



## Banshan Jar

c. 2600–2300 BCE

China (Gansu  
province)

(Neolithic Period,  
10,000–c. 2100 BCE)

*Earthenware with painted decoration*  
Made during the Banshan phase  
of the Majiayao culture

Height 12  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches (32.4 cm),  
diameter 17 inches (43.2 cm)

This splendid large jar with its dynamic patterns and others like it are known as Banshan (bahn-shan) ware. Banshan is an area in the present-day Gansu (gahn-su) province of northwestern China, where pottery of this kind was first found. The Banshan culture arose out of several early societies that existed during the Neolithic period, before metal came into use. The people of this area were farmers, raised animals for food, and are best known for their distinctive painted pottery, which includes jars, basins, and bowls.

To make this vessel, the potter worked from the bottom, beginning with small coils of clay and adding successively larger ones as he or she moved to the waist. From there, the coils decreased in size to the neck. The coils were probably fused by hand on a slow-turning wheel to form this shape. The jar was then fired at a very high temperature, painted, and finally polished into a shiny finish. In daily use, it may have been carried with a rope strung through the pair of handles. Jars like this one have also been excavated from burial sites.

The painted pattern on the shoulder of this jar is sometimes called a running spiral, a popular design motif in several ancient world civilizations. The pair of running spirals shown here is made of several parallel, solid lines that alternate between purplish-red and black and are notched with teeth. This densely arranged pattern is perfectly proportioned for the globular shape of the jar.

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