

An Artifact Speaks • Artifact Information Sheet

Artifact Name: Panathenaic-style Amphora (small)

Time Period/Date of the Original: 410 BCE

Culture/Religion Group: Ancient Greek

Material: Clay and pigment

Reproduction? Yes



Background Information:

An amphora is a two-handled, slender-necked pot used for food storage. Most often, the pot was used to hold oil, wine, olives, or grains. The silhouette and size among amphoræ varied greatly: unglazed examples many feet tall were used to transport large amounts of food for trade across the Mediterranean Sea, and small, finely painted versions were found in upper-class homes.

An amphora painted in this style—a representation of an armed goddess Athena on one side and an athletic contest on the other—had a very specific purpose. It was a Panathenaic prize. The Greater Panathenaia were held in Athens every four years. The Lesser Panathenaia were held the other years. The contests in the Greater Games included musical events, athletic competitions, and sports for Athenians only, such as a race with torches between villages and throwing a javelin from horseback. During the Lesser Games, only the latter sports were held.

The winners of the athletic competitions won the special amphoræ. Each would be filled with oil from the olives from the sacred grove of Athena. How many amphoræ a winner received depended on the age category of the competitor (boy, youth, adult) and the type of competition. The greatest number of amphoræ—140—was awarded to the winner of the chariot race.

Three aspects of this amphora show that the original was of the Panathenaic style but not a true prize. First, the amphora has been painted in the red-figure style, meaning that the figures are red on a black background. All Panathenaic prizes were decorated in black figure. Second, the pot is smaller in size than true prize pots, which held approximately 40 liters of oil. Third, true pots were signed with the phrase *ton Athenethen athlon*, which means 'one of the prizes from Athens.' This amphora is a wonderful example of how looking at the details of an artifact is important in a discussion of its use.

(continued)

Sources:

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