



21. Attic Black-Figure *Hydria*

Of the many Greek vases in the Melbourne collection, we have chosen to highlight here the only *hydria*, which was stolen from the University in 1990. It was returned in 2003, having been tracked down by Interpol. It had meanwhile been published in summary by Connor and Jackson in the hope of its recovery. It is of great interest, in that it represents a transitional phase, stylistically, between the Orientalising period and the true Archaic period.

The shape is particularly representative of the Archaic period in Athens, when the tyrant Peisistratos introduced many fountain houses to improve the city's water supply, and also encouraged foreign craftsmen, particularly potters, to come and work in Athens. Painted scenes on contemporary *hydriai* showed Athenian women carrying the jars on their heads, balanced on a cloth pad; they would have been heavy when full of water.

The vase is decorated in the black-figure technique. There are two figured scenes, one on the shoulder and one on the body of the vase. On the shoulder, two lean panthers confront each other with magnificently waving tails, flanked on each side by a sphinx with raised wings and curling tail. The use of added white and red colour is lavish. Between the waving tails and curved bodies are lotus buds on curved stems. The use of panthers and sphinxes, as well as the filling of the field with flowers, harks

back to the Orientalising style popular earlier in the century and makes an interesting contrast with the main scene, typical of the Archaic period, depicting a warrior's departure from home. The warrior marches stiffly to the right in his red tunic, his hand raised in farewell to the four men who flank him, dressed in civil attire. Two are bearded, older men, two are youths. All are presumably family or friends. The warrior is well-armed with spear, baldrick and a hoplite shield dramatically decorated with a white satyr's head (now lost). The viewer could easily associate the warrior with a mythic hero such as Achilles, but hoplite warfare also had contemporary relevance in everyday life.

Heather Jackson

P.J. Connor, 'Replicas in Greek Vase-Painting: The Work of the Painter of Louvre F6', *BaBesch* 56 (1981) 37-44; P.J. Connor and H. Jackson, *Greek Vases in the University of Melbourne* (2000) no. 31, 88-89.



Attic black-figure *hydria*
Painter of Louvre F6
c. 550-540 BC

height 32.7cm; diameter
(max. with handles) 29cm;
Accession no. 1972.0111
Purchased in 1972 from
the Kofler-Troniger
Collection, Lucerne.