



Cultural Diversity in the Greek World

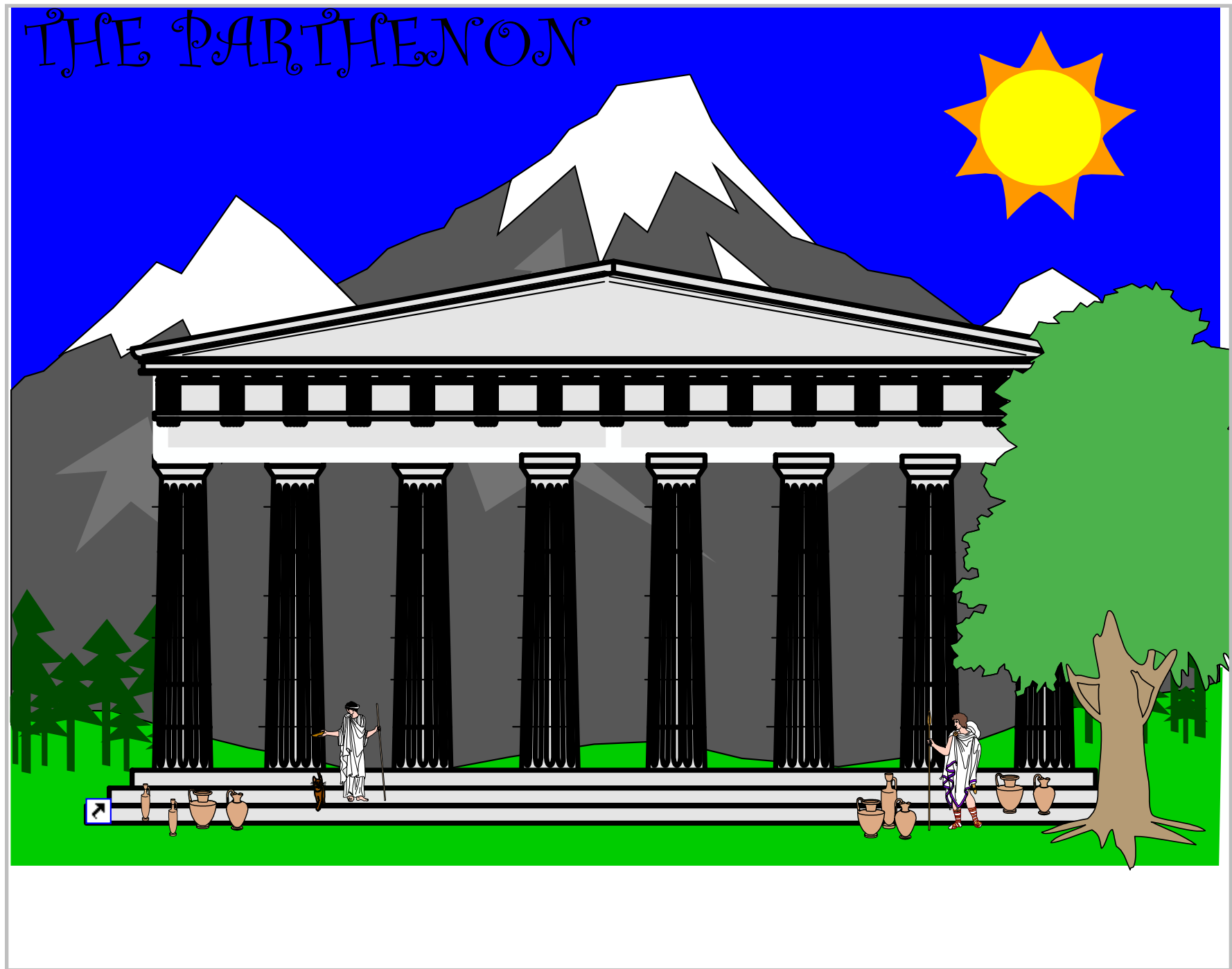
The City-States of Athens and Sparta

In the ancient world Greece was never a unified country. Greeks were connected by cultural similarities such as shared gods, language, and custom, but beyond that there was great variety in what it meant to be 'Greek'. The mountainous landscape of Greece meant that communities developed and lived separately from one another. Out of this situation emerged the concept of the city-state, cities that were self-governing and exerted in control of the land, people, and resources of the region surrounding them. Although there were times of co-operation, these city-states often competed in bloody rivalry for power and authority.

The Peloponnesian War

In the fifth century BCE, the rivalry between states reached its peak. In a struggle for supremacy, the two most powerful states, Athens and Sparta, clashed head-on in the cataclysmic Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE). This conflict drew attention to the considerable differences between the two cities. Luxurious Athens, in Attica, was a modern, imperialistic power experimenting with new ideas of democracy, whereas Sparta, way down in the south in Laconia, retained its traditional, militaristic austerity and politics based on kings and councillors. The differences seemed irreconcilable and each side fought for the destruction of the other.

Despite the endless bloodshed caused by difference, occasions such as religious festivals and athletic contests brought the Greeks together. The cultural continuity provided by religion can be seen even in those two bitter rivals, Athens and Sparta. The Temple of Athena Parthenos on the Athenian Acropolis is a world famous landmark (it is better known by the name Parthenon).



Title: The Parthenon (4 of 22)

In the potter's workshop

The Greeks made pots out of terracotta (which means 'cooked earth'). Terracotta is made of clay and other minerals, which potters collected from old river beds near their homes. By studying the clay from these river beds, archaeologists have worked out which pots were made in which places. The reddish-orange coloured clay of Athenian pots matches the clay found in river beds in Athens.



Potters formed wet clay into shapes. The round parts, e.g. the bowl of a kylix, were turned on the spinning potters' wheel. Handles, some mouths and other parts were moulded and added by hand. Once the clay had dried out a little, the potter might burnish (smooth) the surface with a stone or rag.

After the pot was left to dry it was decorated. The painter added a design in fine slip (watered-down clay). When it was fired a certain way the design turned black. Firing the pot also made it hard and waterproof.

Workmen stacked the pots in a kiln (oven), which they heated up to 900 degrees celsius. Modern scientists have discovered that the Greeks shut the oxygen out of the kiln in the middle of firing, to turn the decoration black. Red patches or streaks on black glaze might have been firing mistakes but sometimes make interesting patterns.

See further sections on [shapes](#) and [decorative techniques](#) involved in making Greek vases.

ANCIENT GREEK VESSELS



PYROTECHNOLOGY

The Greeks were master potters, technically adept at controlling time, temperature, and atmosphere—the essential aspects of the firing process. The Greek kiln, illustrated on several potsherds, was a beehive-shaped, updraft kiln with a rectangular fuel box and a short chimney. The characteristic red-on-black or black-on-red decoration was achieved in a three-stage firing process: oxidation-reduction-oxidation. First, the kiln was heated using ample wood fuel and good air circulation (*oxidation*) and all peep-holes open. When the temperature reached about 850°C, indicated by the cherry-red color of the fire, the chimney and peep-holes were blocked and green wood or damp sawdust was added to the fuel box. This created a *reducing* atmosphere, causing red iron oxide to convert to black iron oxide and turning all the pottery black. In the third phase of firing, peep-holes and chimney were reopened, allowing air to circulate again and turn the clay body back to red-orange. In a successful firing, the slipped areas remained jet black, providing a pleasing contrast with the red-orange color of the fired Athenian clay.



Shapes of Greek vases

Ancient Greeks made pots to be used and they had many different shapes for different purposes. The basic form of each pot provides a clue to its function. For example, the open form of a shallow kylix or a deep kantharos or krater allows you to see and reach what's inside.

Some serving containers, like the krater, were too heavy to be carried around so they sat on a table at the middle of the party. But if you wanted to move around then a closed form would stop things from spilling out. The amphora has two big handles to help you carry it. The oinochoe is made for pouring liquid: this is why it has a fancy lip.

Sometimes they kept precious things on display in a pot with an open form or hidden in a pot with a closed form. They put jewelry and makeup in a pyxis, an opened shape that was closed with a lid. They put their most prized possession, oil, in a lekythos or a kothon. The lekythos, which has a closed form, has a narrow neck to stop the oil from pouring out too quickly. The rim of the kothon curves in to catch oil from spilling out.

ANCIENT GREEK VESSELS

Greek Vase Shapes

Scholars today classify ancient Greek vases by shape, of which there are about 100 different types, many with several sub-types. Here are some examples of the major types arranged by predominant (but not exclusive) function.

Vases used for storing and transporting wine and foodstuffs



Amphora

The amphora was a two-handled vase used for storage and transport.



Stamnos

Stamnos is probably another name for a large amphora.

ANCIENT GREEK VESSELS

Vases used for drawing water



Hydria

The name of this three-handled vase is derived from the Greek word for water. Hydriai were used for drawing water, as ballot-boxes, and also as urns to hold the ashes of the dead. They are commonly seen in vase-representations of women drawing water at the fountain-house.



Loutrophoros

The name of this vase means "carrier of washing-water", and the vase was used only in ritual contexts: at weddings, to carry the water for the bridal bath; in funerals, to carry the water for washing the corpse of unmarried persons and to mark their graves. Vases of this shape are commonly decorated with scenes of mourners or wedding processions.



Lebes Gamikos

This vase-type has three pieces: a bowl with handles, a lid (not shown here), and a stand. The term means "marriage bowl," and the vase was used for the same purpose as the loutrophoros in wedding rituals--to bring water for the bridal bath. Many of these vases are decorated with scenes depicting wedding preparations or wedding processions.

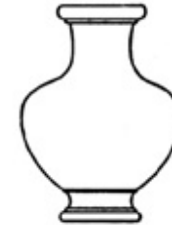
ANCIENT GREEK VESSELS

Vases used for mixing and cooling wine



Krater

The word krater means "mixing-bowl," and the vase was used for mixing wine with water. (The Greeks did not drink their wine "neat".)



Psykter

The word psykter means "cooler," and it was used for cooling wine: the psykter was placed in a krater which had been filled with cooled water, and the cooling liquid would surround the psykter and cool the wine.

Vases used for drinking or pouring (wine or water)



Kantharos

This type of drinking-cup is often seen held by Dionysus in representations on vases.



Kylix

This drinking-cup is sometimes called the "symposium-vase," since it appears often in vase-representations of symposia



Oinochoe

This vase is a kind of ladle or small pitcher used for pouring wine from the krater into a drinking-cup. The word oinochoe means "wine-pourer."

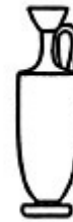
ANCIENT GREEK VESSELS

Vases used for cosmetics



Pyxis

This vase was a round box with a cover used to hold cosmetics.



Lekythos

This vase was a flask used for toilet oils, perfume, or condiments, and also appears in funerary contexts, where it was used to pour libations for the dead or was left on the grave as an offering.

Vases used for athletics



Aryballos

This vase was a small flask with a narrow neck used to hold and pour oil; it is often shown in Attic vase painting as being suspended from the wrist of an athlete, or looped by a string and hung on the wall.



Alabastron

This vase was an elongated flask with a narrow neck used to contain oil. Like the aryballos, it was sometimes suspended from an athlete's wrist or from a peg on the wall.

The evolution of Greek vase painting

A comparison of earlier pieces (from the Neolithic and early bronze age [2nd millennium BC]) show the improvements that the potters wheel brought to the fineness and shapes of the vessels. Bronze age examples (all dating before 1100 BC) from Cyprus, Crete (so-called 'Minoan' wares) and the Greek mainland (so-called 'Mycenaean') show a variety of coarse as well as fine wares, some made by hand and others made on the potter's wheel.

The interaction of Greeks and near easterners is suggested by similarities in these wares to those that their eastern neighbours used, and in the inclusion of 'Oriental' motifs such as lions, sphinxes, and lotuses, especially on Archaic vases (those made in the period from 700-480). 'Naucratis' wares (from Naucratis, a Greek trading post in Egypt) show the infusion of Greek styles in Egypt.

In the high Archaic period (7th-6th c. BCE) the Corinthians were the biggest producers of Greek decorated wares, and they pioneered in the development of the so-called black-figure style (black figures on a red background). The Athenians took over this style and with it became the preeminent producers of decorative wares in the 6th century BCE. They also experimented with more techniques, of which the most important became the red-figure style (red figures on a black background), which began to be produced in 530 BC.



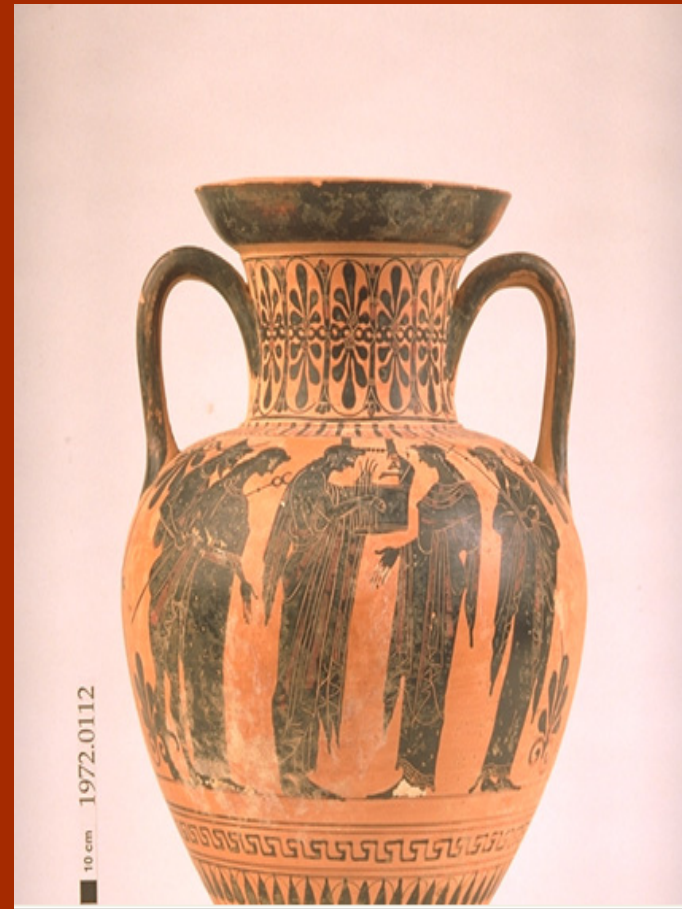
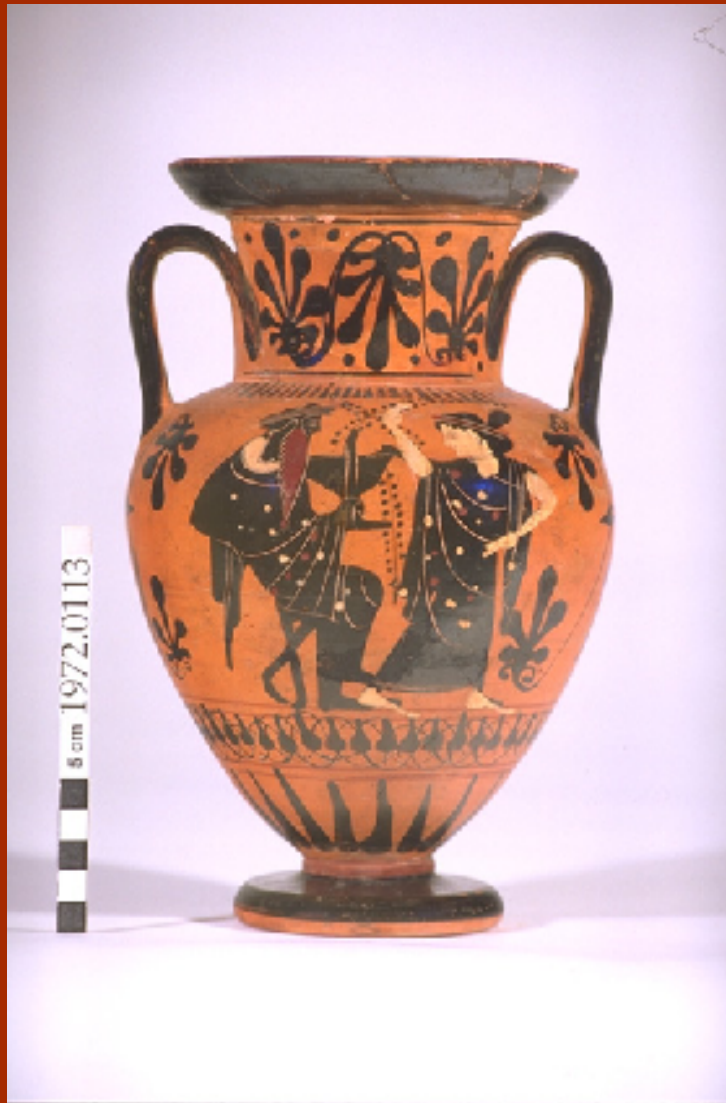
Techniques used in making and decorating Greek vases

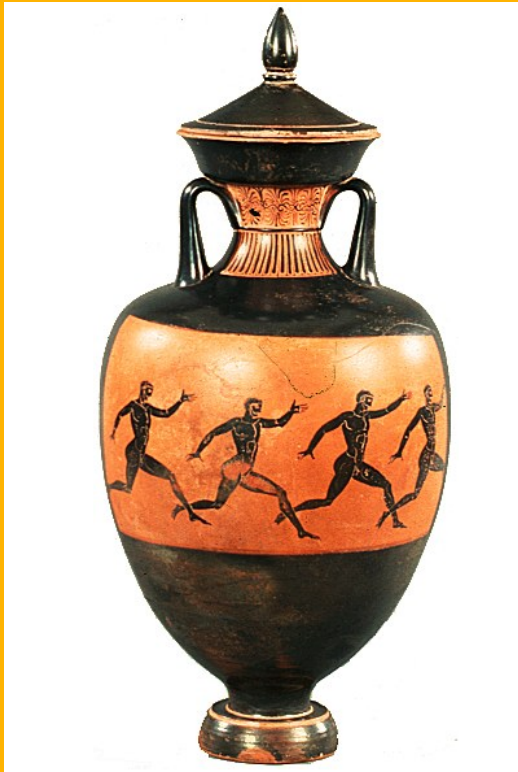
A wide variety of techniques were used by Greek potters and painters to decorate their wares.

The simplest form of decoration (found especially in Egyptian, Cypriote, Minoan and Mycenaean fabrics) was the addition of a slip (red or white) or the use of burnishing to provide a shiny surface that would look like the surface of stone vases. Variants of dark-on-light ware and light-on-dark ware were favored by different societies at different times through the bronze age period and even later (see Attic geometric examples from the eighth century BC) and attest the longstanding tradition that the basic designs used on the surfaces would be a contrast of the underlying (buff or reddish-pink) colour of the terracotta fabric with a darker terracotta slip applied to the surface. This principle lends itself to the 'black-and-the-red'-the famous red figure and black figure techniques that dominated Attic/Athenian production in the 6th and 5th centuries BCE. (Sometimes the clay that burned to black was not applied thickly enough and the surface would misfire to red, or look streaky as on [\[RM.99.26.59 \]](#)). Also the red colours would sometimes turn gray if the vase was accidentally burned later: see [\[29.11.3 \]](#)).



AMPHORA





AMPHORA



KRATER

Column Krater



Volute Krater



KRATER



AMPHORA



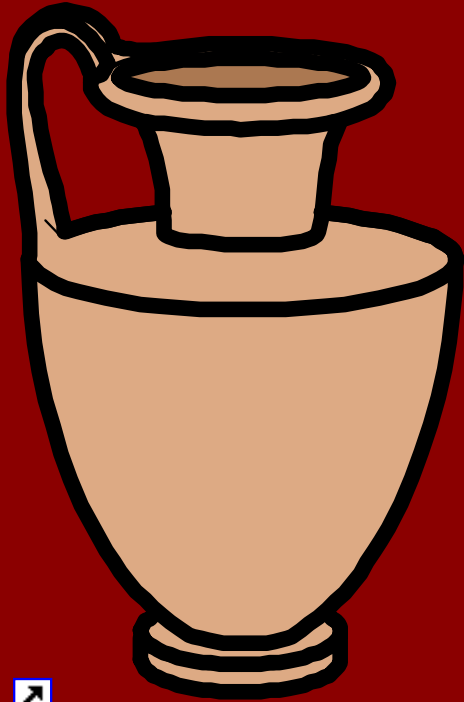
OINOCHOE

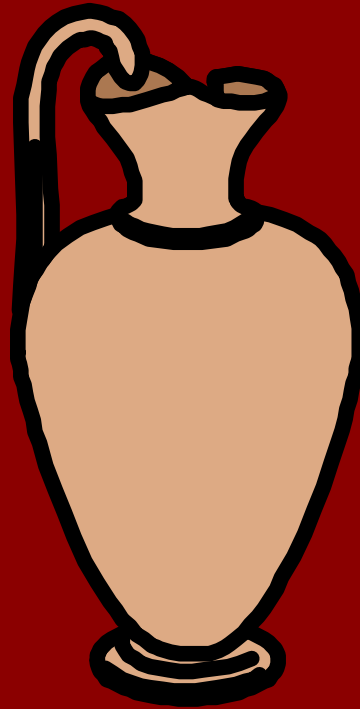


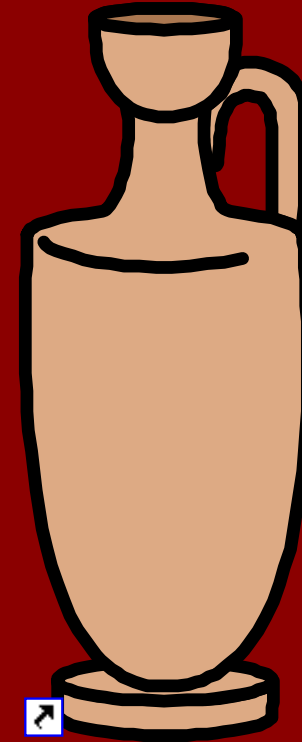
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Oinochoe (18 of 22)

What shapes are these Greek Vessels called?



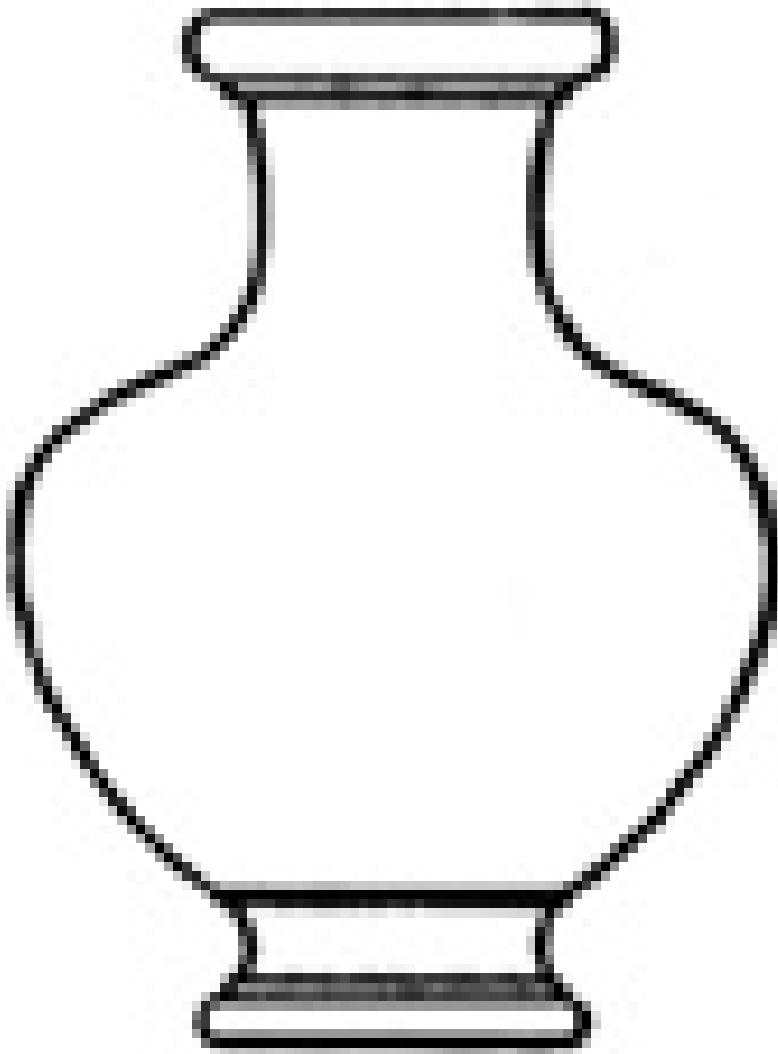




NOW; with
your visual
recollection!
Draw a Greek
Vessel of your
choice!

CREATE A
DRAWING
INSIDE
THIS
GREEK
CRATOR!





CREATE A
DRAWING
AT OLYMPIA
INSIDE
THIS
GREEK
VASE!