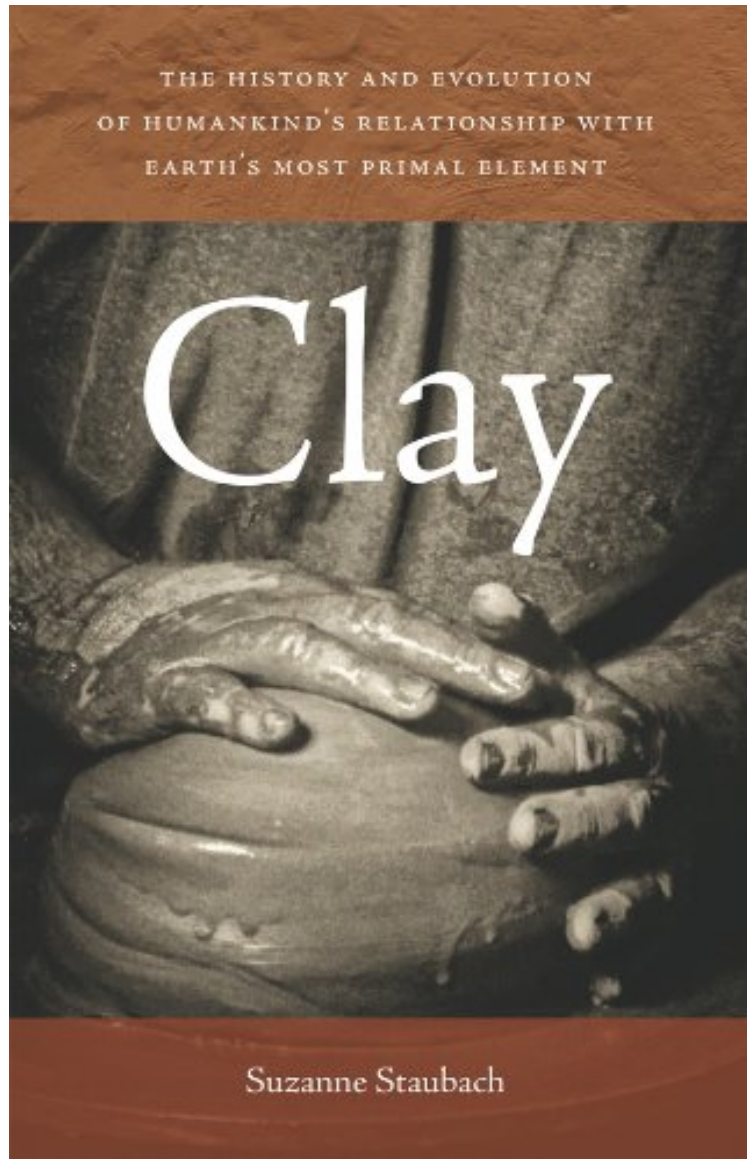


(Get free) Clay: The History and Evolution of Humankind's Relationship with Earth's Most Primal Element

# Clay: The History and Evolution of Humankind's Relationship with Earth's Most Primal Element

*Suzanne Staubach*

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**Suzanne Staubach : Clay: The History and Evolution of Humankind's Relationship with Earth's Most Primal Element** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Clay: The History and Evolution of Humankind's Relationship with Earth's Most Primal Element:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Nothing Muddy About ItBy WJSA readable history of clay, that

should please people of divergent backgrounds. Thoroughly researched and yet condensed to a state of manageability for those with limited time. 8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Read about clay's multiple, vital roles in world history. By Tim F. Martin. *Clay* by Suzanne Staubach is an information-packed and interesting look at how one substance - clay - has had far-reaching effects on world history, culture, architecture, cuisine, and technology. Unbelievably abundant, clay (from *kleben*, German for "to stick to") is alumina, silica, and chemically bonded water. Its popularity through the ages is due to its abundance, plasticity, and its durability after being heated (even sun-baked clay has considerable durability, though unfired clay or raw clay has had a myriad of uses as well). Clay vessels have had a huge role in how humanity has cooked and stored food. With the advent of clay pots, it became possible to make grains and cereals into pottages, tough chunks of meat and tubers into stews, and babies could be weaned earlier thanks to easily-digested mush, which could easily be made in clay pots. Clay vessels made the brewing and consumption of alcohol possible, as pottery enabled the ancient Egyptians to brew ale; the Sumerians date wine; and the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans grape wine. Interestingly, Roman wine was thick and intensely flavored and had to be mixed with water in specially-made clay vessels called *kraters* before drinking. Clay storage vessels also kept food safe from insects, rodents, and moisture. The first ovens were made of clay, enabling people to bake bread (especially raised bread). The Sumerians developed a large clay beehive oven called a *tannur*, a type that spread to many other parts of the world, including India, where it came to be called the *tandoor*. The *tandoor* is still in use today and *tandoori* cuisine is popular in many restaurants throughout the world. Also the very first stoves and ranges were made of clay and their remains have been found in ancient Mesopotamian, Chinese, and Roman archaeological sites. Potters became the world's first industrialists, as fired clay was the first synthetic substance ever created and the kiln and the potter's wheel were among the very first machines ever made. Indeed it is possible that the potter's wheel predates wheels used for transportation. Clay of course allowed people to produce plates, cups, and bowls for the dinner table, particularly after glazes were invented (the ancient Egyptians knew of two types of low-fire glazes, lead and alkaline). It was the Chinese who really advanced the art of producing dinnerware, producing the first porcelain in the Sui dynasty (the 500s AD), though it was the later Ming dynasty (1368-1644) that became truly famous for it, its wonderful blue and white porcelains dishes a popular export commodity. The import of Ming porcelain vastly changed European tastes, leading to by the mid-16th century the need for aristocrats at least to have matching sets of china (as it became known). European potters were not to be outdone; Josiah Spode invented "bone china" or spode ware that thanks to bone ash from cattle had added stability and Josiah Wedgwood pioneered the idea of the assembly line in his potteries and made so much money he was able to finance the researches of his cousin Charles Darwin. Clay was key in the development of writing, as the Sumerians used clay tablets for their cuneiform writing and the world's first printing press with movable type, a Chinese invention of around 1041 BC, used printing blocks made of fired clay. Clay still has an impact on writing today, as clay bonded with graphite makes it more stable, enabling its use in pencils. Clay of course has a huge role as a building material. Clay structural types include wattle-and-daub (a woven structure of sticks or reed is covered with mud), cob (balls or chunks of clay mixed with straw, manure, and sand are stacked into walls and smoothed together), adobe bricks, rammed earth (or *pise*), and fired or burned brick buildings. Each type of construction is not only ancient but still in use; the famed British buildings of dark beams and contrasting tan or white panels of plaster - "Tudor style" - are wattle-and-daub. The Great Wall of China is actually multiple walls of unfired loess (a type of fine-grained clay), bricks, and burned bricks. Also clay tiles have been used in buildings for thousands of years, dating back to Egyptian times and becoming particularly notable in Islamic architecture in the Middle East and Central Asia, while red terra-cotta roof tiles have become associated with the scenic towns of the Mediterranean, Mexico, and South America. The author showed in chapter after interesting chapter that the uses of clay throughout history have been nearly endless. Clay water pipes and flush toilets have had a huge role in modern sanitation, saving millions of lives from dysentery, typhus, typhoid fever, and cholera. Indeed collectors of Royal Doulton figurines and china might be interested to know that the "Royal" comes from the fact that Sir Henry Doulton was knighted in 1887 for his contributions to public health, as his clay sewer pipes and other sanitary ware greatly improved British life. Clay-lined pit furnaces enabled the invention of smelting, and clay crucibles were vital in producing molds so that metal tools, pots, and weapons could be cast. Clay was used as insulation in the first internal combustion engines, particularly with spark plugs. Clay has had a major role in so many products, including early successful false teeth (they replaced inferior wooden, bone, or horn teeth, all of which absorbed stains and eventually putrefied and stank), smoking pipes (even many of those made of stone, pipestone, were really made of clay, as pipestone was known from upper Missouri River region of southwest Minnesota and was once clay, compressed into stone by the weight of Ice Age glaciers), fertility rituals (the clay figurine the Venus of Dolni Vestonice dates back 30,000 years), cremation urns, hearths to heat the home, and grave goods (including my favorite, the 9,000 strong terra-cotta army of the First Emperor of Qin who died in 210 BC, 7,000 soldiers and 2,000 horses so accurately rendered that even the underside of the shoes of the soldiers have tread). 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Very complete history. By Penelope McQuarrie. I first saw this book while traveling as a hotel book. I started it but didn't finish it so upon returning home I purchased it. It is extremely well done, covers details and directions in history that clay has taken. I would recommend this book to anyone who works with clay, either for work or for pleasure.

More than a third of the houses in the world are made of clay. Clay vessels were instrumental in the invention of cooking, wine and beer making, and international trade. Our toilets are made of clay. The first spark plugs were thrown on the potter's wheel. Clay has played a vital role in the health and beauty fields. Indeed, this humble material was key to many advances in civilization, including the development of agriculture and the invention of baking, architecture, religion, and even the space program. In *Clay*, Suzanne Staubach takes a lively look at the startling history of the mud beneath our feet. Told with verve and erudition, this story will ensure you won't see the world around you in quite the same way after reading the book.

From Publishers Weekly: Staubach, a potter and freelance writer, successfully communicates the passion she feels for her material (both literal and literary) in this extensively researched overview of clay. What is this ubiquitous stuff? It began as granite, which over millions of years was ground down by rain, sleet, snow and chemical forces into what we now know as clay. The first known clay objects were small religious figures, followed by pottery vessels, in Neolithic times. The oldest such pottery known was produced by the Jomon peoples of Japan. In addition to an informed discussion of clay ovens used by various cultures over time, the author compares these cultures' designs as pottery grew to be an art form. Ancient Greeks, for example, created a unique appearance by controlling the atmosphere of their kilns. Clay, Staubach says, has served many purposes: clay tablets were used for the earliest writing; it also became the key ingredient for building houses and, in modern times, sewer pipes and flush toilets. Some sections of this account will be of most interest to potters, pottery aficionados or those with an interest in earth science, but Staubach leavens her facts with captivating anecdotes throughout. Photos. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist: Clay has been a useful, ubiquitous material throughout history. Staubach has arranged her chapters according to clay's functional uses (as construction material or containers, in artwork, and so forth), and her background as a potter imbues her prose with a thematic intimacy. Cool and slimy, clay is what the hands make of it, and it itself is simply a product of weathered rock, composed of aluminum, silicon, and water. Stepping off from the physical reason clay becomes rigid when fired (the expulsion of the water), Staubach tours globally the ancient archaeology of clay-made objects: fertility amulets, pots, amphora, cuneiform tablets, and ziggurats built from sun-dried bricks. Drying one's creation in the sun or putting it in an open fire worked, but kiln firing worked better. Staubach describes kilns, and the kiln's ability to control temperature, which made possible harder bricks, glazing, and porcelain. An eclectic treatment that encompasses chamber pots and the art pottery movement of the early 1900s, Staubach's enthusiastic history will please people at the potter's wheel. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved. "Staubach successfully communicates the passion she feels for her material (both literal and literary) in this extensively researched overview of clay."—Publishers Weekly