ANOTHER LOOK AT ZIA PUEBLO CERAMICS

Punamesh

At Punamesh, an ancestral village of the Zia Pueblo located about a mile and a half up the Jemez River from the present village, sherds recovered indicate an occupation from the Coalition and Classic periods (A.D. 1200 to 1600).

White ware pottery from the Coalition period consists at Punamesh is represented by a mixture of Santa Fe Black-on-white (75%) made from clays with feldspar and san ilsiro, in addition to San Ildefonso Black-on-white, similar to that noted in Pueblo III pottery produced in the Northern Chama and San Ildefonso region to the west (80%). Gray wares also exhibit a combination of coarse feldspar and sand, temper indicative of pottery associated with these two regional traditions.

This combination of pottery, along with White Mountain Red Ware and early glaze ware types known to have been produced in the Zuni area, indicates that during the Coalition period the Zuni area may have been an important link by which information and goods flowed between other Pueblo villages in the Northern Rio Grande and those in the Colorado Plateau.

As a part of Zia Pueblo’s land claims, Florence Hawley Ellis conducted excavations at the pueblo in 1966. The primary focus was the stratigraphic excavation of the ash dump on the east of the village. Additional excavations included two 3-meter-square test holes at a location just to the north of the main part of the village, and a 3-meter-square test hole at the ancestral village of Punamesh, located about a mile and a half up the Jemez River. She interpreted the data as indicating nearly continuous occupation since the fourteenth century. This was reported in a 1966 American Anthropological article titled “The Immediate History of Zia Pueblo as Derived from Excavation in Ruins Deposits.”

Given changes in ceramic analysis over the past 40 years, we thought it worthwhile to take a second look at Ellis’s ceramics now held at the Maxwell Museum. Our work, while mainly corroborating Ellis’s conclusions, also adds new information and insights to the story of Zia Pueblo’s long existence.

Spearhead

Although not specifically stated, we believe that the bags labeled “Spearhead” in the Maxwell collections contained ceramics from the location described in Ellis’s report as “two test holes in old deposits on top of the hill at the northern edge of the present occupied area in Zia.” This excavation included a ceramic sequence from the Late Developmental (A.D. 950s) to the Historic period.

A contribution of this study is the identification of ceramics indicating an occupation dating to the early part of the Late Developmental period. This is reflected by the presence of Red Mesa Black-on-white and plato and neck banded gray wares that are concentrated in the lowest stratigraphic levels.

Together, evidence from the various units excavated by Ellis indicates that the occupation of Zia may have spanned over a millennium and the sequence could be one of the longest yet documented for a currently occupied Pueblo.

Ash Dump

The Ash Dump, or trash mound, is located on the east side of the present village. The wide variety of glaze ware and historic polychrome types noted from various contexts support interpretations by Ellis of an almost continuous occupation from the thirteenth century to the present.

The common use of deep red firing clays and a distinct basketry temper throughout the Classic and Historic periods allows for the easy identification of decorated pottery that was locally produced, and includes a long continuum of resources used, leading to the striking and distinct pottery still in production today.

Profile of Ash Dump illustrated by Ellis in 1966

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