

# COLNAGHI



*Boeotian black-glazed Kantharos*  
5th Century BC

Terracotta  
23 cm (9 in.)

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Provenance:  
Acquired 1980s-1990s.  
H.N. collection, Milton Keynes, UK

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The ancient Greek pottery tradition is one of the most iconic genres in all of art history. Instantly recognizable and astounding in its endless variety, our graceful vessel fits neatly into a subgroup of Greek vases known as Black Glaze Ware. As one can clearly see, this technique allowed the form of the vase to take centre stage; in this case, that of the *kantharos*, a tall, stemmed, double-handled drinking cup with a dramatic silhouette.

The vase is well made with relatively thin walls and careful attention to symmetry. The black glaze has survived in good condition, still maintaining much of its original lustre, despite a few light points of restoration. The firing process left some areas of lighter reddish color, but the tan ring around the stem indicates that this area was covered when the cup was in the kiln and is original to the piece.

The kantharos shape in Greek pottery can be traced back to the eighth century BC, and it is believed to have mimicked the form of contemporary metal vessels, providing a less

# COLNAGHI

expensive, easier to produce version of similar cups in gold, silver, and bronze. In fact, the black glaze technique, which produced a glossy monochrome surface, is thought to have been aimed at reproducing the surface effect of silver vessels. This type of black glaze kantharos was a specialty of the region of Boeotia, just northeast of the Gulf of Corinth. Boeotian black glaze kantharoi seem to have enjoyed great popularity in the mid to late fifth century BC, and a number of close parallels for our cup exist.

A very similar kantharos in the Metropolitan Museum of Art possesses identical technique, even down to the ivy motif around the rim (fig. 1). The buff colored fabric that is revealed is consistent with Boeotian manufacture, as Attic wares are distinguished by their reddish clay. Another excellent example in Brussels displays the same standard shape, spurred handles, and careful application of the shiny black glaze, including the reserved band surrounding the ridge midway up the stem (fig. 2)

Kantharoi were most often used as wine cups, both for ceremonial purposes and at banquets. The shape was closely associated with the cult of Dionysus, god of the vine, as he was said to possess a kantharos that was forever refilling itself with wine. This myth is aptly illustrated on a 5<sup>th</sup> century pelike in the Louvre showing Dionysus holding a kantharos that is very similar in shape to our piece (fig. 3). This makes our kantharos one of the ancient Greek wine vessels *par excellence*, as well as being a particularly fine example of the black glaze ware of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC.

This kantharos has recently undergone slight retouching to the black glaze.



Fig. 1. Boeotian black glaze kantharos with ivy garland, Metropolitan Museum of Art, no. 1993.197

# COLNAGHI



Fig. 2. Boeotian black glaze kantharos, Brussels, Musees Royaux, no. A76.

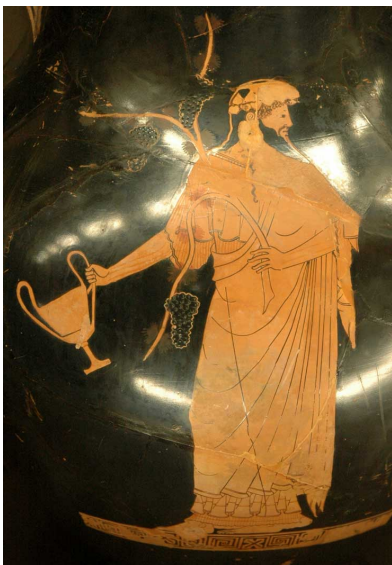


Fig. 3. Red figure pelike with Dionysus holding kantharos, Louvre, Paris, CA2981.

# COLNAGHI



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