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FREDERICK H. DOUGLAS

Curator



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SANTA CLARA AND SAN JUAN POTTERY

LOCATION. Santa Clara and San Juan are Pueblos, or permanent villages, of the Tewa Tribe of Pueblo Indians. These towns are about 35 miles north of Santa Fe, New Mexico, in the Rio Grande valley. The population of each town is about 175.

PREHISTORIC PERIOD. Black or red polished pottery has been found in Chaco Canon and surrounding ruins and in many places in New Mexico and Arizona. It is supposed to belong to the last Basket-maker and first two Pueblo periods—see Leaflet 11—and resembles in every way the polished pottery now made on the Rio Grande. So far there has been no attempt to trace the modern ware back to the prehistoric, and as the ruins in the neighborhood of the modern villages do not contain any of this kind of pottery its true origin is not known.

HISTORIC PERIOD. As far back as is known within historic times the Tewa and perhaps other Indians of the Rio Grande country have made the polished black or red wares. This was, and is, especially the case at the villages of San Juan and Santa Clara. San Ildelfonso made some of the ware but also made a polychrome pottery. Similar ware of poor quality was made at Nambe, Picuris and Pojuaque. Santa Clara is especially noted for the black, and San Juan for the fine red wares, although both villages make the two kinds, neither of which show any decoration.

At the time of the coming of the Spaniards there were at least nine Tewa villages scattered in the neighborhood of the present ones in the Rio Grande valley. Now there are only four, San Juan, Santa Clara, San Ildelfonso and Tesque. Nambe has become so Mexicanized that there are no full blooded Tewas now living there.

GATHERING OF MATERIALS. There are many clay beds in the neighborhood of most of the villages and the gathering of the clay is often made the excuse for a sort of picnic in which families and their friends participate. Fine grained sand is gathered from the banks of the Rio Grande and Chama rivers, as well as from the stream beds of the larger creeks close to the villages. Yellow ochre, used in making the red slip, is found in natural deposits in many places about the country.

CLAY. The clay is a dirty gray in color, and comes in slabs and chunks of all sizes. It is first mashed, and then ground and pounded into almost dust, on slabs of stone reserved for this purpose and often consisting of old fragments of discarded metates. Small stones and other foreign materials are carefully picked out by hand and thrown away. The powdered mass is thoroughly sifted and set aside. The very fine, white sand, rich in silicate grains, is freed from foreign matter by washing in a basket. After cleansing it is thrown onto cloths to dry. When dry it is sifted until each grain is separated from the others and then stored until needed.

CLAY MIXING. The potter mixes two parts of clay to one part of sand, in a dry state, on a cloth with her hands. This is to insure the materials being thoroughly and properly mixed. Then water is flipped over the mass until it becomes fairly moist. It is then kneaded, patted, and rolled. Finally, if not moist enough, it is again spread out on the cloth and more water added. When the mixing is finished the paste is rolled into a ball and wrapped in a damp piece of common canvas. Some of the older women formerly used ground up pottery fragments for temper, in addition to the sand which is used for the same purpose, but this is seldom done anymore. The mixing is a delicate operation, for should there be too much clay the vessel will crack in baking or be too porous. Too much sand will make it crack and crumble after baking.

Also the paste must have neither too much nor too little moisture. If too wet it will collapse during the drying, while if not wet enough it will be crumbly and not stand up.

MOLDING. The women do not and never have used a potter's wheel. The nearest thing to this is a saucer or piece of flat board on which the article being made is often placed for support, and which may be turned around during the building process. Usually the potter takes a piece of clay rolled into the size of a baseball and after kneading and patting it into the shape of the bottom of the vessel desired, she sets this pat on the rest provided for that purpose. A small amount of clay is then rolled into a rope, from one-half an inch in diameter and several inches long to somewhat larger dimensions, according to the size of the pot to be made. This is placed around the edge of the pat already made and is carefully pressed into place. It is then smoothed with a small piece of dried gourd rind. When this is finished more ropes are made, one at a time, and added as has been described. The only tools used are the hands, which are kept constantly moist by being dipped in water, and small pieces of dried gourd rind which vary in shape from round to long oval and slightly blade shaped pieces, and are usually about the size of a silver dollar for the round ones and proportionately the same size for the other shapes. The coiling of one rope above the other goes on until the vessel has grown to the size desired. Both the outside and inside are smoothed as the building continues and the walls shaped and thinned with the gourd tools. If a rope is too thick it is stretched and thinned with the fingers.

DRYING. After the pot is built up it is set aside to dry. It is never put directly in the sun at first, but after it has dried pretty well in the shade, to a point where evaporation will not be too rapid, it is put in the sun to finish drying. In the winter months it is usually set in front of the fireplace to dry, or may be put in the oven of the cookstove.

SCRAPING. When the vessel is sufficiently dried it is scraped with an old knife, a bit of glass or rubbed down with coarse sandpaper. This is done to make the surface smooth and in some cases to thin the walls in places where they are too thick.

SLIP AND POLISH. After the smoothing is done the pot is covered with a slip or wash of yellow ochre which is allowed to partly dry. The slip is applied with a bit of cloth or the fingers. A smooth, fine-grained stone, about the shape and size of the first two joints of a finger, is then used to polish the surface of the pot. Polishing stones may also be round but the long shape is preferred by most potters. The polishing is a long and tedious process. Over and over again the pot is slightly moistened with the ochre slip and polished again. The whole outer surface is polished. If the vessel is an open one, like a bowl, the inside is also polished. Some of the women use the ochre raw, when the color is yellow, while others burn it to make it red. After the polishing is done the vessel is ready to be fired. The high polish of this ware is due to this rubbing only, and not to any glazing process.

FIRING. In recent years some of the women have used the ovens of their kitchen ranges to bake their pottery, but this does not give the vessel as much strength and temper, as the old method of baking the ware in the open fire out of doors. In doing this care must be taken to prevent drafts that will crack the vessels. The potter must know exactly how to distribute the heat, flame, and smoke. The building of the fire and placing of the pots also requires time and knowledge. The fire is built on a level, clean-swept spot, not in a pit. Cedar wood, dried

thoroughly, is the best fuel to produce the clear flame necessary to burn the red pottery. It is broken into short lengths and arranged so as to have an even draft. After the fire has burned for a time and is reduced to red coals, a gridiron or heavy piece of metal netting is put over it, on which the pottery is stacked, usually upside down. Then the fire is built up around and over the pots, the top layers of which have been covered with broken pieces of old pots. When the red ware is made the flames or bits of burning wood must not touch the vessel, as this will make a blemish. An even heat is maintained and additional fuel is added as it is needed. The firing usually takes several hours to accomplish.

If the black ware is desired the pottery is placed on the grid, and covered with a heavy mass of damp cow manure which has been almost pulverized and then wet. This gives out a heavy black smudge which goes all through the pottery and turns it black. The polished surface shows a glossy glaze-like finish. The paste under it is grey-black to a solid black after firing. Often, before a pot was completely cool, the maker would smear it with a light coat of grease which soaked in and when rubbed with a soft rag improved the polish. The clay for both wares is the same color before firing.

SHAPES. In the old days shapes were simple. The largest pieces were storage jars, some as large as four feet in height and about the same in diameter. They were usually black but one sometimes found red ones. The usual form was globular, with a rim around the small opening in the top which might or might not have a lid fitted over it. Next came vessels about half the size of the large ones. These did not have lids and had a larger opening in the top. They stood about 16 to 18 inches high with rather rapidly incurving shoulders and a neck an inch or two high. These were temporary meal jars for the most part. The water jars came next, ranging from 10 to 16 inches in height. From rather narrow bottoms, rapidly outsloping sides rose to well rounded shoulders in which there was usually a slight dip. A flaring lip projected outward from the neck. There were many variations of these vessels. Large bowls for mixing purposes ranged from 10 to 20 inches in diameter and height. San Juan specialized in bowls of various sizes with dark red above and yellow or orange bases. Smaller bowls, sometimes with handles and again without them, sometimes ornamented with a row of knobs on the shoulder or wavy indented lines made with the fingers, were used to serve stews and other foods. There were also individual food bowls. Vases with double necks connected with a handle are common. In addition to these there were many other forms that are common to all Indian pottery of the Southwest. Now many animal figurines of cows, dogs, pigs, mountain sheep and other animals, and also bird forms, are made to sell. The potters are also producing vases suggestive of ancient Greece and other forms. All of these are made for commercial purposes. The pottery industry is a very important source of income to the Santa Clara and San Juan people.

Compiled by Jean Allard Jeançon from his original field notes.

The following titles are suggested for comparative reading:

1. Pueblo Pottery Making. Guthe. Yale University Press, 1925.
2. The Pueblo Potter—Bunzel. Columbia University Press, 1929.
3. Pottery of the Southwestern Indians—Goddard. Guide Leaflet No. 78 of the American Museum of Natural History, New York.
4. Pueblo Indian Pottery Making—Jeançon and Douglas. Leaflet No. 6 of the Indian Leaflet Series, Denver Art Museum.

San Ildefonso pottery, 1; Zuni, Hopi and Acoma pottery, 2; information on all makes, 3.