

## Teacher Guide

### Achaemenid Jar with Lion-Griffin Handles

The Achaemenid Jar with Lion-Griffin Handles is a vessel that could have been utilized at an exclusive Persian dinner party. This guide can be used to teach about ancient Persian art and culture. The guide contains information for teachers, suggested discussion questions, and activities for students that can be carried out in the Getty Villa's galleries or in the classroom.

## Background Information

The Persian Empire of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. was vast, stretching 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 included within this empire, and many Persian artworks reflect a cosmopolitan world drawing from many traditions.

The Persians were famous for their metalwork. This beautiful silver and gold jar, called by the Greek name amphora-rhyton, is rare. It combines an amphora, a two-handled wine jug commonly used in antiquity to hold wine at dinner parties, with a rhyton, a vessel used to pour liquids. In the gallery with this vessel are other later rhyta (pl.) in interesting shapes. Elite Persian dining and wine-drinking rituals reinforced the cultural value of hospitality, and exquisite gifts conferred social status. Here, the little spout at the bottom of the amphora aerated wine as it was poured into a drinking vessel. The spout would have needed a stopper when not in use.

This kind of vessel in precious metal, elegantly decorated, would have been used at an elite Achaemenid dinner party or given as a special gift. In a relief from the east stairway of the Audience Hall (Apadana) at Persepolis (early fifth century B.C.), Lydians bring gifts to the Persian king. One delegate carries two vessels very similar to this one. (A picture of the delegates is reproduced in gallery 203 of the exhibition *The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia: A New Beginning*, on the label for the "Armlet with Griffins.")

The artist has emphasized the shape of different areas of the jar—lip, neck, shoulder, handles, belly/base—by alternating smooth surfaces with areas of incision and relief decoration. Delicate Egyptian lotus petals decorate the lower half and seem to open as the rounded base swells upward. The handles are crafted as winged lions with goat horns, hybrids of a type typical of inland Persia. Similar hybrid animals common in Greek mythology were borrowed from the east, including from the multiethnic Persian Empire. A version of this griffin-beast more familiar to students from Greek art has the head of an eagle or other bird of prey.

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## Questions for Teaching

- Look closely at this object. What details or symbols do you notice?
- Describe how the different decorative elements help divide the vessel into different sections.
- How does the shape of the vessel help inform us about how this object was used?
- If you owned this vessel, on what occasions would you use it?

## Related Content Standards for California Public Schools

### COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

#### Grade 6–12

#### College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening

1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

### CALIFORNIA STATE CONTENT STANDARDS FOR HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES

#### Grade Six

- 6.2 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Kush.

### CALIFORNIA STATE CONTENT STANDARDS FOR VISUAL ARTS

#### Grade Six

- Historical and Cultural Context 3.1: Research and discuss the role of the visual arts in selected periods of history, using a variety of resources (both print and electronic).
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.1: Construct and describe plausible interpretations of what they perceive in works of art.

#### Grade Seven

- Aesthetic Valuing 4.2: Analyze the form (how a work of art looks) and content (what a work of art communicates) of works of art.



Spouted Jar with Lion-Griffin Handles  
Unknown artist  
Achaemenid, ancient Persia, 350–325 B.C.  
Silver and gold  
10<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 4<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in.  
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