

TEWA WATER JARS



Pottery Discussion #2

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When I wrote the first of these discussions, I put a painting by Kevin McDermott on the cover, a fine thirteenth-century example from a museum. We had another of Kevin's museum paintings, and it's on the cover of this one.

It's titled *San Ildefonso ca. 1910 A.D.*

I did the first piece because I was fascinated by a painted design, the Tularosa Swirl. This time, it was a shape that fascinated me.

Some time in the nineteenth century, the potters at Santa Clara Pueblo decided exactly what a water jar should look like, and they formalized the shape. We have one sitting in our living room. It's from about 1895 and it's 14-1/2" in diameter.



They made the shape again and again during those years. almost always in the shiny black that's been a Santa Clara characteristic for more than two hundred years.

The two below are both from around 1910. The one on the left has an impressed bear paw, and both have a ridge above the midbody that the one on the opposite page lacks. The one with the bear paw from Frank Harlow's collection is 10-1/2" high while the one on the right from the Taylor Museum is much bigger, 15-1/2" in diameter. However, the differences aren't what impressed me. It's the similarity.



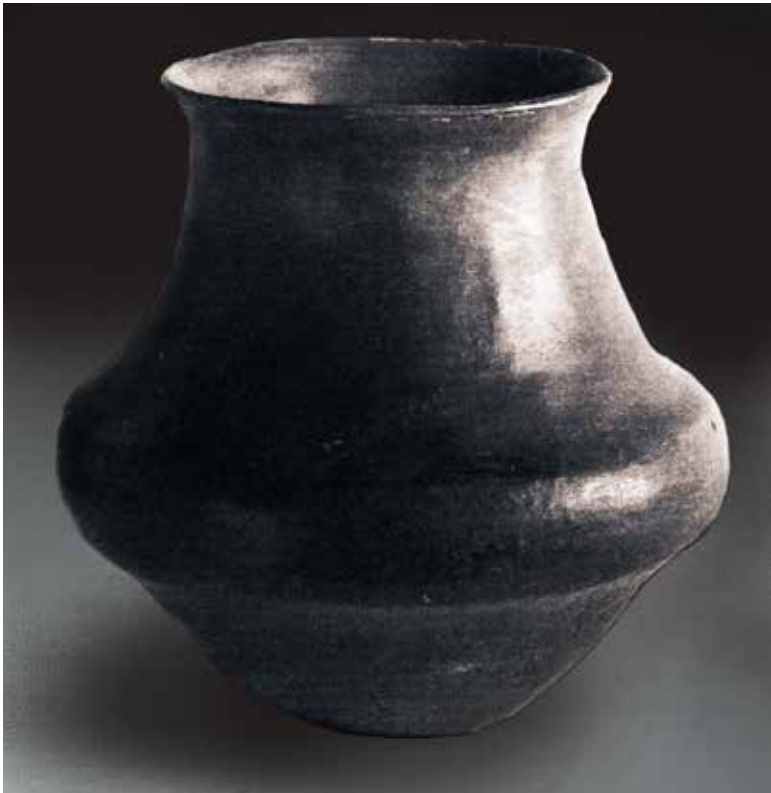
The piece below was collected for the Smithsonian in 1880. It's 13-1/2" high and eighty years later, Margaret Tafoya suggested that her mother had made it. Whoever made it, it's pretty clear that potters from



Santa Clara Pueblo agreed on the correct shape for a water jar.

We've looked at thousands of pots over the years, and not many of them echo that shape. Once I decided to explore where it came from and what happened after, I found surprises at both ends of the time span.

The origin of the shape at Santa Clara is pretty clear. In the 1700s and early 1800s, they made a type called Kapo Black. The School of Advanced Research dated the piece below at 1720–1760. It's right in the size ballpark, 15" in diameter.



But Santa Clara didn't invent the shape. In the early days, they made it in several places a bit downstream along the Rio Grande. And when they made it in those other places, they didn't make it black. All colors were fair game.

Moving back in time, there's an 11-1/2" diameter example of Pojoaque Polychrome in the Museum of New Mexico dated 1720. The shape is less exaggerated, but the idea stayed the same. Pojoaque Pueblo is a few miles south of Santa Clara, next door to San Ildefonso, Santa Clara's immediate neighbor to the south.



We started this discussion by referring to the shape as the Tewa Water Jar, and the Pojoaque jar above is a direct descendent of a late seventeenth-century type called Tewa Polychrome. But the shape didn't originate at Tewa-speaking Pueblos.

Other places approached the final shape. Farther down the river, at Cochiti, they had Kotiyiti Glaze Polychrome and still farther south at Santa Ana, they had San Diego Polychrome. Both Pueblos speak Keresan rather than Tewa.

The San Diego piece at left is 11-1/2" in diameter and dates from 1660. The 13-1/2" diameter Kotiyiti piece is circa 1670.



There were hints of the shape way earlier, down in Arizona during Hohokam times more than a thousand years ago.

The Santa Cruz Red on buff jar on the left dates from about 950 and the Sacaton Red on buff jar next to it is from a hundred years later. The Santa Cruz jar is small, just 5-5/8" diameter, and the Sacaton one is closer to the later sizes, 9-1/4" diameter.



These jars are ancient, but they aren't the jars that started this search. The jar on the next page was the one that really caught our attention. We bought at an auction in Santa Fe and felt we'd scored a treasure.

We were sure we had an early, rare example of a red Tewa water jar. We thought it might be the earliest Tewa water jar we'd ever find. It's the correct size, 13" in diameter, and it has the fully evolved shape. We thought it was important enough to show to experts.

Al Anthony and Jonathan Batkin saw it, thought we might be right, and suggested we take it all the way to the top.

We drove to Los Alamos and took it to Frank Harlow. He sat it in his lap, examined the clay and temper with a loupe, and decided it wasn't Tewa. It was Keresan, either from Santa Ana or San Felipe, and dated it as circa 1890.

Later, we showed it to another expert. Dick Howard questioned Harlow's date because the piece didn't have an indented base, which would have been standard at the time. He suggested it would more likely be from the early nineteenth century.

Then we talked to Walter Knox, a dealer from Tucson who knew the pot, knew exactly where it was found and knew the type.

Frank Harlow missed by three hundred miles and over four hundred years. It's an example of Perry Mesa Red from the Sinagua culture of central Arizona and it dates from around 1400.



We'd seen and held enough Sinagua pieces from the period to know that Walter Knox was right.

So we learned just how far away from Tewa the Tewa Water Jar was defined. However, no matter what its origin, it had settled so firmly into Santa Clara and next-door San Ildefonso by 1900 that it still feels right to have the Tewas claim the shape.

After 1900, the water jar shape wasn't a Santa Clara exclusive. Tewa potters from San Ildefonso potters and also Tesuque used it a lot.

They didn't make much blackware at San Ildefonso in those years. They left the black for Santa Clara, the Pueblo just up the river. San Ildefonso potters made Tewa water jars, but they painted them.



This one is from our living room.

It's 9-1/2" in diameter and we date it in our books as circa 1902. It's the Santa Clara shape done in the San Ildefonso manner.

During those years, the San Ildefonso and Santa Clara potters knew each other, but before there were cars, travel between the Pueblos was difficult. The pottery families mostly confined themselves to making their own Pueblo's traditional styles, to the point where you'd never see, and still won't see, an impressed bear paw on a San Ildefonso piece. It's a Santa Clara exclusive, reserved for Santa Clara potters alone.



The water jar shape wasn't exclusive, however, and Tewa potters from San Ildefonso used it a lot.

These two dazzling pieces from the Gallegos collection both date from around 1910, and neither is attributed to a maker. The one on the left is 12-1/2" inches high, and the one on the right is 10" high.

We do know who made the next one. It's from a private collection, shown in Susan Peterson's book on Maria Martinez, and it's a 1910 piece by Maria and Julian, 12" in diameter.

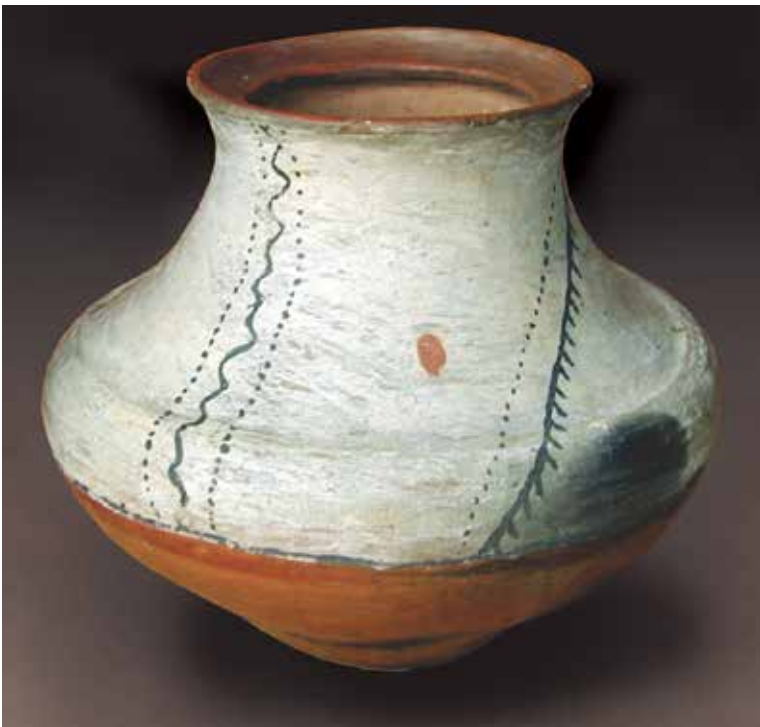


During those years, other versions of the water jar came out of San Ildefonso. They ranged from the quickly made to the masterful.



The 9" jar on the left dates from 1895. The 10-3/4" diameter jar from 1910 is almost certainly by Tonita Roybal, a potter whose stature rests right alongside Maria Martinez's at San Ildefonso. Tonita was the acknowledged master of black on red.

The oddly decorated 12" diameter jar below is from Tesuque Pueblo. It dates from 1890. Tesuque is the southernmost of a tight cluster of Tewa Pueblos north of Santa Fe. Beginning at Tesuque, you



can head north through Pojoaque, Nambe, San Ildefonso and Santa Clara. They all touch each other.

During those years, they made a few pieces farther down the river. This 1910 piece in The Museum of New Mexico came from Kewa Pueblo, then known as Santo Domingo. It's another forty miles south of Tesuque and half way to Albuquerque, and its language is Keresan, not Tewa.. The jar is 11-1/2" in diameter.



With the long tradition of blackware at Santa Clara and the enthusiastic replication of the shape at the other Tewa Pueblos and beyond, you'd expect it to persist.

However, it didn't.

When we got fascinated with the shape, we started looking for it everywhere we could find it.

Remarkably, in my research, I didn't find a single piece made between 1920 and 1950. I know they're out there—polychromes made at San Ildefonso in the 1920s and pieces made here and there in other places.

The main reason it disappeared at Santa Clara was simple fashion change. Margaret and the other Tafoyas created a new carved style, and pieces that would have had the shape narrowed and brought the neck and body diameter closer together, to the point where the water jar shape was gone.

This piece from the Elkus Collection was made by Christina Naranjo of Santa Clara around 1950. Although the shape is softened, it has all the characteristics and a bear paw as well.

I did find three pieces made between 1950 and 2000, and the fact



that I only found three of them attests to their scarcity. By then, it wasn't a fashionable shape and nobody seemed to think it was a particularly useful one.

As I researched, the next one I found came from San Ildefonso. It's in Susan Peterson's book on Maria Martinez. Maria remembered the shape, and made this 11-1/4" high jar in 1963. She signed it Maria Poveka, the name her son Popovi Da suggested she use for pieces with no painted decoration.



Seventeen years went by between Maria's jar and the next one I found. It's on the next page, and except for the shape, it had very little to do with water jar tradition. It was sized for the collector or souvenir hunter, 8-1/4" in diameter, and although it used traditional elements, its decoration bore only a faint resemblance to earlier tradition.

It was made in 1980 by Lois Gutierrez and her husband Derek de la Cruz. In the years since, Lois has been recognized as one of the finest painters among pottery artists, and this early piece only hints at the range of her skill.

She had every right to use the shape, since she was born in a Santa Clara family, and the piece includes a lightly impressed Santa Clara bear paw accented in white.



Today, Lois and Derek don't claim Santa Clara. They live in Pojoaque, and in our books, she, Derek and this piece, show up on the Pojoaque pages.

Then the shape went in hiding for another twenty years. It took a highly visible potter from Nambe Pueblo to bring it back. Nambe is just northeast of Pojoaque and in the Tewa family.

By the 1990s, the judges at Indian Market had decided that the only fine pottery from the Southwest was decorated with paint or carving. Plainware was a second-class citizen, not worthy of awards.

Micaceous pottery like they made at Taos and Picuris was also beneath the judges' dignity, dismissed as utilitarian rather than art.

Lonnie Vigil changed all that. He made huge, undecorated micaceous pieces, and he made them so well that the judges had to start paying attention. Through the 1990s, he kept bringing his pieces to Indian Market and he'd get an occasional ribbon along with the comment that his micaceous pieces, nice as they were, didn't belong in the show.

In 1999, a coffee table book on micaceous pottery came out, and Lonnie was featured as one of the major artists. The breakthrough came in 2001. One of Lonnie's black pieces won Best In Show at Indian

Market. Everybody noticed, and Lonnie became an international celebrity. Now, shape and finish became as important as painting and carving, and the judging standards were permanently changed.



Lonnie made this monumental 18-1/2" diameter jar in 2001. Although the earlier Tewa Water Jars weren't made in micaceous clay like Lonnie's, he brought the shape back in style and made it important again. It's pictured in Charles King's *Spoken Through the Clay*.

The Tewa Water Jar had its roots with the Hohokam in Arizona a thousand years ago. It reached refinement a bit farther up the hill in Arizona with the Sinagua six hundred years ago.

And it had its brief years of glory in the Tewa Pueblos north of Santa Fe a hundred years ago.

Then it disappeared until Lonnie and 2000, but we're not ready to say it's back.

We found another post-2000 piece. It's on the next page, and it's not by a Tewa, or even by a Pueblo Indian. It's by a great Navajo potter, Samuel Manymules.

It has a surface unlike anything any Pueblo potter ever made. After a wood firing, Navajo potters traditionally coat their pieces in resin as

the pot cools, which creates a characteristic high shine. The pieces often have black clouds created when live coals discolor the surface during firing. For centuries, potters have used these fire clouds as a decorative element.

Samuel made this one in 2005. It's even bigger than Lonnie Vigil's, and it's from the same collection. It's 20" in diameter.



It seemed like just the right piece to end this discussion.

It makes a near-perfect circle back to the fire-clouded fifteenth-century Sinagua pot that started our search.

Page 3 upper left from *Historic Pottery of the Pueblo Indians* by Larry Frank and Francis Harlow, upper right from *Pottery of the Pueblos of New Mexico* by Jonathan Batkin, lower from *Margaret Tafoya* by Blair and Blair.

Page 4 from *Matte Paint Pottery* by Francis Harlow

Page 5 all from *The Pottery of Santa Ana Pueblo* by Francis Harlow, Duane Anderson and Dwight Lanmon.

Page 9 upper images from *Two Hundred Years of Historic Pueblo Pottery, the Gallegos Collection* by Francis Harlow, lower image from *The Living Tradition of Maria Martinez* by Susan Peterson.

Page 11 from *A River Apart* by Valerie Verzuh.

Page 12 from *The Elkus Collection* by Dorothy Washburn.

Page 13 from *The Living Tradition of Maria Martinez* by Susan Peterson

Pages 15 and 16 from *Spoken Through the Clay* by Charles King

Eight uncredited images are from the joint Hayes/Blom collection.