Encyclopedia Entry: Bucchero Sottile Jug Olpe

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Abstract
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Disciplines
Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity | Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture | Byzantine and Modern Greek | Sculpture

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BUCCHEO SOTTILE JUG OLPE

Etruscan, c. 650–630 BCE
Attributed to the workshop of the Cornacchiola Tomb Potter from Caere by C. R. Mack.
Intact, with a few cracks. Glossy, black-glazed surface, highly burnished; light encrustation on interior. Thin-walled jug with low, rounded base and ribbed body, neck sharply demarcated from body, wide mouth, and high-flanged handle.

Typical of Etruria, bucchero pottery is fired in a reducing atmosphere, leaving the surface and internal clay black. Bucchero vases of southern Etruria are usually of higher quality and more pleasing in design than those from central and northern Etruria and Etruscan Campania.14 The thin walls of the Ackland jug, less than three millimeters in thickness, are characteristic of bucchero sottile wear and suggest that the jug was intended to imitate a metal vessel; it was likely used as a burial gift.15

This shape of jug, or olpe, is native to Etruria and among the earliest bucchero shapes. The Ackland vase corresponds to Rasmussen’s jug Type 1A,16 with a rounded mouth, a conical neck articulated from the body, a high ribbon handle, and a low, narrow base. Early examples of this type usually have ribbing or striations on the body, but these features died out in the last quarter of the seventh century.

Decoration comprises impressed fans, which were probably created using a pliable, comb-like instrument that was rotated in an arc, in a technique called rouletting.17 Nine vertical fans encircle the base of the neck, with a half fan by the handle. Four shells are impressed upon the handle, three of increasing size on the exterior and one on the interior; six dotted lines cross the handle base. Four horizontal incised lines occur on the neck interior.

Impressed designs on the vase appear to contain something white. This could be a white substance or lead paste added intentionally to draw attention to the designs, or the result of materials in the ground; it is probably not silver leaf.18

The Ackland jug can be placed in the workshop of the Cornacchiola Tomb Potter, based on comparisons with vases from this tomb in Caere. A Type 1A jug from this tomb has a similar ribbed body, but it differs in having two rows of fans between three groups of rouletted lines on the neck.19 The Ackland jug’s dark glossy surface, ribbed body, and shape place it soon after the mid-seventh century BCE.

R.L.M

16. Rasmussen, Bucchero, 89–90, pl. 23, fig. 97, c. 650–625 BCE; Ramage, "Etruscan Bucchero," 1–65, Type 8C.
17. Ramage, "Etruscan Bucchero," 16; Rasmussen, Bucchero, 120.
18. Rasmussen, Bucchero, 128 (addition of silver leaf), 131 (compounds in soil).
19. Rasmussen, Bucchero, 13, no. 3, pl. 22, fig. 94.