



Water Jar (Hydria)

Date

ca. 575-500 BCE

Primary Maker

Leagros Group

Medium

pottery and paint

Description

The principal narrative of the painting on this hydria, Achilles and Ajax playing dice in the presence of Athena, was one of the most popular subjects for vases in Athens during the 6th century BCE. Presumably, the representation originated with Exekias (active ca. 545-530 BCE), the greatest of Athenian black-figure vase painters, whose designs, however, excluded the goddess Athena, protector of the Athenian nation and the patron goddess

of warriors. Exekias left an empty space where Athena stands to heighten the tension of the great warriors preoccupied with a game while war was to be waged, as their armor suggests (usually one doesn't play a board game with spears in hand!). Not an incident from Homer's Iliad but likely a local myth, the story loses some of its drama by the addition of armored Athena, who turns toward Achilles, a favorite of hers, and encourages both heroes to rise and fight, thereby fulfilling their duty and fate. Her presence foretells victory; whether she was seen or not, Achilles and Ajax would have sensed she was with them. Greek gods, it was believed, provided motivation to human beings, courage to warriors. Touches of purple and white slightly enliven the black silhouettes of the figures and objects. In Greek art, goddesses, like women, were painted white. The inscriptions name the participants and record the dialogue between the intent players.

Dimensions

Overall: 16 5/8 x 12 3/8 x 10 3/8 in. (42.2 x 31.4 x 26.4 cm)