

# Puebloan Pottery

## ORIGINS: Acoma and Cochiti Puebloan People

Date: Unknown

Place: Rio Grande Valley, Acoma and Cochiti Pueblos

Materials: Clay

Donated

By: Unknown



Large Piece of Pottery

## DESCRIPTION

The two pieces of pottery are made from the white clay commonly found in the Rio Grande Valley, the location of origin. The largest piece of pottery has two handles. The piece has a maximum width of 20 cm and a height of 12 cm (Fig. 1). This piece has an exterior burn mark on the lower half (Fig.2) The smaller piece has a diameter of 13 cm, including its one handle, and a height of 6 cm. This piece does not have and blemishes (Fig. 3).

Both of these pieces of pottery are decorated in the traditional Puebloan colors and designs. Pueblo pottery is characterized by white, red, and black coloring. The patterns on each pot are common in Pueblo pottery as well. The larger features a plant design (Fig. 1) while the smaller features a checker-board pattern which symbolizes rain (Fig. 3).



Vegetal designs on the side



Close up of burn marks



The Smaller vessel

## CULTURE

### Description:

In 1540, during their exploration of the Americas, Spanish explorers found permanent buildings and communities of people throughout the Rio Grande Valley and named these people “Pueblo”. “Pueblo” is Spanish for “village” and was given to the people because of their established villages. The Pueblo people can be separated into nineteen distinct groups based on their location. The nineteen Pueblos share many characteristics but offer some variation in the goods they crafted, the materials they used, and in their storytelling and history. The nineteen Pueblo groups as a whole are skilled potters and artisans. The traditional uses of pottery in Pueblo society are mainly functional. Pottery was used for storage and cooking with little exception. Over time, the Pueblo people began to create pottery for ceremonial or storytelling purposes.

The Pueblo of Acoma have existed as a distinct entity in the heart of Acoma lands, Acoma Mesa, since at least 1200 AD. Acoma Mesa is a city consisting of approximately 500 multi-story, clay houses and structures built on a ridge west of the current day city of Albuquerque. Acoma Mesa has been considered to be the oldest continuously inhabited community in North America and is still inhabited and open to the public today.

Prior to building the city of Acoma Mesa, the Acoma were foragers in the surrounding desert lands. For an unknown reason around 1100 AD, the Acomas began to build their settlement on the ridge which would become the great city of Acoma Mesa. The Acomas historically were skilled in crafting pottery, artisans, and architects and still value these skills today.

The second group of people associated with these pieces of pottery is the Cochiti Pueblos. The traditional lands of the Cochiti Pueblo are located north of present day Albuquerque. The Cochiti Pueblos were- and still are- skilled artisans and created fine jewelry, pottery, and drums. The Cochiti placed a stronger emphasis on history and storytelling than the Acomas which can be seen in the Cochiti’s storytelling pottery and drums.



*Caption: Acoma Mesa*

*National Park Service*

**Use within Culture:**

Traditionally, pottery crafted and used by the Acomas was strictly functional although these pieces have become more decorative. The Pueblos of Acoma used pottery for cooking, storage, and eating. The Acomas created their pottery using the coil method- long ropes of clay are wrapped together to create one solid piece- although today, some Acoma potters have moved away from the coil method and prefer using a mold. Traditional Acoma pottery was created from white clay found in the nearby regions.

Pottery crafted by the Pueblos of Acoma is characterized by orange and black intricate designs with very fine, accurate lines. The designs featured on Acoma pottery are traditionally very symbolic and are centered on life cycles, water and the sky. One of the most commonly seen patterns on Acoma pottery is the hatching pattern. The hatching pattern is a black and white checkerboard pattern which symbolizes rain.

Unlike the Acomas, the Cochiti Pueblos do not strictly use their pottery for storage. Traditionally, the Cochiti created pots for storage much like the Acomas but began to stray away from the functional pieces. In 1964, Helen Cordero, a notable Cochiti Pueblo, created the first storytelling piece. Cochiti storytelling pottery is characterized by the telltale man or woman in a seated position with an open mouth surrounded by several children.

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