Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

TUNISIA G29/A



Tunisia is situated in North Africa. The north of the country faces the Mediterranean Sea whilst the arid south is dominated by the Sahara. The contrast in the geography of the country is matched by the weather. It has wet winters but sunny summers.

Tunisia has been invaded by Romans, Arabs, Turks, Spaniards and French. All have influenced the modern Tunisian culture. The diversity can be seen in the architecture, pottery and clothing of the country. This box has examples of these.

Necklace



In Tunisia jewellery is highly decorative with Berber jewellery particularly popular. The Berbers are a nomadic group that live across North Africa. The beads are a bright, shiny green colour. In Islam green is an important colour and many Islamic countries have green in their flag. The focus of the necklace is the crescent shaped piece. The crescent shape is part of the Tunisian flag and like the green is often used as a symbol of Islam along with the five-pointed star.



This necklace is quite light and so is likely to have been a copy, authentic versions are quite heavy. It would have been sold in one of the many souks of Tunisia. These are big markets and are organised in a street system. They have lots of small shops selling jewellery, gold, silver, pottery and clothes. A souk is usually a very busy and noisy place where customers haggle with the shop owner over prices.

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Unglazed pot with four handles



Nabeul is famed for its tile designs and pottery like this. The pots are traditionally made by hand. On this one you can see at the bottom where the clay has been worked with the fingers.



Larger pots of similar shapes are used to store olive oil and olives. The clay pot protects them from the sunlight so they stay cool and fresher for longer.

Green glazed pot with two handles





Only the inside of this pot has been glazed. You can see the difference glazing makes to the surface. Look at how shiny the inside is compared to the outside. Like the four handled pot you can see how the potter has used his fingers to work the shape. If you look at the handles they have been added later and have been smoothed down where they join the main body.

Eggcup



The eggcup shaped object could have been used for a variety of purposes. It has been made by the potter using a wheel that spins the clay round. As it is spinning round the potter controls the shape maintaining the symmetry of the object. The spinning gives the object the ringed look that can be seen on the stand and inside the cup. When the shaping is finished, the complicated decoration is made by scoring the clay. It is then fired in a kiln at a very high temperature to give it strength.

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Pineapple pot with cover



This pot is an unusual shape! It looks a bit like a pineapple or even as though it has lot of elephant trunks coming out of it. There are lots of holes in the pot for flowers.

Unlike the other pots this one has been glazed on the outside. Which one is your favourite piece of pottery? How would you design your pot?

Decorated tile



The tile comes from the Tunisian town of Nabeul. It is a place with a long history. Nabeul belonged to the Roman Empire thousands of years ago but was eventually abandoned. When it was rebuilt it was given the name Nabeul, which means 'new city'.

Tiles are used to decorate buildings. There are a selection of photographs showing tiles on the outside of mosques and butchers. Lots of tiles are placed beside each other to create the patterns. This one would have been part of a floral design.



Ceramic tiles are made mainly from clay, sand, feldspar, quartz and water. These ingredients are mixed and ground up to create a body slip. This is the unglazed pink-brown part of the tile. It is put in a dryer to remove the moisture and comes out as a powder. The powder is then put into a large press which squeezes the dust into the tile size and shape. It then has the patterns and designs added to it. After this the glaze can be added. The glaze material is designed to melt onto the surface of a tile during firing. The firing happens in the type of cooker called a kiln. It is then left to cool so the glaze sticks leaving the tile with a shiny surface.

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Copper plate

The copper plate is another item that would be sold in the souk. There are many people who work the copper to make the designs. This is done with a hammer and small chisel. Imagine trying to make such intricate little markings!



Rakwa

The rakwa is an Arabic name for a brass coffee heater. It has lots of other names depending on the country. In Turkey it is a cezve but is also known as an ibrik and dellel.



Coffee is very important in North Africa and Arabia. People visit coffee houses like the one below to drink, talk and listen to music. It is different from the coffee your parents probably drink at home. Look at the size of the pot for making the coffee. It is a lot smaller and holds enough for only one person. This is because the coffee is very strong.



The coffee is very finely ground up then water and cardamom are added for flavour. Sometimes sugar is included, depending on a person's taste, but milk is almost never added. When it is brewed it must be heated for at least five minutes, this creates foam on top. Then the coffee is poured into a small glass cup.