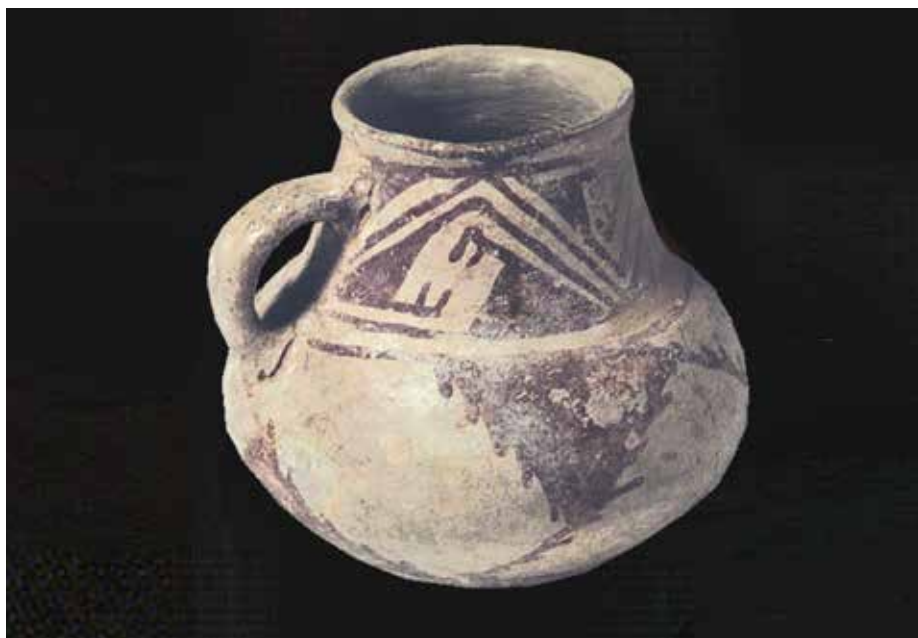


WHITE ARIZONA POTS



Pottery Discussion #9

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Summerhouse Indian Art

Once you start studying this pottery, you learn a geographical truth. Potters use their available clays, and those clays tell you where the pots came from.

In prehistoric times, gray and white pottery came from the Anasazis in the north, and now white pottery comes from the Pueblos. In Arizona's desert country south of the Mogollon Rim, they made a lot of buff and later, a lot of red pottery. White pots came from elsewhere.



End of discussion? Not quite. These are fragments of some of the oldest Southwestern pottery I've ever seen and held. They were made about 800 B.C. in Tucson by a vanished culture, and they're gray. On the same visit, I saw other fragments from Tucson that went all the way back to 2000 B.C. They were gray too.

The Tucson Farmers who made these fragments were gone before 100 A.D., replaced by the Hohokam, who for more than a thousand years made that buff pottery. Its overwhelming preponderance makes it easy to come to a nothing-but-buff conclusion.



But the Hohokam didn't start out with buff. These are the two earliest Hohokam painted types, perhaps made as early as the 500s. The one on the top is Estrella Red on gray, and the one below is Sweetwater Red on gray. Repeat: Red on GRAY.

After the 600s, though, the Hohokam were making nothing but red on buff and never made red on gray again.



Those early pieces lay a little foundation for what I'm trying to say in this Discussion, but they're not the reason I decided to tackle it.

What really got me going was the wonderful Fall 2019 issue of *Archaeology Southwest Magazine*. It was entirely devoted to the late Hohokam Casa Grande community, and it suggested some of the things I've wondered about for years.

That community existed during Classic Period Hohokam, the last days of greatness of the Hohokam world. It lasted from roughly 1100 to 1450, the time normally given for when the Hohokam abandoned the area and were replaced a couple of hundred years later by today's O'odham people.

I've always had trouble with that picture of abandonment. Just because large numbers of people do something, it doesn't mean that everybody does. I've always felt that quite a few leftover Hohokam stayed behind.

The magazine thought so too, and devoted a lot of space to the oral histories of the O'odham and their opinions about connection.

I've always had a lot of time for the long-since discredited archeologist's idea that pottery equals people. I think it makes a lot of sense, and for years, I've believed there's a pottery connection between the Hohokam and the O'odham, and that connection is white pottery.

However, the Hohokam didn't make it for several hundred years. They started making their buff pottery in the 600s, and by 1050, they were making pieces like this Sacaton Red on buff seed jar. It's 6" in



diameter and probably near the size of the early Estrella and Sweetwater pieces. Even though it's quite light in color, you can't call it white.

You could say the same about this 3-1/4" diameter censer with the snake wrapped around it. We're guessing it's also from the Sacaton period and dates from around 1000.

It's easy to say that long hiatus is where my theory about a whiteware connection falls apart.

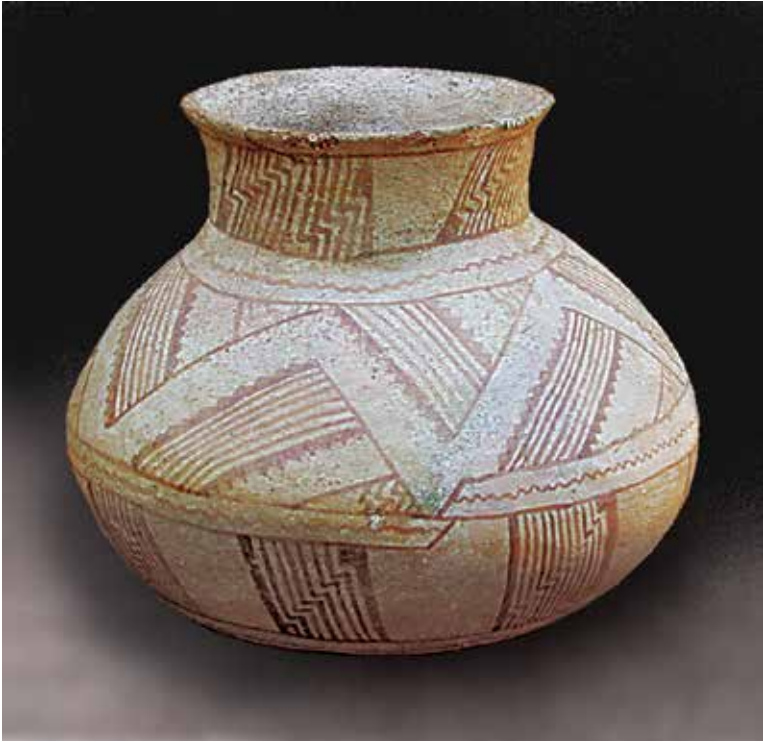


The next Hohokam pottery is the reason I feel the connection is real. The pot on the cover is an example of Casa Grande Red on buff. It's 4-1/4" wide and was made around 1350. Yes, it's called Red on buff, but there's a big difference. Now that buff clay is covered with a whitish slip. It's not dead white like the white pieces from elsewhere, but they'd found a local clay to make their pieces whiter.

By 1350, there was a lot of cross-culturation going on, trade with the north and east. White-slipped pottery was what the Salado and the Mimbres did to the east, and there was enough trade going on in those years for the Hohokam to pick up on the technique.

From perhaps 1300 to 1450 Hohokam red on buff was white slipped. Then that not-necessarily total abandonment took place. The reasons were social and ecological. Overpopulation and overdevelopment polluted the rivers and used up the arable land, A big flood that happened around 1350 may have contributed to the unrest.

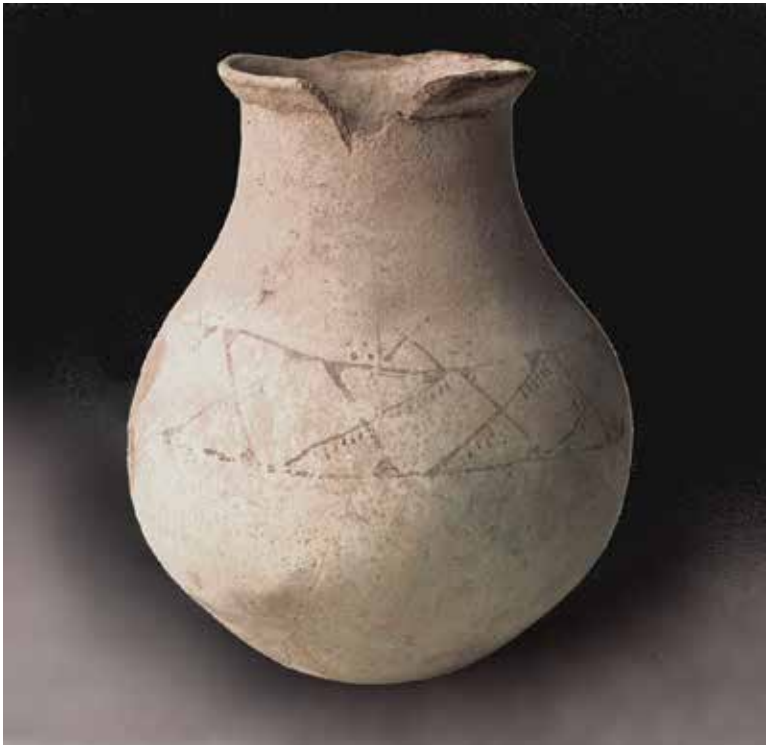
It's called the Classic Period because it was the time of the Hohokam's greatest development, but the Period did itself in. Too many people, too little food, too many problems.



This 8-1/4" diameter jar, also from 1350, is a classic example of Classic Hohokam, the last days of the Hohokam empire. Then, abandonment. Or not.

This 14-1/2" high jar is Exhibit A for my argument in support of a prehistoric-to-present connection. According to our best guess, it was made around 1650, when there weren't any Hohokam.

It's shaped and sized exactly like the storage jars the O'odham people made for hundreds of years and the Hohokam seldom made. But it's slipped and painted exactly like the Casa Grande jar on the previous page. It's as if they gathered their clay, their slip and their paint material the day after the 14th century Hohokam gathered theirs.



History gets fuzzy for the next couple of hundred years. Seventeenth-century Spanish wrote about Arizona Indians making large pottery jars, and in subsequent years, most other observers talked about red ones.

The issue got further complicated when the Maricopa left the Colorado River and came into the Phoenix area around 1700. They built a strong alliance with the northern O'odham branch, the Akimel

O'dham, The Akimel used to be called the Pima, The Tohono O'dham are the southern branch, centered in deep Hohokam country around Tucson. They used to be called the Papago.

The only book ever devoted to O'dham pottery, Bernard Fontana's 1960 *Papago Indian Pottery*, suggested that the O'dham didn't make any white or cream pottery before 1930. I have a lot of trouble with that proposition. We kept finding things like the 10-3/4" diameter shallow bowl below.

One knowledgeable observer called it "the oldest Maricopa piece I've ever seen." I'm pretty sure it's Tohono rather than Maricopa, but I can believe it goes back to the middle of the 19th century.



Unlike the old jar on the previous page, the piece isn't slipped and I'm quite aware that someone looking at it could call it a pale, over-fired black on red. It has the typical high polish of the period, but it's much lighter in color than the other 19th-century red pieces we've seen.

If this were the only early O'dham whitish pot we'd seen, we'd be willing to abandon our theory, but we ran across a potter whose work we can date to the 1870s. A penciled note on the bottom of one of her pieces stated it was bought in 1874 at San Xavier del Bac, the Tucson

Mission that remains southern Arizona's biggest tourist attraction. Nobody could call what she did black on red. She used the pink local clay and applied an off-white slip much like the potter who made the 17th-century jar a couple of pages back. We found several of her pieces and featured them in the Second Edition of our *Southwestern Pottery*.

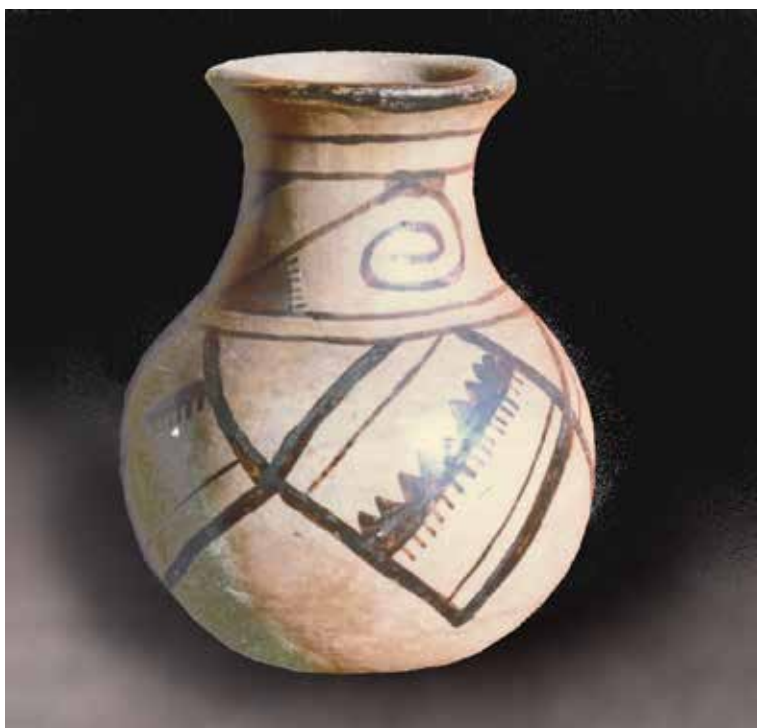


Here are two more of them. The cup made a cameo appearance in Discussion #5.



Despite the efforts of that early 19th-century potter, white or whitish pottery really didn't take off in O'odham country until well into the 20th century. We dated this 4-1/2" tall piece as circa 1930.

People who don't agree with our thoughts about O'odham whiteware could insist that it's just a faded black on red, and I wouldn't have much of an argument to the contrary.



The real white pottery didn't start to happen until later, and it came about because of a clay supply in a different part of O'odham country, West of Tucson in the huge Sells Reservation, there's a town named Hicciwan, and it has a major source of the kaolin clay that gives Acoma pottery its pure white.

In all the years that the Hohokam occupied that country, they never seem to have found that clay or used it. It took potters from a few Hicciwan families to bring it back. We're pretty sure that almost all the



other pure white southern Arizona pieces we've seen came along after World War II.

In our books, we put a 1940 date on this jar, which may be too early. There's no question about its whiteness, however. This is full, pure kaolin white which, so far as we've been able to tell, never showed up in Arizona's desert lowlands before.

The one thing we're sure of is that all those dead-white pots have a Hicquiwan connection, and most are connected to one of two pottery families. Juanita Antone was active and Cross Antone produced pieces, but the real impetus came from Joe Angea Sr. and his heirs.

It started with Joe in the 1950s, but his family, led by his son Rupert, became a major pottery source from the 1980s into the 2000s, to the point that if you decided you wanted an O'odham pot, it would probably be signed "Angea" and would almost as likely be a Friendship Jar. We talk about those and show one in our Discussion #4.

Those Friendship Jars became so popular that they almost destroyed the Angea family's credibility as major artists. Fancy dealers relegated their work to the tourist curio level.

That wasn't the case back in 1950 when Joe Sr. made the quiet little jar at the top of the next page. Although white pieces were made



earlier, this 5" diameter jar marks the beginning of a pottery dynasty.

Joe's son Rupert made the 5-3/4" tall jar below around 1985, and it shows how the family began to hit stride.

The Angeas weren't alone in making whiteware. Over the course of





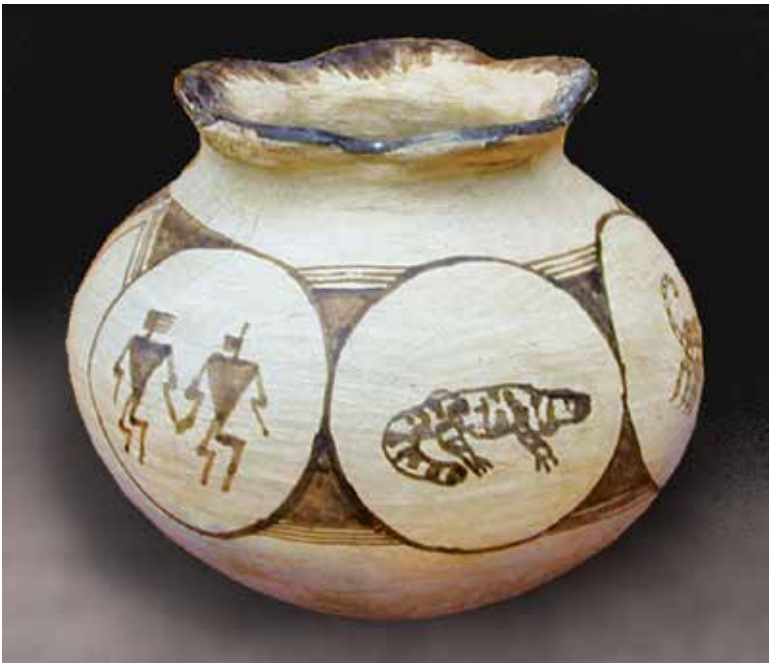
collecting, we found examples from the 1950s and 1960s that we couldn't attribute. Some were hastily made and decorated, like this 8" upside-down bowl, while others, like the 9-1/2" olla below, were done at a high level of expertise.





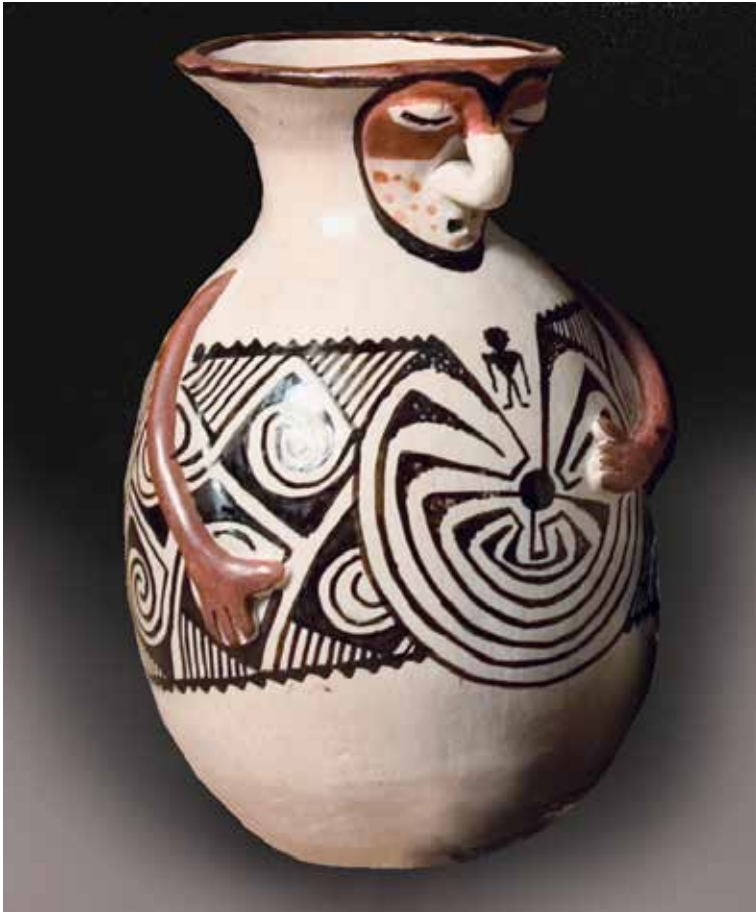
You can see that expertise in this 9-1/2" olla. It has so much exuberance and flair that it makes us realize just how much creative energy bounced around the walls of Hickiwan during those years.

The 5" jar below came from the other important Hickiwan family.



A few pages back, we mentioned Juanita Antone, who made important pieces in the 1970s. Her son Cross made the piece at the bottom of the previous page. Skilled as Juanita and Cross were, nobody from Hicciwan, or for that matter, any O'odham potter from anywhere, got the attention the Angeas did.

Billy Manuel came from a fine pottery family, and he and his sister Annie made a lot of important red and buff pieces. But in 2003, he also made this 7-1/2" high effigy jar.



It owes everything to the Angeas, to the point where he even used the Tohono tribal emblem, the Man-In-The-Maze, exactly the way the Angeas used it on many of their pieces. They used it so often that it almost became an Angea trademark.

The simple fact that a potter as important as Billy Manuel would copy the Angeas tells how thoroughly they dominated O'odham pottery at the turn of the 21st century.

The Angeas continued their high production over the years. Although we haven't searched for their pieces lately, we did turn up this little angel from 2007. She's wearing the Man-In-The-Maze on her hat and on her tummy.

It's signed simply "Angea," as are most of the family pieces. We'll probably never sort out which family member made what.



The Angeas showed the world that the O'dham make white pottery. I'd just like to suggest that they weren't the first.

That nearly three thousand year connection may be too much of a stretch, but the thread is there.

We photographed the image on page 2 at Desert Archeology, Inc. in Tucson. The Estrella and Sweetwater pieces on page 3 and the Angea angel on page 16 are from rarepottery.info. All other images are from the joint Hayes/Blom collection.