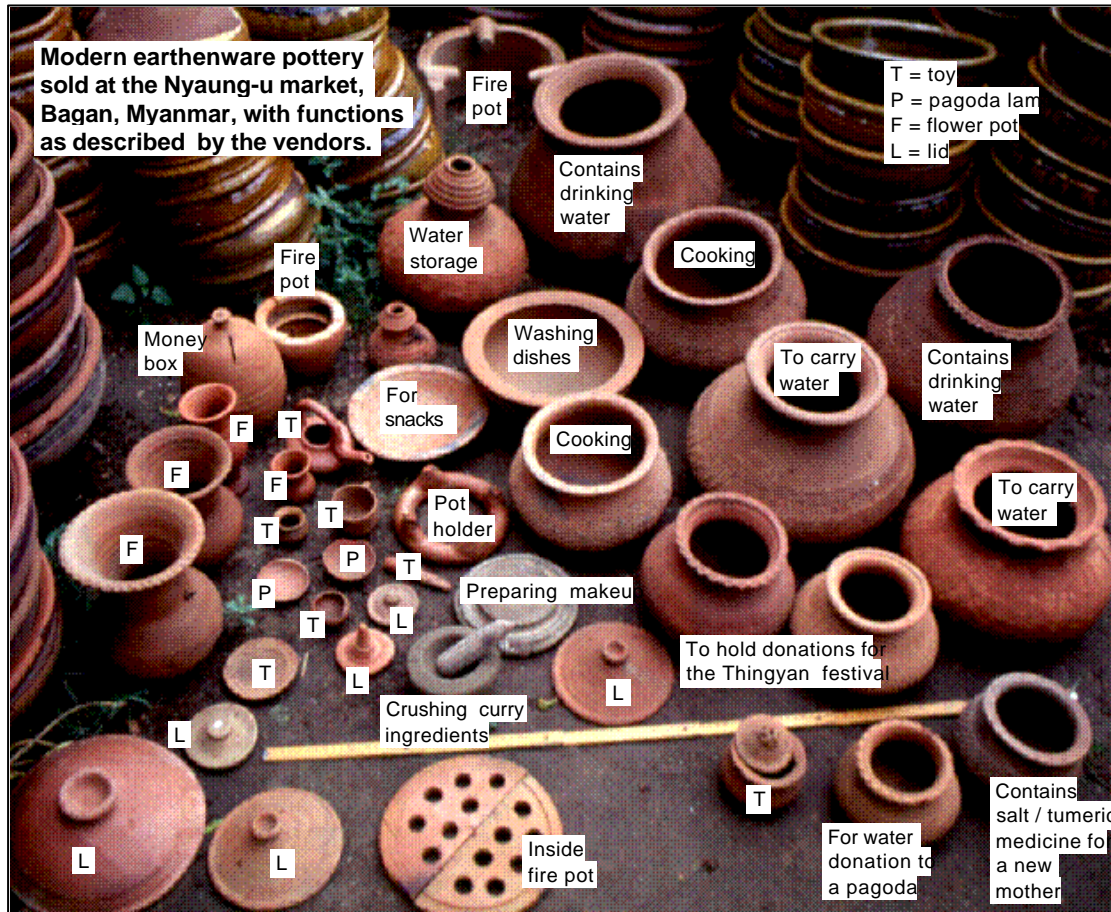


Handmade pottery in Myanmar/Burma.

This collection of pictures is designed to give an idea of how the folk pottery tradition is continuing in Myanmar.



Pottery, earthenware as well as glazed, is still in common use in households in Myanmar (Burma). Pots for drinking water are refilled from a large, glazed storage pot, which itself may be filled from a river, a well or a bore. The water settles in the large pot, and any debris sinks to the bottom. The water is usually filtered through a cloth strainer as it goes into the drinking water pot, or just before people drink it, or both. The drinking water pot has a pattern outside which maximises the surface area. Because it is not glazed, moisture can evaporate slowly from the outside of the pot, taking heat with it. The water inside the pot is as cool as water from a refrigerator.

While people in villages or small farming hamlets in Myanmar may also use some metal pots for cooking, they will often tell you that curry and other food tastes better if it is cooked in an earthenware pot. People in rural areas use charcoal for cooking, sometimes with a “fire pot” as pictured above. These little earthenware fire pots, just enough to hold one cooking pot, and so conserve fuel, have been in use for many centuries across South and Southeast Asia- they have been excavated at Arikamedu, near Pondicherry, in India, an old trading site that dates back 2,000 years.



Pots can be made using a kickwheel, like the one above left, at Twante, west of Yangon, or using a hand-turned wheel, like the one on the right at Sagaing, near Mandalay. The lady turning the wheel by its wooden handles is paid a fee for every pot that is made.



(LEFT) Larger pots can be coiled by hand. (RIGHT) Pots are often beaten with a paddle, to smooth and thin them. A small clay tool called an anvil is held inside the pot so it does not collapse. The anvil is dipped in sand now and again so it does not stick to the inside of the pot.

Sorry this picture is a bit blurry. It shows the paddles, which may have a pattern carved on them, which is transferred to the pot, plus three anvils, and the potter's bowl of sand. The scale is 10 cms long.





Pots are also sometimes smoothed or burnished on the outside with a simple tool such as a smooth stone, like the lady on the left at Twante is doing. In villages such as Sagaing the pottery-making families take the green pots to a specialist who fires them- they don't do the firing themselves. Sagaing specialises in pots to contain and cool drinking water.



The pots are fired in an open area, with wood, grass and possibly old broken pots piled around them. It was overcast the day we visited Sagaing, so they were not firing any pots in case it rained- but the local children showed us where the firing takes place, and they demonstrated how pots are stacked ready for firing.

Useful references:

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