



Unknown (Egyptian)
Grave pot, 3800–3000 B.C.
terracotta
7 1/2 in. (19 cm)
Acquired through the Egypt Exploration Fund through the efforts of Professor Richard Austin Rice, 1881–1903
SEG.10.24

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Grave pot 3800–3000 B.C.

Clay pots were left in Egyptian tombs beginning as early as 4,500 BCE. The pots often held food offerings. Clay dug from the alluvial silt on the banks of the Nile was rich in iron oxides, producing a reddish-brown color when fired. This pot was made before the advent of the pottery wheel in Egypt, which first comes into use in the Old Kingdom (ca. 2649 BCE–2150 B.C.E.).

Predynastic pots like this one were shaped by hand, dried in the sun, and then sometimes coated with red ochre. The surface was often burnished with a stone to add a sheen. They would be fired over an open fire or in a simple kiln. The black area near the mouth of the pot is typical of pottery from this period. Experiments suggest that the black color may result from the absorption of carbon from the smoldering of organic material like chaff. The pots may have been placed upside-down on such materials before, during, or after firing.

Sources

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DISCUSS

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Clay pots like this one often held offerings of food. In ancient Egypt food offerings were provided to honor the gods. In addition, containers placed in tombs held food and other supplies that the ancient Egyptians believed the deceased would need in the afterlife.

Roll your cursor over the photograph of the grave pot to magnify. Look closely. What do you notice about the pot? How would you describe its shape? What do you think it could be made of? How do you think it was made? What colors and textures do you see? What other details catch your eye? To learn more about this pot, click on the EXPLORE tab.

What types of containers do you use? What do they hold? What are they made of? How were they made? Are some more special to you than others? Why?



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CREATE

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This clay pot was made by hand before pottery wheels were used in Egypt. Roll your cursor over the photograph to magnify. Do you see any details that give us clues about how the pot was made? Try creating your own pot out of clay or modeling dough.

To begin, make a pinch pot:

Roll some clay into a ball. Press your thumb into the center of the ball. Then pinch your thumb and forefinger together as you turn the ball slowly in a circle. As you pinch and turn, you are thinning and shaping the walls of your pot.

To add height, make some coils:

Roll a piece of clay out into a long, slender “snake” or coil. Place the coil along the rim of your pot and use your fingers or a Popsicle stick to smooth the coil onto the rim. (Moistening the rim first with a little water is helpful for natural clays).