

Wine Cup with a Boy Holding a Lyre, painted by Douris, potted by Python

Wine Cup with a Boy Holding a Lyre

Signed by Douris, painter; attributed to Python, potter
Greek, Athens, about 480 B.C.
Terracotta
4 11/16 x 15 5/16 x 12 5/16 in.
86.AE.290

Background Information

Scenes of the daily lives of Athenian schoolboys decorate this **red-figure** cup. In addition to basic literacy and mathematics, Greek boys were trained in athletics and music. On the interior of the cup, a boy holding a type of **lyre** called a **kithara** stands in front of a

bearded man leaning on his walking stick. The tortoise shell used to make the resonator, or soundbox, of the kithara is clearly visible in the image. The boy appears to be attending a music lesson with his teacher. On the outside of the cup, men and boys form similar scenes. The imagined walls of the schoolroom are hung with musical instruments and athletic equipment: lyres, string bags with knucklebones (a game similar to jacks), and **aryballoi** (small containers for oil or perfume). Schoolroom scenes showing boys with their teachers were popular in the early fifth century until about 450 B.C. This popularity may have stemmed from the increasing number of Athenian citizen families who were investing in formal education for their sons.



This cup was designed especially for ancient wine-drinking parties called **symposia**. At symposia, male citizens would gather for dinner, conversation, music, entertainment, and drinking. The master of ceremonies for the evening, called the symposiarch, would decide how much wine would be drunk. Ancient Greeks diluted their wine with water, a practice that they believed set them apart from “barbarians,” which was a term they used to refer to all non-Greeks. The symposiarch would determine the proportion of water to wine, and servants would mix the liquids in a vessel called a **krater** and pour the drink into wine cups like this.

About the Artists

Douris (Greek, active 500–460 B.C.)

Douris worked as a vase painter in Athens in the early fifth century B.C. He also occasionally worked as a potter, which was not common in antiquity, when pottery was usually formed by one skilled tradesman and decorated by another person who specialized in painting. Douris is known from forty-one signed vases, two of which he also potted. Altogether, almost three hundred vases

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have been attributed to him. Douris primarily decorated red-figure cups, but he also painted a few vessels of other forms and in other techniques, including **white-ground** containers. He depicted scenes of both mythology and everyday life. He worked with a number of potters but seems to have had a regular collaboration with Python. Douris was so influential in his day that another painter, Onesimos, depicted a cup signed by Douris on one of his vases, and there is even an ancient forgery of Douris's signature.

Python (Greek, active 500–480 B.C.)

The potter Python, who formed the wine cup out of clay, had a long association with Douris, who painted decorations on it. Although it was common practice for one person to form the shape of a piece of pottery and another to paint it, the continued collaboration of Douris and Python was unusual. In addition to working with Douris, Python potted cups for Epiktetos and the Triptolemos painter.

Python worked in Athens in the early 400s B.C. A specialist in cups, he is known from his signature on three vases. Distinctive aspects of Python's potting style include the form and size of the foot of his cups and the shape and angle of the handles. Many of his cups are small in size.



Education



The J. Paul Getty Museum
at the Getty Center

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Questions for Teaching

Take the time to look closely at the work of art. What do you notice about the object?

What do you notice about the people depicted in the center of the work of art?

What objects are they depicted with? (*The man is leaning on a walking stick; the boy is holding a lyre.*)

Based on the gestures, size, and physical appearance of the people, as well as the objects depicted with them, what do you think is the relationship between the two individuals? (*The figures could be a student learning to play the kithara with his teacher, or a young musician with a parental figure.*)

Painters using the red-figure technique had a much greater freedom of expression than those using the earlier **black-figure** technique, which relied on incised rather than painted lines. Can you describe the ways different types of lines were used to create details on the wine cup. (*long, straight, and wavy lines to depict the folds of fabric; curvy lines to denote muscles; short, thin lines for eyebrows, toes, mouths; cross-hatched lines on the cushion of the stool; repeated spiral lines in the circular pattern*)

View a reproduction of the wine cup from another angle. Look closely at the form of the object. Does it remind you of anything in your home?

What does the form of the object reveal about how the object may have been used? (*The bowl shape of the interior could hold liquids, and the handles would have enabled someone to easily hold and lift the object.*)

Why do you think an object used at a drinking party would be painted with a scene of a music teacher and student? (*Music was an important part of daily life and formal education in ancient Greece.*)

What special cups or plates do you or your families like to use at parties?