



## Classical and Hellenistic Greek pottery in the Black Sea region

### Περίληψη :

Attic pottery had prevailed in Mediterranean and Black Sea markets since the 6th century BC. The political conditions in the Pontic area, however, were decisive for the origin of the pottery imported there. So, as Attic wares were becoming less popular in the 3rd century BC, their Ionian counterparts flourished. The Greek pottery in the Black Sea region is represented by all the well known pottery styles and shapes of the period under investigation, distributed not only in the big centres but also in smaller towns and villages. However, there is an obvious need for a more thorough research concerning issues such as classification, typology and distribution.

### Χρονολόγηση

Classical and Hellenistic times

### Γεωγραφικός εντοπισμός

Black Sea

## 1. Classical pottery

During the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, [fine Attic pottery](#) started dominating the markets of the Mediterranean “civilized” world, and the Black Sea was not an exception. A large amount of Archaic Attic wares is known from Elaiou, an Athenian settlement in the Thracian Chersonese founded at the time of the Dolonci kingdom of Themistokles the Elder. The period after 540 B.C. marked the decline of [Ionia](#) that found itself under Persian occupation. Another wave of Ionian immigrants arrived in the Black Sea just after the middle of the sixth century BC, and perhaps another one just after the [Ionian revolt](#) and its suppression by the Persians, though for the latter there is less evidence.

By the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC Attic fine pottery appears in limited quantities in the Black Sea markets and this situation remained stable even during the Graeco-Persian wars, when less pottery was produced at Athens and the prices of fine pots rose. Only the important centres in the Black Sea imported good quality vases. After the establishment of the Athenian federation, the Athenian domination of the Black Sea area was evident both in politics and arts. The number of Athenian vases imported there increased during the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, and it does not seem that the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War changed this situation. On the contrary, when markets in Magna Grecia and Etruria stopped importing Athenian vessels, their counterparts in the Black Sea were overflowed by Athenian pottery, whose finds were numerous even beyond the Greek cities, their [choras](#) and [emporion](#).<sup>1</sup> Such pottery was used by the Greeks and their neighbours in all important feasts, whereas local pottery was used to fulfil daily needs.<sup>2</sup>

One of the explanations for the occurrence of rich finds of Attic fine pottery in the Black Sea region is the close commercial links in other areas, notably the Athenian imports of [pontic grain](#), in order to satisfy the demands of the overpopulated Attica. Pottery trade was certainly not of the same importance as grain trade (cf. below), but it was also representative of the Athenian imperial politics in the north.

In proportion, the amount of fine-ware imports (with the exception of [Leuke](#) and several new sites, like Pistiros) remained roughly the same, although the amount of more modest vases enlarged considerably.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, some of the cities yielded a large number of Attic pottery of the later 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. On the Thracian coast, [Apollonia](#)'s cemetery yielded a large number of high quality vases. In the north, notably [Olbia](#) and the big centres of the [Bosporan kingdom](#) on both sides of the straits, were richly supplied but even in smaller places there was enough Attic pottery available.<sup>4</sup> The Elizavetskoe gorodišče at the Don estuary also produced good examples of Attic pottery,<sup>5</sup> while the survey by Shefton about the Castulo cups has shown that even the less brittle cups with the thickened rim were transported further inland along the big rivers and.<sup>6</sup>

Pistiros is an exceptional site in inner Thrace with much Attic pottery dating from the mid-5<sup>th</sup> to the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, while some Attic West Slope wares were also found, belonging to the last phase of the emporion. Moreover, some fragments of Panathenaic



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**amphorae** from the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century BC are also interesting, while this class is otherwise known from 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. North Pontic sites. Castulo cups are well represented at Pistiros.

It is worth mentioning that the Attic pottery exported to the northern Aegean seems to be preferred by the the Black Sea markets as well.<sup>7</sup> Attic Black-Glazed pottery of the late 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. reached even small villages, and this situation only changed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, when Ionian centres ruled again.

In the east , Kobuleti – [Pičvnari](#)<sup>8</sup> yielded a large amount of Attic pottery. The site could well have been a small settlement founded by Athens at the time of Pericles' naval expedition, as suggested by some scholars. But Attic pottery of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. is known from [Vani](#) and from many other places in [Colchis](#).<sup>9</sup>

Overall, Kerch pottery and 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Attic Black-Glazed pottery dominate in all the other production centers, and that picture changes only during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. Concerning **kylikes**, in particular, they stopped being imported in the Black Sea in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. A similar picture can be seen at Cyrenaica and the west.<sup>10</sup>

It should be finally mentioned that Attic Black-Glazed pottery was undoubtedly imitated by local workshops in the Black Sea, especially at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, but this area has not been thoroughly investigated yet.

### 1.1. Relief and figural vases

These two pottery categories of the late 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. have been found mainly as imports in the Black Sea area. The polychrome relief vases were the commonest in all the main north and west Pontic centres. One of the best examples illustrates Athena and Poseidon competing for the rule of Athens, an iconographical theme that decorated Parthenon's west **pediment**. Their figural counterparts were however more popular among the cities of the northern Black Sea shores such as [Phanagoria](#).<sup>11</sup>

### 1.2. Ionian pottery of the Classical period

A significant amount of 4<sup>th</sup> century BC Ionian pottery produced in northern Aegean workshops was uncovered at Pistiros and other West Pontic cities, such as Apollonia, [Mesembria](#) and [Histria](#).<sup>12</sup> On the contrary, the Ionizing banded wares were probably produced in the main centres of the Bosporan kingdom. This class never went out of use completely, and it was detected again by Kacharava in a number of sites in Colchis.<sup>13</sup>

### 1.3. 'Aquarelle' pelikai

The pottery class that imitates Attic Kerch vases in a less sophisticated technique, known as 'Aquarelle **pelikai**', appeared for the first time in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and the production of these vessels continued in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and perhaps in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries B.C. The iconographical themes are identical with the Kerch vases ([Amazons](#), [griffins](#), etc). The polychrome technique implied organic colours, which are only poorly preserved.<sup>14</sup>

### 1.4. Plain Ware and local pottery

Grey Thracian pottery of the Classical period often imitated Greek prototypes like **kantharoi**, **lekanai**, amphorae, pitchers and bowls, with more or less professional level. Lekanidai were also often imitated but there were also imports from pottery centres such as Athens.<sup>15</sup>

### 1.5. Trade amphorae



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The trade amphorae found in the Black Sea area played an important role in the dating of the richest [Scythian tumuli](#) of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>16</sup> Overall, Thasian amphorae prevail among finds and those from [Chios](#), [Lesbos](#), Mende, [Samos](#) and Peparetos (Solocha I-II) are rather common, while items from several other North Aegean islands are also represented. Concerning the Black Sea cities, [Heraclea Pontica](#) and [Sinope](#) had established an exports network to the northern and western Pontic cities. [Panticapaeum](#)'s production was mainly intended for local use. Wine from Colchis was imported to the northern Pontic cities too. Chersonesian [wine](#) on the other hand was exported to Olbia, [Nikonion](#), [Tyras](#) and Histria.

### 2. Hellenistic pottery

#### 2.1 Political background

As it was mentioned earlier, the amount of Attic wares imported to the Black Sea decreased drastically as the Ionian production centres took again the leading role in the pottery trade in the Black Sea.

Politically speaking, the Bosporan kingdom was the most important entity in the north Black Sea area. Moreover, the west Pontic cities formed an alliance, while the south came under the kingdoms of [Bithynia](#) and [Pontus](#) that later annexed the eastern shores under [Mithridates VI](#). The [Scythians](#) were ousted from the Pontic steppes and were confined to Crimea but they were still mighty neighbours of the Bosporan kings, and Olbia probably was under their protectorate. The [Sarmatians](#) were the lords of most of the Pontic steppes, while in the northwest the Getae and the Bastarni were settled, sometimes counted to the Celts, and later mainly to the East Germanic tribes. In the west, after the death of Lysimachus there were only small [Thracian](#) kingdoms and the Celtic kingdom of Tylis that lasted from 277 to 218 B.C. The latter demanded high taxes from their neighbours for their safety, but after their defeat by a coalition, their remained population moved to their relatives in [Galatia](#). The areas near the Greek cities were partly hellenized but the political situation changed many times, and finally Rome emerged as the main power in this area. In proportion, the numbers of fine pottery imported from individual centres may well represent the main tendency in pottery imports in the whole area of the Black Sea.

#### 2.2. Black Glazed pottery

The end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC saw an economic decline in Athens. As a result, many potters emigrated to many places in the Aegean, the new centres of the Hellenistic world in the eastern Mediterranean, and probably in the Black Sea. These immigrants established new workshops that produced mainly Black-Glazed pottery. But this process was probably delayed in the Black Sea area. Excavations showed that Attic workshops exported much pottery into the Black Sea even during the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. In many places of the northern Black Sea coast, like Olbia and Panticapaeum, Attic Black-Glazed pottery still prevailed during the first part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and the same was also true for the cities on the Taman peninsula, while in other places in the west and northwest, Anatolian centres had already taken a larger share of the market.<sup>17</sup>

Imports from Ionian centres were found in large quantities at Kabyle and at Sborjanovo,<sup>18</sup> as well as in minor Romanian and Moldovan sites. But few Attic vessels continued being imported to the Black sea even in later Hellenistic times. Furthermore, Pergamene Black-Glazed wares were apparently common there along with the products of other Asia Minor workshops. These centres producing Black-Glazed pottery were mainly identical with those producing relief and West Slope wares.

#### 2.3 West Slope Ware

The West Slope style was quite common in most of the largest sites. Some of the fragments are Attic, while others come from [Pergamon](#) and other Asia Minor centres.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, minor production centres have not been identified yet, while Pergamon seems to have been the main production centre in Asia Minor.<sup>20</sup> However, concerning Black-Glazed pottery and Megarian bowls, many towns in Asia Minor had their own local workshops that produced also the West Slope Ware.

Panticapaeum was investigated by V.S. Zabelina whose statistics give a reliable picture.<sup>21</sup> Attic imports from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup>



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century BC until the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. are represented by 80 finds; 155 sherds come from Asia Minor -the two thirds of which come from Pergamon- while 115 fragments are classified as coming "from the islands", i.e. their clay is related to [Rhodian](#), [Koan](#) and other centres of trade amphorae. The West Slope Ware, both Attic and Pergamene, was rather common at [Hermonassa](#), too.<sup>22</sup>

### 2.4 Megarian bowls

The so-called 'Megarian' bowls were invented in Athens at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC<sup>23</sup> and in many sites this Attic class had exceeded all other imports. According to present evidence this was also true for the Black Sea area. Attic Megarian bowls are found at Olbia, Panticapaeum, [Nymphaion](#), [Chersonesus](#), [Myrmekeion](#), Histria and Apollonia.<sup>24</sup> One mould found at Messambria may suggest a local production of Megarian bowls.<sup>25</sup>

The products of Ionian (mostly Ephesian) workshops are the most common everywhere. The most prolific workshop used to sign with the monogram A in a square; its attribution to Ephesus is doubtless since 68 moulds of this workshop have been found near the Magnesian Gate.<sup>26</sup> Ch. Rogl added to the Monogram-Workshop three others: the so-called 'belles Meduses', 'petite rose spiralee' and 'comique à la canne' which are widespread all over the Mediterranean.<sup>27</sup> She also believes that the abbreviation PAR... means Paramonos, a name known at Ephesus also from other signatures. The localisation of all four at Ephesus is very probable but it should be understood that punches were also subject of trade and accessible to more workshops. Ephesian bowls are also known from Stobi but are rare in inner Thrace.<sup>28</sup>

Ionian workshops producing Megarian bowls were located in bigger centres but Ephesian products were imported to all major Asia Minor cities. Menemachos' signature comes second after the 'A in a Square' and his products have been found in the same places as those of 'A in a Square'. These two were followed by Philon (his bowls are known from Mesembria, Histria, Myrmekeion, Panticapaeum, cf. , Héraios (with imports to Histria, Panticapaeum and Chersonesus), and by the 'workshop of grey vases' known from Histria, Panticapaeum, Olbia, Nymphaion, and [Tanais](#). Less common were the products of other Ionian workshops. NI was identified with certainty only in Histria as well as Apollonios and the workshop of the "double filles épeis". Athenaios' products reached Histria and Olbia. The 'Plagiaire' workshop was probably a Delian one and in the Black Sea his bowls are identified with certainty only at Histria.<sup>29</sup>

Many Ephesian bowls are also known from minor sites and country villas and there are probably many more at Olbia, Panticapaeum and several other sites not identified yet. As there are no detailed studies of Megarian bowls from other Pontic cities, a more extensive distribution of products of other Ionian workshops can be reasonably supposed. Megarian bowls of Menemachos, Héraios, Philon and the Grey Vases were probably also produced at Ephesus.

Pergamene bowls are easily recognizable and are known from Panticapaeum, Histria, Olbia, Znamenskoje gorodišče, Phanagoria, Myrmekeion and from Belous near [Kerkinitis](#).<sup>30</sup>

Other Asia Minor workshops have not been located yet with the exception of an Asia Minor group which is certainly situated in NW Anatolia.<sup>31</sup> The attribution of a Zabelina's class to Samos needs to be proved but that island may well have been a producer. A small pottery group considered as Rhodian has actually no parallels in Rhodes, so another centre has to be identified after a more detailed examination. Finally, Peloponnesian products were very rare at the Black Sea region.<sup>32</sup>

### 2.5. The KIPBEI bowls

This individual class of bowls has been found in important Black Sea sites such as Olbia, Panticapaeum, Chersonesos, Myrmekeion, Histria and Tomis.

A frequent iconographical theme that decorates the bottom of the interior is a female figure wearing a city-shaped crown - the city goddess - surrounded by the signature of the craftsman. The glaze is usually described as grey to brown, sometimes reddish, but



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sometimes also black or even red. Some sherds coming from collections of Russian museums (Moscow, Leningrad, Würzburg) have a fine brown clay, while their glaze is thin and rather fine, reddish brown to grey with a 'violet' metallic shade. It is generally well preserved on the surface but it is worn on the edges, where the layer is thinner. Most of the specimens have been found at Olbia, and their distribution map speaks in favour of a NW Pontic production centre.<sup>33</sup> The level of craftsmanship there is better than that of other Black Sea workshops and their context, if any, is late. Therefore, they can be dated from the late 2nd to the early 1st century B.C.

Demetrios of Panticapaeum imitated the grey Ephesian bowls and he has been recently attributed some finds from Histria.<sup>34</sup> His Panticapean workshop used only limited series of punches, which were thoroughly investigated by Šurgaja and Loseva.<sup>35</sup> Demetrios implied practically only five motives: (a) petals and dot, (b) 3-4 petals alternating with a palm leaf, (c) both preceding, with also acanthus leaves whose points are turned right or left; above the calyx, **rosettes** and birds, (d) pointed leaves in rows and (e) imbrications.

The signatures ΠΟ(ΣΣΙΔΟΣ?), (Ζ)ΗΝΟΔΟΤΟΥ and other similar ones form the Pontic group<sup>36</sup> and they perhaps represent some local potters. Local signatures are found also among the items of a group published by Zahn, in the Vogell collection, and in the Louvre by O. Jentel.<sup>37</sup> The famous relief **situla** from Olbia<sup>38</sup> is in its clay and glaze comparable to one of the Zabelina's Asia Minor classes. ΜΟΙΡΑΓΕΝΟΥΣ has been identified as a graffito from Kerch, while a signature ΠΟΚΙΛΕΟΥ is known both from Olbia and Kerch. V Štern mentioned also other signatures on Megarian bowls from Kerch: ΕΥΒΑΝΟΡΟΣ, ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟΥ, ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΔΕΣ, ΑΡΚΕΣΙΛΑΟΣ on a bowl similar to those of Demetrios, while from Chersonesos a bowl bears the signature ΜΟΡΑΓΕΝΟΥΣ.

### 2.6. Grey Knidian, braziers with Satyr heads

The now easily recognizable Grey Knidian Ware bowls with handles are also known from several sites, most notably from Panticapaeum and Olbia. The braziers with heads of Satyrs, also mainly produced at Knidos, are known from Nesebar, Olbia, the Kerch region, Sinope and Ammisos in the south, and apparently from other main sites as well. The most common signatures are Hekataios and Athenaios and their production lasted throughout the 2nd century B.C.<sup>39</sup>

### 2.7. Pergamene pottery with applied reliefs

This class is rather rare in the Black Sea area but is nevertheless represented in some places. In fact, Pergamene vases with applied reliefs were well known since the beginnings of Pontic archaeology. Several fragments have been unearthed in Panticapaeum, Olbia and several other places. Vases with busts as tondos in the centre of the bowl are also known from several cities, including Hermonassa.<sup>40</sup>

### 2.8. Lagynos Ware and local varieties of the Lagynos Ware

Some imports from Asia Minor were found in Olbia, Panticapaeum and in other major centres. A specific series made in Olbia has been discussed especially by K.I. Zajceva but a similar class was probably produced in the Bosporan kingdom and in Chersonesus as well.<sup>41</sup> Most of the **lagynoi** date between 150-50 B.C., as in other parts of the Hellenistic world.

### 2.9. Hadra vases

Imports of Hadra vases from Crete in the Black Sea are apparently very rare. However, some series of this type have been discovered in Olbia, Histria and the Kerch area.<sup>42</sup>

### 2.10. ESA A and B, Late Pergamene Red



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The transition from Black Glazed to Red Glazed pottery is characteristic for the second half of the 2nd century B.C. Eastern sigillata A, produced in North Syria, appeared in around 150 B.C. along with the red-glazed vases with applied reliefs (ca. 150-130 B.C.).<sup>43</sup>

According to present evidence, the Pontic group dates to the Roman period only. Characteristic for the North Pontic sites is the Eastern sigillata B and AS C made at Candarli but the exact dating of the earliest Hellenistic phase of the Eastern Sigillata remains dubious. Pergamene and Candarli (ESC) wares were apparently common in the Late Hellenistic – Early Roman deposits of many sites including Vani. Eastern Sigillata B and Candarli Ware are partly identical with what was called Samian Ware. It is strongly suggested a deeper investigation concerning the distinction of the earliest sigillata classes since scientific analyses underline that genuine Samian ware was also imported to the Black Sea sites, while Italic sigillata is overall very rare in the Pontic area.<sup>44</sup>

### 2.11. Balsamaria

These vessels, which replaced earlier *lekythoi* in the 3rd century B.C. as containers for perfumed oil, were also used as offerings in graves and contained ointment for the dead. They should have been produced in many places locally, and scientific analyses may prove one day that they were also exported.<sup>45</sup>

### 2.12. Lamps

During the 3rd century B.C. wheel made lamps, both imported and locally made, still prevailed, while their moulded counterparts became common in the 2nd century BC and they included Ephesian and other Asia Minor fabrics. The first Italian lamps reached the Black Sea in the late 1st century B.C. and were imitated in the Pontic cities.<sup>46</sup>

### 2.13. Trade amphorae

The south and north Pontic cities continued to produce their own wine. Sinope was the main producer in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC and it also exported olives and olive oil in amphorae. Heraclea Pontica, Amisos, Colchis, Chersonesos and Panticapaeum exported less quantities though. Thasian exports diminished during the 3rd century BC, while during the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC Rhodian imports increased drastically, not to mention those from Knidos and Kos. The three of them took the lead during Late Hellenistic times and they were followed by [Paros](#). Moreover, in Hellenistic times, wine amphorae were often traded further inland. They have been found in a number of sites in Bulgaria, and in Romania east of the Carpathian mountains. In the north Pontic zone they penetrated along the main rivers hundreds of kilometres northwards.<sup>47</sup>

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28. For the distribution of these classes in the Black Sea cf. the maps by Bouzek, J. *Studies of Greek Pottery in the Black Sea area*, (Prague 1990), esp. p. 85 with fig. 29 and Domăneanțu, C., *Les bols hellénistiques à décor en relief*, (Histria XI), (Bucarest 2000), map 9 for "Monogram A dans carée", map 9 for the "petite rose spiralée", map 4 for the "belles méduses" and map 6 for the "comique à la canne".
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31. Zabelina, V.S. *Ellinističeskaja importnaja keramika iz Pantikapeja*, (Soobščeniia GMII 7) (1984), 133-152 and Bouzek, J. *Studies of Greek Pottery in the Black Sea area*, (Prague 1990), p. 81, pl. 17. 6-10.
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38. Bouzek, J. *Studies of Greek Pottery in the Black Sea area*, (Prague 1990), p.160, pl. 16: 1
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### Γλωσσάριο :

	<b>1. lekanis, the, 2. lekane, the</b>
	1. low bowl with two horizontal handles and a broad low foot. The handles are regularly ribbon-shaped. The lekanis is shallow, lidded and often decorated. Examples of it appear in marriage-scenes and other scenes involving women, and are themselves regularly decorated with scenes of marriage. It flourished during the end of the 5 <sup>th</sup> and the 4 <sup>th</sup> centuries BC. 2. In general, similar to lekanis but the lekane is usually lidless and often undecorated.
	<b>amphora, the</b>
	from the greek words "αμφί"(on both sides) and "φέρω" (carry): vessel with long ovoid body and a considerably narrower neck made in various sizes from the smaller perfume oil container to the large storage receivers of liquids and solids. It stands on a small foot and it bears two invariable vertical handles on either side. Some of the distinguished types of the amphorae are these whose lower part is tapering to the point (narrow bottomed), the neck type, the Nicosthenian, the Nola, the Panathenaic, the Tyrrhenian, the SOS type.
	<b>chora, the</b>
	The agricultural land (including villages and land-plots) belonging to a polis. It was bounded with the polis on an administrative and economic basis.
	<b>emporion, the</b>
	Places where trade was conducted, usually small settlements of urban character on the borders or along the coasts and the commercial routes. With the same term are characterized the trade districts, the markets outside the walls of a city and/or settlements being themselves trade centers.
	<b>kantharos, the</b>
	a deep drinking vessel with two distinctive high handles and an often tall stem of the foot. Kantharoi are frequently depicted



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on black- and red-figure vases, held by Dionysos or Herakles.

### kylix, the

The most essential ancient drinking cup. It bears a wide and shallow body raised on a stem from a foot. It always has horizontal handles disposed symmetrically, often swinging upwards. The interior, flat, round bottom of the vessel was used as surface for painted decoration. There are many different types of kylikes such as the Komast type, the Siana type, types A, B, C, the Droop and the Cassel cups.

### lagynos, the

Vase for the transport of wine with short, angular body, tall, narrow neck and a vertical handle. Widely diffused in the hellenistic period.

### lekythos, the

A perfumed oil container with a narrow mouth and one vertical handle. There are lots of variants of this shape. They are predominant during the 5th c. BC. A common find is also the aryballoid lekythos with a globular and squat body. White lekythoi were used solely as votive offerings in burials.

### pediment, the

The triangular structure, over a building façade, between the horizontal entablature and the sloping roof, often decorated with sculptures, reliefs or painted figures.

### pelike, the

another version of the amphora. It appears for the first time in 520 BC. It consists of a globular body, a short neck, a projecting thick rim, vertical handles and a short base. Due to its stability, merchants used to store in it valuable ointments for sale.

### rosette, the

An ornament with a generally circular combination of parts resembling a flower or plant.

### situla, the

an ancient ceremonial, relief decorated, bronze or pottery vessel shaped like a deep bucket. It was used in funerary rituals and originates from the Etruscans.

Βοηθ. Κατάλογοι