

ART ANCIENT



RARE BLACK-FIGURE PYXIS

Greek, circa 6th century BC

Terracotta

Width: 16 cm

PROVENANCE

Sotheby's, New York, *Collection of Highly important Egyptian, Western Asiatic, Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities*. 13 June 1966, Lot 142 (ill.).

Subsequently, Condylis collection, acquired from the above.

A particularly well-preserved Attic pyxis, with elegant geometric motif and sleek design.

Finely potted, the cover with rounded knob and reserved decoration of concentric circles, the body of the lid with further black glazed concentric bands and an outer border with intertwining bunches of grapes and vine leaves, the leaves with small touches of white paint. The lower half in plain black glaze, the underside of the foot with potter's mark.





This is a beautifully preserved example of an ancient Greek vessel, known as a pyxis. Likely used by the lady of the house, the pyxis would have held personal items, such as cosmetics, trinkets or jewellery, or was even used for dispensing incense. On account of their personal nature, they were often given as wedding gifts, or even placed in the owner's tomb after death. In addition to being functional objects, they were decorative items. The elegant motifs of the present piece, painted in black glaze, are reminiscent of the geometric forms belonging to earlier Corinthian black-figure pottery. As such, while many such items have been found in Etruscan tombs, there remains some debate as to whether such pieces were native to Etruria, or were brought there via trade with the Greek colonies of Southern Italy.

Black-figure pottery was highly prized in the 18th and 19th centuries, with a number of European nobles, like Sir William Hamilton (1730-1803) and Prince Lucien Bonaparte (1775-1840), forming huge collections. Hamilton in particular played a pivotal role in popularising such pottery by publishing illustrated volumes of his collections, which influenced artists and designers across Europe.



1 Image from Sotheby's *Collection of Highly important Egyptian, Western Asiatic, Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities*. 13 June 1966, Lot 142 (ill.).



'Bounteous beyond expression is the Earth, if we only consider in detail her various gifts... her productions in the shape of pottery alone, would more than suffice, in their variety, to satisfy our wants...'

Pliny the Elder, Natural History, XXXV