

## Kalpis Fact Sheet

**Object:**

Ancient Etruscan Kalpis (water vessel)

**Artist:**

Attributed to The Painter of Vatican 238, an anonymous artist whose distinctive painting style is seen on a vase located in the Vatican Museum

**Date:**

About 520-510 BCE

**Medium:**

Terracotta with black painted figures

**Size:**

Height is 20 ½" (52.1 cm)

**Acquisition History:**

The Kalpis was acquired by the Museum in 1982 from a Swiss art dealer who provided documentation of private ownership dating back to 1935. The vase has been published several times since the Toledo Museum of Art's accession and was loaned to international exhibitions in Paris and Berlin in 1992/93 and to the international exhibition "Gli Etruschi" in Venice in 2000/01.

**Background:**

Before the days of Ancient Rome's greatness, Italy was the home of a nation called Etruria, whose people are called the Etruscans. Its civilization prospered between 950 and 300 BCE. in northwestern Italy. The Etruscan people rose to prosperity and power, and then disappeared, leaving behind many unanswered questions concerning their origin and their culture. Because little Etruscan literature remains and their language remains only partially deciphered, scholars have gained most of their knowledge of the Etruscans from studying the remains of their buildings, monuments, vast tombs and the objects they left behind, notably bronze and terracotta sculptures and multi-colored ceramics. Although their origins remain uncertain, there is some evidence that the Etruscans may have migrated from Greece, which would explain the similarity between Greek and Etruscan vessels.

**Significance of the Work:**

This magnificent work features bizarre half-man, half-dolphin creatures depicting the mythological story of Dionysos, the god of wine and drama. One of only a handful of surviving illustrations of the myth, this vase is the only Etruscan example. It reflects the influence of the Ionian Greek vase painters from what is now southern Italy and Sicily.

As the story goes, pirates kidnapped the young Dionysus while he slept and carried him aboard their ship. When he awoke and became aware of his capture, he caused wine to flow throughout the ship, a grape vine to split the sail and ivy to tangle the mast and oars. Dionysos then changed into a lion. The terrified pirates dove into the sea, where the fiery god transformed them mid-air into dolphins. The story was used to explain the origin of dolphins and their often friendly disposition towards humans.