

NICHOLSON MUSEUM

LIFE IN ANCIENT GREECE



The School of Athens, 1509-10, Raphael (1483-1520)
Apostolic Palace, Vatican, Rome, Italy

ACTORS, ATHLETES & ACADEMICS

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INTRODUCTION

This exhibition presents Greek material from the Nicholson Museum collection in a new light. It abandons the art historical approach of previous exhibitions, and embraces an approach that combines the cultural history of Greece, archaeology and writings by classical authors. It allows visitors to examine objects on display not only as aesthetic items, but also contextualised as part of the daily life and practices of ancient peoples.

The exhibition presents displays that are ordered by themes that cover the lived experience of the ancient person, literally from birth to death: Life (birth, education, marriage), Religion (Festivals, gods, specific religious observances), War (both mythical and real), the Symposium (the drinking party), Theatre (Tragedy, Comedy and Dionysos), Athletics (training, Games), Science and Technology (the Antikythera Mechanism), Myth (Herakles) and Death (threats to life, burial rituals, grave markers).

The selection of objects from the Nicholson Collection guided the focus of the research information that cover each of the above themes and presents a new selection of Greek material to visitors. Each object is accompanied by information that provides details about the name, use, date, description and classification of the object.

This exhibition sources quotes from ancient authors that are relevant to the objects and to the themes presented. In this way, the exhibition combines the ancient artefact with the voice of ancient people, to truly gain an appreciation of their lived experience.

This approach allows visitors to find information that they can relate to their own life experience and thus a familiarity with the objects. Of course, there are details of ancient life that are quite different to our own, and the exhibition also highlights the contrasts between now and then.

Dr Elizabeth Bollen, Assistant Curator, Nicholson Museum

GREECE

DR ELIZABETH BOLLEN

Had Greek civilisation never existed, we would never have become fully conscious, which is to say that we would never have become, for better or worse, fully human citizens.

W.H. AUDEN (1907–1973)

In 490 BC the Persian forces of King Darius I, crossed from Asia Minor (Turkey) and landed on the coast of Greece at Marathon ready to invade the land and subjugate its people. Facing this emergency were a contingent of soldiers from Athens and from Plataea; the Spartans, the elite warriors of the Greek world, were absent, prevented from joining due to observances required at a religious festival. The vastly outnumbered Greeks, secured an unexpected and much celebrated victory. Athens had preserved Greek autonomy.

In 480 BC Darius' son Xerxes, invaded Greece again. A series of battles were fought on land and at sea. The most famous is the Battle of Thermopylae, in which the Spartan forces made a last stand. Although defeated their courage in the face of death assured enduring fame.

For a time the Persians had the ascendancy. They sacked Athens and destroyed the temples on the Acropolis. Much of the population of Athens had left the city and sheltered on the island of Salamis. It was within the straight between this island and the mainland that the decisive naval battle of the campaign was fought. The victorious Greeks followed up their advantage with a land battle at Plataea. The Persians retreated.

Although the Athenians returned to a city destroyed, the freedom that they and their fellow Greeks had preserved boosted their confidence and their sense of entitlement. The Athenians banded together with other Greek states to form the Delian League and increased their naval power, to protect Greece from the Persians.

By the middle of the century, the Athenians had turned this League into an Empire.

Using funds from the Delian League, the political leader Pericles oversaw the construction of new temples on the Acropolis. The centrepiece of this building program, the Parthenon, remains an iconic structure and an architectural marvel.

This Golden Age of Athens has resonated through time – influencing the development of art, architecture, politics, science and education from the Renaissance to the modern day.

The power of Athens was opposed by the Spartans and through much of the second half of the 5th century these two powers, and their allies, were at war. Sparta was victorious, but could not retain power. In the fourth century first Thebes was the dominant Greek state and then power passed to Philip

of Macedon. His son, Alexander the Great (356–323 BC), cited revenge for the Persian invasions as justification for his extensive and startlingly successful campaigns in the East.

LIFE

DR ELIZABETH BOLLEN

Childhood

Oh he's a bright boy all right, why when he was only so high, just a little nipper, he was making houses out of clay, and wooden boats, and miniature chariots from scraps of leather and carving pomegranates into jolly little frog-figurines, you've no idea how good he was.

ARISTOPHANES (446–386 BC), CLOUDS 878–881

When a child was born a family could choose to keep or expose the child. On day five or six of life, the child would be carried around the hearth (the amphidromia) and officially accepted into the family. On day 10, a naming ceremony (the dekate) was held, attended by friends and relatives. The gathering celebrated the event with a feast. When a child turned three they would be enrolled in their clan (known as a phratry) which made them Athenian citizens. As citizens, the children could enjoy the new wine in a small wine jug (cat. 1 and 2) at the Anthesteria, a festival in honour of Dionysos.



Cat. 7

It is possible that these chous, which are so well preserved, were placed in the grave of a child, perhaps one who died before being able to enjoy the festivities of the Anthesteria. Terracotta animals (monkeys, horses and goats) and the torso of a jointed terracotta doll all may have been children's toys. Children played with bells and rattles, carts, swings and seesaws. They also played a chasing game called "catch the slave". Old and young alike could enjoy a round of jacks or checkers.

1. Red figure chous

Made in Athens, 425–400 BC

Depicting a child and a dog.

Donated by the Classical Association, 1946. [NM46.49](#)

2. Red figure chous

Made in Athens, 430–420 BC, Attributed to the Crawling Boy Workshop

Class of the Sydney Chous

Depicting a child and a dog.

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860. [NM98.37](#)

3-4. Two terracotta figurines of a seated monkey

Made in Boeotia, Greece, 600–500 BC

Donated by Dr Walter Hess, 1954. [NM54.38](#); [NM54.42](#)

5-6. Two terracotta figurines of a horse with rider

Made in Greece, 800–700 BC

Donated by Dr Walter Hess, 1954. [NM54.46](#)

Donated by Mr Huyer, 1994. [NM94.13](#)

7. Terracotta figurine of a horse

Made in Boeotia, Greece, 550–500 BC

Donated by Dr Walter Hess, 1954. [NM54.47](#)

8. Terracotta figurine of a goat

Made in Boeotia, Greece, 550–500 BC

[NM62.891](#)

9. Body of a terracotta doll

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860. [NM66.113](#)

Education

As soon as the children have learnt to read, the master makes the whole class (all sitting on their stools) repeat aloud various verses from the classic poets, which they are then obliged to learn by heart ... Later the music teacher, as soon as his pupils can handle their instruments properly, will introduce them to other fine works of literature in the field of lyric poetry. At a still later stage the children are passed on to the physical education teacher.

PLATO (428–348 BC), PROTAGORAS 325 C–E

In Sparta the state oversaw the education of both boys and girls, but in Athens, the education of children was at the discretion of their parents. Wealthier families would employ tutors to teach reading, arithmetic, literature – including Homer, music and athletics to their sons. Rhetoric, the ability to speak persuasively in public, was a focus of education as it was an important skill in Athenian democracy.

The majority of girls and boys would learn life skills and a trade from their parents.

Education could be furthered by following the teachings of a philosopher – a person who loved wisdom. Teaching informally in the marketplace of Athens, Socrates questioned the opinions and values of normal Athenians, leading them to consider other views.

Such questioning of accepted norms was controversial. In 399 BC Socrates was put on trial for corrupting the youth of Athens and of failing to worship the gods properly. He was found guilty and forced to take a lethal dose of hemlock.

His pupil Plato, who along with Xenophon recorded many of Socrates' teachings, founded the first philosophical school – the Academy, in 388 BC.

10. Red figure pelike

Made in Athens, 450–425 BC

Attributed to the Peleus Painter

A seated, bearded, older man with staff instructs a boy in the art of public speaking. On the reverse, a young man walking, with staff.

[NM51.15](#)

11. Black figure pelike

Made in Athens, 500–475 BC

A standing man plays a kithara. Beside him a seated man has his mouth open to show that he is singing. On the reverse, a man plays the aulos (a double flute).

[NM47.7](#)

12. Greek ostrakon

Made in Thebes, Upper Egypt, 20 BC–AD 395

Deissman no. 83. Nile silt sherd with writing exercise including the beginning of the Greek alphabet Α Β Γ Δ Ε (?).

Donated by R Gillespie, 1936.

[NM36.78](#)

13. Papyrus, preserving a fragment of text

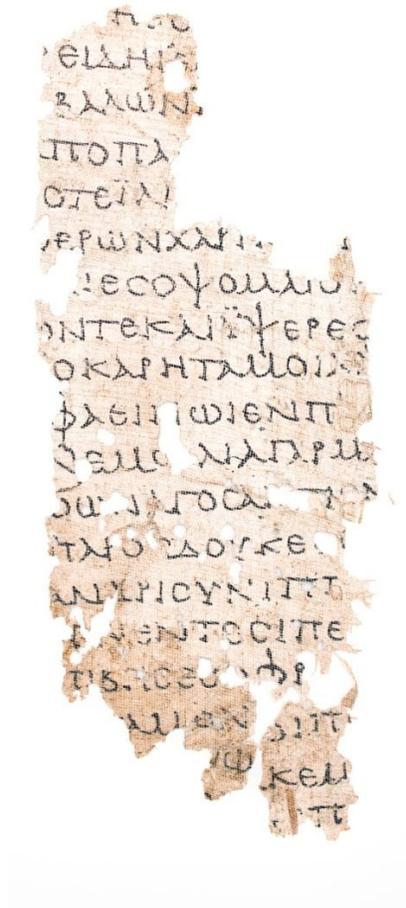
from Homer's Iliad, Book V, 206–224

Made in Egypt, 2nd century AD

Excavated near Oxyrhynchus in Egypt, 1896–1907

The fragment preserves part of a conversation between the Trojan leader Aeneas and Pandarus, the son of Lycaon. Aeneas urges Pandarus to kill Diomedes who is, with Athena's aid, wreaking havoc among the Trojans.

[NM39.5](#)



Cat. 13

Marriage

Of all the occasions for a banquet, none is more conspicuous or talked about than a wedding – a wedding-feast advertises itself by the shouted marriage cry, the torch ... and the double pipe ... even the women stand in their doorways to watch and admire.

PLUTARCH (AD 46–120), SYMPOSIACS, BOOK IV

Well, Socrates, it is true, I don't spend my time at home – as far as the management of the household is concerned, my wife is certainly perfectly capable of looking after that.

XENOPHON (431–354 BC) ISOMACHOS TO SOCRATES IN OIKONOMIKOS

When a woman married she left her father's home and went to live in her husband's home, along with his parents, his brothers and their wives. The wedding ceremony marked this transition with a

procession from the father's home to the husbands. The bridal couple rode together in a cart or chariot accompanied by friends and relations.

The black figure hydria (water jug) (cat. 14) shows a wedding procession, perhaps of the mythical pair Peleus and Thetis, parents of Achilles. The couple stand on a chariot and the woman, with white skin, pulls her veil out to shield her face, a typical modest gesture of the new wife.

The lebes gamikos is a pot specifically for the wedding ceremony. Most likely it held water for the nuptial bath. Both husband and wife washed in sacred water to mark the transition from their old life to their new life together. The lebes gamikos (cat. 15) shows women holding gifts for the bride, which she received from friends and family in her new home on the day after the wedding.

It was the ideal for a Greek woman to remain inside the house, or so the written sources tell us. This may have been possible in some wealthy families, but many women would have left their houses daily, to collect water in a hydria from the public fountain houses for household use, to work on the family farm, to purchase provisions and so on.

A main occupation of women was to weave cloth for the household and, in some cases, for sale. Yarn was spun using a drop spindle weighted with a spindle whorl (cat. 16-21). The looms were set up within the interior courtyard of the house, or in adjacent rooms where the light was best. Greek women worked on vertical looms and the vertical warp threads were weighted with clay weights, called loom weights (cat. 22-24). Unfortunately very little fabric has been preserved in the archaeological record, but the painted clothing on sculptures and the decoration of fabrics on figured pottery hint at the elaborate designs that were produced.

14. Black figure hydria

Made in Athens, attributed to the Leagros Group, 525–500 BC Wedding scene. Bride and groom, probably Peleus and Thetis, in a chariot pulled by four horses. They are accompanied by Apollo (?) playing the lyre, led by Hermes and greeted by Demeter (?). On the shoulder, Herakles fights the Cretan bull.

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860. [NM98.24](#)

15. Red figure lebes gamikos

Made in Athens, 400–375 BC Women, including women with wings, holding chests, wicker baskets and an oil vessel.

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860. [NM98.27](#)

16. Decorated spindle whorl

Found at the Little Palace, Knossos, Greece

Donated by the family of Professor W J Woodhouse, 1948. [NM48.401](#)

17-18. Decorated spindle whorls

Donated by the family of Professor W J Woodhouse, 1948. [NM48.402.1](#); [NM48.402.2](#)

19-21. Decorated spindle whorls

Found on Lesbos, Greece

Donated by Dr Winifred Lamb, 1949. [NM49.69.1](#); [NM49.69.2](#); [NM49.69.3](#)

22. Loom weight

From the Neolithic site of Dimini, Greece, 3700–3000 BC. [NM52.50](#)

23-24. Loom weights

1550–1450 BC

Donated by the family of Professor W J Woodhouse, 1948. [NM48.415.1](#); [NM48.415.2](#)

FESTIVALS

DR ELIZABETH BOLLEN

That day was Pallas Athena's festival and virgins carried, in the accustomed way, in baskets, flower-crowned, upon their heads the sacred vessels to her hilltop shrine.

OVID (43 BC – AD 18), METAMORPHOSES 2. 709

We fled and escaped from being torn apart by the Bacchae, but they, with unarmed hands, sprang on the heifers browsing the grass and you might see one rending asunder a fattened lowing calf, while others tore apart cows.

EURIPIDES (480–406 BC), BACCHAE 735–736

Gods

In Greece there were many gods to worship. Most well-known and powerful were the 12 Olympian gods, but there were also lesser gods, spirits, personifications and heroes that could be approached for different causes. The stories of Greek gods show how they fought amongst themselves, had feuds and love affairs, meddled in human affairs and looked after their favourites.

Greek gods were capricious and best kept on side. The ancient Greeks did this by giving them attention, by worshipping them, sacrificing animals to them and bringing them gifts.

Zeus – father of the gods and men

25. Greek silver coin (tetradrachm)

Macedonia – Philip II, 359–336 BC or posthumous

Head of Zeus on obverse.

[NM2004.665](#)

26. Greek silver coin (tetradrachm)

Aradus mint – Posthumous Alexander III, c.316–301 BC

Zeus enthroned holding eagle and sceptre on reverse.

[NM2004.483](#)

Athena – goddess of war, wisdom and crafts

27-28. Greek silver coins (tetradrachms)

Athens, 449–400 BC

Head of Athena on obverse. Owl, olive sprig and crescent moon on reverse.

[NM2003.250.6](#); [NM2003.250.2](#)

Athena with Poseidon (god of the sea)

29. Red figure krater

Made in Athens, 400–375 BC, Attributed to the Oinomanos Painter

Athena, with helmet and spear, and Poseidon, with trident, stand to the right. At centre, the hero Theseus is seated behind the altar of Zeus Meilichios. To the left stand Phorbas, his charioteer, and his friend Perithoos.

[NM49.4](#)

Apollo – god of music, healing and prophecy

30. Greek gold coin (stater)

Macedonia – Philip II, 359–336 BC

Head of Apollo on obverse.

[NM2004.720](#)

Aphrodite – goddess of love and beauty

31. Marble figurine of Aphrodite

Made in Greece, Hellenistic Period, 323–31 BC

Donated by Professor EG Waterhouse. [NM62.822](#)

Hephaistos – god of metallurgy, craftsmen and fire

32. Red figure cylindrical lidded pyxis

Made in Apulia, Italy, 350–325 BC, Attributed to the Darius Painter

Head of Hephaistos on lid, bearded and wreathed. In front of his face is a pair of tongs.

Donated by Professor Alexander Cambitoglou, 1997.

[NM97.188.1–2](#)



Cat. 31

Wild Women

Bacchae or maenads (female followers of Dionysos, god of wine and theatre) exist in Greek stories, but they were also a real part of Greek life. There were festivals to Dionysos throughout Greece that were attended exclusively by women. For the duration of the festival, the women could abandon the restrictions of daily life. These women achieved states of the ecstatic as they became possessed by the god. In artistic representations maenads are often shown with the male followers of Dionysos, called satyrs, who subvert the normal accepted behavior and appearance of a good Greek man.

33. Black figure lekythos

Made in Athens, 525–500 BC

Two satyrs and two maenads, grapevine.

[NM2007.135](#)

34. Red figure bell krater

Made in Athens, 375–350 BC, Attributed to the Retorted Painter

Satyrs and maenads in an ecstatic state, dancing. The white maenad holds a tympanon (hand drum).

[NM46.39](#)

35. Black figure skyphos

Made in Athens, 500–475 BC, Attributed to the CHC Group

Hephaistos riding on an ithyphallic donkey, flanked on either side by satyrs and maenads.

Donated by the Classical Association, 1946. [NM46.44](#)

Sacrifice

In Greece the altar, which stood outside, was a focal point of activity at a sanctuary. The animal would have its throat slit. The carcass would be butchered and the meat burnt on the pyre. Once the gods had their fill (on the smoke of the burning long bones and fat), the gathered worshippers would feast on the meat.

The cult statue was a powerful representation of the god. Temples were built to house the statue. Each Greek city had a patron god, but there were also numerous shrines, altars and temples for other gods and heroes.

Terracotta figurines were popular dedications at sanctuaries. They are smaller versions of the larger and richer sculptural dedications. Some figurines show the individual presenting a dedication to the god, some might represent a dedication or a sacrificial victim, such as a pig. Some figurines are representations of the god or goddess themselves.

The plank figurines (cat. 43-45) may be representations of wooden effigies that were carried in a procession to the goddess Hera (wife of Zeus, goddess of marriage) at Mount Kitharion in Boeotia, where they were burnt on the pyre alongside the sacrificed animals.



Cat. 36

36. Red figure lekythos

Made in Athens, 480–475 BC, Attributed to the Icarus Painter

A herm (a stone pillar with a sculpted head of Hermes on top, and genitalia) standing beside an altar.

[NM51.14](#)

37. Terracotta figurine of a standing woman holding a phiale (a ritual bowl for pouring libations)

500–400 BC

[NM62.769](#)

38. Moulded pot in the form of a woman holding a dove

540–520 BC

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860. [NM66.90](#)

39. Terracotta figurine of a dove

500–400 BC

Donated by Mr Huyer, 1994. [NM94.12](#)

40. Terracotta figurine of a pig

Made in Greece, 500–400 BC

Donated by Dr Walter Hess, 1954. [NM54.40](#)

41-42. Two Terracotta figurines of a seated woman or goddess

500–400 BC

Donated by Dr Walter Hess, 1954. [NM54.8](#)

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860. [NM66.100](#)

43-45. Plank figurines of a standing woman or goddess

Made in Boeotia, Greece, 575–500 BC

Donated by Mr Huyer, 1994. [NM51.4](#); [NM62.788](#); [NM94.14](#)

Processions

The continuous sculpted frieze of 114 panels, 160 metres long, that runs around all four sides of the Parthenon shows a religious procession. First, horsemen attend to their horses, then they are in full canter, joined by chariots, women carrying oinochoai (jugs) and phialai (bowls) for libations and men carrying baskets filled with food, hydriai (water jugs), or leading the sacrificial bulls, who are uneasy and pull from their guides. On the east side, the gods are shown seated, while in the centre an adult and a child hold a piece of cloth between them.

The crowd makes its way to the sanctuary, where the dedications will be laid, the prayers said and the animals sacrificed at the altar. The gods will receive their portion, before the people feast.

In the 1890s, James Stuart, who travelled to Athens and recorded many of the sculptures in situ, suggested that this frieze depicted the Panathenaic procession. There are some problems with this interpretation, some differences between the representation in the frieze and written descriptions of the procession. Why have the foot soldiers been replaced by cavalry and where is the wheeled ship that was meant to display the peplos as it sails on the way to the Acropolis?

Other interpretations have been presented, but none wholly satisfying. The frieze does, however, beautifully capture the many different people, the movement and the expectancy of a religious procession.

Plaster casts of the Parthenon frieze by sculptor John Herring, 1811

Based on Elgin's marbles (now in the British Museum), those still in Athens and others preserved in Jacques Carrey's drawings of 1674.

46-47. West Frieze

The beginning of the processions with riders attending to their horses, horses rearing and some already moving. [NM2008.48.25](#); [NM2008.48.36](#)

48-50. North frieze

Showing sacrificial victims (bulls and rams), three men carrying offering trays, four men carrying water hydriai, musicians playing the aulos (double flute) and the kythera. [NM2008.48.34](#); [NM2008.48.31](#): [NM2008.48.47](#)

51-56. South frieze

Horse riders. [NM2008.48.16](#)

Horse riders and chariot. [NM2008.48.11](#)

Chariots, followed by the sacrificial procession, elderly men who carry olive branches, kithara players and sacrificial victims. [NM2008.48.43](#); [NM2008.48.28](#); [NM2008.48.30](#); [NM2008.48.50](#)

57-59. East Frieze

Women with phialai (bowls) and an oinochoe (jug). [NM2008.48.26](#)

At left, some of the ancestral heroes of Athens. At right, women handing over the basket containing items for the sacrifice. [NM2008.48.48](#)

The 'Peplos' scene, in which the cloth of the peplos is held between a priest and a young boy. An older woman turns towards two younger girls who carry stools above their heads. The scene is flanked by seated gods, on the left are Zeus and Hera with Isis standing behind and to the right are Athena and Hephaistos. [NM2008.48.35](#)

Ritual Flogging

These lead figurines and miniature pots were dedicated to the goddess Artemis Orthia and collected by W.J. Woodhouse, Nicholson Museum Curator, during a visit to the Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Sparta in the early twentieth century. The sanctuary was established in the ninth century and by 700 BC a temple had been constructed. The sanctuary became famous in the Roman period, when large numbers of tourists came to watch boys being flogged at the altar until they bled and sometimes until they died. Although Roman authors provide various explanations, but the reason for the blood-letting and the date at which it became a ritual practice both remain uncertain.

60-80. Votive lead figurines

Made in Greece and dedicated at the Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, Sparta, 700–600 BC

Donated by the family of Professor W J Woodhouse. [NM48.316.9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), [15](#), [16](#), [17](#), [18](#), [19](#), [20](#), [21](#), [22](#), [23](#), [24](#), [25](#), [26](#), [27](#), [28](#), [29](#)

81-90. Votive miniature vessels

Made in Greece and dedicated at the Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, Sparta, 700–600 BC

Donated by the family of Professor W J Woodhouse. [NM48.310.1](#), [NM48.310.2](#); [NM48.332.1](#), [NM48.332.2](#); [NM48.343.1](#), [NM48.343.2](#); [NM48.343.4](#), [NM48.343.5](#), [NM48.343.6](#); [NM48.343.8](#)

WAR

DR ELIZABETH BOLLEN

I take no account of a man for his prowess at running or wrestling ...no man is good in war unless he can take the sight of bodily slaughter and is able, at close quarters, to lunge at the enemy.

TYRTAIOS (7TH CENTURY BC), FRAGMENT 12

Warriors

War was immortalised in the heroic tales of Homer. *The Iliad* (which tells of the tenth year of the Trojan War) and the *Odyssey* (which relates the many adventures of Odysseus) formed part of the Epic Cycle. Many other stories from the Cycle, written by less revered poets, have not survived.

Homer's *Iliad* focuses on the wrath of Achilles, first at the loss of the slave girl Briseis and then at the death of Patroklos. Patroklos entered the fray disguised in Achilles armour. He killed many, including the Lycian king and son of Zeus, Sarpedon (cat. 91). Hector, believing that he was fighting Achilles, killed Patroklos. This sent Achilles into a wild fury. He killed Hector and dragged his body around the walls of Troy.

Many of the stories of Troy, including that of the Trojan horse, the trick which won the war for the Greeks, are not recorded in Homer. Some are preserved in plays, or retold in later texts, others survive in the visual arts. Here, pots depict two of those myths: Achilles ambushes the young prince Troilos (cat. 92) and Achilles slays the Amazonian queen Penthesilea (cat. 94).



Cat. 91

91. Black figure olpe

Made in Athens, 500-475 BC, Attributed to the Painter of Vatican G49

Hypnos and Thanatos (Sleep and Death) lay the body of Sarpedon on his funeral pyre.

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860. [NM98.150](#)

92. Red figure bell krater

Made in Campania, 350-325 BC, Attributed to the Libation Painter

Achilles, fully armed, creeps out from behind the fountain house as Troilos, unaware that he is about to be attacked, watches his horse.

[NM69.10](#)

93. Black figure oinochoe

Made in Euboea, 550–525 BC

Troilos tries to escape on horseback as Achilles runs up behind him.

[NM85.1](#)

94. Black figure neck amphora

Made in Athens, 520–500 BC, Attributed to the Painter of Villa Giulia M482

The Greek hero Achilles fights the Queen of the Amazons, Penthesilea.

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860. [NM98.25](#)



Cat. 92

Battles

The Grecian navy circled them around with fierce assault; and rushing from its height The inverted vessel sinks: the sea no more Wears its accustomed aspect, with foul wrecks And blood disfigured; floating carcasses Roll on the rocky shores.

AESCHYLUS (525–455 BC), THE PERSIANS, 435–440

War existed as a very real, everyday experience in ancient Greece. The fifth century began with three invasions of the Persians, a foreign force who were repelled after the heroic stand of the Athenians and Plataeans at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC, the Spartans at the pass of Thermopylae and the naval Battle of Salamis in 480 BC, all recorded by Herodotus.

War also occurred regularly between Greek cities. The Peloponnesian War, a series of conflicts between Athens and Sparta and their allies, ran throughout much of the second half of the fifth century. Sparta was dominant on land and Athens was dominant at sea. Both avoided fighting on the others' turf. As a result, much of the war played out in sieges.

Spartan forces regularly entered Athenian territory, forcing the population within the walls of the city. The long walls, which connected the city to the port at Piraeus, provided an access corridor for supplies and food and prevented the Spartans from starving the Athenians out. But the overcrowding and unsanitary conditions contributed to the outbreak of plague, which in 430–426 BC devastated the Athenian population.

Sparta was victorious after they set up a permanent garrison on Athenian territory and blocked access to the silver mines that had funded the Athenian war effort.

95. Black figure skyphos

Made in Athens, 520–500 BC, Attributed to the CHC Group

Warriors fighting, flanked by onlookers and sphinxes.

[NM47.16](#)

96. Pot in the shape of a helmeted warrior's head

Made in Rhodes, 600–575 BC

Donated by the Classical Association, 1946. [NM47.1](#)

97. Black figure aryballos

Made in Corinth, 580–540 BC

Donated by the National Archaeological Museum of Athens 1948. [NM48.10](#)

98. Black figure lekythos

Made in Athens, 500–475 BC, Attributed to the Group of Hoplite leaving home

Departure of a hoplite.

Donated by the National Archaeological Museum of Athens 1948. [NM48.11](#)

99. Black figure lekythos

Made in Athens, 525–500 BC

Donated by Ms Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 1984. [NM84.99](#)

100. Black figure lekythos

Made in Athens, 525–500 BC

Warriors fighting, with onlookers.

[NM49.7](#)



Cat. 96

Hoplites & Triremes

Go tell the Spartans, passerby that here, obedient to their law, we lie

SIMONEDES (556–468 BC), EPITAPH TO THE SPARTANS WHO DIED AT THE BATTLE OF THERMOPYLAE

Greek citizens served their city in the army. An elite group formed a cavalry which carried out raids on enemy forces. The majority of fighting was undertaken by foot soldiers, called hoplites, who were armed with a shield and a spear and fought in a tight-knit unit called a phalanx.

Each citizen had to provide their own equipment. The wealthier hoplite would dress in a bronze breast plate (cuirass) and helmet with cheek plates, and might also wear bronze greaves. The disciplined style of fighting was perfected by the Spartans, whose social structure revolved around the production of great warriors, who found the upmost glory in dying in battle.

In the fifth century an Athenian citizen might be drafted into the navy. In the boats, called triremes, the citizen would sit alongside 200 others, including non-citizens and immigrants, in cramped conditions, each holding their own oar. The main tactic of naval battles was to ram the enemy ship to damage the hull and sink it. Typically five archers and ten marines were present to board enemy boats but more importantly to defend the oarsmen from attack.

101. Black figure amphora

Made in Athens, attributed to Sakonides, 575–550 BC

Two horses and riders.

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860

[NM98.18](#)

102. Bronze arrow head

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860

[NMR453](#)

103. Bronze Pilos Helmet

Made in South Italy, 4th century BC

[NM82.29](#)



Cat. 103

SYMPOSIUM

DR ELIZABETH BOLLEN

When the tables had been taken away and they had poured a libation and sung a hymn, a Syracusan joined the revel. He had a good flute girl and a dancing girl who could do acrobatics and a very pretty boy who played the harp and danced very well.

XENOPHON (431–354 BC), SYMPOSIUM, 2.1

But whenever men of gentle breeding and culture are gathered together ... they are quite capable of entertaining themselves ... with their own voices, talking and listening in their turn, and always decently, even when they have drunk much wine.

PLATO (428–348 BC), PROTAGORAS, 347C–D

The symposium was a drinking party attended by Greek men. An intimate affair (usually between 7–15 attendees), the men would recline on couches, drink wine, eat the food laid out on the tables in front of them and be entertained by philosophical discussions or by singing, music and games provided by their fellow diners or by hired male and female entertainers. Such a scene is painted on the krater (cat. 104) where the furniture of the symposium, the drinkers, a singing lyre player and a female escort are depicted.

The krater was the central vessel of the symposium; into its large bowl wine was poured from an amphora and mixed with the water from a hydria. Good Greeks always mixed their wine; not to do so was a sign of a barbarian. Using smaller jugs, such as the oinochoe to dip into the krater, each member of the party was served the wine. The cups used were delicate, broad and shallow stemmed bowls that were cradled in the hand. On the krater (cat. 104), one of the men is holding his cup upright by the handle – he is playing a game called kottabos, where the player flicked wine out of his cup to hit a target.

104. Red figure column krater

Made in Athens, attributed to the Naples Painter, Found in Bari, Italy, 450–425 BC

Symposium scene with four diners reclining on two couches accompanied by a standing female. In front are tables and a foot stool. One diner plays a lyre, one plays kottabos. The other side of the krater depicts two draped youths and a woman.

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson. [NM46.42](#)

105. Red figure hydria

Made in Athens, attributed to the Chrysis Painter, 425–410 BC

Eriphyle is seated. Polyneikes stands in front of her. In one hand he holds a box, in the other he holds out a necklace. The necklace will entice Eriphyle to betray her husband. On either side of them stand Eriphyle's female attendants.

Purchased with funds from Mr W G Ketts, 1954. [NM54.3](#)

106. Red figure oinochoe

Made in Athens, attributed to the Bull painter, 425–400 BC
Two women, one holds a box (kista), the other holds a fillet.
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson. [NM98.29](#)

107. Black figure amphora

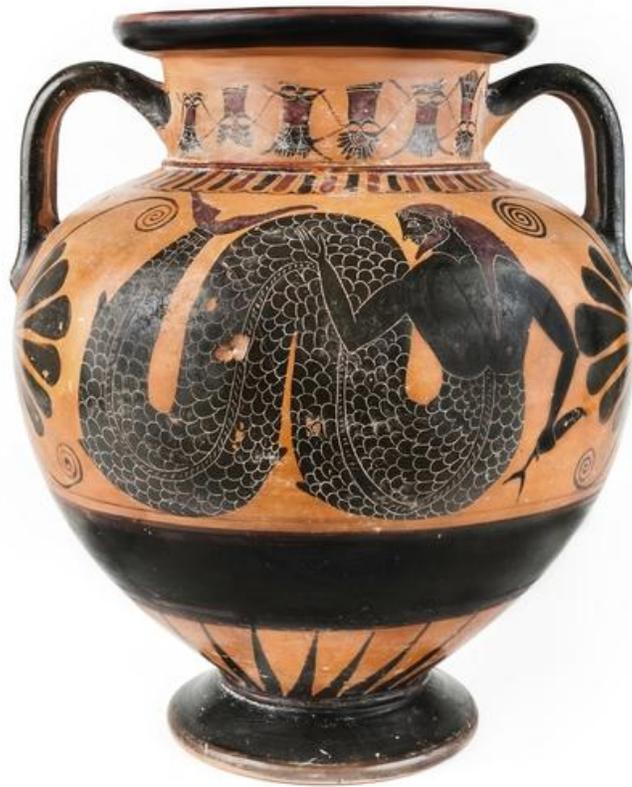
Made in Athens, 550–525 BC
Depicts Triton
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson. [NM98.20](#)

108. Black figure band cup

Made in Athens
A pair of roosters with two draped young men on either side.
[NM51.11](#)

109. Red figure cup

Made in Athens, attributed to the Brygos Painter, 470 BC
A young man seated on a chair (klismos) playing an aulos (double pipe). The animal skin hanging on the wall beside him is likely to be the case for his instrument.
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson. [NM98.22](#)



Cat. 107

ATHLETICS

DR ELIZABETH BOLLEN

Know what you see when you gaze upon this: it is Theognetos, boy-champion of Olympia, who skilfully steered his course to victory in the wrestling ring. Most beautiful to behold, most formidable to challenge, here is as youth who crowned the city of his good forefathers.

GREEK ANTHOLOGY, 16.2 INSCRIPTION ACCOMPANYING A FIFTH CENTURY STATUE

The athletes of ancient Greece came together to compete at the four Panhellenic Games at Delphi, Isthmia, Nemea and most famously at Olympia. Footraces (200, 400, 800 metres), horse and chariot races, wrestling, boxing, the pankration (a combination of boxing and wrestling), and the pentathlon (discus, long jump, javelin, running and wrestling) were all contested. There was a 400 metre race where the competitors dressed in armor.

The prizes at the Games were simple wreaths but the glory that accompanied victory was great and was often commemorated by the dedication of a statue of the athlete in the sanctuary. The athletes trained and performed naked. Capturing the perfection of the male body was a preoccupation of art in Classical Greece. The Townley discobolos is a beautiful example of this, as is the Nicholson Hermes (NM35.120). The same is more mundanely captured in the terracotta figurine (cat. 113).

110. Black figure neck amphora

Made in Athens, attributed to the Northampton Painter, 525–500 BC

Horse and rider flanked by athletes. The one on the left has an aryballos (perfumed oil vase) looped around his wrist. The perfumed oil would be applied to the athlete after exercise. The opposite side shows Dionysos flanked by satyrs. Donated through the Hon R P Meagher bequest, 2011. [NM2012.5](#)

111. Bronze strigil

Used by an athlete to clean himself. The strigil scraped the excess oil off his skin along with sweat and dirt.

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson 1860. [NMR474](#)

112. Aryballos

Made in Corinth, 625–600 BC

Perfumed oil vessel. Swan flanked by griffin and panther, solid, incised rosettes as filling ornament. Acquired through the Friends of the Nicholson Museum, 1947. [NM47.8](#)



Cat. 110

113. Terracotta figurine of a youth

Made in Boeotia, Greece. 350 BC

Donated through the Alan Richard Renshaw bequest, 1976. [NM76.3](#)

114. Black figure white ground lekythos

Made in Athens, attributed to the Athena Painter, 490 BC

Depicting an athlete holding the halteres (weights) and preparing for the long jump, accompanied by a person playing the double flute (aulos) and his trainer who holds a staff. An athlete competing in the long jump did not, as in modern times, complete a run-up. Rather he stood with his two feet together, swung his arms forward with his hands holding a 2kg weight (called halteres), jumped and swung his arms back to provide a counterweight. Experiments have shown that from a standing jump, the halteres increase the length of the jump and the steadiness of the landing.

[NM51.12](#)



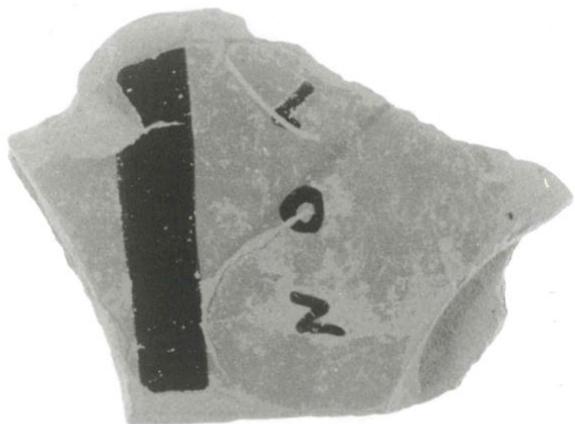
Cat. 114

115-116. Two fragments from a Panathenaic amphora

Made in Athens, attributed to the Achilles Painter, 450–425 BC

One fragment shows the lower part of the dress and front foot of Athena, the other depicts a column and part of the standard inscription of a Panathenaic amphora [AQENEQEN ATH] LON “one of the prizes of Athens”. Amphorae, filled with oil were presented to the winners at the Panathenaic festival in Athens. One side depicted the event at which the individual was victorious, the other side depicted Athena.

Donated by Professor Alexander Cambitoglou, 1997. [NM97.74](#); [NM97.76](#)



Cat. 115



Cat. 116

THEATRE

MICHAEL TURNER

Dionysos

Theatre in Classical Athens was entertainment with a moral message. It was also a celebration of the great god Dionysos to whom it was sacred and in whose honour it was performed. Each spring, over five days, tragedies, comedies, and satyr plays, were performed in the great open air Theatre of Dionysos in front of an audience of 15–20,000. These five days were part of the Great Dionysia, a festival central to the Dionysiac Mysteries.

As god of theatre, wine and death, Dionysos was central to Greek religious belief. He was the god of ekstasis (ecstasy, literally 'standing outside'), the altered state where one left one's body – a concept implicit in acting (the putting on of the mask to become somebody else), drinking wine (leading if not properly done to inebriation), and death. Belief in the god, initiation into his mysteries, enabled the reversal of these out of body experiences – the taking off of the mask, sobering up, and return to life in the afterlife.

Our main source of information for theatre in the ancient world are the surviving plays and fragments of especially Aeschylus (c.525–455 BC), Sophocles (c.497–405 BC), Euripides (c.480–406 BC) and Menander (c.341–290 BC), as well as the Poetics of Aristotle (384–322 BC).



Cat. 117

The Death of Pentheus

117. Red figure oinochoe

Made in Apulia, South Italy, attributed to the Group of Vienna 4013, 375–350 BC

Pentheus defends himself from attack by two Bacchantes, probably his mother Agave and one of her sisters, either Ino or Autonoe.

[NM73.2](#)

The consequences of denying Dionysos are dramatically retold in the play by Euripides (480–406 BC), the *Bacchae*, first performed in 405 BC. *Women, I bring you Pentheus, the man who mocked me, denied my sacred mysteries, the man who mocks you now. Take him for his crimes! Agave, his own mother, like a priestess with her sacrifice, fell on him first ...He reached out his hand to touch her cheek and cried out: 'Mother! Mother! Look! It's me, Pentheus, your own son! ...Spare me, Mother, I beg you! ...*

Bacchae translation from R. Robertson, *Euripides Bacchae* (2014)

Dionysos and an actor

118. Red figure bell krater

Made in Paestum, South Italy, attributed to Python, 350–325 BC

Dionysos followed by an actor in a mask and dressed as an elderly satyr. Half man half goat, satyrs were the servants of Dionysos. In the background, the mask of a slave from Comedy hangs from a wall.

[NM47.4](#)



Cat. 118

Tragedy

Tragedy represents people as better than they are.

ARISTOTLE (384–322 BC), *POETICS* 2

A tragedy should not be epic, by which I mean made up of many stories. It would be impossible for example to dramatise the Iliad as a whole. All who have tried have failed. Far better to take a single story from such epics like Euripides does, or as Aeschylus does with Niobe.

ARISTOTLE (384–322 BC), *POETICS* 18

Two of the most important elements in the emotional effect of tragedy are anagnorisis (discovery) and peripeteia (reversal).

Anagnorisis (discovery) is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing either friendship or hatred in those who are destined for good or ill fortune ... for example, Orestes revealed to Iphigenia through the sending of the letter.

Peripeteia (reversal) is a change of the situation into the opposite, a change that is moreover probable or inevitable.

For example, the old man who reveals Oedipus's real parentage to him, thinking he is doing the right thing in all good faith, but with disastrous consequences.

ARISTOTLE (384–322 BC), *POETICS* 6–11

Iphigenia at Tauris

119. Red figure amphora

Made in Campania, South Italy, attributed to the Libation Painter, 350–325 BC

Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon was sacrificed by her father to bring wind to take his ships to Troy. Unknown to all, the goddess rescued the girl and made her priestess of her temple at Tauris on the Black Sea. Local tradition meant that all shipwrecked foreigners be sacrificed at this temple.

Many years later, her brother Orestes and his friend Pylades were shipwrecked off Tauris and brought to the temple to be sacrificed. Refusing to say who they were, and not recognising her, Iphigenia nevertheless agreed to sacrifice just one of them if the other would return to Argos with a letter for her brother (Orestes!) letting him know that she was alive and well. With the giving of the letter (described above by Aristotle) recognition followed and all escaped.

[NM51.17](#)



Cat. 119

The Death of Niobe

120. Red figure hydra

Made in Campania, South Italy, attributed to the Libation Painter, 350–325 BC

Niobe had between 10 and 14 children. She risked the wrath of the gods by saying that she was therefore a better mother than Leto, the mother of Apollo and Artemis. Leto sent her children to kill Niobe's. In grief, Niobe stopped eating and gradually died. Her death is shown as petrification, literally 'turning to stone'. When dead she will have become a marble statue in her own funerary monument. Kneeling on the steps is her father Tantalos, begging her to eat the food on the steps of the monument. Above, Apollo and his mother Leto watch.

[NM71.1](#)



Cat. 120

Comedy

Comedy represents people as worse than they are.

ARISTOTLE (384–322 BC), POETICS 2

Comedy consists of some mishap or ugliness that does not cause pain or disaster, an obvious example being the comic mask which is ugly and distorted but not painful.

ARISTOTLE (384–322 BC), POETICS 5

The Gluttony of Herakles

121. Red figure bell krater

Made in Apulia, South Italy, attributed to the Lecce Painter, 375–350 BC

The gluttony of Herakles. Two comic actors wear masks and 'stage naked' costumes with padded bellies and buttocks and with attached long, flaccid penises or phalloi.

[NM88.2](#)

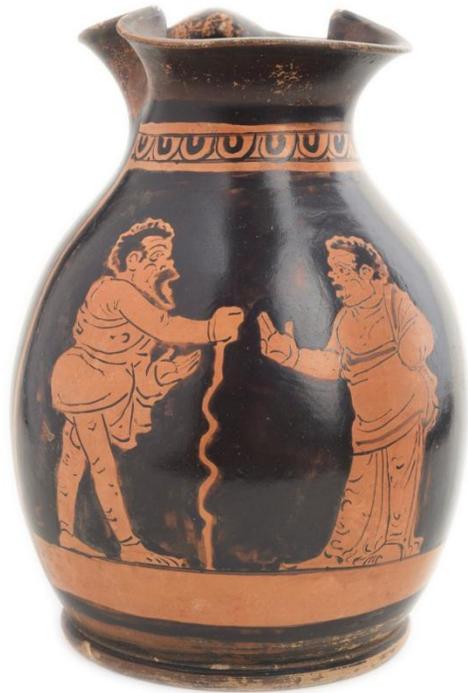
The Hen-Pecked Husband

122. Red figure oinochoe

Made in Apulia, South Italy, attributed to the Truro Painter, 375–350 BC

Two masked comic actors stand facing each other. They represent the comic situation of a man in confrontation with his domineering wife. The unusually thick band below the actors indicates the stage on which they are standing.

[NM75.2](#)



Cat. 122

Phaedra and the Death of Hippolytos

123. Red figure bell krater

Made in Lucania, South Italy, attributed to the Creusa Painter, 410–390 BC

Two comic 'female' actors in a parody of tragedy. A mistress lies back on her couch in obvious distress as her nurse tells her some bad news. Professor Richard Green identifies the scene as Phaedra hearing of the death of Hippolytos. The tragic story is known from the surviving *Hippolytos* of Euripides. Presented by James Ede of London in honour of Emeritus Professor J. Richard Green, 2013.

[NM2013.2](#)



Cat. 123

DEATH

DR ELIZABETH BOLLEN

What sweet relief to sufferers it is to weep, to mourn, lament, and chant the dirge that tells of grief!

EURIPIDES (c.480–406 BC), THE TROJAN WOMEN, 608–609

The bodies of dying men lay one upon another, and half-dead creatures reeled about the streets and gathered round all the fountains in their longing for water.

THUCYDIDES (460–395 BC), THE HISTORY OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR, BOOK 2.7

Briseis, fair as Aphrodite, when she saw the mangled body of Patroklos, flung herself upon it and cried aloud, tearing her breast, her neck, and her lovely face with both her hands.

HOMER, ILIAD, BOOK XIX, 282

In Ancient Greece, when a member of your family died, there were rituals to follow so that the pollution caused by the death did not linger. It was the duty of the women of the household, to wash, anoint with oil and dress the body for its final journey. Friends and relatives would visit the house and mourn: singing dirges, pulling at their hair and clothes and beating their breasts.

Ancient Athens suffered a high infant mortality rate, not only through the practice of exposing unwanted or weak babies, but also through the many complications of childbirth and the vulnerability of young children to illness and injury. Once past childhood it is estimated that the average life expectancy was around 35–40 years. A major threat to longevity for males was war, for females, childbirth.

Before dawn, a funerary procession would convey the dead to their final resting place. The cemeteries were outside the city walls, lining the main roads leading out of the town.

Placed often directly in the rectangular pit, the dead individual was laid out on their back. Everyday items would be placed beside them for use in the afterlife – a cup, bowl and jug – along with personal items – a mirror, weaponry, jewellery. Terracotta figurines and perfume vessels are common inclusions. Often a coin would be placed in the mouth of the deceased.

The coin was to pay the ferryman Charon. He took the psyche (spirit) across the river Styx to the Underworld where Hades and his wife Persephone ruled. According to Homer (8th century BC) the Underworld was not a happy place and the dead had a shadowy existence. By the Classical period mystery religions, like the cult of Demeter at Eleusis, offered the initiated a joyful existence in the next life.

Many Athenians were buried in family plots. The family could choose to erect a tombstone (stele) to commemorate the deceased. The placement of these on the roadside of the plot gained maximum public exposure, but for archaeologists it is a frustrating practice as it is difficult to associate the tombstone with a particular skeleton.

During the Peloponnesian War, the citizens of Athens were often crowded within the defensive walls of the city. In such crowded conditions a plague broke out (430–426 BC) and quickly spread through the population killing many. Thucydides tells how the city was completely overwhelmed as whole families died in quick succession leaving no one to carry out the rituals and see to the burial of the dead. With corpses piling up in the street, the only practical option was mass burial. In 1994–5, during the excavations associated with the building of the Athens metro, one such mass grave was discovered. It contained at least 90 individuals.

124. White ground lekythos

Made in Athens, 450–425 BC

Tomb scene. Female at left approaches a grave marker. She is carrying an offering basket. To the right is a cloaked male figure.

Donated by the Former Archaeology Students and Association of the Friends of the Nicholson Museum, 1952. [NM53.27](#)

125. White ground lekythos

Made in Athens, 500–425 BC, attributed to the Thanatos Painter

Bearded man draped in a red cloak and carrying a staff. On the other side is the faded outline of a woman.

Donated in memory of Max Le Petit, 1947. [NM47.20](#)

126. Etruscan bronze mirror

Made in Italy, 4th–2nd century BC

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860. [NMR.505](#)

127. Bronze bracelet

Made in Italy, 4th century BC

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860. [NM82.31](#)

128. Terracotta figurine of a woman

Made in Greece, 2nd century BC

Mould made. Traces of paint on the surface.

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860. [NM62.760](#)

129. Black glaze skyphos

Made in Italy, 350–300 BC

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860. [NMR.861](#)

130. Black glaze salt cellar

Made in Italy, 350–325 BC

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860. [NMR.722.1](#)

131. Black glaze plate

Made in Italy, 3rd century BC

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860. [NMR.881](#)



Cat. 127

132 and 133. Two silver coins, Obols

Minted in Sicyon, Greece, 4th century BC

Obverse: Head of Apollo laureate. Reverse: Flying dove.

[NM2004.535](#); [NM2004.813](#)

Marking the Dead

Remember me!

I was rich and important and lots of people came to my funeral. There I am lying on the bed and there are all my friends and relations standing around me crying and pulling out their hair. When I was taken to the grave heroic warriors accompanied me in their chariots.

Such is the message of the monumental pots that marked the graves of men who died in Athens in the 8th century BC. Whole and fragmentary examples have been found in the cemetery outside the Dipylon Gate in Athens, one of the main roads into the city. This find-spot has provided the common name for these pots – Dipylon kraters.

The style of decoration on these pots gives the name to the historic span (900-700 BC), the Geometric period. At this time Greece was beginning to pick itself up, after a quiet few hundred years following the collapse of the Mycenaean culture (1200-1020 BC). The palaces, writing, and the production of many forms of art were lost, trade and contact with the outside world greatly reduced.

From finds such as the Dipylon krater archaeologists can build a picture of the emerging society of 8th century BC Greece. The krater shows that Athens had a wealthy and powerful elite, who could afford to mark their graves with monumental ceramics.

The interest of the wealthy in unusual and expensive products prompted the expansion of international trading and led to the settlement of Greeks at trading outposts to the east and the foundation of colonies, particularly on the Black Sea coast and in southern Italy and Sicily. The influx of traded items provided great inspiration to local artists, an awareness of different techniques and access to raw materials. With a growing local and international market, the arts and crafts of Greece could again flourish.

On the Dipylon kraters the figures are drawn in silhouette, with triangular bodies and angular limbs, maintaining the geometric appearance of the surrounding bands of ornamentation. The artist does not draw what he sees, but rather what he knows to be there – two wheels of the chariot and the four legs of each horse; the deceased body is not covered by the shroud but rather the shroud hovers above the body so the body can still be seen.

The imagery of the chariots and warriors recalled the battle of Troy and the descriptions of warfare and heroic funerals from oral poetry. These tales are partially preserved for us in the writings of Homer, which date to this same period. These pots not only declare the importance of deceased in Athens in 750 BC but link him to the heroic past.

*But with his chariot each in order led, Perform due honours to Patroklos dead;
...And thrice their sorrows and laments renew; Tear bathe their arms, and tears
the sands bedew.*

HOMER *ILIAD* BOOK XX111, 10-11, 17-18

134. Dipylon Krater (ceramic grave marker in the shape of a krater)

Made in Athens, 750–725 BC, Reconstructed from fragments

Funerary scene (prothesis) showing mourners surrounding the deceased with chariot teams on either side. Mourners, chariot and armed soldiers in horizontal band below. On the other side, chariot teams and warriors in panels and in continuous horizontal bands. Repeating geometric motifs in horizontal bands decorate the surface above and below the figured scenes.

[NM46.41](#)



Cat. 134

HERAKLES

DR ELIZABETH BOLLEN

Even by the look of him it was plain that he was a son of Zeus; for his body measured four cubits, and he flashed a gleam of fire from his eyes; and he did not miss, neither with the bow nor with the javelin.

EURIPIDES (c.480–406 BC), THE TROJAN WOMEN, 608–609

Herakles (the Roman Hercules), clothed in lion skin and carrying a club, remains a familiar figure in the modern world. His strength, his slaying of monsters and his adventuring are celebrated in movies and cartoons. But are we being told the whole story?

According to legend, Herakles was the son of Zeus and a mortal woman Alcmene. Hera, Zeus's wife, was jealous of her husband's infidelity and wanted to be rid of Herakles. When Herakles was still in his cradle, she sent a pair of snakes to kill him. Baby Herakles showed his strength and strangled the snakes.

However, Herakles did not always use his strength for good. He had a wild temper and this led to acts of uncontrolled violence. As a teenager he killed his music teacher, as a man he smashed up his home killing his wife Megara and their two children.

To atone for killing his family, the Oracle at Delphi ordered Herakles to serve Eurystheus, king of Tiryns. Eurystheus, with Hera in his ear, set Herakles many difficult tasks. These Labours, for which Herakles is most famous, exhibit his famed strength but often also required some lateral thinking.

His first Labour was to kill the Nemean Lion and return with its skin. The Nemean Lion was a difficult foe because its skin was so tough it could not be pierced by weapons. So Herakles wrestled the lion and strangled it. Once dead, Herakles used the lion's own claws to skin it.

For another Labour, high in the Arcadian mountains, Herakles drove the Erymanthean boar into the snow, which slowed it down and enabled Herakles to capture it. When he returned with the boar, Eurystheus was so frightened of the beast that he jumped into a large storage jar (pithos) to hide.

Another of Herakles' deeds (though not commonly counted as a Labour) was to kill Kyknos. Kyknos was a bandit, who intercepted travellers, relieved them of their goods and then of their lives. Kyknos challenged Herakles to battle but was soon defeated.

Herakles travelled to the far west, to the mythical Hesperides to capture the cattle of Geryon. Geryon was a warrior monster with three heads, three bodies and three pairs of legs. Herakles killed Geryon with a poisoned arrow, and took possession of the cattle.

Herakles travelled east to acquire the girdle of the Amazon Queen Hippolyta. When he had almost reached a peaceful negotiation, Hera interfered and spread the rumor that Herakles was planning to abduct the queen. The Amazons attacked and Herakles was forced to battle the warrior women. Herakles slayed Hippolyta and took the girdle.

Herakles was worshipped across the Mediterranean. Many leaders of the ancient world claimed descent from him, which helped legitimise their power and reflected some of his glory upon them. Alexander the Great was one such descendent. He used the imagery of Herakles on coins, and was also depicted wearing the lion skin himself.

Today the murderous rage of Herakles is at odds with our notion of a hero – how can we celebrate someone who kills his wife and children? Even if plagued by Hera, a vengeful god, even if he atoned by slaying one monster after another, can we forgive him? It is not surprising that many modern retellings, including Disney's *Hercules* (1997), completely ignore his wild outbursts. The Herakles of our era has lost his complexity – he is a sanitised, muscle-bound good guy.

135. Silver coin, Diobol

Made in Taranto, Italy, 4th–3rd centuries BC

Reverse: Herakles fighting a lion.

[NM2004.424](#)

136. Black figure lekythos

Made in Athens, 525–500 BC, Attributed to the Leagros Group

Herakles with the Erymanthean boar approaches Eurystheus who is about to hide in a storage jar (pithos). Athena stands behind Herakles. Herakles' bow and quiver hang above the pithos.

Purchased with funds from the Friends of the Nicholson Museum, 1946. [NM46.52](#)

137. Fragment of a black figure amphora

Made in Athens, 525–500 BC

Herakles (at left) fights Geryon (the many armed and legged monster). Between them lies the slain cattle herder Eurytion.

Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860. [NM98.168](#)

138. Black figure lekythos

Made in Athens, 500–475 BC

Herakles fights Amazons.

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Ray Wilson OAM in memory of James Agapitos OAM, 2011.

[NM2011.7](#)

139. Tetradrachm, silver coin of Alexander the Great

Minted in Memphis, Egypt, 332–323 BC

Obverse: Head of Herakles wearing a lion skin.

Donated through the Jon Hosking bequest, 1989.

[NM2003.72](#)



Cat. 139

140. Black figure amphora

Made in Athens, 525–500 BC, Attributed to the Antimenes Painter

Side A: Herakles fights Kyknos. Zeus at centre, Herakles and Athena to the left; to the right Kyknos and Ares. Side B: A female initiate journeys to the afterlife. She is led by Hermes to Dionysos, who greets her. She leaves with a satyr.

Purchased with funds donated in memory of Mary Tancred, 1977. [NM77.1](#)



Cat. 140 (side a)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY: THE ANTIKYTHERA MECHANISM

DR ELIZABETH BOLLEN

This new kind of globe, invented by Archimedes, shows the movement of the sun, the moon and of the five stars that we call the wanderers. By turning the device, the various and divergent movements and the different speeds of each of the heavenly bodies are accurately represented.

CICERO (106–43 BC), DE RE PUBLICA, 1.14.21

In 1900 Captain Dimitros Kontos and his crew were sailing home after a season of sponge diving off the North African coast. A wild storm blew them off course and forced them to shelter in a bay of the rocky island of Antikythera. As the waters calmed, the divers decided to explore their surrounds. Returning spluttering to the surface, a diver claimed that there were naked bodies on the sea bed. Closer inspection revealed these to be ancient sculptures. The sponge divers had stumbled on a ship that had been wrecked in the 1st century BC.

The find was reported to the authorities, and divers were commissioned to recover what they could. At first it was the sculptures and jewellery that grabbed the headlines. But amongst the impressive finds was a small wooden box, measuring about 32 x 16 x 10cm. Inside the box were the calcified remnants of a bronze mechanism.

This was the remains of the Antikythera Mechanism. An elaborate device that consisted of some 32 bronze gears. These gears were fitted together to move arms on dials on the front and back of the box. They accurately reproduced on any given date, the motion of the sun, the moon, the five visible planets (wandering stars) and the fixed stars as seen from earth. The dials on the back of the device plotted the solar and lunar cycles that formed the basis of the ancient calendar.

The Antikythera Mechanism displays an advanced understanding of the movement of the heavens and the impressive technical ability to create a machine that could replicate and predict these movements.

While the Antikythera Mechanism is a unique find, similar contraptions are described by Cicero (106–43 BC), one of which he credits to the great inventor Archimedes. Certainly the complexity of the Antikythera Mechanism suggests that it is the result of many experiments; earlier models and later refinements are yet to be found.

In September 2014 a team, including members of the Australian Centre for Field Robotics from the University of Sydney, returned to the wreck. Their investigations were aided by an Autonomous Underwater Vehicle which surveyed and mapped the site, metal detectors and an “Exo-suit” – a wearable submarine that allows a diver to remain at the wreck for up to five hours. After a successful season in which the team mapped the wreck and uncovered some tantalising remains (including the

spear from a bronze sculpture), they plan to return next year. What will they uncover? Will further remnants of the Antikythera Mechanism be found?

For further information on recent research visit www.antikythera-mechanism.gr and antikythera.who.edu

141. Model of the Antikythera Mechanism

Designed in 1989 by Dr Allan Bromley, Associate Professor in the Basser Department of Computer Science at the University of Sydney.

The model was constructed by Mr Frank Percival. It demonstrates the complexity of the gears and dials of the Antikythera Mechanism. The recent research of Bromley's collaborator, Michael T Wright, has advanced the understanding of the Mechanism beyond that shown in the model.

The remains of the Antikythera Mechanism and other finds from the wreck are on display at the National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

On Loan from the Estate of Dr Allan G Bromley

ACROPOLIS

DR ELIZABETH BOLLEN

There is but one entry to the Acropolis. It affords no other, being precipitous throughout and having a strong wall. The gateway has a roof of white marble, and down to the present day it is unrivalled for the beauty and size of its stones ...

PAUSANIAS (2ND CENTURY AD), DESCRIPTION OF GREECE, 1.22–27



Cat. 142

In 480 BC the forces of the Persian Empire overran Athens, sacked the town and tore down the temples and sculptures on the Acropolis.

The buildings that we admire today were constructed in the fifth century BC under the direction of the political leader Pericles. This building project celebrated the expulsion of the Persians, the resurgence of Athens and represented the ambitions of Athens as a regional power.

The buildings were paid for with funds from the treasury of the Delian League, a fund collected from a confederacy of city states for the purpose of protection from the Persians, primarily for the construction of ships and to pay the cost of naval activities.

The Sanctuary of Athena on the Acropolis was a city sanctuary. The most venerable sculpture housed within its temples was that of Athena Polias, Athena of the City. The majority of members of the Delian

League would have felt no allegiance to this sanctuary or to the version of the gods who were worshipped here.

The Acropolis had been a stronghold of those dwelling in the region, at least from 1250 BC when it was heavily fortified. After the demise of Classical Athens it continued to be occupied and built upon.

In the Byzantine Empire (AD 330–1453) the Parthenon functioned as the Cathedral of Athens, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Athens. The entrance was changed to the western end of the building, the sculpture of the Birth of Athena was removed from the pediment and many of the offending pagan figures in the metopes were decapitated.

Under Ottoman Rule (AD 1453-1832) the building was converted to a mosque, a conversion that required the addition of a minaret. The entire area within the walls of the Acropolis was heavily built up and functioned as a stronghold and garrison.

In 1687, Venetian forces attacked Athens. The Ottomans placed their women, children and gunpowder stores inside the Parthenon. Either they placed their trust in the thick walls of the building that had stood for centuries, or they thought that the Christian forces would not attack a building that had been a church for so long.

But attack they did. At least 700 cannon balls hit the west side of the temple alone. The walls were penetrated and the gunpowder ignited. There was a colossal explosion. 300 people were killed and the Parthenon, which had functioned as a place of worship for more than 2000 years, was reduced to a ruin.

Between 1800–1805, Lord Elgin, the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, collected sculptures from the ground and, notoriously, removed others from the Parthenon. Packed in boats, the sculptures were sent to England, where they eventually found the home they still have, in the British Museum. The poet Lord Byron attacked his contemporary Elgin for removing the sculptures in the poem *The Curse of Minerva*.

In the 1980s, Melina Mercouri campaigned for the return of the marbles, bringing international attention to the issue. Since then public pressure has grown to have these items of cultural significance returned to Greece. Through this, the Parthenon has gained the national and international significance that the fifth century Athenians strove for.

From the 19th century the Acropolis has been the focus of intense archaeological work which has stripped away the evidence of the two thousand years of occupation back to the fifth century layer. Few of today's tourists would know they are not only looking at a Temple to Athena, but also a Christian cathedral and a Moslem mosque.

The fifth century buildings have been conserved and rebuilt. The reconstruction work continues today, with a focus on the Parthenon, where new stone blocks have been hewn and set alongside the original to create a more complete Parthenon for the visitor to admire.

142. Model of the Acropolis at Athens and the surrounding area

Made in Berlin, Germany, by Heinrich August Walger, c.1895

Acquired before 1941. [NM2008.4](#)

In 1891 the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York commissioned Heinrich August Walger to create a model of the Acropolis. Walger, a sculptor who resided in Berlin, specialised in creating relief maps. To create the model he worked with four German archaeologists, all with expert and first-hand knowledge of the Acropolis: Professor Ernst Curtius, Ferdinand Georg Kawerau, Johann August Kaupert and Wilhelm Dörpfeld. Together they created the model, of which the Nicholson model, cat. 143 is a copy.

The model shows the Acropolis as it appeared in the 1890s. Excavation had stripped the Acropolis back to focus upon the buildings constructed under the leadership of Pericles in the 5th century BC.



Cat. 142

SCULPTURE

MICHAEL TURNER

Full-size plaster-cast or bronze copies of famous statues from antiquity were popular in the 19th and early 20th centuries. They were used as teaching tools in museums, galleries, schools and art schools, and as decoration in public institutions. The original statues, from which the copies were made, belonged to leading European museums, especially in England, France, Germany and Greece.

By the early 1960s the Nicholson Museum had over 300 copies in its collection (almost all had been acquired by Professor William Woodhouse, curator of the museum, between 1903-1938). With the re-design of the museum in the mid 1960s it was decided they be removed – former curator Professor Dale Trendall (curator 1938–1954) describing them as ‘non utile non dulce’ – no longer useful or attractive. Many were subsequently disposed of.

Today little more than 50 survive from the original collection. This is a selection.



Cat. 148

143. Cast of Torso and head of a young woman (a kore)

From the Acropolis, Athens, 560–550 BC, Possibly made on Naxos
Acropolis Museum, Athens. Kore 677
Nicholson Museum [NM2008.10](#)

144. Cast of Torso and head of a young woman (a kore)

From the Acropolis, Athens, 520–510 BC, Possibly made on Chios
Acropolis Museum, Athens. Kore 675
Nicholson Museum [NM2008.18](#)

145. Cast of Head of the goddess Hera

From the Temple of Hera, Olympia, About 580 BC
Archaeological Museum, Olympia
Nicholson Museum [NM2008.20](#)

146. Cast of Headless body of a young woman (the Cheramyes kore)

From the Temple of Hera, Samos, 570–560 BC
Louvre Museum, Paris. Ma 686
Nicholson Museum [NM2008.19](#)

147. Cast of Agias, 5th century BC King of Thessaly (and famous Olympic athlete)

From Delphi, About 330 BC
Found near the theatre and dedicated to Apollo by Agias' grandson,
Daochus II of Pharsalos
Archaeological Museum, Delphi. No. 1875
Nicholson Museum [NM2008.9](#)

148. Cast of Torso of Hermes holding the baby Dionysos (his hand can be seen on Hermes' left shoulder)

From the temple of Hera, Olympia, 3rd or 2nd century BC

Archaeological Museum, Olympia

Nicholson Museum [NM30.50](#)

149. Cast of Head of Apollo

Roman copy of a Greek original, 2nd century AD

Once in the collection of Charles Townley, Sold to the British Museum in 1805

British Museum, London. 1805,0703.58

Nicholson Museum [NM2008.12](#)

150. Cast of Cult statue of the goddess Demeter seated on her throne

From the Sanctuary of Demeter, Knidos (in modern Turkey), About 350 BC

British Museum, London. GR 1859,12-26.26

Nicholson Museum [NM2008.16](#)



Cat. 144



Cat. 150

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