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INTRODUCTION

The People

AT PICURIS PUEBLO, cradled in the green forest of New Mexico's Sangre de Cristo Mountains, when workers prepare to restore the old adobe mission, they pile plastering dirt next to the cracked foundation. In this soil glint the sharp edges and faded designs of broken pottery—potsherds from generations past about to be mixed into mud plaster for a twenty-first-century church.

At Taos, the elders ask a young potter to make a bowl for ceremonial use in the kiva. They reject her first effort; it looks too new. They want one blackened with smoke, so she refires her bowl, smudging it black. The elders are satisfied.

Isleta Pueblo, south along the Rio Grande, celebrates its feast day every year on the fourth of September. After mass, the Isleta people carry a carved image of Saint Augustine in procession around the plaza. Near a shrine where the saint will be honored, a Pueblo woman offers food to the carved *santo*. Under the approving eyes of the village priest, she walks to the head of the procession with a pottery bowl full of steaming chile stew, wafting the steam toward the saint's chiseled face.

Facing page: Potter Candace Tse-Pe Martinez dancing in the San Ildefonso Buffalo Dance, 1985. Right: Ladder to the sky, Picuris Pueblo Church, 1985.

"We come into this world with pottery, and we are going to leave the earth with pottery," says Acoma Pueblo potter Dolores Garcia. Acomas are bathed in a pottery bowl at birth and buried with pottery when they die. A pot is shattered over the surface of each grave. At Laguna, these pots are clouds, and when these break, the people say, "Let it rain."

Pottery is a tradition, but it is also a part of contemporary life. It is art—vital, everyday art, and fine art as well—a creation and a symbol of the Pueblo people. The Pueblos are one people and many people. They share a way of life, a worldview, and a landscape. They



speak half a dozen languages and live in more than thirty villages scattered in a 350-mile arc that reaches from Taos, New Mexico, to the Hopi mesas in northern Arizona. Their immediate ancestors lived in an even vaster area, from central Utah to deep in northern Mexico and from Nevada to Texas.

Pottery comes from the earth. By transforming pieces of this earth—painted with minerals and plants, shaped with stones and gourds—Pueblo artists create a bond between landscape and people, between home and spirit. Hopi-Tewa potter Dextra Quotskuyva speaks of trying to incorporate the whole universe—the earth and the sky and human lives—into her designs. A Taos man says, “The story of my people and the story of this place are one single story. No man can think of us without thinking of this place. We are always joined together.”

The land is where we begin.

The Pueblo Landscape

Two great rivers drain the Southwest: the Colorado and the Rio Grande. On its way from the Rockies to the Gulf of California, the Colorado River cuts through its namesake plateau in deep canyons, climaxing at the

Grand Canyon, the westernmost boundary of the Pueblo world. The Rio Grande flows from the San Juan Mountains of Colorado through New Mexico in a north-south line with only a few gentle curves. Between Taos and Santa Fe, the Rio Grande passes between the two southernmost ranges of the Rocky Mountains: the volcanic circle of the Jemez Mountains on the west and the high spine of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains on the east.

The Pueblo people have woven themselves into this geography. Beginning at the north, away from the Rio Grande, the two northernmost pueblos sit in spectacular settings: Taos, right up against the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, and Picuris, *within* those mountains. Downstream toward Española, the Rio Grande Gorge opens out, and from here south lie the other Rio Grande pueblos. First comes a northern cluster in the rift between the mountains—San Juan (now known by its Tewa name, Ohkay Owingeh), Santa Clara, and San Ildefonso. Just north of Santa Fe, the pueblos of Pojoaque, Nambe, and Tesuque lie on eastern tributary creeks of the big river.

Where the Rio Grande flows out into desert basins south of Santa Fe, a sequence of villages (Cochiti, Santo

Ancestral Pueblo potsherds, 1986. Potters tuned their methods to local clays, fuels, and weather, creating endlessly inventive designs.





The Zuni Olla Maidens, shown here in 1992, dance at celebrations all over the Southwest.

Domingo, San Felipe, Sandia, and Isleta) stands on its banks. Santa Ana, Zia, and Jemez pueblos fringe the southern mesas of the Jemez Mountains on the Jemez River, tributary to the Rio Grande from the west.

Heading west from the Rio Grande Valley at Albuquerque, angular desert mountain ranges give way to mesas cut through by squared-off canyons faced with red and golden sandstone cliffs. Here and there rises an island of mountain forest. This is the Colorado Plateau, the prehistoric Pueblo heartland, home to the Pueblo ancestors we have called Anasazi.

On the Rio San José just off Interstate 40, Laguna is the first living pueblo encountered on the trip westward. Farther west—farther from the highway, from water, and from familiar worlds—lie the pueblos of Acoma and Zuni. The “sky city,” Acoma perches securely atop a mesa south of Mount Taylor. Zuni Pueblo stands at the western foot of the Zuni Mountains on the edge of the sweeping desert grassland known as Navajo Country. Finally, deep in the remote plateaus of north-central Arizona lie the Hopi villages. All but two of the far-flung Hopi farming communities stand on or near three arid and rocky mesas that jut like ships’ prows above the plains that lead away to the Grand Canyon and the San Francisco Peaks.

Sacred arrays of mountains, lakes, and mesas

bound the world of every pueblo. The land is stark, as sharply delineated as life and death. The health of each pueblo depends on rain to nourish its fields and on ceremonies and dances to ensure adequate rainfall. Guided by the sun, the people plan their ceremonial calendar around planting and harvest. Solstices bring times of extremes; equinoxes bring order and balance. The Pueblo world, mundane and spiritual, reflects these unequivocal dualities: winter and summer, solemn ritual and outrageous clowning, weak and strong, life and death, Father Sun and Mother Earth.

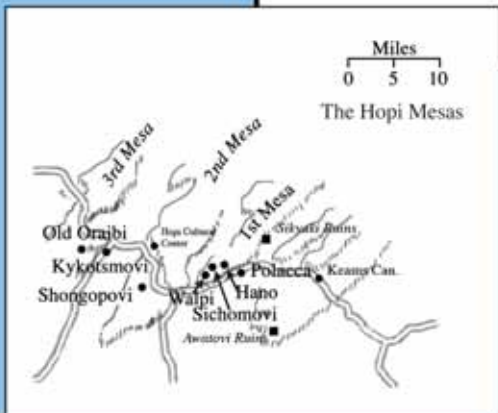
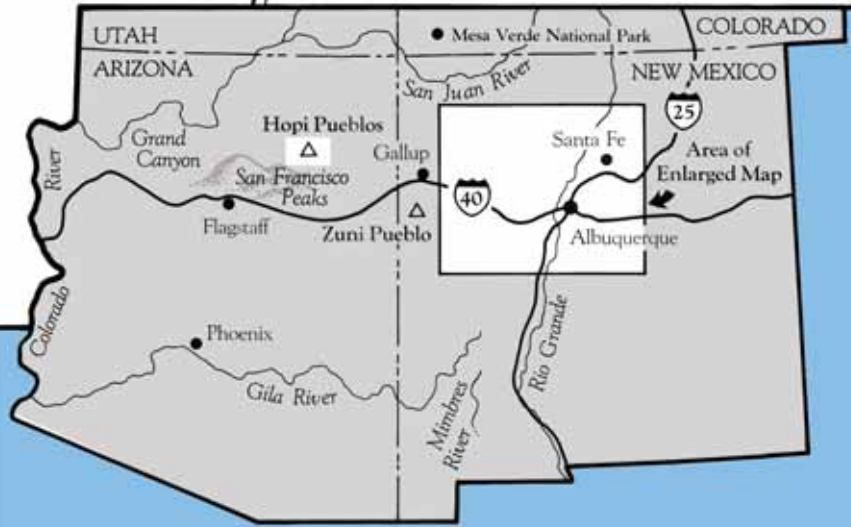
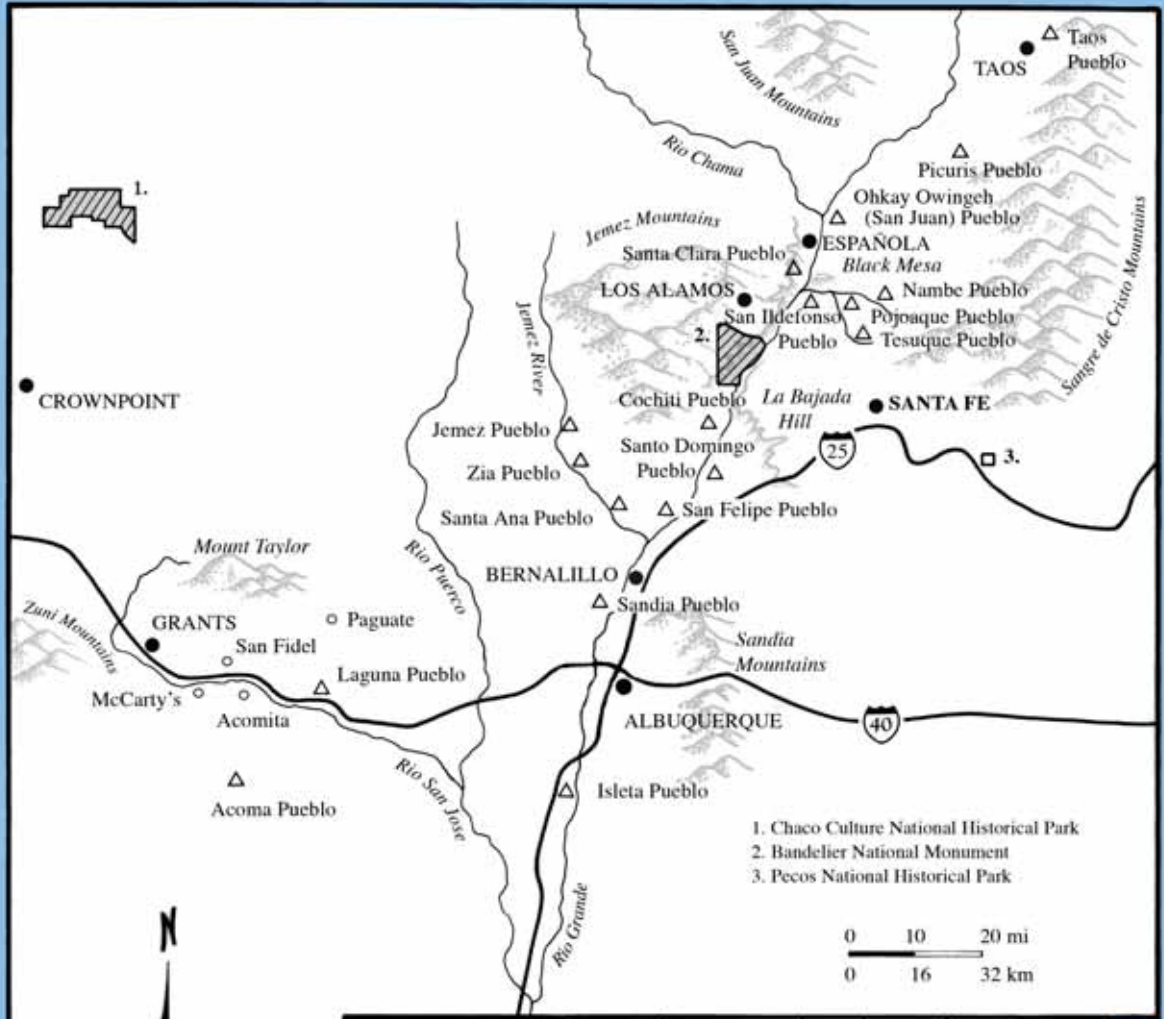
Pueblo pottery captures the people’s refined sense of order, opposition, and balance. Black-on-white. Paired figures. Symmetry. When potters outline designs on a slipped and polished vessel, they see with a perspective honed by every aspect of their existence. In every task, Pueblo people start from the boundaries of their world and work toward the center. Again and again, Pueblo potters say that they let the clay take whatever shape it wants, without their conscious control. They listen, and then paint and shape designs dictated by the form.

Pueblo: Village, Language, People

An Acoma potter is an Acoma Indian, a Pueblo Indian, and, linguistically, a Keresan. A Picuris person is Pueblo, from the Tanoan linguistic group, and speaks Northern Tiwa. No wonder travelers in the Southwest keep asking for clarification: just who are the Pueblo Indians?

Traditionally, these native people live in stone and adobe towns, farm nearby fields, and share distinctive arts and religion. The word *pueblo* means “village” in Spanish and refers to a town and to its people. But many subdivisions exist within this category.

Language, the anthropologist’s favorite method for distinguishing between cultures, proves both useful and confusing in the case of the Pueblos. The Hopis speak a





Hisi Nampeyo (as she signs her pottery), shown here in 1985, is also proud to be known as Camille, daughter of the great Hopi-Tewa potter Dextra Quotskuyva.

language related to that spoken by Ute and Paiute people farther west. The Hopis' nearest Pueblo neighbors, the Zunis, speak a language that stands alone, with a remote connection to one Californian Indian linguistic family. Acoma, Laguna, and the Rio Grande Pueblos of Zia, Santa Ana, San Felipe, Santo Domingo, and Cochiti speak Keresan (or Keres), a language that also stands by itself.

The rest of the Rio Grande Pueblos speak Tanoan—also spoken by the Kiowa, Plains Indian people. Even among Tanoan speakers, substantial differences exist among Northern Tiwa (Taos and Picuris); Southern Tiwa (Sandia and Isleta); Towa (Jemez); and Tewa (Ohkay Owingeh, Santa Clara, San Ildefonso, Pojoaque, Nambe, and Tesuque).

To further complicate matters, the Western

Pueblos of Acoma, Laguna, Zuni, and Hopi differ in social organization from the Rio Grande Pueblos. When such confusing variety exists in contemporary people (with whom we can talk), imagine the task of the archaeologist trying to untangle the prehistoric story.

Archaeologists speak of four main prehistoric Southwest peoples. The Mogollon lived in highlands across central Arizona and New Mexico and southward; the Anasazi dominated the Four Corners plateau country and the upper Rio Grande. Two other desert cultures, the Salado and Hohokam in southern Arizona, were neighbors but not direct ancestors of the Pueblos (though some Hopi Water Clan people say otherwise).

As Mogollon and Anasazi cultures blended and evolved over 1,500 years, changes came—but the people did not disappear. They live on in today's Pueblo people, who are their inheritors and descendants. This is why scholars and Pueblo people now avoid the word *Anasazi*, a Navajo word meaning “enemy ancestors,” and instead speak of “Ancestral Pueblo” culture.

In prehistoric times, the Southwest was more densely populated in places than it is today. Across the canyons and mesas of the Four Corners lie thousands of ruined, abandoned villages. We differentiate prehistoric regions by what we can excavate: villages, houses, jewelry, and—more than anything else—pottery. Some archaeologists spend so much time analyzing pottery fragments (potsherds) that pottery almost becomes synonymous with culture.

Pueblo languages have no word for “art.” Tewa people do speak of the concept of an artful, thoughtful life. Prehistoric peoples made ceramic vessels for cooking, carrying water, and keeping food safe from insects and rodents. “It wasn't something they had to write about or research or study,” says Jemez artist Laura Fragua Cota. “They just did it. It was life.” These useful objects also happened to be beautiful, and potters worked even harder to create beauty when making ceremonial vessels.



Piñon smoke and sun-warmed adobe, Taos Pueblo, 1985.

Mogollon people first began depending on pottery instead of baskets about AD 200. After another three centuries, pottery-making had spread across the Southwest. Zuni potter Josephine Nahohai described these times: “We took care of pots, and they took care of us.” Indeed, in Tewa a single word (*nung*) means “people,” “clay,” and “earth.”

By about AD 500, the southwestern people had become farmers, nurturing fields of corn, squash, and beans. In the seventh century, they began to paint their white and red pottery with black designs, and later with multicolored polychrome. In southern New Mexico around AD 1000, the Mimbres people, within the Mogollon tradition, painted some of the most artistically remarkable pottery in the prehistoric Southwest.

The Ancestral Pueblo people had abandoned the Great Houses of Chaco Canyon by the late 1100s and Mesa Verde and the San Juan River drainage by 1300, leaving behind many other traditional homelands by 1450. The people simply moved on. Scholars devote lifetimes to untangling the evolving pottery styles as they

follow the Ancestral Pueblo potters tuning their methods to local clays, fuels, and weather in new homelands. The experts marvel at the inventiveness of painted pottery traditions, teasing out influences of Salado pottery from south of the Mogollon Rim, tracing Hopi yellow pottery through time. The continuity between prehistoric artists and their descendants in today’s Pueblo villages is astonishing.

Each modern pueblo tells stories about how its clans gathered from many places to come to the one place where they should live and where they do live today, the “center of the universe” for each. Each clan had migrations to complete, a spiritual quest that depended on religious leaders who announced when it was time to move on. Oral traditions recognize many ruins as ancestral sites. Marcellus Medina’s grandparents at Zia always told him, “We are descendants from Mesa Verde.”

When Coronado arrived in 1540, some 130,000 Pueblo people lived in about 150 sizable villages. Diseases brought by the Europeans wiped out entire communities in terrifying epidemics—with up to 95

percent of the population lost. Pueblo people abandoned dozens of villages when population dropped too low for farming and proper ceremonial life to continue.

After decades of oppression, the Pueblos revolted in 1680 and exiled the Spanish from the Southwest until 1692—and from Hopi permanently. Many Rio Grande Pueblo people took refuge with the more isolated Hopis, and a village of Tewa-speaking people remains on First Mesa to this day. Keresan and Towa refugees founded Laguna in 1697. The last seventeen Pecos Indians, remnant of what had been New Mexico's largest pueblo, moved to Jemez in 1838. With these changes, the number of pueblos stabilized. The villages that exist today have survived through the centuries against daunting odds.

With the return of Spanish colonists, the work of Pueblo potters became a bedrock layer in the New Mexico economy. Villagers of all ethnicities relied on Pueblo pottery well into the nineteenth century, until the railroad finally brought metal pots and pans in sufficient quantity to begin replacing clay cookware.

Today ancient traditions live on among the Pueblo people, though they steadfastly shield their most sacred ceremonies from eyes of inadequate understanding. At the same time, Pueblo people inhabit twenty-first-century America, where they confront one last duality—the

difficult search for a path between the old ways and the new. Tessie Naranjo from Santa Clara believes that “pottery, participation in dancing, extended family—these are all generational things. Social activity is one of the most important parts of pottery-making. It's intimate and nurturing. Only in that way does culture survive. Only in that way is culture active.” And, always, pottery-making is a relationship with the earth. Tessie sums up this interdependence: “Without the human, the clay can never be the pot. Without the clay, the human can never make the pot.” Max Early at Laguna believes that the skills and aesthetics of pottery-making are now embedded in the genes of the Pueblo people.

Pottery helps bridge the gap between worlds, between humans and clay, springing from old ways but generating an income in a wage-based society. Pueblo potters carry on with the grace, intuition, and eloquence of their ancestors. They build their designs and contemporary lives—their “stories”—into this pottery. Along with the southwestern landscape and the traditions of the people who settled here, preserving their language and identity for seventeen centuries, each Pueblo pot contains a part of the potter's spirit—all joined together, people and place, in a “single story” embodied in clay.

The late Louis Naranjo of Cochiti and his bear storyteller: “They're just like my grandkids to me,” 1986.

