Technology: 3500 B.C.

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The Potter's Wheel

Archaeologists can trace the origin of the wheel back to flat stones used to make pottery about 8,500 years ago. An ancient potter's wheel consisted of a stone, wood, or baked-clay disk resting on a short stone or clay stand. A potter's helper would spin the disk while the potter shaped clay. The spinning motion allowed potters to make symmetrical containers. Some ancient potters had artists decorate their finished pots. By 3500 B.C., the Sumerians of Mesopotamia had developed the first true potter's wheel, which rotated at a much greater speed. This enabled potters to produce larger quantities of containers, helping to turn pottery into an industry.

The wheel has provided not only a surplus of goods to be traded far and wide but also a means of transporting them.

The potter's wheel makes possible the mass production of a wide variety of inexpensive goods.

Archaeologists study broken pieces of pottery, called potsherds, to learn about lifestyles and practices of past civilizations.

The centrifugal force of the spinning wheel causes the clay to move outward, allowing the potter to form stronger, lighter vessels and to fashion such useful features as spouts.

Critically THINKING

1. Drawing Conclusions
As production of pottery increased, the amount of decoration decreased. Why?

2. Making Inferences
Which mechanical devices used today were adapted from the wheel?