

# DENVER ART MUSEUM

DENVER, COLORADO

## *Department of Indian Art*

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GRINDING CORN, A PUEBLO INDIAN POTTERY MODEL

*Leaflet No. 8*

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PUEBLO INDIAN FOODS

**INTRODUCTORY.** The Pueblo Indians of Arizona and New Mexico (see Leaflet No. 4 for location and population) have been and are primarily an agricultural people, depending for food more upon the products of their fields and the wild edible products of nature than upon the hunt. The relative scarceness of game in certain portions of the Pueblo territory, combined with the difficulty of capturing it, made the meat side of their diet rather scant and uncertain. Communal hunts for deer and rabbits may have brought a temporarily plentiful supply of meat, but as a rule it was more or less a luxury. For distribution and population see Leaflet 45-16.

**FOOD GATHERING.** With the exception of the corn harvest there are no clan or group gatherings of either wild or cultivated crops. The gathering of the crops of wild plum, acorn and pinon nut are along the lines of village picnics, lasting a week or more and the occasion of much pleasure making and courting. All other wild crops are gathered in season by women and children in accordance with their own needs and convenience. Many of the smaller wild crops are consumed on the spot instead of being brought home for family use. Juniper boughs loaded with ripe berries are brought home by the men as a treat for the children.

Hunting is done by men and boys. Communal hunts of rabbit and deer used to take place in the spring and fall. The deer were surrounded and driven into traps. The rabbits were killed with oak throwing sticks, shaped somewhat like the Australian boomerang. In former days these hunts had a decided ceremonial side, being led by the war chief and his assistants. Other game was hunted by individual parties, who captured it in traps or killed it with bows and arrows. Since the introduction of firearms the communal hunts have been more or less abandoned.

**COOKING METHODS.** In former times all cooking was done in fireplaces or on the streets and roofs, the former only since the advent of the Spaniards. Dried dung cakes and different kinds of wood were used for fuel. Boiling and stewing were done in rough, undecorated pots of baked clay. Some dishes were cooked by roasting in the ashes or hot coals, and others by grilling. Baking was done in adobe ovens or upon flat stones laid over a fire. In modern times American cook stoves have come into quite common use, and metal pots and pans have replaced the clay dishes.

### NATIVE FOODS

**BERRIES** were eaten raw, boiled, or mashed into a paste which was made into cakes and fried. Berries commonly used were: hackberry, juniper, chokecherry, gooseberry, wild currant, sumac, wild strawberry, ground tomato, false Solomon's seal, bear berry, tomatillo, bull nettle, ground saracha and matrimony vine.

**BEVERAGES.** Infusions of the leaves of thelesperma, coyote plant, coryopsis, mistletoe and of teamster's or Brigham's tea plant were used as beverages before the introduction of tea and coffee.

**GREENS.** The leaves, stems or tops of many plants were eaten either raw, boiled or fried, as individual dishes or mixed with meats or other vegetables. Sagebrush, milk pink, milkweed, amaranth, pigweed, aster, goldenrod, purslane, bee plant, stanleya, orache or

saltbush, scouring rush, tansy mustard, dandelion, water cress, coriander, horsemint and wild currant were the plants most used for this type of food. Mint leaves were served as a condiment or relish.

**NUTS** were eaten raw, roasted, or boiled into mush. Acorns, wild walnuts and pinyon nuts were the only native nuts.

**ROOTS** of wild onion, mariposa lily, prairie clover, vetch, wild potato and milkweed were eaten boiled or raw.

**SEEDS** of tumbleweed, wormwood, orache, aster, Indian millet, rush grass, lamb's quarter, amaranth, mentzelia, panic grass, coriander, winged pigweed and cocklebur were ground into fine powder and mixed with corn meal as flavoring. These mixtures were usually cooked in the form of dumplings.

**SEED PODS** of the wild rose, milkweed and milk vetch were eaten raw or cooked. The pods or fruits of all the varieties of cactus were either roasted or made into jellies. Nightshade pods served as a condiment. Peppers are eaten whole when green, both raw and cooked. When dry they turn red and only the skin is used for seasoning, the seeds being too hot.

**VEGETABLES.** Beans are boiled with meat or alone. The boiled beans are often mashed into paste, which is fried in grease. The paste is flavored with garlic, chili and sage. Squash and pumpkins are eaten when pickled, and also are cut into strips which are dried and hung up for use in the winter. Water and musk melons are eaten fresh or are hung up for winter use.

**MISCELLANEOUS.** Ashes of several plants, notable the salt brush, are used to give different colorings to corn meal dishes. The root of the Colorado rubber plant serves as chewing gum. The dried cakes of boiled down guaco or bee plant sap are fried. All the non-poisonous mushrooms, toadstools and puff balls are fried after boiling. The blossoms of the squash vine are fried. Wild honey is eaten.

**CORN** was the principal food of all the Pueblo peoples. It has been cultivated by them for hundreds of years. It is found in all the prehistoric ruins. Corn is planted in the spring, and harvested in the late fall. All the tasks of the corn harvest are carried out by nearly the whole population of the villages, and the whole season is one of happiness and festivity. The men do most of the picking, but women and children take an active part in the husking and sorting. Part of the ears are laid aside for seed, others for the reserve stock always kept against a crop failure, and the rest is kept in the homes and ground as needed.

**CORN GRINDING.** In former times all corn was ground by the women on flat stones called metates. The stones were set on a slant in a box, in the bottom of which was placed a quantity of shelled corn. The woman knelt by the box at the upper end of the stone, holding in both hands a flat, fairly thin piece of stone called a mano, big enough for both hands and rounded on the corners. With this stone she would rake some of the corn up on the slanting stone and then grind it between the large fixed stone and the one in her hand on the downward stroke. Corn was reground several times on stones

of varying degrees of coarseness before the desired fineness was attained.

**CORN COOKING.** The meal thus ground is cooked in many ways. A large proportion of it is baked in the thin translucent sheets called wafer or paper bread. Corn meal and salt are mixed with water so as to form a very thin gruel. The baker dips her fingers in this thin mixture and sweeps them across a very smooth stone, under which a fire is built. By the time the stone is covered the gruel has cooked and is peeled off in a thin sheet. These sheets are folded up and stored away until needed. Besides this staple form, corn meal is cooked in thicker loaves, as pancakes, doughnuts, thick or thin gruel, mixed with meat, chili, etc., in various forms of tamales, and made into dumplings, usually flavored with various kinds of ground up seeds. Some corn was parched.

**MEAT.** Deer, elk, antelope, rabbit, prairie dog, squirrel, beaver, bear, mountain sheep, turkey, ducks, small rodents and all birds except scavengers and little birds were all eaten by the Pueblos. Snakes, lizards and salamanders were never eaten. Dogs were perhaps eaten under press of famine, but not as a usual thing. These meats were boiled alone or with vegetables, roasted or grilled. Much meat was sun dried, smoked and stored till needed. It was eaten raw or cooked. It was also pounded up fine, mixed with fat and packed in bags as pemmican.

**SALT** was obtained by the Hopi from the Grand Cañon and by the Eastern Pueblos from salt lakes in central New Mexico.

**FISH** were caught in nets and cooked in various ways.

### INTRODUCED FOODS

The Spaniards and Americans have introduced the Indian to almost all the common fruits, vegetables and meats used by the white man. Wheat flour has largely replaced corn meal. Potatoes, cabbage, onion, tomato, and garlic are now in common use, and many other vegetables are beginning to be used. Apples, peaches, pears, apricots and grapes have been grown since the coming of the Spanish and are today great favorites with the Indians. Many of these fruits are dried for winter use. The Indians are very fond of bananas and oranges, but do not raise them. Beef and mutton have almost entirely replaced the wild meats, but they are cooked or dried and smoked in the old way. Chickens, eggs and milk are in everyday use as are tea and coffee. Canned goods and manufactured bread stuffs of all kinds are eaten everywhere among the Pueblos. In very many cases the old foods are forgotten or are only used ceremonially.

Compiled from the following sources by Jean Allard Jeançon and F. H. Douglas:

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