

**UCLA**

**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

Mimbres Painted Pottery. By J. J. Brody .

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8rr25900>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 11(3)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

**Author**

Naranjo, Tito E.

**Publication Date**

1987-06-01

**DOI**

10.17953

**Copyright Information**

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

of Tlingit stories is unresolved, and I know that culture bearers are struggling with these questions as well. I find myself asking questions such as: who owns the recording?; who can use it?; how do I differentiate between "owned" stories and general, biographical, or geographical accounts? The overriding issue centers on what is owned and how cultural groups define and enforce limits of control over their oral traditions. Advances in recording, copying and printing have complicated the issue by making the accounts easily available to many people. I personally look forward to the editors' fuller discussion of this issue.

It is important for us to know more about Nora and Richard Dauenhauer, how they began their work, how it developed for them personally, and the specific talents they bring to the process. This would enhance the reader's appreciation for the tradition bearers and for the process of recording and publishing their work. People from Southeast Alaska and academic colleagues will know some of this information, but for the wider range of audiences—students of Native American Studies and collectors of books on Northwest Coast history and culture—their reading could be enriched by more information on this special collaboration.

It is a major credit to the editors that this book will be held in equally high esteem by culture bearers, scholars, and students of Tlingit oral literature. This book lives up to the series description: Classics of Tlingit Oral Literature.

*William Schneider*

University of Alaska-Fairbanks

**Mimbres Painted Pottery.** By J. J. Brody. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987. 253 pp. Paper \$24.50. Cloth \$42.50.

*Mimbres Painted Pottery* chronicles the story of a prehistoric Pueblo people of what is now South Central and Southwestern New Mexico who were most unusual in that they left behind painted pictures of their ideas and life activities on the insides of shallow, semi-hemispherical pottery bowls which were perhaps three inches deeper and about the width of a modern day dinner platter.

J. J. Brody, a professor of art and art history at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, writes their story and plays the role of chief detective in piecing together evidence from varied fields of study such as archeology, ethnology, cultural anthropology, art, etc. in order to give the reader a sense of who, where, when and how these prehistoric Pueblo people, the Mimbres, lived. Brody's book in subject matter and content addresses much more than the pottery of a prehistoric people. The writing situates the Mimbres people into a physical environment, a human environment, a time frame, and Brody struggles in a courageous attempt to humanize an unknown, mysterious people in order to give as much life and meaning as is possible to their unusual art form uncovered in their primary legacy, black-on-white painted pottery of two distinct types.

The central focus of the book pivots around analysis of Mimbres pottery form and structure, design and painting, functions and meaning during the classic phase of their pottery production, roughly a time span of 250 years from about 1,000 AD to 1,250 AD as based on modern day scientific dating devices available to the archeologist. Brody's focus on Mimbres pottery painting further narrows to a discussion of the design on non-representational or abstract designs of geometric nature and, secondly, on painting of pottery termed "representational" which depict primarily human and animal life in single or multiple compositions and which may or may not be narrative in nature.

Funded by the School of American Research based in Santa Fe, New Mexico and as part of the Southwest Indian Art Series, Brody's book and the art series are aimed to reach three groups of readers which are:

1. Indian Artists
2. Southwestern Scholars
3. "Knowledgeable general readers . . . of Southwestern Indian Arts."

(J. J. Brody, *Mimbres Painted Pottery*, 1977: p. xviii). This is a disparate audience to reach and perhaps polarized when one considers that Indian artists may be older potters from Acoma, Hopi, Santa Clara, San Ildefonso or any other contemporary pueblo who may have progressed through the elementary grades in a government day school or the first years of a secondary boarding school as compared to university students and professors with long years in academics. Yet, by first hand observation the reviewer has seen Brody's book, or an awareness of, or accessi-

bility to a book of primarily Pueblo potters who either etch, paint, or carve designs on Pueblo pottery. And the key to its popularity with Indian potters is in its numerous photographs, both black-white and color, which illustrate with a very appreciable quantity and quality, the richness of an art to be (yes) reproduced, modified, built upon or simply to serve for inspiration to further their creative urges in divergent directions.

For the potential and established scholars, the book formulates questions and the puzzle of how a relatively primitive group of subsistence farmer-hunters produced "climax ware" more typical of modern day specialist in a time when survival and tradition would seem to dictate a more functional and less specialized pottery. Both implicitly and explicitly, the question as a theme throughout the book hangs ubiquitously, "What was the motivating factor for the Mimbres advanced pottery art?" Brody states, "The painted pottery of the Mimbres Phase was apparently a radical innovation, and whether this art is perceived as a sudden idiosyncratic invention that became a local tradition through imitation, or as an evolution from local prototypes, is a central issue (1977, page 59). Whatever the interpretations, the conjecture, and professional opinions, the recurrent phrase returns, "cannot be known."

Brody's admirable attempts to draw information from contemporary pottery process and production from modern Pueblos is at times incomplete. One case in point is the discussion of Mimbres pottery warpage which he attributes to firing of low temperature clay. In the reviewers personal experience and subsequent observation of Pueblo pottery fired in traditional practice on literally hundreds of firings of both micaceous and polished ware, Pueblo potters never experience distortion of thin walled or thick walled pottery of any form or shape during a low firing which is between temperatures of 900 degrees to 1,500 degrees fahrenheit. Natural clays used by Rio Grande Pueblo potters begin to warp and disintegrate between temperatures of 2,500 to 3,000 plus degrees in commercial kilns. Early on potters learned that warpage occurs during construction and drying especially of thin walled, slab type or thin coiled and scraped pottery. Warpage can be controlled to give a variation in shape to enhance form and structure or as a variation for a basis for design. Also along the same thinking, the Mimbres, it was suggested, were unaware of reduction firing. Yet any Pueblo potter learns quickly what creates a fire cloud, basically a mini or spot

reduction firing and that these can also be controlled. It is this reviewers thinking that Mimbres potters were aware of both how to control and use warpage and that they were also aware of how reduction firing occurred, and that they did not prefer reduction firing yet understood what creates it.

*Mimbres Painted Pottery* is a remarkable book written about the art of a people perhaps typical of human-kind, geniuses before their time, like a bumble bee who is not supposed to be able to fly, yet he flies despite his incorrect being. This is a book of beautiful illustrations and intriguing thoughts and information. It is recommended highly by the reviewer for any readership interested in prehistoric people and prehistoric art which impacts on contemporary people.

*Tito E. Naranjo*  
New Mexico Highlands University

**Early Field Recordings: A Catalogue of Cylinder Collections at the Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music.** Edited by Anthony Seeger and Louise S. Spear. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1987. xviii + 201 pp. \$22.50 Cloth.

Seeger and Spear's book describes 158 collections of nearly 7000 wax cylinder recordings made between 1893 and 1938 by various anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, linguists, and explorers. Approximately two-thirds of these collections document the music and spoken words of North American Indians. The catalog is therefore an important research tool for those who are looking for early aural documentation of Indian culture.

*Early Field Recordings* is a product of the two-year Archives of Traditional Music [ATM] project to re-record the cylinders on preservation tape, to check the documentation, and to create a computer database from the resulting information. The ultimate purpose of the work, funded by the National Science Foundation and undertaken by many ATM staff members, was to make the cylinder collections "more widely known and more easily available to researchers" (p. xviii). Thus considerations of accessibility have influenced the format of the book.

Opening with a short introduction to the history, mechanics, and particular problems of cylinder recording and archiving, the