

*Let's begin with the term "PRE-COLUMBIAN". What does that mean?*

*Pre-Columbian simply means before Christopher Columbus.*

*When was that? 1492. So how much longer before 1492?*

*About 3000 years before. What is that based on? It's based on the oldest known archaeological remains, the Olmec. So, they're the oldest? Probably not, archaeological evidence indicates man was migrating into America from Asia about 30,000 years ago. Logically, if man was migrating from the north, sites to the north would be older. Yet we don't have evidence of earlier settlements or ceramics, why? For centuries up until contemporary times tribes were nomadic, hunters and gatherers. Pottery was just too much baggage to lug around. If they existed, no evidence has been found or they were in an area settled for a long time and the evidence was destroyed.*

*1800-2000 B.C. would that make the Olmec the oldest ceramic remains? Not even close. Greek pottery was well established and Egypt precedes these cultures by nearly 1000 years. None are even close the record oldest. China, Japan and Europe have remains that go back 25,000 years.*

*The American continent was truly the New World. Even the so called Indians, what we call Native Americans, were migrants.*

### **Where does Indigenous America sit on the time line?**

Found in text after table of contents.

Map of the Americas

### **Why isn't there more pottery in Canada and the northern United State?**

It wasn't for a lack of clay. There are many excellent clay sources. Tribes were nomadic hunters and gathers. The indigenous tribes of the northwest are fabulous artists, their mediums were wood and basketry. Pottery was a tradable item but too heavy to lug around and not a skill highly prized. Many tribes had some pottery but lacked the sophistication and skill of the cultures that are mentioned here.

### **Are there recognizable traits in the pottery that would link it to China (Asia) since they came from there?**

There are similarities but experts credit them to coincidence and the nature of medium and environmental similarities. First year novices here at Gavilan without any exposure to these pots and not Chinese, or even Hispanic often discover similar styles. Of course, Jungians believe in a collective unconscious that preserves the human experience across time. Those stylistic coincidences would not be an accident, but a preserved memory that somehow filters down to our conscience memory.

### **Mimbres Black & White Bowl**

Typically when a person dies their personal bowl has a hole punched through the bottom which symbolizes the spirit escaping or traveling. The bowl is buried with the individuals. The designs tell messages (family connections, tribal connections). The "stair" symbol represents a petition or journey to the gods/heavens. All elements of the native American lives was intertwined with spirits.

### **Hohokam Seed Pot**

This motif is known as the river serpent. The stairs in the serpent relate it to the spirit world. Water of course was critical for survival. From the cliffs the meandering river do look like a serpent.

### **Modern Jemez (Hemesh) pots**

Fusion of Spanish and Native American traits. The forms are traditional Indian forms but the figurative designs are more similar to Spanish designs. The figures relate to Western approach to figure (natural like proportions) vs stylized or cartoonish figures.

### **San Ildefonso Black Ware Style**

Earthenware, burnished, pit fired

Form: Wedding pot, symbolic of the individuals joining

Symbols: Bear and Feather (good luck signs) or family totems

**Cochiti, "Storyteller"** A figurine tradition of a woman covered with children. There were male storytellers (not usually captured in clay, is that because the women are mostly the potters?) and female storytellers. They tell different stories. They passed the history of their culture, since they had no written histories. In upper right corner a modern translation of the Mother Goose, Old Lady in a Shoe story.

Native American pottery today is highly decorative but they continue to raise the standard of design without sacrificing craftsmanship. Their pottery still has a great deal of integrity despite being a commercially desirable commodity. Not all modern pottery is worthy of international acclaim. Usually that work, while well crafted caters to a clientele drawn to kitsche and trite sentimentality. Where is that line between true, folk art and kitsche? Both share a common interest in popular culture. One is an honest portrait while the other is poor attempt to capture the essence of a culture/person.

### **What elements are studied to understand the contribution of ceramics to a culture?**

#### **Culture (religion, politics, economy)**

Agriculture is the civilizing factor. Pottery was an essential development since storage of large amounts of food was required preserve the harvest and to sustain large groups. Specialization was required because no one individual had enough time and resources to produce all that they needed.

**Culture:** religion, politics, economics, body of knowledge, domestic practices

- 1) Religion: many clay objects were made for religious rituals early science/seasons were often tied to religion and clay. Many symbols refer to nature/religion.
- 2) Economics: the development of civilizations requires the development of agriculture and trade. One of the critical items is clay pots for cooking, storage, and trade. Economic needs create demand for ceramics.
- 3) Body of knowledge: it's hard to understand in our age of internet, where vast amounts are at our fingertips, that there was a time when acquiring knowledge was a special and powerful occupation. Sometimes known as priests, shamans, witches. Potters were sometimes feared 'cause they practiced magical rituals (fire, transformation, sometimes ritual objects).
- 4) Domestic practices: clay has been used for food, medicine, cosmetics, theater, architecture, coffins/burial rituals, interior decoration personal adornment.

**Environment:** Strong connection to nature and agricultural practices.

**Attitude towards artist:** For the majority of time, ceramic artists were anonymous (many were slaves and some were regarded as shamans), but as we approach modern times, certain individuals have received greater recognition for their artistic achievements.

**Technology:** Reveals a lot about the development of culture.

Provides the means to expand production, delivery, + aesthetic expression

- 1) Clay body – ideal choice?
- 2) Firing – pit vs kiln
- 3) Forming technique (How was it made?) – pinch, coil, slab, wheel...
- 4) Surface decorating techniques. Slip vs glaze, polychrome, vs carved

Earthenware – why is this ideal?

Pit vs kiln

Forming Techniques

Pinch, paddle, coil

Mold (press not slip cast)

Wheel

Decorating techniques

Slip vs glaze

Polychrome

### **Olmec Influences**

"Mother Culture" – advanced agriculture, crafts, astronomy, engineering (irrigation), ceremonial centers (ball game, trade centers), religion (jaguar cult), sculptures and sculptural vessels

### **Why are the Olmec considered to be the Mother Culture?**

Some how by the time the "Indians" had migrated to Mesoamerica, the culture had morphed into something different from the North. They were giving up their nomadic life and settling down. They shared a knowledge of irrigation with the southwest Indians that allowed large scale farming which allowed large communities to develop. As the need to keep migrating diminished the character of the cultures seemed to develop unique characteristics. The Olmec seemed to have wide spread influence. Although distant cultures sprang up with differences, the Olmec marked one of the first major cultures that had a wide influence to the point that the surrounding cultures retained similar customs over time and distance.

Olmec Influences apparent in surrounding areas. "Mother Culture" – advanced agriculture, crafts, astronomy, engineering (irrigation), ceremonial centers (ball game, trade centers), religion (jaguar cult), sculptures and sculptural vessels

### **Mesoamerican Traits**

The Olmec figures were pudgy, with fat, pouty lips and flat forehead. The pudgy figure had a dual source, genetics and a diet based on starches. The lips apparently were a stylistic convention referring to a jaguar snarl. The flat forehead was real. It was a common practice, especially of the upper class, to bind the heads of infants (much like the Chinese bound feet). The origin of this practice is unknown. The purpose was to distinguish classes or castes.

The ball references the ball game.

To victor go the sacrifice, players offered themselves as sacrifice.

Not supposed to use their hands or feet. Life and death struggle.

Games were an important social and religious event.

The specific significance of the jaguar imagery may have varied from culture to culture, but the clay techniques were the same: earthenware, burnished slip, pitfired, culture of the jaguar, maize

Pouring vessels known as **stirrup pots** was a Mesoamerican convention. The handle was a useful technique to prevent spilling. It was wide spread. The pots that had stirrup handles seem to be more highly finished as if for ceremonial or decorative purposes rather than daily use. The name "stirrup" was given by the Spanish because it reminded them of their saddle stirrup. The makers were not attempting to copy Spanish saddles. There is a theory the shape may relate to capturing spirits. Some handles were carefully manipulated to whistle. Whistling relates to the element of wind, a spirit domain.

The topic (also known as **motif**) of the pots reveal their concerns, what was important for survival. Food sources (meat, fish, corn, drink, water), Procreation, fertility (theirs and natures), Religious themes, architecture, transportation, status/celebrity (wealthy patrons would have portraits done), interior decoration. Pretty much like today.

### **Spanish Influences**

Disrupt ancient tradition

Introduce new imagery

Christian

Europeans & European designs

Introduce new technology

True wheel

True kiln

Glaze

### **Personal Reflections**

How would you depict the things that are important to you?

Are the things that are important to you political, economic, cultural, spiritual, communal, familial...?