

# HISTORY OF CERAMICS

Making objects and art from clay is one of the oldest forms of human creativity, with Indigenous pottery traditions existing almost everywhere in the world. This timeline charts some of the developments of fired clay during its almost 30,000-year-long history.

## 28000 BCE

The oldest recorded fired ceramic artifact dates from the late Paleolithic period, a statuette known as the ‘Venus of Dolní Věstonice,’ from what is now the Czech Republic.

## 18000 –17000 BCE

In China’s Xianren Cave, fragments of pots are linked to the earliest rice cultivation.

## 15000 –10000 BCE

Prehistoric populations in Japan and Siberia were producing ceramics. Pottery for storing and cooking grain is linked to the development of agriculture and emergence of sedentary communities, around 12,000 years ago.

## 9500 BCE

Ceramic shards in Central Mali date back to this period. Along Africa’s Nile Valley, early pottery was used by groups of hunters and fishermen, with designs made by impressing fish bones across the clay surface.

## 7500 BCE

The earliest discovered ‘bricks’ for building are sun-dried mud blocks from Syria.

## 5000 BCE

The earliest ceramicware in Central Europe is thought to be Neolithic Bandkeramik pottery, known for its linear or banded designs, with unfilled dots and cross-hatching.

## 4000 BCE

The first known pots in Britain are round-based or carinated bowls used by Neolithic farmers who cultivated cereals for cooking and storing food. They were likely introduced from the continent.

## 3500 BCE

Mesopotamian potters’ wheels dating from this period made ceramic production faster and easier.

## 2099 BCE+

Dispersals of peoples across Europe saw the spread of Corded Ware culture—named for its pottery ornamentation—across a large tract of Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe through the late Neolithic, Copper, and early Bronze Ages. They were succeeded in the early Bronze Age by the Bell Beaker people, named for their drinking vessels, and remaining in Britain until as late as 1800 BCE.

## 1600 BCE

Porcelain was developed in China over several dynasties through a complex process of firing clay with locally available feldspar and quartz. It is highly sought after for its durability, lightness, and translucency.

## 250-200 BCE

China’s Terracotta Army was constructed and buried.

## 150-800

The Moche in Northern Perú developed ceramics that were highly decorated and mass-manufactured (in molds), with work featuring erotic themes and slip-painted red designs.

## 200

The earliest Pueblo pottery was introduced to Yootó Hahoodzo (the area now known as New Mexico), hand-made (not thrown or cast), and fired in an earth pit.

## 800

Islamic civilizations developed lusterware, which created a distinctive golden shine on pots, and evolved across territories through trade with China along the Silk Road.

## 1680

In Rouen, France, soft-paste porcelain is made in European attempts to replicate hard-paste Chinese export porcelain, or ‘china.’

## 1740s

Industrialization of British ceramics began at Staffordshire potteries. By the late 1700s, new canals and roads enabled the transportation of clay and coal to factories and the delivery of finished products to market. By the end of the 16th century, Staffordshire was recognized as the home of the British ceramics industry.

## 1884

Britain colonized Nigeria.

## 1920

Bernard Leach (1887-1979), together with Japanese potter Shōji Hamada (1894-1978), established the Leach Pottery in St Ives, Cornwall, England. Many consider this moment to mark the beginning of the British Studio Pottery Movement. In 1923, Michael Cardew (1901-1983) joined the Leach Pottery as Leach’s first apprentice potter.

## 1945

Michael Cardew set up a pottery studio in Vumé, Ghana, returning to the U.K. in 1948.

## 1951

The Nigerian colonial government appointed Michael Cardew as Senior Pottery Officer, and he established the Pottery Training Centre in Abuja (since renamed Suleja).

## 1954

Ladi Kwali (1925-1984) became the first female potter at the Pottery Training Centre.

## 1960

Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule.