

APULIAN AMPHORA

GREEK, APULIAN, 350–330 BC
RED-FIGURE TERRACOTTA

HAUTEUR : 49.5 CM.

LARGEUR : 22 CM.

PROFONDEUR : 20 CM.

PROVENANCE :

*FORMER PRIVATE COLLECTION OF
STEVE STAVRO A MACEDONIAN
IMMIGRANT TO CANADA WHO FOUNDED
THE "KNOB HILL FARMS" GROCERY
CHAIN.*

*ACQUIRED AT THE SOTHEBY'S, PARKE-
BERNET AUCTION IN TORONTO IN 1982.*



This amphora, characteristic of ancient Greek pottery, has a tall, slender silhouette. Its slightly ovoid body tapers gradually toward a narrow, stable foot. Two symmetrical handles connect the shoulders of the vase to its open, flaring neck. The surface is decorated in the red-figure technique: the figures appear in the natural reddish-orange colour of the clay, while the background is covered in a glossy black slip.

The red-figure technique emerged in the Athens region during the 530s BC; it spread widely beyond Attica and almost entirely replaced the black-figure technique that preceded it.

The figural decoration is concentrated on the body of the amphora, while other decorative motifs, such as palmettes or a laurel-leaf frieze, appear beneath the handles and on the neck of the vase. Greek pottery most often presents a main side and a more generic side. Here, the main side depicts what appears to be a votive scene, as suggested by the tall central stele and the offerings flanking it. These are held by two young figures, a man and a woman, both richly adorned. The setting is briefly evoked through elements such as the ground, rendered as a meander frieze, a few plants, and above all the imposing central stele. In this scene, which appears to take place outdoors, the two figures are not static but suggest a gentle movement, walking toward the tall stele. Their garments are very light: the female figure wears only a chiton that reveals part of her body, while the male figure wears only a chlamys draped over his shoulders. Both are richly adorned, she with her jewellery and he with his headband. These elements are highlighted in added white, as are the offerings they hold and certain parts of the stele. This added colour, which lends the scene a refinement concentrated in its details, is absent from the second scene on the reverse of the amphora. Indeed, this more generic side shows two static, draped men who appear to face one another within a minimal setting. The iconography is far less developed than on the main side, consisting



essentially of the drapery and the staff held by one of the young men.



This Greek red-figure pottery comes from Apulia, in the region of Puglia, most likely from Taranto more specifically, which was the principal production centre for Apulian pottery. Apulia forms part of Magna Graecia, that is, the territories colonised by the Greeks during antiquity. Apulian pottery, which spread beyond its own region, flourished throughout the 5th and 4th centuries BC before declining in favour of Campanian production. The iconography of Apulian pottery generally alternates between mythological scenes drawn from classical tragedy and funerary scenes, the latter particularly associated with the "ornate style," which features large naiskoi (ill. 1). Funerary imagery is not, however, exclusive to the "plain style"; it also appears there, essentially through the presence of a funerary column or stele such as the one seen on our amphora. It is highly likely that this amphora served a funerary function, consistent with its iconography; however, given the versatility of ancient pottery — used variously as

domestic tableware, votive offerings, or funerary furnishings — it may well have served several purposes.

Apulian pottery can be classified either chronologically or by identified style. The principal styles, in order of appearance, are the "plain style" and the "ornate style." Stylistic studies have made it possible to identify the hand of certain masters or their workshops, though the names given to them are not their actual names but later attributions. This amphora belongs to the "plain style," the earlier of the two, characterised by the use of added colour in touches, sparse ornamentation, and an iconography featuring few figures, usually one or two per side. The "plain style" is often found on small vases or, as here, medium-sized ones. Its themes are wide-ranging — mythological, warlike, or funerary — and vary chiefly according to the painter responsible. The pioneers of this style were the Sisyphus Painter and the Tarporley Painter.



The latter established certain conventions, such as depicting draped young men on the reverse, fluid anatomical rendering, and the recurrence of Dionysiac subjects. His successors are grouped into three circles and retain the essentials of the Tarporley Painter's style, the conventions of the generic reverse side, and the recurrence of Dionysiac themes (ill. 2), while further developing funerary themes evoked through the presence of stelae, funerary columns, or mourning figures.



Some painters produced decoration in both the "plain style" and the "ornate style," although each painter seems to have generally favoured one or the other, with the exception of a few, such as the Varrese Painter or the Bari Painter, who worked in both. The "ornate style," which took shape in the mid-4th century BC, is easily distinguished from the "plain style": it makes lavish use of colour, and the scenes depicted bring together numerous figures arranged across several registers. This style was mainly used on large-scale pottery. The best-known hands of the "ornate style" are those of the

Darius Painter, the Baltimore Painter, and the Underworld Painter (ill. 1). This stylistic overview allows our amphora to be placed within the "plain style" and dated to the 4th century BC, most probably to 380–360 BC. It is difficult to attribute it to a specific painter, but the anatomical rendering, the manner of suggesting the setting, and the treatment of the generic reverse side are all features consistent with the style of the Schiller Painter and the Painter of the Long Overfalls (ill. 3). An alternative hypothesis would link this amphora to another of the groups following the Tarporley Painter, namely that of the Hoppin Painter and the Lecce Painter. Their style is close to that of our amphora, which likewise shows a sense of movement in the figures, a slightly loosened female chignon, a male headband, and, above all, animated female drapery (ill. 4–5).

While our amphora may possibly be attributed to one of these painters, it belongs with certainty to an Apulian production in the "plain style," of remarkable quality of execution and state of preservation. This amphora belonged to the personal collection of Steve Stavro, a businessman of Macedonian origin settled in Canada, where he founded the celebrated "Knob Hill Farms" grocery chain. At the sale held by Sotheby Parke-Bernet in Toronto on 30 March 1982, he acquired several works. The invoice from that sale, preserved ever since, confirms that the object was among the lots sold, under number 571. The piece remained in Toronto until 2024.

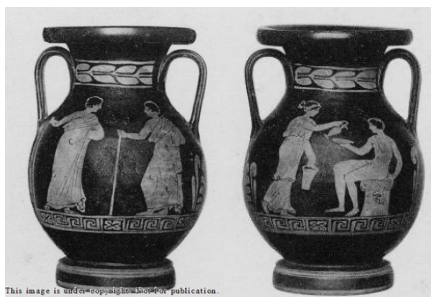
Comparatives :



Ill. 1. Apulian red-figure volute krater attributed to the Underworld Painter, "ornate style," 345–310 BC. Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich (inv. 3297).



Ill. 2. Apulian red-figure bell krater attributed to the Dijon Painter, "plain style," 380–360 BC. Vatican Museums, Rome (inv. 17946).



Ill. 3. Apulian red-figure pelike attributed to the Painter of the Long Overfalls, "plain style," 380–375 BC. Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels (inv. A140).



Ill. 4. Apulian red-figure bell krater attributed to the Hoppin Painter, "plain style," 380–360 BC. Private Swiss collection.



Ill. 5. Apulian red-figure bell krater attributed to the Lecce Painter, "plain style," 385–370 BC. British Museum, London (inv. 1836,0224.155).