

Chapter 6

Greek Vase Painting

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NCEA Level 3 Classical Studies material covered in this chapter includes material for:

- The externally assessed Achievement Standard 90512 (Classical Studies 3.2) 'Explain a work or works of classical art', which involves analysing in detail with supporting evidence features of the work or works.
- The internally assessed Achievement Standard 90514 (Classical Studies 3.4) 'Complete independent research on an area of the classical world', which involves selecting and analysing a wide range of relevant evidence and reaching developed conclusions based on a wide range of evidence.

Lower Belly

Encircling frieze, *not narrative*. Depicts a selection of mythical animals, including griffins and sphinxes.

Lowest Belly

Encircling rays.

Foot

Encircling – pygmies ride pygmy horses and fight off cranes.

Handles



Fig. 6.4: Gorgons from the handles of the François Vase; found overlooking the interior and mouth of the vase

Both sides depict the goddess Artemis surrounded by animals; on one handle, a deer and a panther, on the other, lions. Beneath this scene, Ajax carries the dead Achilles. Scene beneath the panther and deer has greater incision detail of the hair and muscles, but no spear.

Upper flat surface

On each there is an identical creature (though the hand position varies from one to the other) – a **gorgon** of some sort.

Connections

Thematic link between many of the friezes is *Achilles*. He appears, either in person or linked through his parents, Peleus and Thetis, in the following scenes.

- *Lip A* (though Peleus' presence).
- *Neck A* (Patroclus had died wearing his armour).
- *Shoulder* (through his parents' marriage).
- *Belly A* (Chasing Troilus).
- *Handles* (dead, being carried).

Artemis, too, is a common character.

- *Lip B* (she had sent the Calydonian boar).
- *Shoulder* (she is one of the gods present at the marriage celebrations).
- *Handles* (she appears, surrounded by animals).

Theseus is mentioned more than once.

- *Lip A* (he took part in the Calydonian Boar Hunt).
- *Lip B* (rescuer of the Athenians).
- *Neck B* (was the friend of Perithous).

Overall theme: success of the Greeks over Trojans, barbarians and animals and the esteem in which the Greeks are held by the gods.

The painter was a master of details, seen by the delight obvious on the faces of the Athenians on Lip B and the intent of the satyrs on the reverse of the belly. Limitations of the technique meant full depth, real interest in movement and anatomy and drapery were simply not possible; a convincing narrative was impossible. Nevertheless, within these confines, this is an outstanding example of early Black-Figure painting.



Fig. 6.5: Detail of the frieze on the foot of the François Vase – pygmies ride horses and fight off cranes

Activity 6A: The François Vase

1. Explain how the François Vase got its name.
2. Identify the potter and painter of the François Vase.
3. What images of the story of Achilles are portrayed on the François Vase?
4. Identify three features of early Black-Figure painting found on this vase.

Activity 6A: The François Vase

1. It was found by Alessandro François. (A)
2. The potter is Ergotimos, the painter is Kleitias. (A)
3. Lip side A – The Calydonian Boar Hunt.
Neck side A – The Funeral Games for Patroclus.
Encircling frieze – Marriage of Peleus and Thetis.
Handles – Ajax carries the dead Achilles.
Belly side B – Pursuit of Troilus. (A – all facts needed). (A – any three of female flesh white; undefined anatomy; stiff drapery; small stiff figures; faces in profile; eyes frontal)
4. Flesh white; undefined anatomy; stiff drapery; small stiff figures; faces in profile; eyes frontal. (A – any three needed)

Glossary/Index**Chapter 2: Aristophanes' Comedies**

agon (7): structural element of Attic Old Comedy – a debate judged by the chorus.

anticlimax (23): a surprising and contrasting descent after an ascending series of words, actions or images.

aristoi (54): the 'best' people:

bathos (28): a sudden descent to the ridiculous.

bawdy (23): lewd or obscene language and imagery.

burlesque (28): turning into ridicule by grotesque parody.

caricature (24): parody depending on the exaggerated or the ludicrous.

demos (24): the people.

Demeter (21): Mother goddess of the Earth. Brought winter to the upper world when she followed her daughter Persephone to the underworld – a fertility goddess.

Dionysia (9): (The Great or City.) One of the two major festivals (see Lenaea) at which comedy or tragedy was performed.

Dionysus (6): God of fertility, the vine, the theatre and the city. Equivalent to the Roman Bacchus and a son of Zeus. See Iacchos.

discontinuity of characterisation (29): occurs when for the sake of a joke a character is made to say something in contradiction to his normal nature or personality.

ekkyklema (13): the device used in Greek that reveals on stage the results of action within or offstage. Possibly a wheeled platform.

exodos (8): the final exit of the comedic chorus. The part of the play in which the chorus exits.

fertility religions (7): worship of Demeter or Bacchus. Also known as mystery religions, as their rites were secret. Promised new life to the Initiates after death.

festive (7): comedy, like Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in which the satire is less important than the celebration of positive, abiding values.

Four Hundred (22): people involved in the Oligarchic Revolution of 411 BC, when, near the end of the war, control was temporarily wrested from the *demoi* as a whole.

gamos (8): a wedding scene – especially a scene of fulfilment or celebration at the end of a comedy.

hubris (40): overweening pride: the pride that comes before a fall. In Greek drama the pride that causes man to overreach himself and invites censure by the gods.

hyperbole (24): gross exaggeration – a comic device in Aristophanes.

Iacchos (6): see Dionysus. Often associated or identified with Dionysus. The god who guided the initiated in the mysteries of Eleusis; possibly Demeter or Persephone's son.

Initiates (21): those who have been introduced to the secret rites of the Mystery Religions and so promised eternal life. See *Mystae*.

komos (7): part of the worship of Dionysus expressed through song and dance and involving a phallic procession through country villages. The phallus pole shows Dionysus' connection with fertility religions.

Kore (21): the maiden. Another name for Persephone the daughter of Demeter carried to the underworld by Pluto.

lees (7): residue left in a wine jar.

Lenaea (9): see Dionysia – dramatic festival in late winter/early spring restricted to the Athenians. Criticism of the state more likely therefore at this festival.

lot (9): chance. The ancient Greeks saw choice by 'lot' as a way of allowing the gods to influence the outcome.

masks (6): Greek comedy was masked. Suppressed the individual's personality, allowing the god to speak through the actor. May have acted as a 'Megaphone'.

mechane (46): also known as '*geranos*' – the crane used to lower gods etc into the Greek theatre.

Mystae (21): see Initiates – another name for initiates into a 'mystery religion' especially worship of Demeter.

neologism (25): a 'made-up' word. In Greek such words could be very long, intrinsically funny compounds.

nether (21): the lower, or the underworld.

obol (18): a Greek coin.

oikos (32): the individual households which went to make up the *demoi*.

oligarchy (22): 'rule by a few' – usually the rich and influential.

orchestra (11): the 'dancing' – circle in a Greek theatre – where we find the chorus and the musicians.

oxymoron (21): two contradictory and violently opposed images yoked together, eg 'terrific silence'. A sort of verbal paradox.

parabasis (8): the 'stepping aside' – that part of Attic Old Comedy where the chorus, representing the author, spoke directly to the audience.

parabolic (43): having the nature of a parabasis – usually self-conscious humour which breaks through the theatrical illusion and involves the audience.

paratragic (28): language or theatrical devices in comedy which parody tragedy. In Aristophanes, this is usually a parody of Euripides.

parodos (8): either a 'way in' – the corridor between *theatron* and dancing circle used by chorus and audience to enter, or that part of the play where the chorus enters.

parody (26): the part of the play mimicking another author's work in such a way as to make it seem ridiculous.