

Achaemenid Jar with Lion-Griffin Handles

Learn about ancient Persian art and culture by exploring the Achaemenid Jar with Lion-Griffin Handles, a vessel perhaps used at a wealthy Persian dinner party. Read the information and follow the instructions in order to complete the activity below.

Elegant Vessels: Decorations and Symbols

The Persian Empire of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. stretched from Turkey and the Mediterranean Sea all the way east to India and south to Egypt. Many different populations with their own histories of craft and art were contained within this empire, and many beautiful artworks reflect a multiethnic world drawing from many traditions.

This vessel, rare because of its shape and function, would have been used at a special dinner party or given as a gift of honor. The handles are hybrid beings of a sort the Greeks borrowed from the east for their myths. Observe the artist's use of smooth surfaces, relief, and incision as well as precious metals. How does the decoration relate to the shape? Imagine how you might pick up and use this special jar.

Lions with goat horns have been turned into handles. How does the artist change their shape to suit a new function?

This area of the jar is not decorated with a design or image. Even so, how does the artist emphasize it?

This small spout is the clue to the function of the jar. What do you think it tells us?

Egyptian lotus petals decorate the bottom of the jar. How do they suit the shape?



Spouted Jar with Lion-Griffin Handles
Unknown artist
Achaemenid, ancient Persia, 350–325 B.C.
Silver and gold
10⁵/₈ x 4⁷/₁₆ in.
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