



## Exploring Greek Vases

### *Encountering a Greek vase*

#### **Jessica Hughes**

This is a Greek vase that was made in Athens around 520/510 bce, so the very end of the sixth century. I find it particularly interesting, partly because of the mythological scene that's represented on the front of it, which shows Heracles fighting with the mythical sea monster, the Triton. And it's very difficult to untangle their bodies, but you can see that Triton has got a naked upper-half of his body, he's got a black beard and then fishy scales. And Heracles is dressed in a lion skin, his usual attribute. And so it's a very interesting mythological representation. They actually have their names written above them. So Triton here has got this thick stare as he is getting crushed, and then this coiling fishy tail with scales on it that are really beautifully incised and overlapping. And then Heracles is up here. You can't really see his facial features. And then on either side you've got these very static female figures, who are gesturing with their hands towards the battle that's happening. So this vase tells us a really interesting story about change in attitudes to ancient artefacts. Now, it was collected in the nineteenth century, and at that time people didn't really appreciate having fragmentary, broken antiquities, so it was stuck together and the cracks were painted over, so it actually looked like a complete beautiful, untouched vase. In more recent times, there's been a turn towards uncovering these unsympathetic restorations, and revealing more of the actual biography of the vase and how it's been broken and put together over time. So that's why this vase appears to be in what you might describe as a fragmentary state because the restoration has been removed by conservators in the museum. Of all the Greek vases in the Fitzwilliam galleries, this is one of the ones that interests me the most because you can track bits of its biography from looking at its material and how it appears to us today.