

Archaeological literature is rich in descriptions of pot making.

Unlike modern industrial potters, prehistoric artisans created each of their pieces individually, using the simplest technology but demonstrating remarkable skill in making and adorning their vessels.

The clay used in prehistoric pot making was invariably selected with the utmost care: often it was traded over considerable distances.

The consistency of the clay was crucial: it was pounded meticulously and mixed with water to make it entirely even in texture.

By careful kneading, the potter removed the air bubbles and made the clay as plastic as possible, allowing it to be molded into shape as the pot was built up. When a pot is fired.

It loses its water and can crack, so the potter added a temper to the clay, a substance that helped reduce shrinkage and cracking.

Since surface finishes provided a pleasing appearance and also improved the durability in day-to-day use, the potter smoothed the exterior surface of the pot with wet hands.

Often a wet clay solution, known as a slip, was applied to the smooth surface.

Brightly colored slips were often used and formed painted decorations on the vessel.

In later times, glazes came into use in some areas.

A glaze is a form of slip that turns to a glasslike finish during high-temperature firing.

When a slip was not applied, the vessel was allowed to dry slowly until the external surface was almost like leather in texture.

It was then rubbed with a round stone or similar object to give it a shiny, hard surface.

Some pots were adorned with incised or stamped decorations.

Most early pottery was then fired over open hearths.

The vessels were covered with fast-burning wood; as it burned, the ashes would fall all around the pots and bake them evenly over a few hours.

Far higher temperatures were attained in special ovens, known as kilns, which would not only bake the clay and remove its plasticity, but also dissolve carbons and iron compounds.

Kilns were also used for glazing, when two firings were needed. Once fired, the pots were allowed to cool slowly, and small cracks were repaired before they were ready for use.