



MIMBRES POTTERY

The Mogollon (pronounced mug-ee-on) were probably the first Southwestern potters. They began lining their baskets with clay somewhere around 100 C.E. A hundred years later, they were producing pit-fired pots that could be called the first “true pottery” in the Southwest.

The best Mogollon pottery came from the Mimbres Valley located in southwestern New Mexico. The Mimbres people, a subculture of the Mogollon, were mysterious. Their earliest pots, made around 700 C.E., were red or brown. Three hundred years later, they had shifted to what collectors call “Classic Mimbres,” black-on-white slipped bowls. By 1200 C.E., Mimbres potters began painting designs on red pieces, mostly images of birds, animals, fish and insects. Before long, red ware had replaced the now “old-fashioned” black-on-white.

The Mimbres were an isolated people who disappeared into history between 1200 and 1400 C.E. We can identify their work principally through an unusual burial procedure. They placed a bowl over the face of the dead person and punched a ceremonial “kill hole” in the bottom of the bowl. The meaning of this practice is not fully known. Some say it was to allow the spirit of the person to flow freely into the afterlife. Others contend that it was done to allow the spirit of the bowl to accompany the person into the afterlife. Because the Mimbres left no written record, we will never know for certain. However, the “kill hole” in pottery most certainly identifies the piece as Mimbres in origin.