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# KUNST HISTORISCHES MUSEUM

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## **Vitrine EXTRA #7** *Incised, Painted, Concealed* *Inscriptions on Greek Vases*

5 September 2025 until 1 March 2026

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities

The seventh edition of the Vitrine EXTRA series draws attention to often overlooked inscriptions on Greek vases – from quickly scribbled trader's notes to the signatures of proud workshop owners, which seem like precursors to today's 'Made by' labels used to identify a particular brand.

### **Vases speak volumes: small inscriptions, big stories**

When we think about ancient inscriptions, we perhaps have the image before our eyes of large-scale texts chiselled in stone. They can, however, appear quite differently as well: they can be delicately engraved and briskly painted. Vitrine EXTRA #7 shows how Greek inscriptions on vases not only inform, but also surprise or create exciting new images.

In Greek Antiquity, vases were not only artistically painted, but also inscribed – some of the inscriptions carved, some of them painted. Incised inscriptions were usually made after firing and rarely had anything to do with the image depicted on the vessel. In contrast, painted inscriptions were created at the same time as the vase's pictorial decoration and are therefore part of the overall concept. These inscriptions have the potential to reveal the everyday life and culture of people living over 2,000 years ago.

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## **Turned upside down**

Vitrine EXTRA #7 focuses for the first time on the great diversity of these texts. In two special displays, vases are turned (almost) upside down, allowing visitors to see their otherwise hidden undersides. There, markings and notes made by ancient merchants and potters can be discovered, which bear witness to the use and history of these objects far beyond their function as artistically designed vessels.

## **What inscriptions tell us (and don't tell us)**

At seven additional stations in the gallery the presentation highlights exciting aspects such as the development of the Greek alphabet, name inscriptions, workshop signatures and the so-called *kalos* inscriptions: praises of young men's – and, more rarely, women's – beauty which today pose just as much of a mystery as the so-called 'nonsense inscriptions', which make no linguistic sense. Was the vase painter illiterate? Are the symbols imaginative additions to templates or do they merely serve a decorative function?

For Vitrine EXTRA #7, all inscriptions have been translated and explained concisely. Modern labels are also presented: labels, inventory numbers, notes from previous owners – each vase is not only an object from antiquity, but also presents a part of collection history.

Exhibition website:

<https://www.khm.at/en/exhibitions/incised-painted-concealed>

## **Vitrine Extra**

The series of presentations taking place in the permanent exhibition of the Kunsthistorisches Museum's Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities regularly highlights various aspects of antiquity, making deposited and restored, analysed and researched, fascinating and amusing, whimsical and inspiring objects newly accessible again to the public.

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## PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

Press photographs are available in the press section of our website free of charge, for your topical reporting: <https://www.khm.at/en/museum/press>



Ribbon-handle Amphora  
Detail: Signature of the potter and workshop owner  
Nikosthenes  
Attic black-figure, around 530 BCE  
Clay  
H. 34.5 cm  
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Collection of  
Greek and Roman Antiquities  
© KHM-Museumsverband



Ribbon-handle Amphora  
ca. 530 BCE, Greek  
Attic black-figure, around 530 BCE  
Clay  
H. 34.5 cm  
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Collection of  
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## Wine Jug

Scene in a textile shop, the inscriptions on the background have no linguistic sense

Attic black-figure, around 550 BCE

Clay

H. 22.5 cm

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities

© KHM-Museumsverband



## Neck Amphora

Detail of side B: Ajax carries Achilles' body from the battlefield, the inscriptions on the background have no linguistic sense

Attic black-figure, around 500 BCE

Clay H. 26.5 cm

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities

© KHM-Museumsverband



## Neck Amphora

Detail of side B: Ajax carries Achilles' body from the battlefield

Attic black-figure, around 500 BCE

Clay

H. 26.5 cm

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## OPENING HOURS AND ENTRANCE FEES

The current opening hours and admission prices can be found on our website at:

<https://www.khm.at/en/visit>

All tickets and offers are available in the online ticket shop:

<https://shop.khm.at/tickets>

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow us on Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok in order to stay informed about the preparations leading up to the opening, the supporting programme and gain glimpses of the exhibition.

Instagram: @kunsthistorischesmuseumvienna

Facebook: @KHMWien

TikTok: @kunsthistorischesmuseum

#KunsthistorischesMuseum

## MEDIA ACCREDITATION

Journalists reporting on a KHM-Museumsverband location, a current exhibition or an event, will be provided with a free admission ticket.

Please send a written request to [presse@khm.at](mailto:presse@khm.at) at least two working days in advance, mentioning the specific date of your planned visit and your medium as well as submitting a scan of your valid press ID. Thank you!

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