

The Creation of a Painted Pot



Potters | Potters in ancient Athens made many different items including storage jars, plates, highly-decorated black- and red-figure pots, perfume bottles, and lamps.

The local clays used in making pots had varying colors. For instance, Corinth clay was green-yellow. Clay from Athens was a vivid orange-red, a color that made Athenian pottery very popular.

Making a Pot | Clay was dug from the ground and brought to the workshop. Then, the clay was placed on the potter's wheel where an apprentice or slave turned the wheel. Finally, the master potter shaped the pot on the spinning wheel. More decorative pots were sometimes made by two people: one potter and one painter. The pots were *fired* or *baked* in a large stove called a *kiln*. Kilns could reach temperatures upwards of 825-945°C (1517-1733°F).

The Painters | Artists who painted black- and red-figure pottery were storytellers charged with the task of giving visual reality to the

imaginary world of gods, goddesses, and heroes. The artist placed decorative and floral designs above and below the main part of the pot, clearing a broad space for the figures in the story. Designs had to be adjusted to the curved surface of the pot. Painting on the pot with *slip* was the artist's first step. The slip was made of fine particles of clay suspended in water. During the firing process, areas covered by this slip turned shiny black.

Black-Figure Technique | Athenian painters began to use this technique of painting pottery around 630 B.C. At first, the figures the artist painted were completely flat silhouettes. Then, the artist added details by carefully incising lines through the slip with a sharp tool to reveal the red clay underneath. The best black-figure pottery paintings were inspired by myth and epic poetry. Heroic combats and battles were especially popular subjects.



Red-Figure Technique | Red-figure painting was invented in Athens around 530 B.C. This new technique was a reverse of black-figure technique. For the red-figure technique, the background was covered with slip that would turn black during the firing process; the uncovered figures would remain red. Red-figure technique made painting human details easier than it was in black-figure technique: details could simply be painted on with a brush. Thus, the red-figure technique allowed for more variations in action and appearance, making it possible for artists to explore the human muscles, movement, and facial expressions.