

# RARELY EXHIBITED ETRUSCAN POTTERY

Text by:

Benton Kidd, Curator of Ancient Art

Mattia D'Acri, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Ancient Mediterranean Studies

## Ancient Etruria

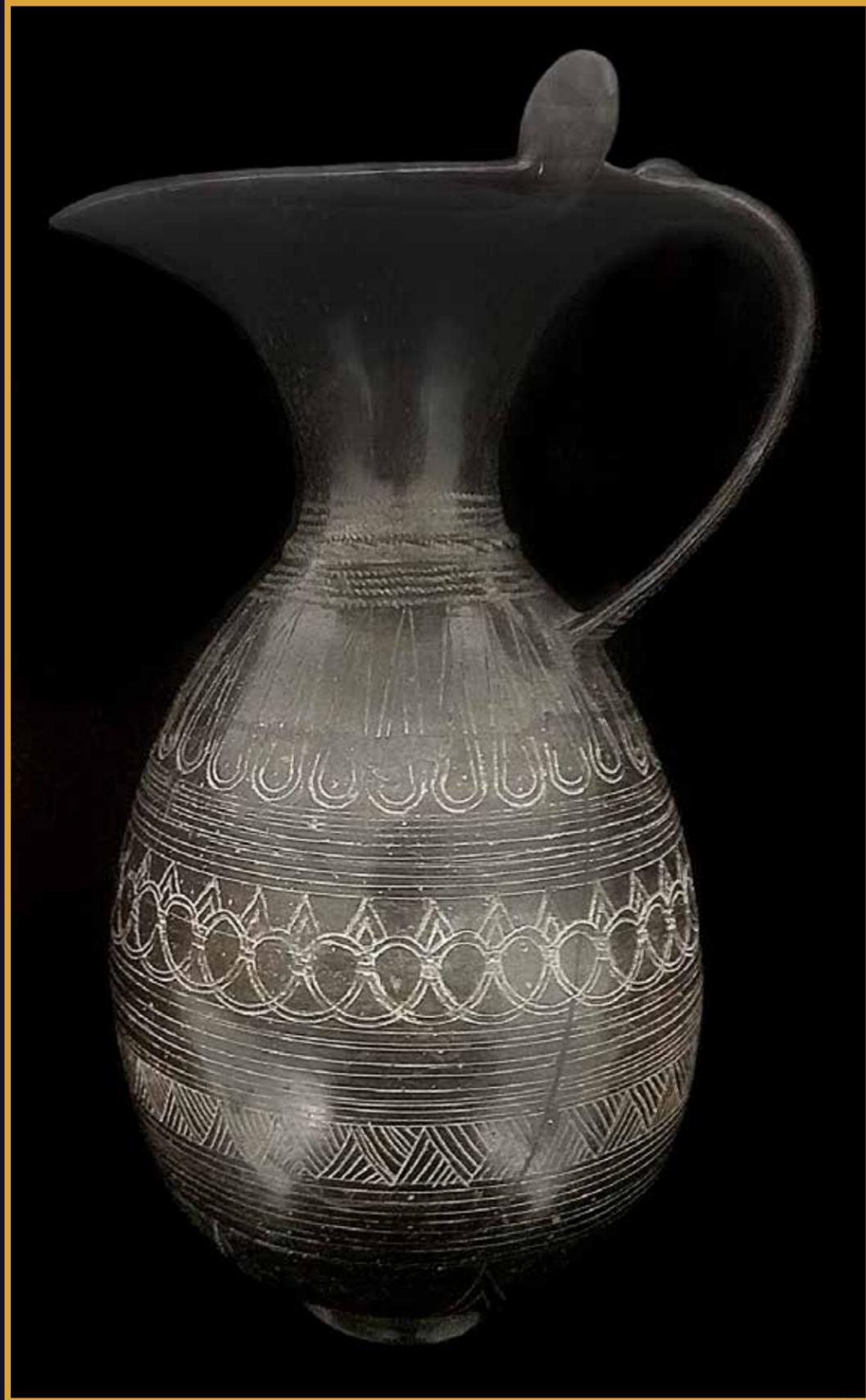
Known as Tyrrhenia to the Greeks, ancient Etruria was located in central Italy, northwest of Rome in the regions now known as Tuscany, Lazio, and Umbria. Etruscans rose to power in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and their prominence increased in the succeeding centuries before complete Roman conquest by the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. (Initial Roman conquests began as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.) Archaeological evidence indicates widespread connections throughout the Mediterranean, but Greek culture particularly seems to have heavily influenced the Etruscans beginning about 750 BCE, when the Greeks began colonization in southern Italy and Sicily.

## Greek Influence on the Etruscans

Based on archaeological remains, Archaic Greece and Classical Greece (ca. 600–325 BCE) had a major impact on Etruscan art and architecture. Additionally, Etruscan writing was based on ancient Greek letters (the Euboean alphabet) but the Etruscan system is not fully understood. What is clear is that Etruscans grew wealthy from trade with cultures to the north of Italy and Greek culture to the south and elsewhere. Imported goods filled wealthy Etruscan tombs, and many of the very best examples of Greek pottery come from Etruscan funerary contexts. Etruscan connections went beyond mainland Greece, however, and evidence for trade with Asia Minor and Egypt is also apparent in Etruscan tombs.

## Etruscan Pottery

Etruscans were prolific potters, the most famous of their wares being the distinctive *Bucchero*. *Bucchero* is a type of wheel-made pottery, uniformly black inside and out, and polished to a glossy finish on the surface, rendering the pottery very like metalwork. The name derives from the Spanish *bucaro*, a word used to designate certain vases from South America made with aromatic and colorful earth. These were imitated in Portugal, and subsequently became popular in Italy about the time discoveries of the Etruscan necropolises were becoming famous. Besides *Bucchero* (broadly 7<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> century BCE), Etruscan pottery was greatly influenced by Greek ceramic production. The chief Greek-influenced styles include Etrusco-Corinthian (imitation of Corinthian shapes and decoration, but made with local clay, 7<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century BCE), as well as Etruscan Red-Figure, and Etruscan Black-Figure (both 6<sup>th</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century BCE), which imitated Attic and other Greek types of pottery. Greek decorative motifs would persist in Etruscan pottery into the Hellenistic period (3<sup>rd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> century BCE).



**Bucchero Olpe (pitcher)**  
Etruscan, ca. 650–580/575 BCE  
Pottery  
Museum purchase (66.339)

Elegant and finely crafted, a Bucchero example such as this has all the characteristics that illustrate how the ware imitated metalwork. These include the very thin spout and handle, the exceptionally precise incision for the decorative motifs, and the burnished, glossy surface.

**Bucchero “Pesante” Kyathos (ladle)**  
Etruscan, 550–500 BCE  
From Vulci or Chiusi (Italy)  
Pottery  
Museum purchase (59.57)

“Pesante” Bucchero is distinguished by thick-walled vessels that contrast with the delicate thinness of examples like the *olpe* (66.339). A ladle such as this was probably used for dipping wine into other vessels.





**Bucchero Oinochoe (wine pitcher)**  
Etruscan, 570–520 BCE  
Pottery  
Gift of Dr. Allen A. Heflin (86.71)

Not all Bucchero was decorated. These examples, imitating Greek shapes, are very diminutive in size and were not practical for everyday use. The *oinochoe* is typically for wine but this one (H:11cm) may have been for perfume used during funerary or religious ritual. This *kylix* was probably also for ritual, perhaps for pouring a libation. Its small diameter (H:10.4cm) limited its use as a drinking vessel, the usual function.

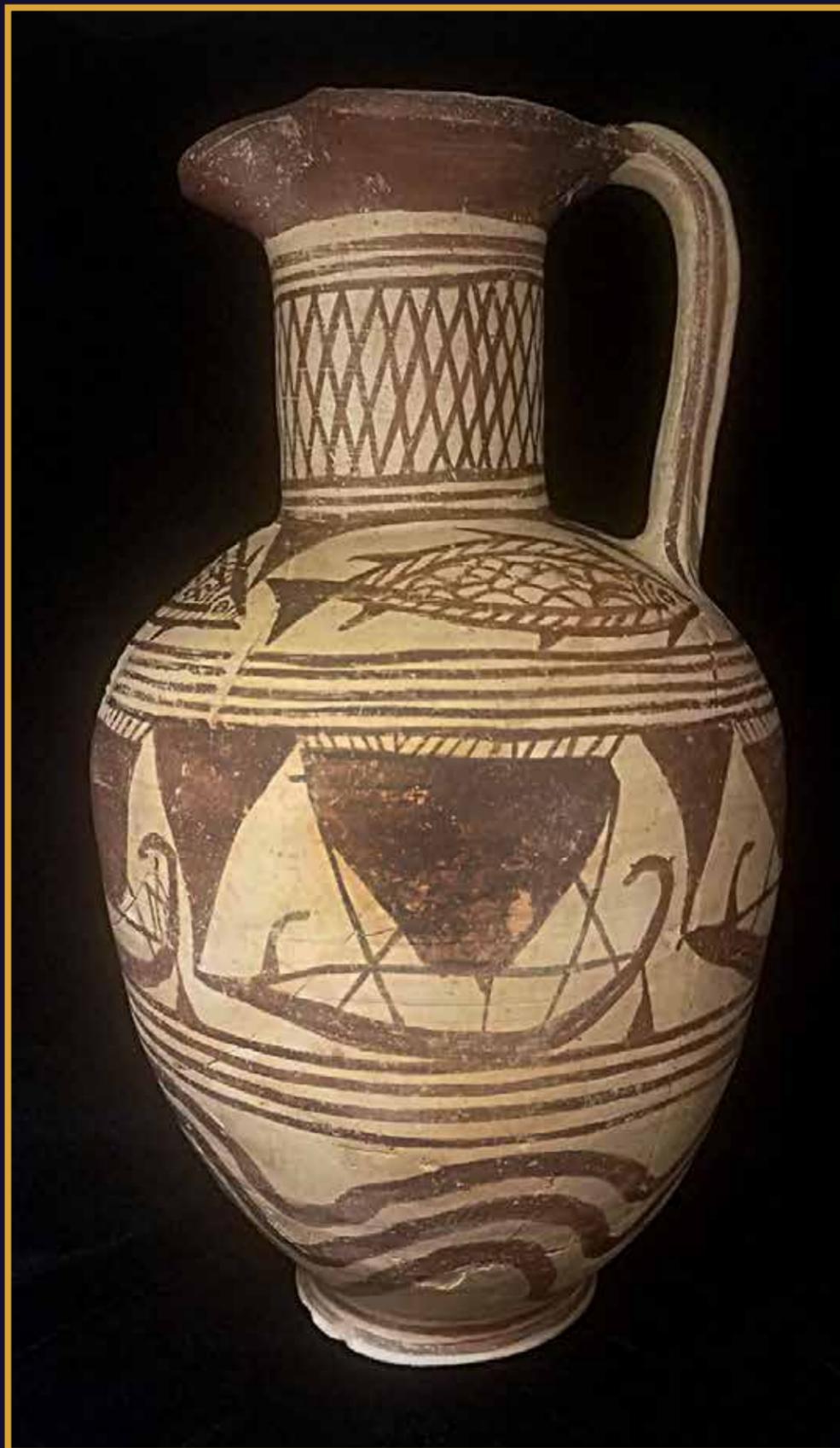


**Bucchero Kylix (wine cup)**  
Etruscan, 570–560 BCE  
Pottery  
Gift of Dr. Allen A. Heflin (85.171)

**Bucchero Kantharos** (wine cup)  
Etruscan, ca. 500–550 BCE  
Pottery  
Museum purchase (66.306)

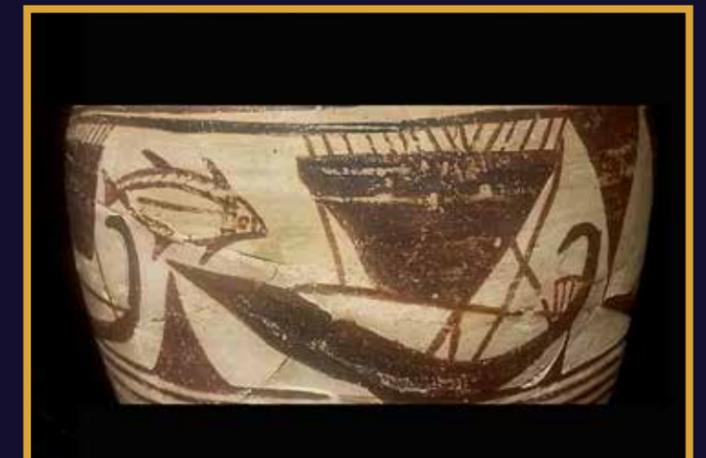
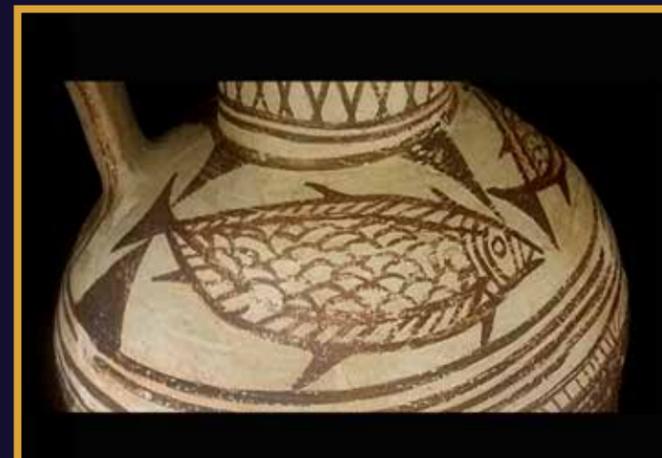
The *kantharos* with high-swung handles is Greek in origin and is found at all of the main Etruscan sites. Very similar examples in bronze are also extant.

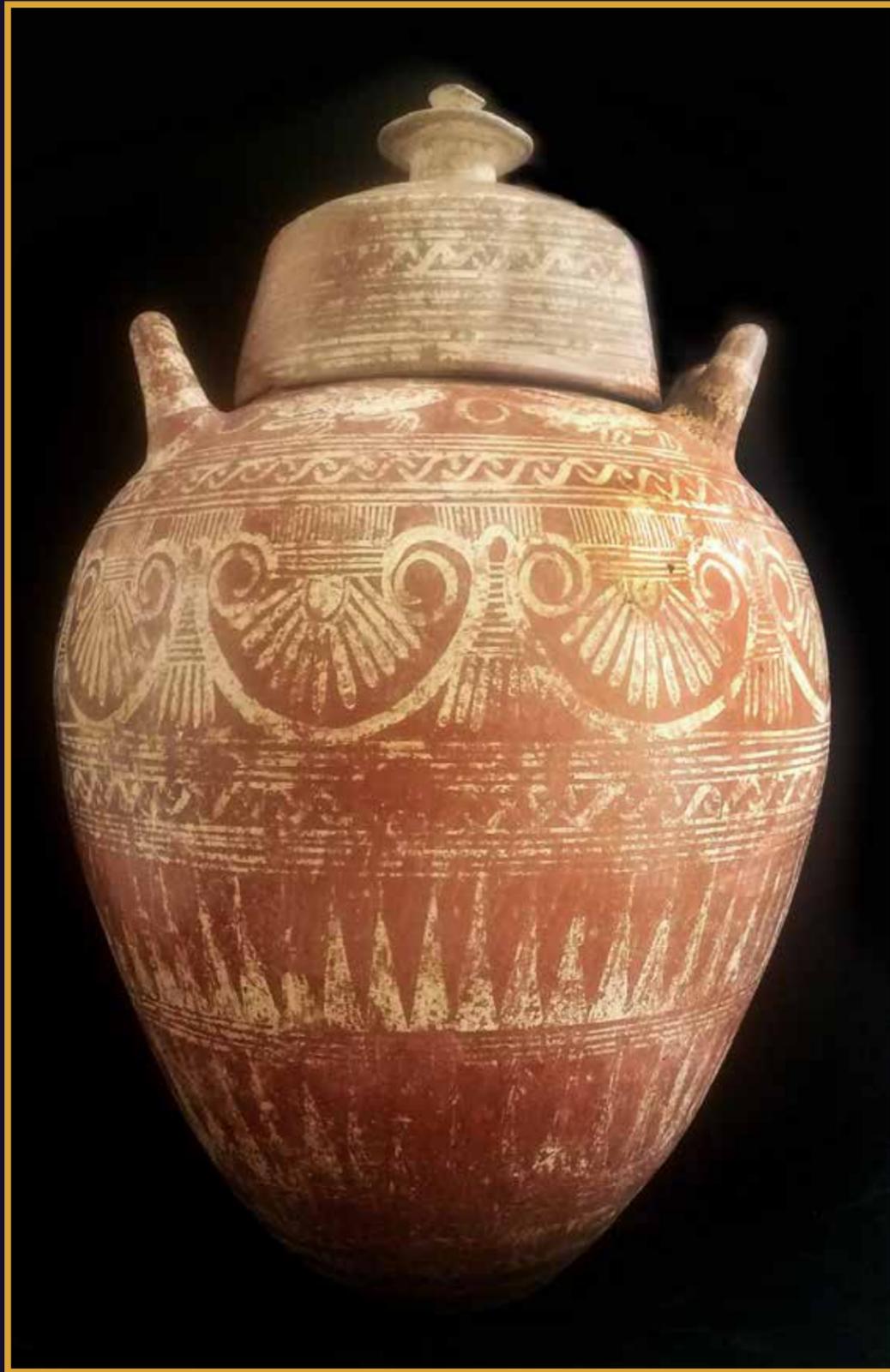




**Oinochoe** (wine pitcher)  
Etruscan, ca. 700–675 BCE  
“Italo-Geometric Style”  
By the Palm Painter  
Pottery  
Museum purchase (71.114)

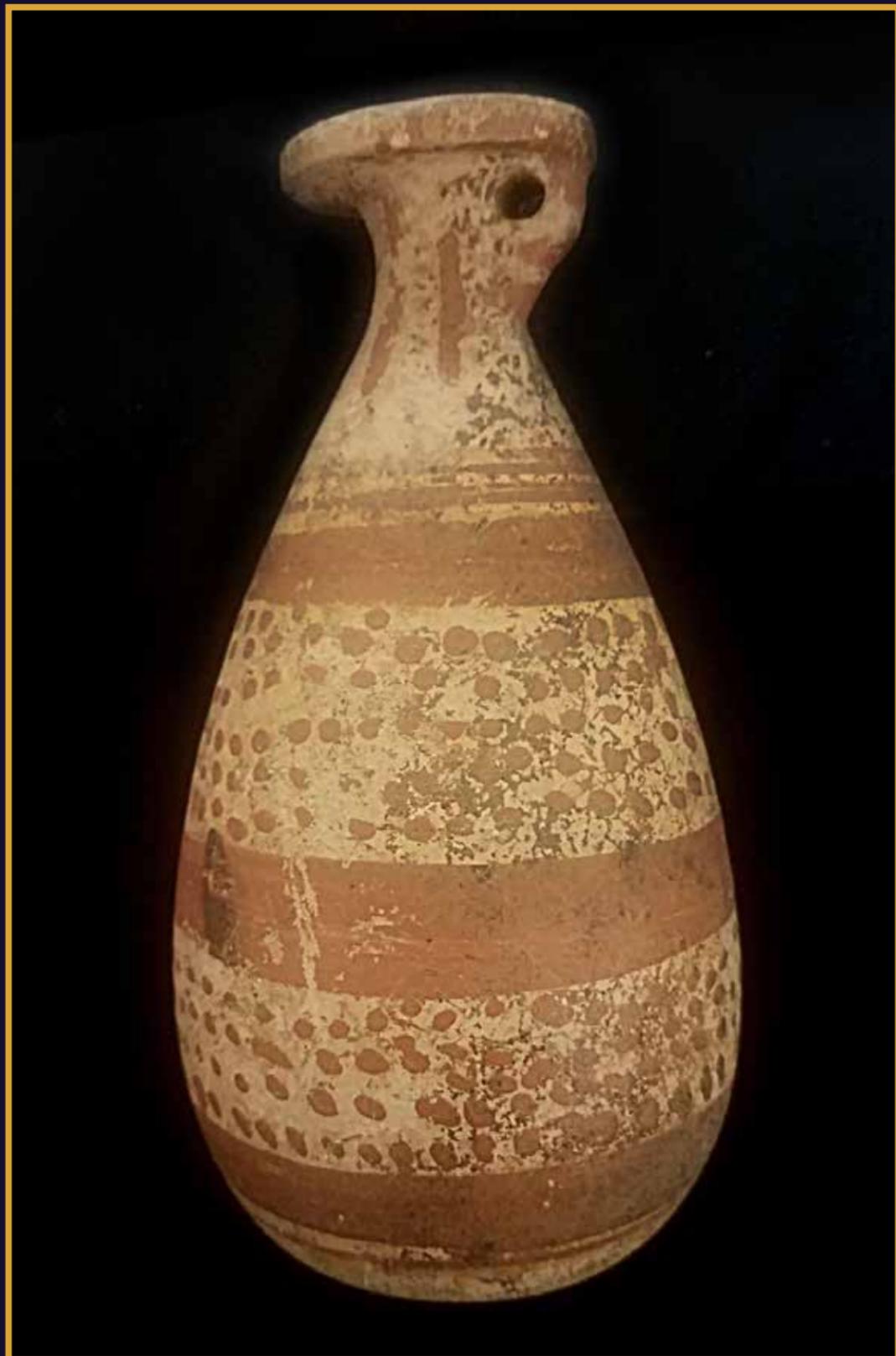
The “Palm Painter” painted at least eleven wine pitchers with ships. The ships attest the international trade in the ancient Mediterranean, but the “Palm Painter” himself seems to have had international connections. His rows of fish reflect trends in pottery at Corinth, while his namesake palms on other vessels show the influence of Asia Minor. He also seems to be aware of Greek Geometric pottery on which figures and objects are reduced to simple geometric forms.





**Olla (decorative storage jar)**  
Etruscan, 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE  
White-on-Red Ware  
Pottery  
Museum purchase (68.71A-B)

In spite of the large size of the jar (H:56cm), it was probably decorative and made for the tomb. It was a common grave good in Etruscan tombs from Caere, Vulci, and Tarquinii. The elegantly painted palmette, wave, and tongue motifs show Greek influence.



**Alabastron** (perfume vessel)  
Etruscan, ca. 600–575 BCE  
From Veio (Italy)  
Pottery  
Gift of Dr. Allen A. Heflin (85.174)

The *alabastron* was originally an imitation of alabaster perfume vessels from Egypt. This variety also imitates vessels from Corinth and is common to sanctuaries and cemeteries in Lazio and Etruria.

**Brazier with Hunting Frieze**

Etruscan, ca. 625–575 BCE

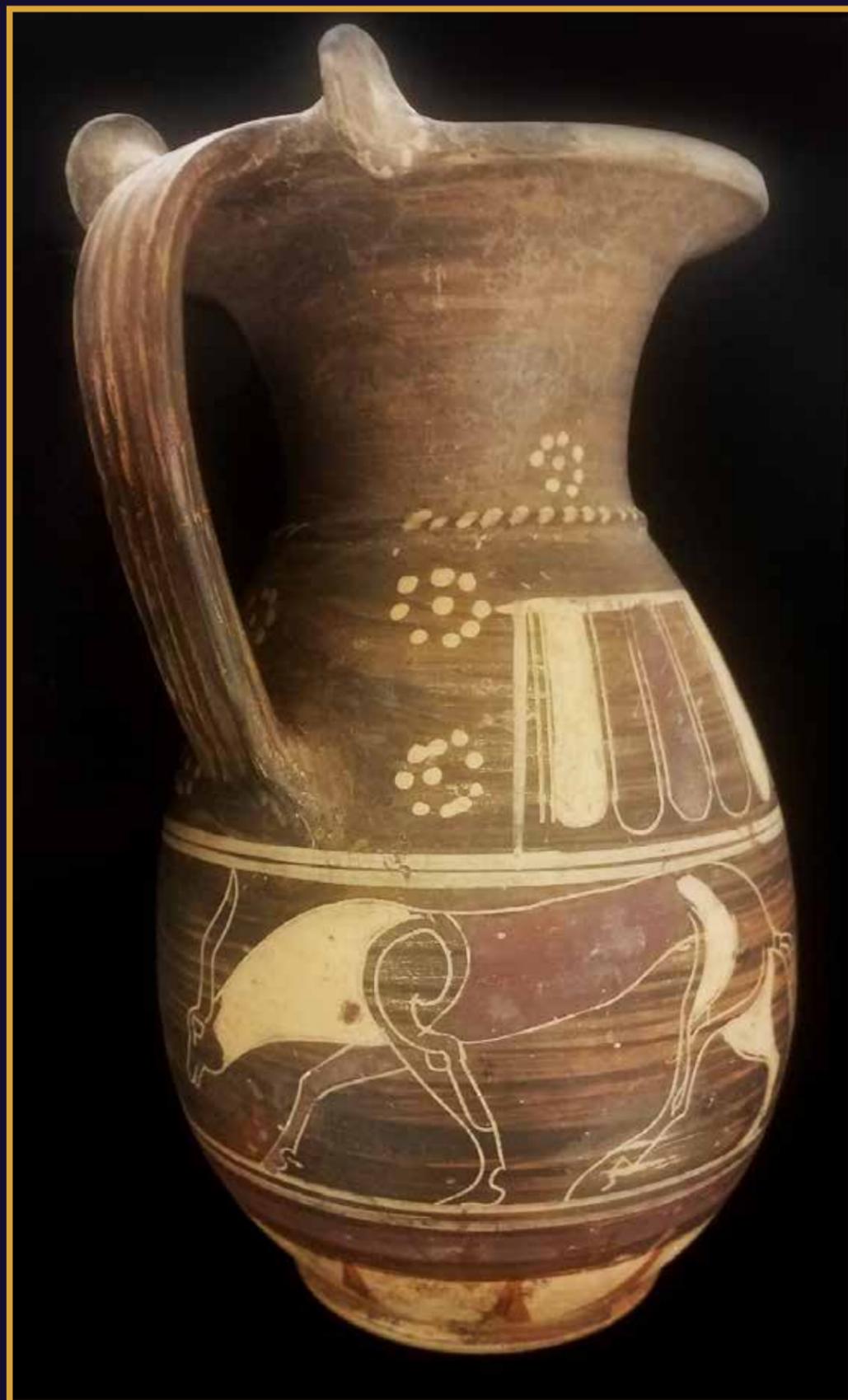
Red Impasto Ware

Pottery

Museum purchase (62.62)

Braziers could be filled with hot coals and used to heat interiors, but many are known from Etruscan tombs. One noteworthy example, now in the Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia (Rome), was found with the burned remains of several eggs, probably a funerary offering. “Impasto Ware” refers to the gritty, coarse nature of the clay.





**Olpe (pitcher)**

Etruscan, ca. 600–575 BCE

Possibly from Vulci

Pottery

Gift of Alumni Achievement Fund (62.12)

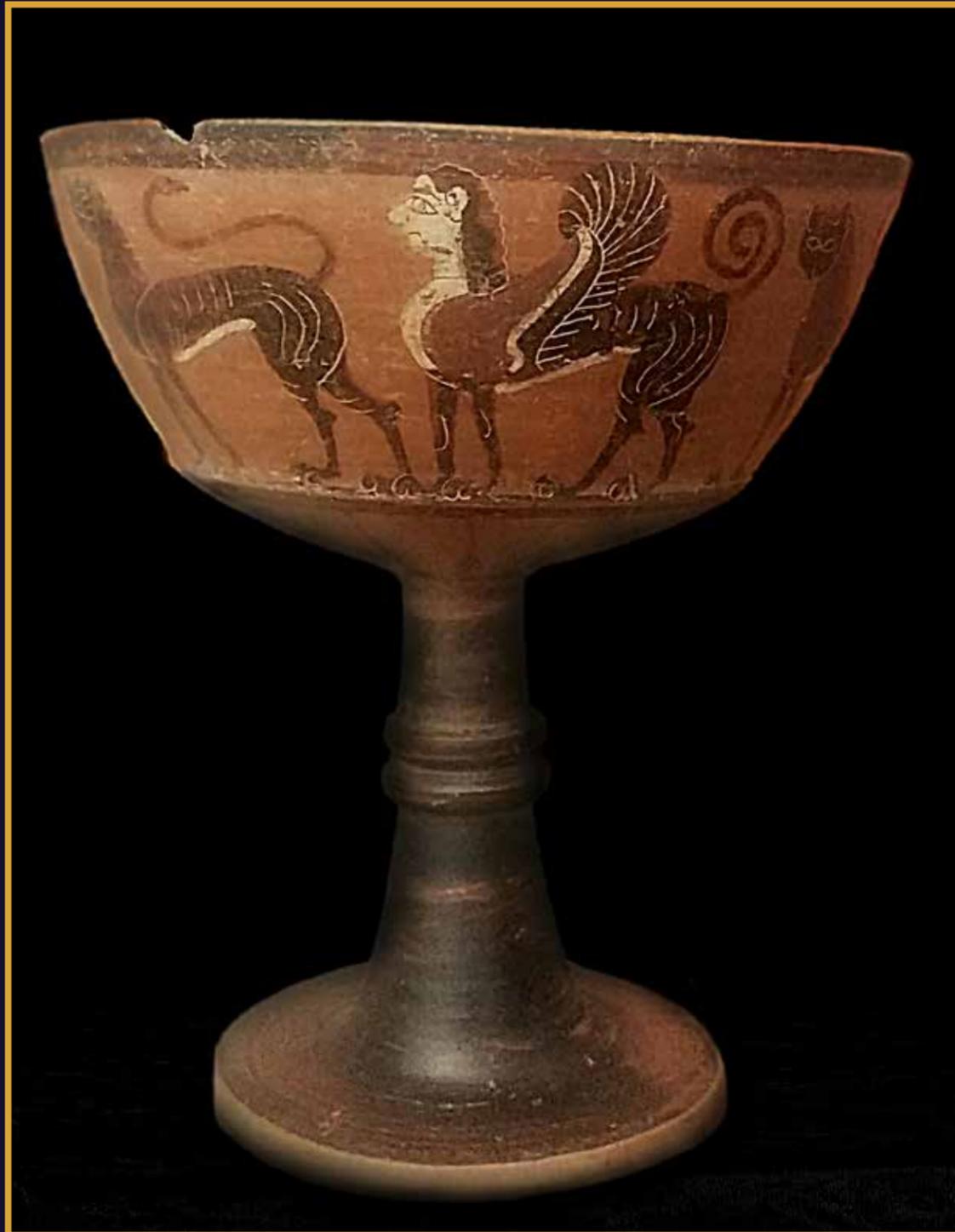
The Etruscan imitation of the “Wild Goat Style,” a type of decoration for Greek pottery that included wild goats but also other animals, is evident on this vessel. The style originated in Asia Minor but the Etruscans were also exposed to it through interaction with Corinth on the Greek mainland, or perhaps through artists that had emigrated west from Asia Minor. The incision into the clay to create the animals and other decoration took a very careful and skilled hand.



**Plate with Animal Frieze**  
Etruscan, ca. 550–500 BCE  
“Etrusco-Corinthian” Style, by a follower of  
the Rosoni Painter  
Pottery  
Museum purchase (59.8)

This plate shows the influence of Corinthian pottery and the Wild Goat Style, as well as the “Rosoni Painter” who was known for vessels decorated with friezes of animals, mostly birds and panthers, but also very large rosettes (Italian: *rosoni*) interspersed between the animals. This unnamed artist, a “Rosoni Painter” follower, also uses the large rosettes, while birds and a panther (now very abraded) once completed the decoration.





### **Chalice with Sphinxes and Lions**

Etruscan, ca. 530–500 BCE

Pontic Style, by a follower of the Paris Painter

Probably from Vulci or Cerveteri

Pottery

Museum purchase (60.10)

An artist who emigrated to Italy from Asia Minor probably decorated this chalice, since it shows a marked influence from the pottery of Ionia (an area of western Turkey). “Pontic Style” is known for its figures in multiple colors (here white, red and black). The “Paris Painter” was the most important painter of this style and likely influenced the artist of the chalice.

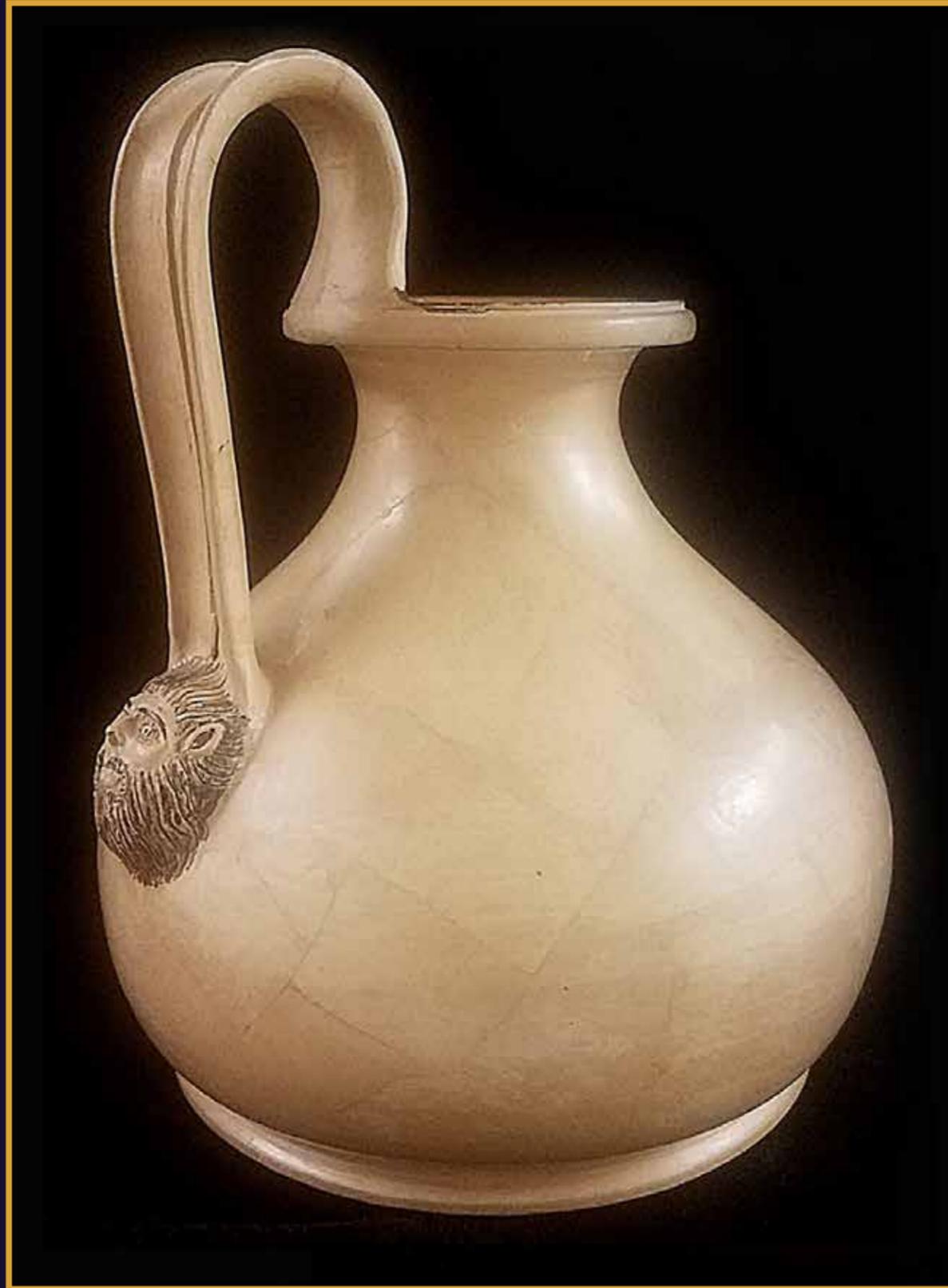
**Olpe with Satyr Head (pitcher)**

Etruscan, ca. 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> BCE

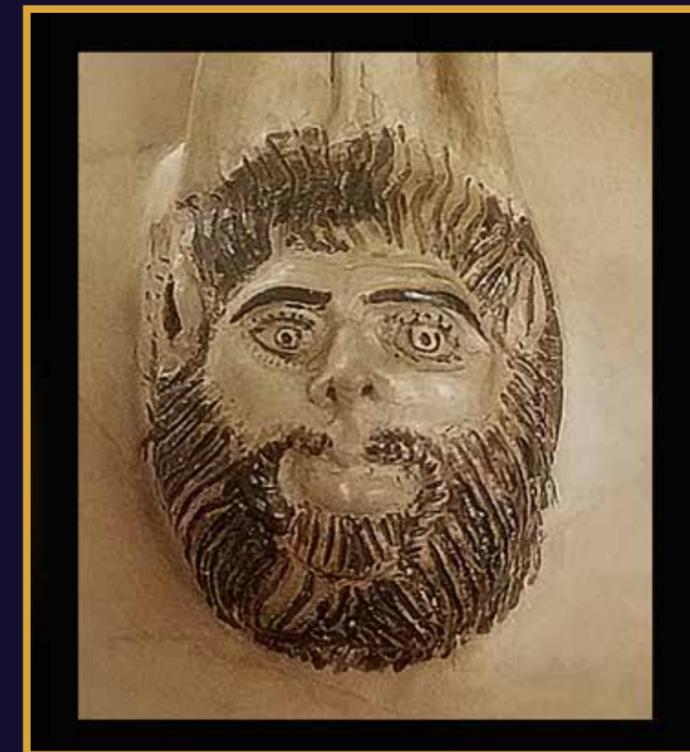
“Creamware”

Pottery

Partial gift of Dr. Herbert Cahn in honor of Saul and Gladys Weinberg (79.75)



Perhaps as much as 200 years separate this vessel and the previous “Pontic Style” cup. Stylistic changes are evident in Etruscan pottery as time progressed, and some examples had considerably less decoration by this period. “Creamware,” which consisted of a depurated (impurity-free) clay and pale slip, became popular and was produced in Etruria and Lazio, as was the distinctive, pot-bellied shape. The satyr shows how Greek myth continued to influence many aspects of Etruscan society even as late as the Hellenistic period.



### Footed Plate

Etruscan or Latin, ca. 320–260 BCE

Genucilia Group

Pottery

Gift of Dr. Allen A. Heflin (85.170)



Common in graves of Etruria and Lazio, “Genucilia” plates with geometric decoration take their name from a woman named “Poplia Genucilia” whose name was inscribed on the plate found in her tomb. A few other examples have names or initials, though this is much less common. This type of plate also has some cognates with pottery in the Greek colonies of southern Italy.

