This dynamic, three-dimensional form with linear sweeping designs and lively details was created during the Middle Jōmon period, 2500–1500 B.C.E. The term Jōmon (jo-mohn) means “cord-marked,” and refers to the cord-like designs that decorate this vessel. Jars of this type are a hallmark of Middle Jōmon pieces found at the archeological site of Katsusaka in Kanagawa prefecture, on Japan’s main island, Honshu.

The ancient potter who created this vessel worked the clay cords up from the base along the cylindrical body in vertical lines that are capped by swirling loops. Along the upper part of the body, the potter applied a wide, horizontal band of the spiraling cords, which look like waves rolling around the edges of the jar. The wave motif continues at the top of the vessel, where along the rim a thick, incised triple band of cords swoops up into open curls at the four corners. Two of the flared corners have small, open-looped handles, where a carrying rope might have been attached.

The long, rolled-cord shapes applied to the surface of this vessel were not only decoration, but also served to strengthen the pot by adding thickness and support to the body. Pieces such as this jar were fired in earthen pits, where the heat only reached between 600 and 750 degrees. Ceramics fired at these temperatures are called low-fired ceramics, or earthenware. While the exact use of such jars is unknown, they were most likely used for cooking or storing food.

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