



**Jar**

Rio Grande Valley

ca. 1870

H: 11"; D: 12"

T0447

<https://collections.fenimoreart.org/objects/1084/jar?ctx=741640b01adadea41368d837a0845faf0de4d949&idx=0>

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The olla comes from the Tesuque Pueblo, located 9 miles north of Santa Fe, NM.[1] In the Fall of 2019 American Indian magazine published “The Path of a Pot” by Anne Bolen on Tewa pottery, which emphasizes Tewa people’s ontological relationship with pottery, stating, “A Tewa pot is never empty—and while used or cared for, always alive, and even if a jar or bowl is not in use, it is only dormant, anticipating the moment that it will once again be awakened by the touch of Tewa hands.”[2] For this reason, I interpret this olla as a dormant-living being.[3] While it is impossible to say when the touch of Tewa hands last awakened this olla or when the next time will be, I would like to proposition that are approaches that can be taken towards activating beings such as this olla while we await for them to awaken. For this reason, my analysis of this olla derives from: understanding the history of the land where this being came from, taking into consideration Tesuque people’s cosmological and ontological beliefs as it relates to this being and attempting to (re)orient the relationship between the human (viewer) and more-than-human (object).[4]

The meaning of “Tesuque” has a few origins. One is that it is derived from the Tewa word tecuge, (te<sup>2</sup>c’úgé) which translates to "a spotted dry place." This name is said to describe water disappearing into the sand of Tesuque Creek, which flows through the pueblo and reappears in spots.[5] Another option comes from a Tesuque and Spanish variation of the Tewa “Te Tesugeh Oweengeh” meaning “village of the narrow place of the cottonwood trees” or “structure at a narrow place.”[6] Both names showcase how Tesuque people defined themselves in relation to the land and to their surroundings. This form of relating to the world is not an exception to this olla, especially since Pueblo people see their pottery as beings that are brought to life by “two fertile substances, water and earth.”[7] In this respect, I am proposing that the olla is a being that carries the land, place, history and stories of Tesuque peoples.[8]

The being is Powhoge Polychrome storage olla (See Figure 1). [9] The underside of the olla is concave, while the body is rounded. The red rim and red band near the underbody, along with its black paint identify this as Tesuque. Its form and decoration indicate a date of circa 1880.[10] The inner red rim of the olla is designed to support a lid which is now missing (See Figure 2). The olla shows signs that it had to be repaired along the neck (See Figures 1 & 4). The painted decorations are mostly in black and are framed by thin single or double lines.[11]

I look to Tesuque cosmological and epistemological ways of relating to their land as the guiding point to interpret the painted decorations. Five repeating mountains surround the rim of the olla (See Figure 3). Two mountains side by side are mirrored and create a narrow place. The mountains are followed by a row of clouds that wrap around the neck of the olla.[12] The dots at the end of the curving point of each cloud represent rain. Below the rain clouds there are four mountain designs that are symmetrical to each other when viewing the olla top-down. The four mountains are painted in black and all repeat a three-feather design within them. With the exception of one mountain, all mountain designs also have three feathers on top (See Figure 4).[13] In between the mountains are two Avanyus (Water Serpents) who are accompanied by side-way rain clouds (See Figure 5).[14] The Avanyu is a deity of the Tewa Pueblos who is the guardian of water.[15] The Ayanyu is usually depicted with a curved spine which suggest a

flowing river.[16] Figure 5 displays the C-designed Ayanyu is facing upward with dots decorating its body. The C- design has a triangle in the middle and a chevron component that connects to a rain cloud. The relationship between Tesuque peoples and water is one that existed prior to contact; Tesuque peoples diverted water from the Rio Grande via irrigation ditches for millennia.[17] The fight to maintain this important relationship after contact is also one that has been documented in the historical record.[18] This olla presents viewers with the opportunity to reconnect with.

In concluding, I would like to offer a (re)orientation of how we (viewers) can interact with this living-dormant being. Figure 2 offers a view of the olla from the top down. The substance kept in the jar, perhaps seeds, would be its dynamic center and the mountain designs that surround it create a spiral that invokes moving energy.[19] The spiral energy then converts into drops rain. The Avanyus are not visible from this angle, but as viewers engage with the olla through different points, other layers reveal themselves. By looking at the olla in this manner we can be reminded that these beings are only dormant and are still full of life, if only awaiting to be awakened.

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[<https://www.theotsegoinstitute.org/uploads/1/3/9/6/139631595/posada.pdf>].



Figure 1: View of olla



Figure 2: View of rim and missing lid



Figure 3: View of Mountain designs

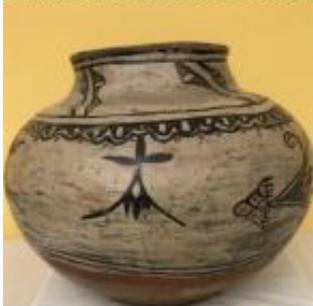


Figure 4: View of mountain



Figure 5: View of Avanyu with side way rain cloud

## Endnotes:

- [1] Tesuque peoples spoke the Tewa language which part of the Kiowa-Tanoan family. See: Pritzker, Barry. *Native Americans: 1*. Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 1999; 124
- [2] Bolen, Anne. "The Path of a Pot." *Magazine of Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian*, Fall 2019, Vol. 20 No.3. <  
<https://www.americanindianmagazine.org/story/path-pot>>
- [3] I choose to move away from the terms such as “art” and/or “object” when speaking about indigenous materialities due to the non-living attributions implications. The olla is alive and carries energies of the earth in its materiality (earth, fire, air, water). Similarly, the olla is alive due its painted imagery which interprets Pueblo cosmological beliefs.
- [4] Shelley Niro uses the term “more than human” to relate the material and non-material (also termed as: objects, non-living, inanimate) assemblages that exist in the world. See: Adamson, Joni, and Salma Monani. *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies*. Routledge, “Cosmovision: Resistance and Hope in Mohawk Cinema: Iroquois Cosmologies and Histories / Shelley Niro and Salma Monani” 2016.
- [5] Cheek, Lawrence W. *Santa Fe, Taos and Northern Pueblos*. New York: Fodor's Travel Pub, 2008; 144.
- [6] Sutton, Logan D. *Kiowa-Tanoan: A Synchronic and Diachronic Study*, The University of New Mexico, Ann Arbor, 2014: 48
- [7] Bolen, Anne. *Ibid.*
- [8] In my opinion this is the reason that Bolen’s article it states that once Tewa hands touch the pottery it will reawaken; to state it a different way, Tewa peoples (in this case Tesuque peoples) have a relation to a place, history, and story that allows them to be able to read and relate to the pottery in a way that not everyone might not understand.
- [9] For a detailed explanation of the method, See: “Southwest Ceramic Typology: Type.” *Southwest Ceramic Typology | Type*. Accessed September 23, 2019.
- [10] Batkin, Jonathan. *Pottery of the Pueblos of New Mexico, 1700-1940*. Colorado Springs, CO: Taylor Museum of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 1987
- [11] This is an aesthetic technique commonly found in Tewa Polychrome ollas. See: *Typology | Type*. *Ibid.*
- [12] The clouds are the same color as the mountains and contain the same narrow path design in the middle of each cloud.
- [13] These three feather patterns that are on the mountains are the same that would later appear on Tesuque Rain God figurines. See: Anderson, Duane, and Bea Duran Tioux. *When Rain Gods Reign: From Curios to Art at Tesuque Pueblo*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2002.
- [14] Typically, Avanyus are represented as a horned or plumed serpent with curves suggestive of flowing water, many also believe Ayanya to be related to Quetzalcoatl, the Mesoamerican water feather serpent.
- [15] Diaz, RoseMary. “Avanyu: Spirit of Water in Pueblo Life and Art.” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, May 16, 2014.<  
[https://www.santafenewmexican.com/magazines/bienvenidos\\_2014/avanyuspirit-of-water-in-pueblo-life-and-art/article\\_da0e9cb8-d4b2-11e3-9331-0017a43b2370.html](https://www.santafenewmexican.com/magazines/bienvenidos_2014/avanyuspirit-of-water-in-pueblo-life-and-art/article_da0e9cb8-d4b2-11e3-9331-0017a43b2370.html)>

- [16] Avanyu – Protecting the Rio Grande.” American Rivers. Accessed September 23, 2019. [17] Pritzker, Barry. Ibid. 125.
- [18] The U.S. Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 and the Nonintercourse Act settlers impacted the relationship that Tesuque people had with water since squatters began diverting water from the region, eventually causing a drought. See: Stevens, Anastasia S. "Pueblo Water Rights in New Mexico." *Natural Resources Journal*, vol. 28, no. 3, Summer 1988, p. 535-584.
- [19] Seeds have the ability to create and sustain life.

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