

POTTERY

Following the Spanish ^{occupation} ~~re-conquest~~ ^{re-entrance} of New Mexico in 1692, some Pueblo Indians, principally from Jemez Pueblo, fled into ~~the~~ Old Navaholand ~~area~~. During the recent archaeological excavations in this area, evidence came to light of the close proximity of these Pueblo groups to those of the Navaho. During the ensuing century pottery ^{fragments from} ~~remains on~~ Navaho sites indicate a definite Pueblo influence, ^{which} ~~on~~ Remnants ^{had been} contained red, black and occasionally white designs on pottery fired to a high temperature.

Later came utilitarian pieces, some of good size, with thin walls and some with exceptionally beautiful form. These were made of crumbly clay with sand temper, shaped with the use of corn-cob scrapers. These storage jars had pointed bottoms, and were held upright by the use of basket rings or depressions in the floor. ^{Pottery} Water bottles were also made with narrow openings and handles or loops on the sides. These were flattened on one side for ease in carrying. Some had designs and horsehair ropes inserted through the loops. These water bottles are very rare now, for they were replaced by other types of containers as soon as they became available.

Bowls of various sizes and shapes, spoons and dippers and dolls were products of years gone by, ^{many with finely executed designs} but to-day, only cooking jars and drums are made, and there seem to be but few potters left. These jars are somewhat similar in shape, rounded on the bottom and with a slight flare at the top, sometimes with scalloped edges. These pots, still in use, have several purposes; as cooking pots, pots for preparing dye for wool, and some made specially for ceremonial use. ^{remedial} The latter are used ^{also} both during a ceremonial and as drums with pieces of sheep or goatskin stretched over the tops. A new pot is always preferred for a drum, and once it has been so used, it must never again be used for cooking.

Legend tells of water bottles being made of the 4 colors, white, blue, yellow & black for carrying water from the 4 sacred mountains.

old fine early designs

game carrying

ceremonial

history

Jars

In some areas firing is accomplished by digging a pit, building in it a large fire of pinon wood. When this has burned down the coals are raked ~~and~~ to one side, the pots put in, usually up side down, then covered with the hot coals and left for from four to seven hours. In other areas pots are placed on flat [↑]stones, then covered with enough juniper (preferably) to insure the fire burning for six hours without replenishing. A few areas have used the Spanish or Mexican type bake ovens. After a good fire had burned down, the pots are placed in the oven~~s~~ and left for twelve hours.

Pottery making among the Navaho ^{in recent years} had never approached the superlative quality of that produced by the Pueblo ^{craftswomen} Potters. Probably the Navaho ^{have} had less use for it, and as they became stock men living in isolated groups, pottery was too easily broken.

Following many inquiries in numerous regions, I finally heard about one potter in the Shonto area. With an English speaking interpreter, we set off to find her. After looking at my pictures and learning what it was I wanted to do, she asked us to return in two days and she would be ready. There are a number of taboos and rituals connected with the making of pottery and I was not at all sure what I would be able to accomplish. One taboo is that no one must watch the making of pottery, particularly the gathering and grinding of the potshers ^d for temper. I asked to watch it, but though no word was ever said, the temper had all been prepared and mixed with the clay when we arrived. But she did leave the metate and a few sherds for me to see. ^{Adon, our potter} May was sitting beneath a shelter as we drove up and greeted us with usual courtesy. We watched her make four pots, using much the same technique as that of the Pueblo potters, using a water worn stone ^{to smooth} on the inside and a piece of corn cob ^{as a scraper} on the outside.

Before May fired these pots we had lunch. We had also been watching a daughter prepare the meal which consisted of roast corn on the cob,

coffee
boiled mutton and fry bread, a dough patted into a round flat cake
and fried in deep fat. We produced some fresh fruit ~~from~~ our
larder and listened to much conversation ^{Navaho} among the Navaho. ^{as we ate our meal.} Finally
after a silent moment ^{on} interpreter turned to me and said " You two
look kind of old, but you sure got good teeth!"

Lunch over and every thing put away, our hostess built up the fire
and placed the pots near it. This was in no sense true firing.
She turned the pots occasionally to heat them evenly all the way
around; ^{they were heated rather than fired} Two of these pots we purchased to bring home, but we imagined
that because we had witnessed as well as photographed their making
they would never be used and would be destroyed after we had gone.
This was a make shift firing. The taboo says that it is bad luck
to have any one watch this process and illeffects could befall the
~~maker or~~ the user of these pots. However, we had had a nice day
and witnessed at least a part of the Navaho process.

When we were packed and ready to leave, May shyly said to us "We
have a new baby in the hogan". Though I had noticed another woman
going in and out of the hogan several times during the day, she did
not join us nor speak to us. We were taken into the hogan and there
we found a tiny baby less than twenty four hours old. It was in
its "four day" cradle board, sound asleep. Before the fifth day the
father would make a larger permanent cradleboard for the new member
of the family. We parted good friends and went on our
way, for we had located a basket maker not so far
away where we were to visit and watch the making of
a basket.