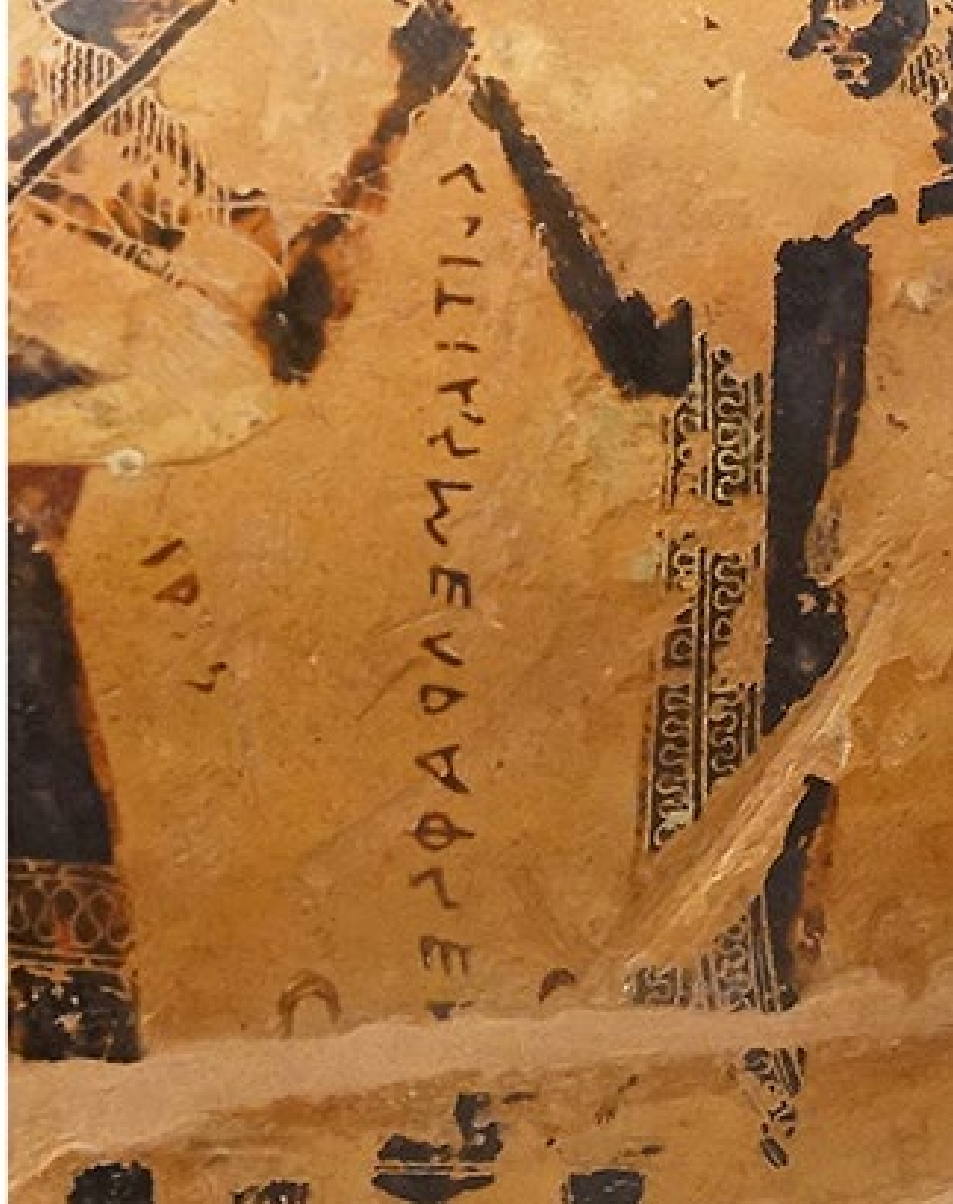


Thetis sits in a grand house. Peleus stands outside greeting the wise centaur Cheiron, who will later become the mentor of his and Thetis's son, Achilles. The centaur is followed by female deities and Dionysos, god of wine, who carries an amphora. More deities follow Dionysos on foot and in chariots, and the parade wraps around the vase.





Detail with painted inscriptions/ signatures identify Ergotimos as the potter (left)
and Kleitias and the painter (right)



Ergotimos mepoiesen (made me)
Kleitias megraphsen (painted me)



Detail with Peleus (center) who stands before his house, greeting the centaur Cheiron seen beside the goddess Iris (left) at the head of the wedding procession (the inscription identifying the painter can be read under their clasped hands).

The seated Thetis (fragmented), can be seen within the house

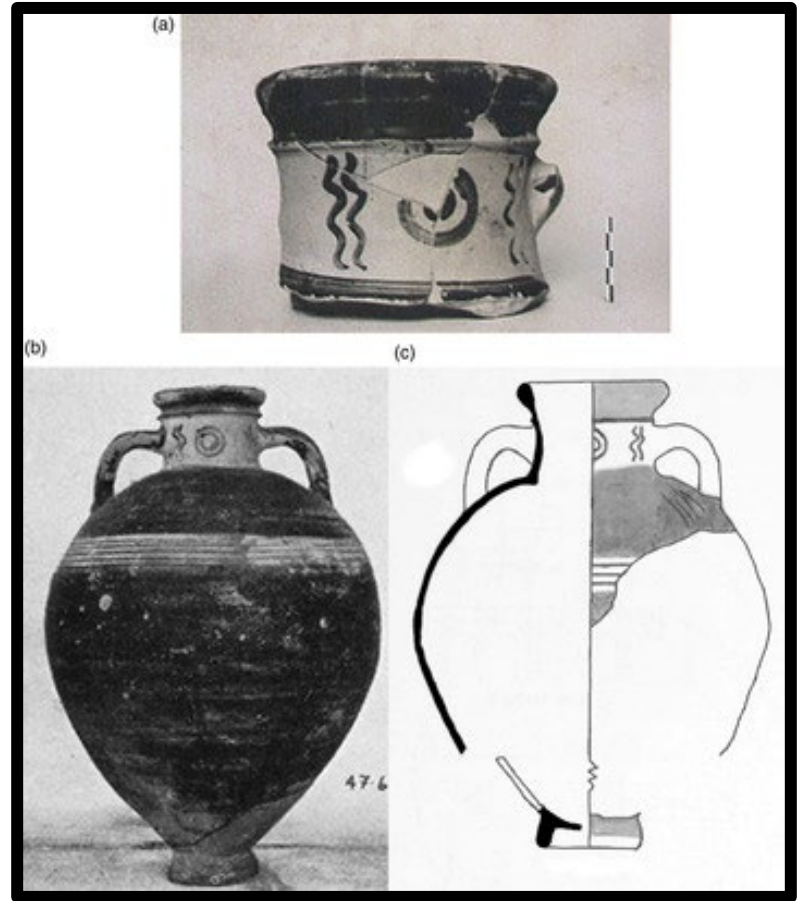


Behind Chiron and Iris follow three female figures sharing a single large mantle: Chariklo, wife of Chiron, Hestia and Demeter, sisters of Zeus and eldest daughters of Kronos.

Detail with Dionysos carrying an amphora
(it looks like a SOS type amphora, for transport
of oil and wine)



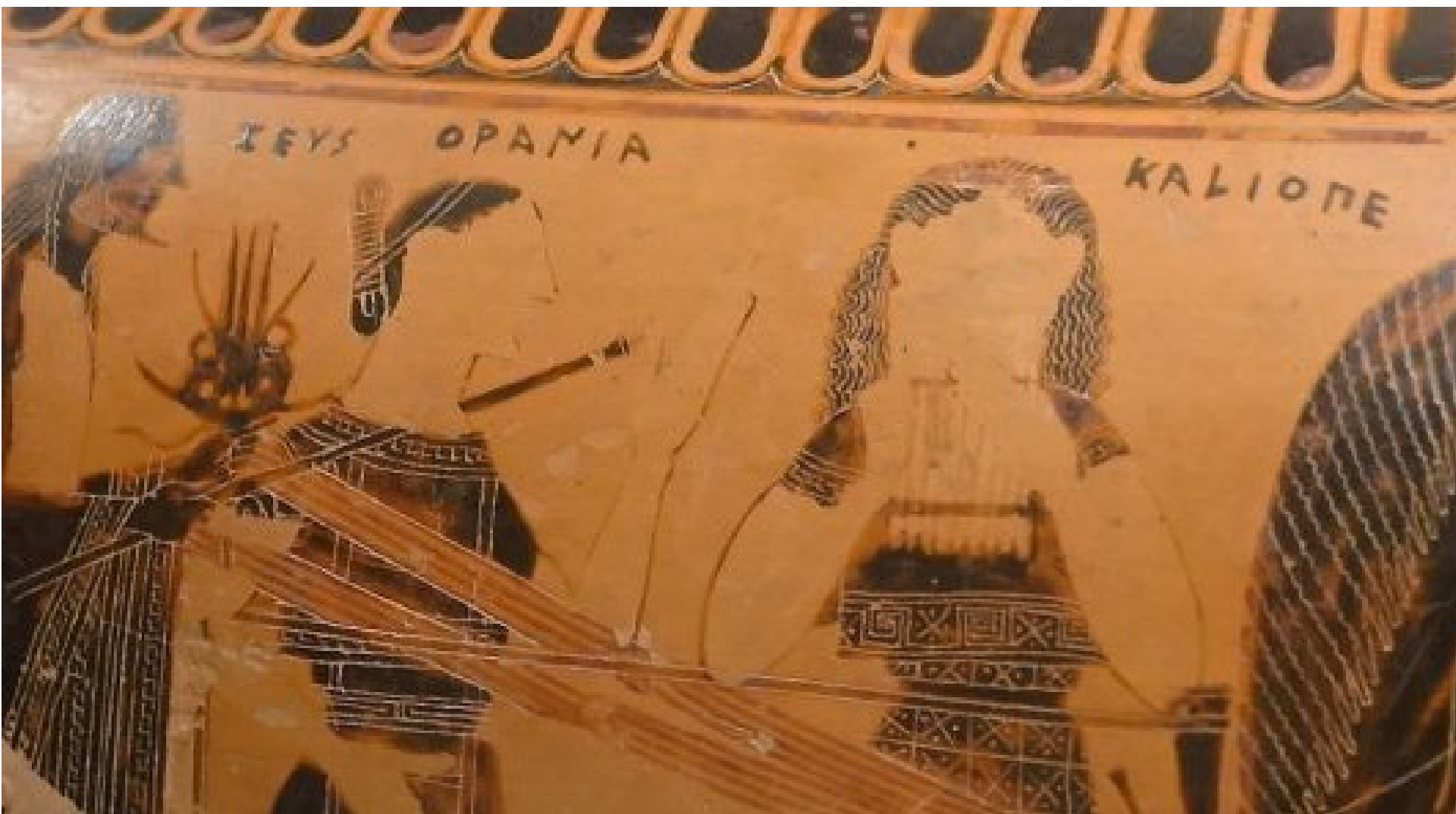
Dionysos is depicted with his face turned
towards the viewer, which is unusual for Greek
art of the time. In fact, Dionysos and Kalliope—
a muse playing a wind instrument near
Dionysos—are the only human figures with
frontal faces on the François Vase



SOS type amphorae



Detail with wedding procession with Hera and her husband Zeus on a chariot (left), Ourania the muse of astronomy, and Kalliope, muse of epic poetry (center)



The neat labels of Greek text that accompany and identify many of the characters on the vase still help us understand its imagery today

Kalliope plays *not* the flute, the usual instrument of the Muses in poetry, but the syrinx or Pan pipes.



The chariot of Athena and another goddess (Artemis?) welcomed by the parents of the bride, Nereus and Doris

Side A depict a series of myths related to the hero Achilles and his father Peleus.

The uppermost register shows Peleus hunting the Calydonian boar.

The King of Calydon called upon the best hunters in Greece to defeat the boar, whose strength is emphasized by the dead human and dog that lie beneath it.

While many people aim spears, stones, and bows at the boar, Peleus and his companion attack it head on, ultimately defeating it.





Detail with Calydonian Boar Hunt (top register) and the chariot race in the funeral games for Patroklos, (below)







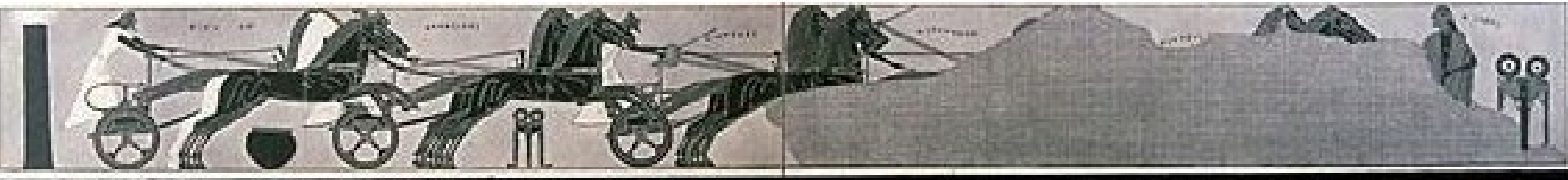
Second from top: the frieze of the chariot race organized by Achilles in honor of Patroklos, his closest friend who was killed in the Trojan War.

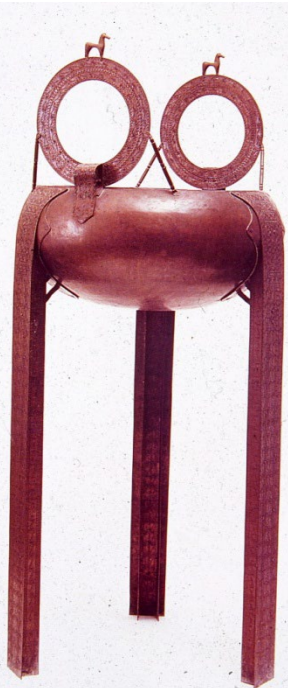
This story is also told in Homer's *Iliad* (XXIII.261-624) A series of chariots reach to the finish line.

Achilles stands beside the prizes and will award to the winner.

The main register, showing the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, appears below the chariot race on Side A. It has a clear relationship to Achilles, as the marriage results in his birth.

The chariot race in the funeral of Patroklos



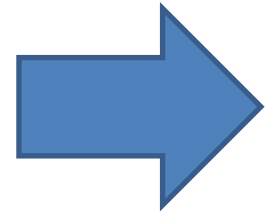


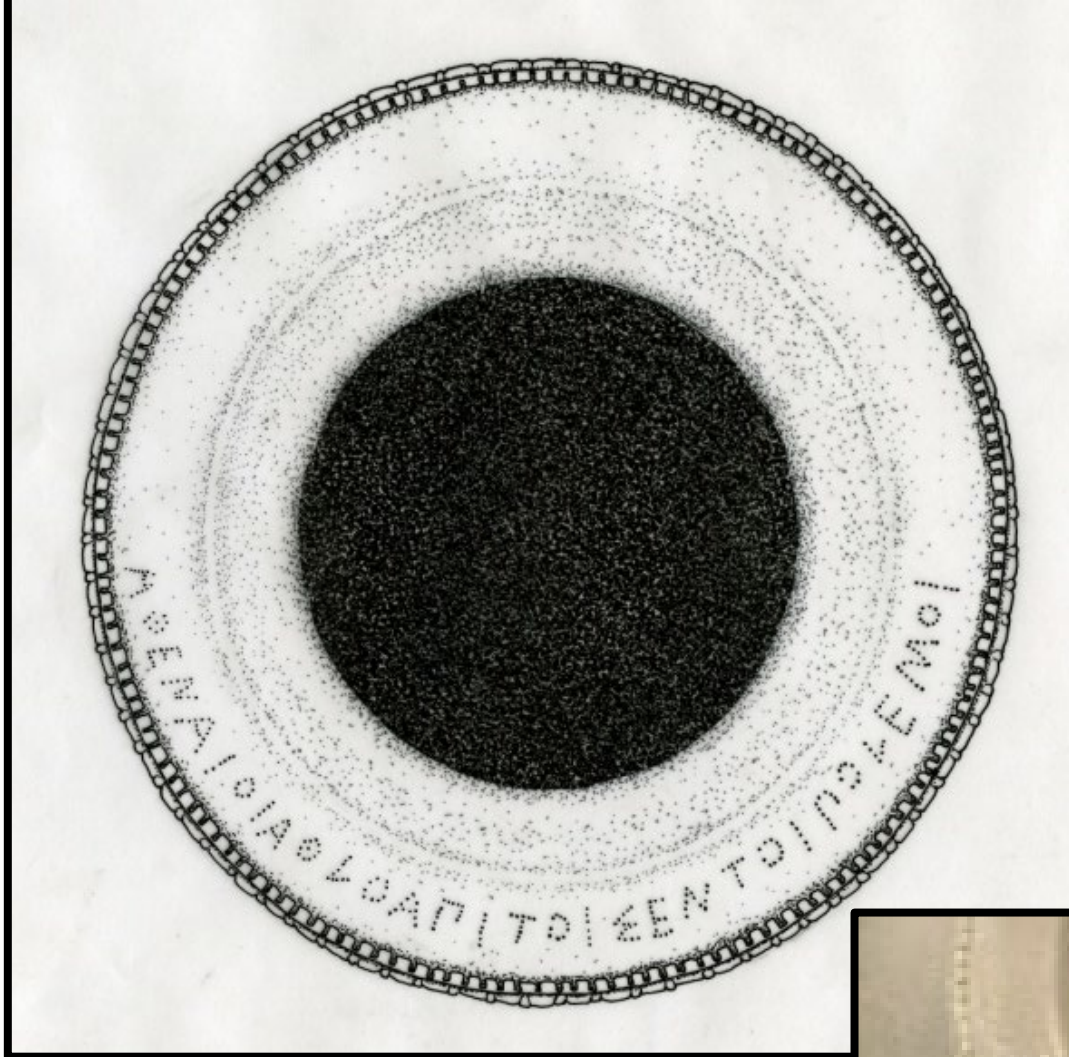


BRONZE PRIZE – HYDRIA, 5th century BCE

The inscription on its rim reads that it was awarded as a prize in the Funerary games organized by the Athenians in honor of those fallen in the war.

It contained the ashes of a dead man, perhaps the winner himself or a member of his family.





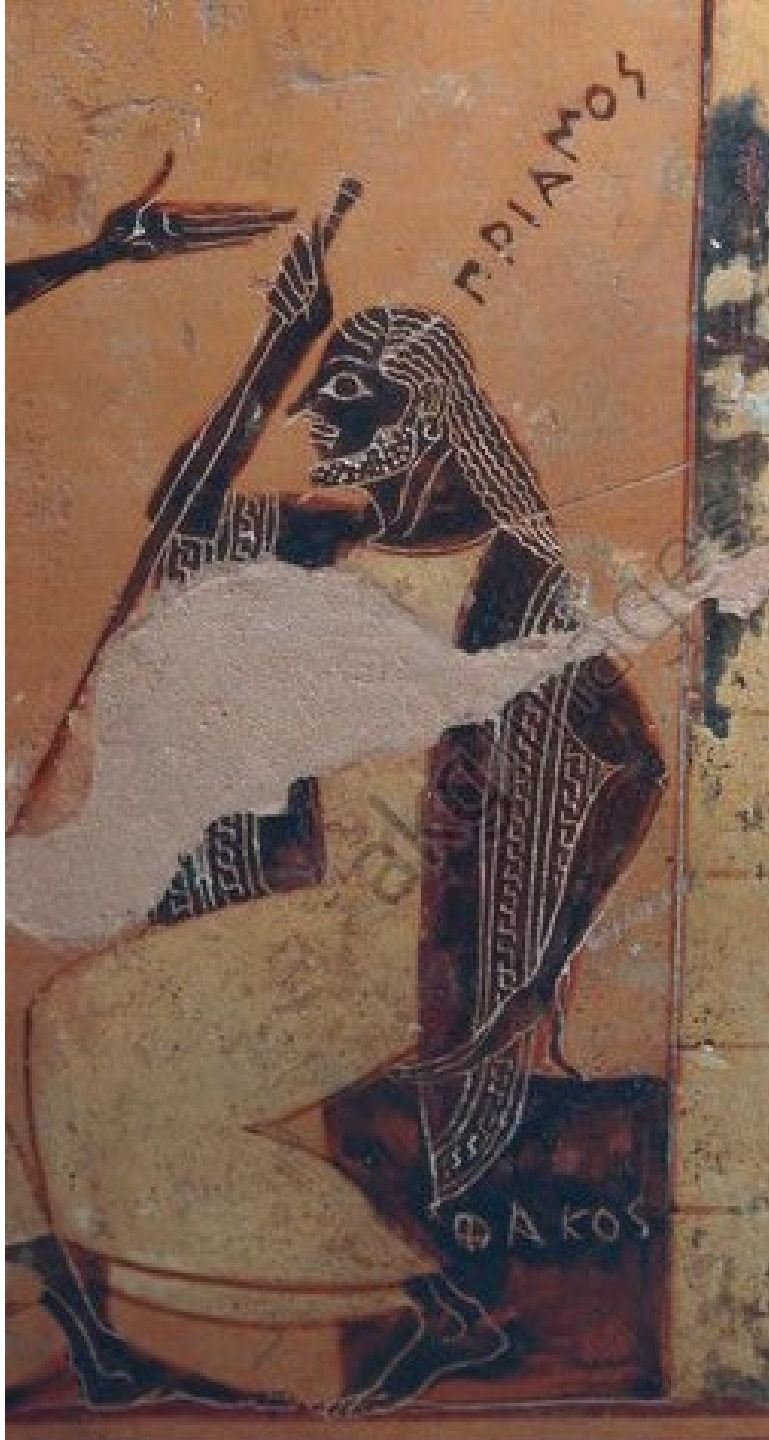
- The chariot-race depicted by Kleitias, though broadly faithful to the spirit of the Homeric description (the number of the competing chariots, the prizes), **it is not an illustration** of it
- Kleitias departs widely for the Homeric account
- Of his five charioteers, **only one**, Diomedes, takes part in the race in Homer, and he, the winner comes third on the vase.
- Two of the five, Damasippos and Hippothoon, **are not even mentioned** in the Iliad.
- The others are Odysseus who leads, but did not compete in Homer, and Automedon.

The register beneath the broad wedding scene shows another episode from the Trojan War, in which Achilles killed Troilos who was the youngest son of the Trojan King Priam while the boy was getting water outside the city walls, together with his sister Polyxene. The fountain house at left sets the scene. At right, a messenger tells Priam about the incident.









Side B of the François Vase has scenes that are not related to Achilles, but instead shows an assortment of myths involving the Athenian hero Theseus and the gods. The top register shows Theseus playing a lyre as he leads 14 boys and girls in the *Geranos* dance. This represents the rescue, by Theseus, of Athenian children from the Minotaur, the Cretan monster who would have eaten them.



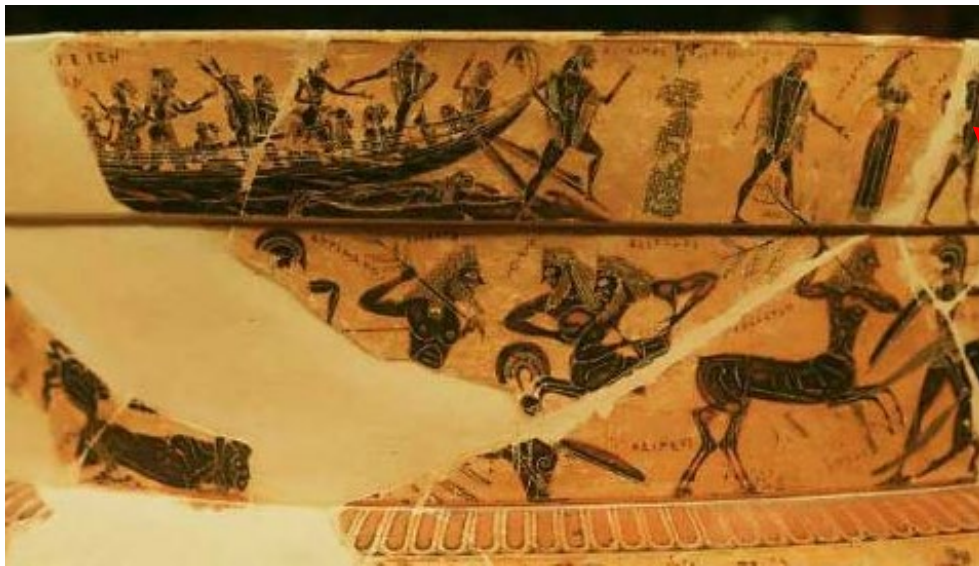
Arrival of Theseus –
Crane dance

Battle between Lapiths
& Centaurs

Wedding of Peleus
& Thetis

Return of Hephaistos
to Mount Olympos

Battle of Pygmies
with cranes





The battle of Lapiths and Centaurs (again, with Theseus)



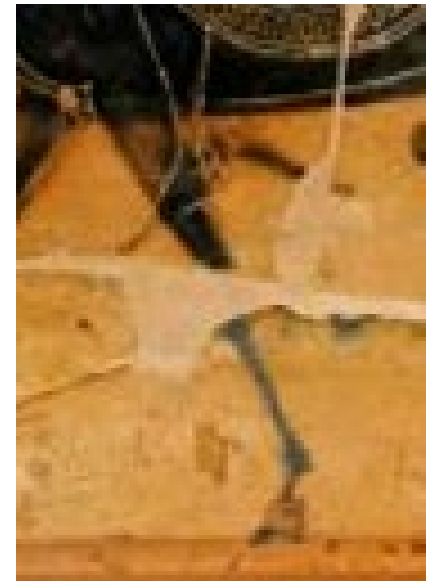
Kaineus rammed into earth by the Centaurs Agrios (“the wild one”), Asbolos (“the dark one”) one the right and Hylaios on the left (“the wooden one”)

LOWER on Side B

The return of **Hephaistos** to Olympus; sitting on a mule, he is led to the Olympian gods by **Dionysos**, followed by a group of **silens** and **nymphs**.



Hephaistos (god of smiths/craftsmen) returning to Mount Olympus (home of the Greek gods). According to Homer, Hephaistos was born with a lame foot, which Kleitias shows by painting the god's feet pointing in opposite directions. Hephaistos was mistreated by his mother and refused to return to Mount Olympus until Dionysos persuaded him by over-serving him wine. Once drunk, Hephaistos agreed to go home, and was carried back on a mule...





Hephaistos was angered by the cruelty of his mother Hera, **and sent her a beautifully crafted chair**. When she sat in it, the chair entrapped her. Here we see Hera awaiting her son's return so that he can release her.



Ares in shame! He had failed to bring Hephaistos back by force...



Detail with the return of Hephaistos to Mount Olympus, with Dionysos ahead, and the silenoi behind.



The end of Achilles' life is shown on the handles of the François Vase. On each handle, beneath a goddess grasping wild animal with her fists (Artemis) we see the warrior Ajax carrying Achilles' lifeless corpse.

The tragedy of the hero's death is dramatized: his huge body sags and his hair hangs down to the ground.







The fields on the inner sides of the handles above the rim of the pot each feature a [Gorgon](#) in motion.







Part of the 'Aegina treasure' . This golden pendant is called "Master of Animals". It is interpreted as showing a Cretan god in a field of lotus flowers. In each hand he holds a goose, while the background is composed of two unidentified objects that are considered to be either connected to "cult horns", the sacred horns of bulls, or maybe composite bows. Description after Higgins: *The Aegina Treasure*, 1979 **British Museum. GR 1892.5-20.8 BM Cat Jewellery 762.**



Winged Gorgon
with birds, c. 600 BCE,
Kameiros, Rhodes



A comic scene of Pygmies (a tribe of small people in Greek mythology) battling cranes decorates the foot of the vase,

providing a light counterpoint to the rest of the imagery.

The paint on the foot is reddish in color instead of black

because the vase was **misfired** in the kiln, as sometimes happened....

Pliny claims that the Pygmies go to the beach every year to devour crane eggs and /or their little ones, to limit the number of cranes that are potentially their enemies!





The Pygmies lived somewhere in Africa...

Pygmies = *Pygme* = *πυγμή* = fist that was their size! According to mythology

NARRATIVE AND VIEWING STRATEGIES ON THE FRANÇOIS VASE

	SIDE A	SIDE B	HANDLE (both)
LIP	Hunt of Kalydonian Boar	Dance of those rescued by Theseus	Gorgons (Stheno and Euryale)
NECK	Chariot race, funeral games of Patroklos	Centauiromachy (Lapiths and Centaurs)	Artemis (mistress of animals)
BELLY, main zone	Gods visiting the newly married (both sides)	Peleus and Thetis	Ajax carrying the dead Achilles
BELLY, lower zone	Achilles pursuing Troilos	The Return of Hephaistos (to Olympos)	
BELLY, near foot	Animals: sphinxes, panther attacking bull, lion attacking boar, griffins, lion attacking bull, panther attacking stag		
FOOT	Battle between Pygmies and Cranes		



- A **narrative thread** links the early exploits of Peleus (Kalydonian Boar), his marriage to Thetis, and the exploits of their son Achilles during the Trojan War.
- Together, the Peleus/Achilles cycle **connects** at least five scenes – six if the (golden?) amphora (Hom. *Iliad* 23.92; *Odyssey* 24.74) that Dionysos is holding when he visits Peleus and Thetis is to be identified with the one made by Hephaistos, who gives it to Dionysos, who gives it to Thetis, who gives it to her son, and which is at last used to inter the ashes of both Patroklos and Achilles.
- The significance of the amphora in the overall scheme of the vase is that it provides a narrative thread that explains the **close association** between Dionysos and Hephaistos – Dionysos helps Hephaistos to return to Olympos, and in return Hephaistos makes Dionysos this golden amphora.

THE QUESTION OF LITERARY SOURCES

- This narrative thread has led other scholars – notably Andrew Stewart (1983) – to suggest that all the scenes on the vase **derive from one poem**.
- Stewart suggests a (lost) lyric poem by Stesichoros, originally commissioned to celebrate a marriage of some kind.
- Basic **objections** to this theory: There is first the **basic implausibility** of a series of scenes accurately transcribing a text, still less a transitory oral performance.
- Such scenes **do not derive from texts**. Rather, they arise from a range of story or epic cycles, transmitted orally, of which the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the only versions we really know
- Texts therefore have no *authority* when it comes to imagery.
- Interpretations such as Stewart's expect that there can be some **kind of set 'meaning'** to the images, a meaning which, while not immutable, is rooted in literature. But, as the example of the funeral games of Patroklos shows here, this is **plainly not the case**.

What is “agency”?

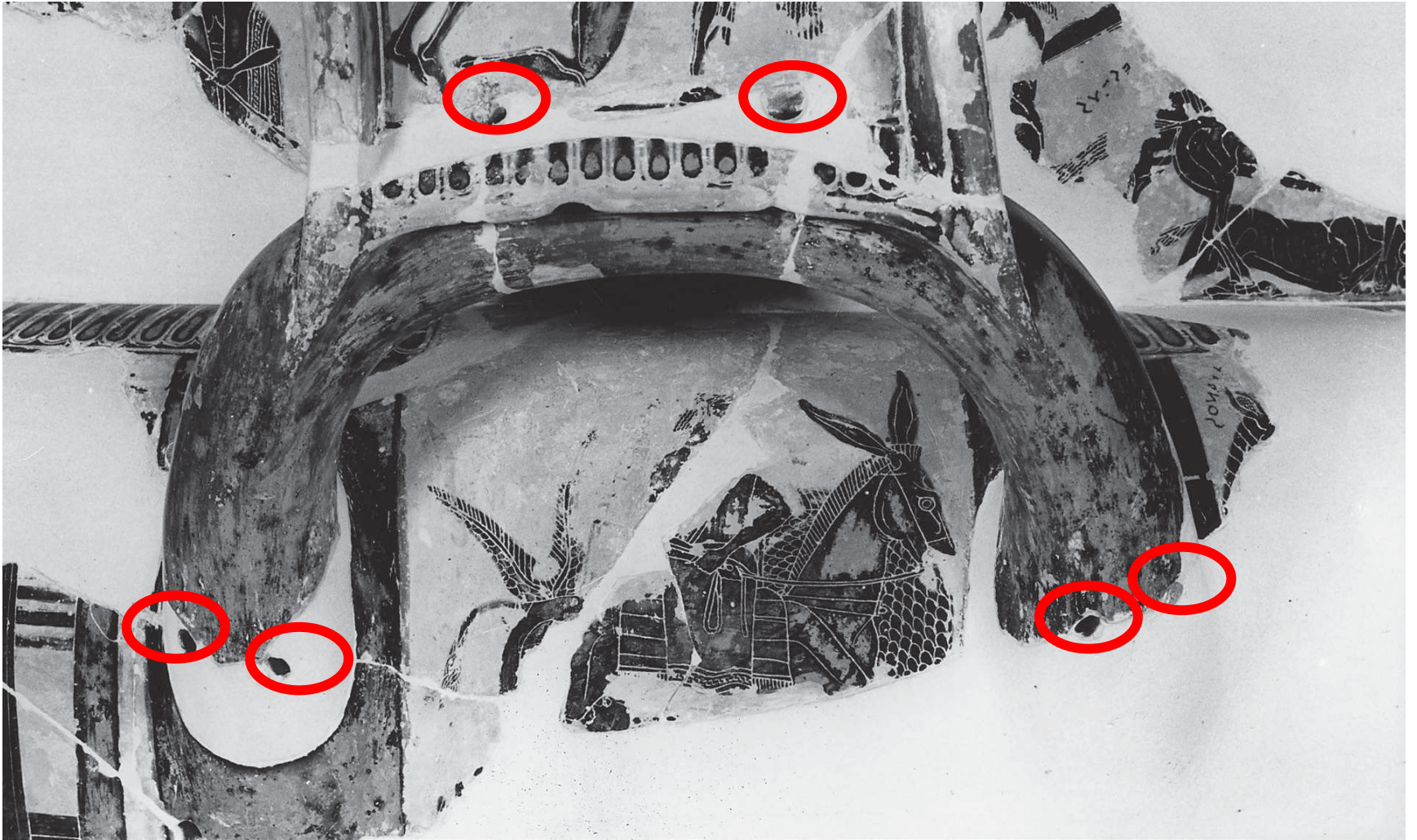
- Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency* (1998)
- ‘what lies behind the seductive power of Art’ is
 - neither its aesthetic deftness
 - nor its ability to act as a highly sophisticated, and profoundly suggestive, language
- Art not a matter ‘of meaning and communication’...
- Instead: ‘about *doing*’
- Agency: artifacts (including *objets d’art*) function as material entities which interact with their viewers and users by motivating their response.

AGENCY AND THE THE FRANÇOIS VASE

The **agency** of the potter and painter has been painted on to the surface of the vase (twice!): KLEITIAS MEGRAPHSEN; ERGOTIMOSMEPOIESEN: 'Kleitias painted me' – 'Ergotimos made me'.

- The same can be said of the **painted labels** that accompany the scenes, which are (by any account) excessive.
- We have over 120 painted labels from the François Vase and they are doing something very odd.
- Care was taken to note not only the human figures or the hounds in the scene with the Kalydonian Boar (Peleus, Meleager) but the seven hounds as well
- And in the Marriage of Peleus and Thetis, the Battle of Lapiths and Centaurs, and the scene where Achilles meets Troilos, objects are animated by their labels
- In purely narrative terms, redundant – It may be that 'their purpose is not so much to clarify the scenes as to accompany them in an **independent narrative**'
- The inscriptions do not simply accompany a 'narrative' scene, or clarify the identity of the persons shown. Rather, they **animate the *dramatis personae*** – the **agents** in the story, agents which comprise 'inanimate' objects as much as persons.

SOME TECHNICAL NOTES ON THE VASE



In the restoration of the vase in the 1970s several sets of **holes** were noted, on and around the handles,

- All of the holes visible on the vase seem to be the result of an **ancient repair with traces of lead**
- First of all, they occur exclusively on the handles, and there are none in the walls of the vase.
- From this we can conclude that the body of the vase was never broken before it was deposited in the large chamber Etruscan tomb
- This leads us to the *vexata quaestio* of the function of the François Vase, that is, whether it **was ever really functional** or if it was used **exclusively for ceremonial purposes ?**

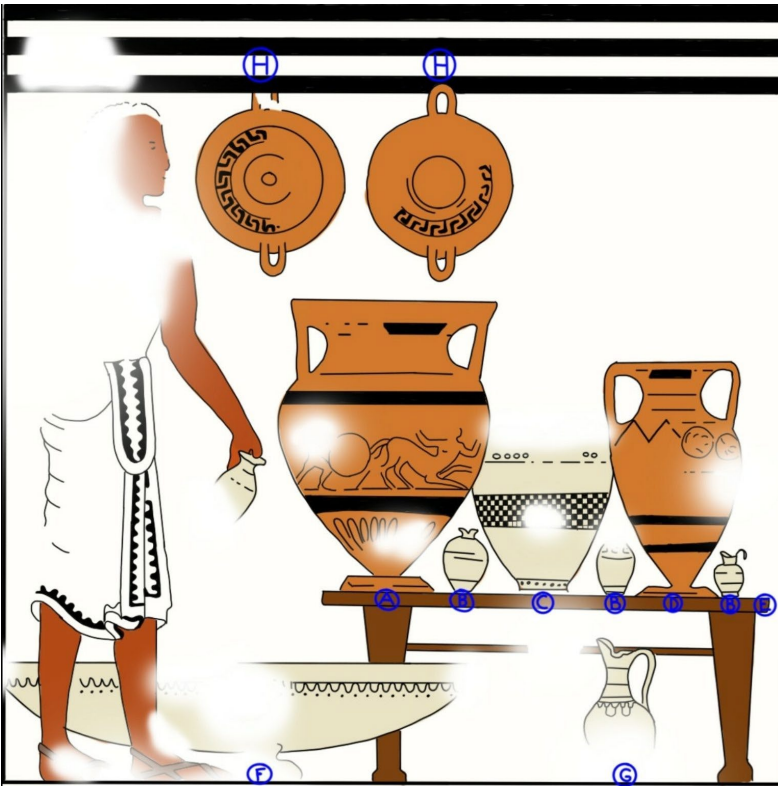
How Was the François Krater Used?

- Filled to the height of the offset that marks the beginning of the rim, the vase has a capacity of about **79** liters.
- The interior surface of the vase, reddened owing to imperfect firing, shows clear and **unequivocal signs of the use of metal utensils**, traces of circular movements with *kyathoi* and *kykethra* (ladles) of different types, for measuring and mixing the wine.
- It **remains uncertain** whether the krater was used (and the scrapes left on the inside) in Greece or in Etruria, and whether the handles were broken and repaired in Greece or in Etruria.



A SPECIAL COMMISSION OR SECOND-HAND TRADE?

- Based on the insufficient information we have, the first fragments of the vase was discovered in a (today lost) princely Etruscan underground-built tomb forming a tumulus north of modern Siena in 1844, in the area of Chiusi. Together with other black-figure vases the crater served as an elaborate funerary offering.
- Most modern scholars do not accept the notion that the trade of Athenian vases relied primarily on second-hand vases; it was an organized phenomenon, with pottery destined specifically for export.
- Etruscan familiarity with Greek myth and their predilection for complex narrative; the scenes on the Francois vase and their Greekness emphasized with the many inscriptions suited local taste
- Cross-cultural context and Etruscan consumption: appropriation, integration or even manipulation of the object and imagery in a new setting, in accordance with local customs and worldview.



La tomba del Colle di Chiusi, 5th c. BCE

