

What shape and size were their pots and what were they used for?



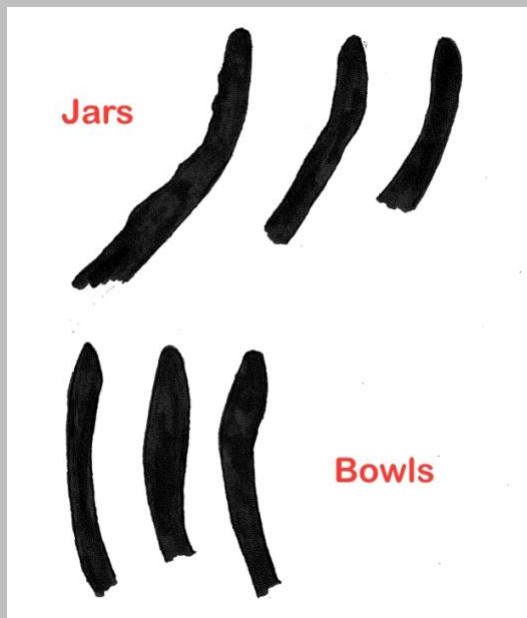
Utility Ware jar (78.67.285) and bowl (78.67.368) from Tijeras Pueblo. Courtesy of Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, University of New Mexico.

Southwestern “utility ware” pottery consists of coarse, unslipped, and unpainted vessels, usually jars, with plain or textured surfaces. Archaeologists assume that they were used primarily for food preparation, cooking, and storage. The assumption is based on where we find these pots within sites, the frequent heavy sooting, wear patterns from repeated use, organic residues visible on many utility ware pots, and comparisons with pottery use among historical Pueblo households in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Utility ware pottery may at first appear drab and crude compared to painted pottery types, but it was able to survive the rough and tumble of daily life—including repeated episodes of heating over open fires. Pottery that durable required sophisticated technological knowledge and skill to produce. The utility ware pottery from Tijeras Pueblo and other Ancestral Pueblo villages in the Rio Grande region was, in fact, very well engineered. The region’s potters were able to make very large utility ware vessels with thin walls, from micaceous clays. The thin walls allowed for rapid and efficient heat transfer, while the mica inclusions added strength.

Most utility ware vessels were jars of various sizes, with constricted necks and flaring rims. Archaeologists are able to determine the range of vessel forms, even their sizes, from vessel fragments (potsherds). Rim sherds—pieces from the tops of vessel mouths—provide the best information on vessel shape and size.

An unusual feature of the utility ware vessels from Tijeras Pueblo is the large number of bowls. Such bowls are extremely rare at contemporary villages (such as Arroyo Hondo near Santa Fe and Forked Lightning near Pecos), but nearly one-quarter of the utility ware rim sherds recovered from Tijeras Pueblo were from bowls. Utility ware bowls are also common at contemporaneous villages in the southern part of the Western Pueblo area (southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona), suggesting ties between Tijeras Pueblo and distant communities.

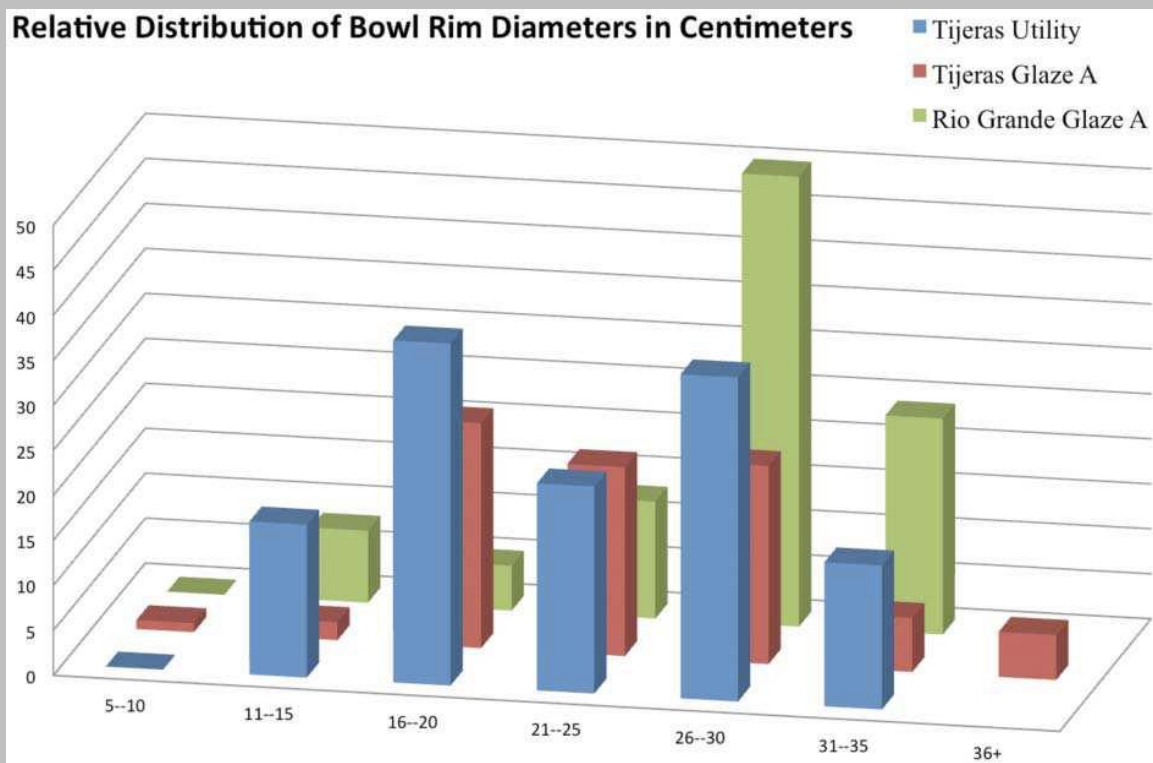


Utility jar and glaze ware bowl rim profiles from the site of Goat Spring, near Magdalena, NM. Vessel exteriors are to the left. Courtesy of Suzanne Eckert..

While jars are thought to have been used for food preparation, cooking, and storage, bowls, both painted and unpainted, are believed to have been used mostly for serving meals. Studies among modern peoples support the common-sense idea that the size of a bowl reflects the number of people who share food from that bowl. Thus, smaller bowls are thought to be associated with meals shared within a household, while larger bowls are believed to be associated with larger gatherings of people, such as feasts. Bowl sizes (rim

diameters) can be reconstructed from rim sherds by matching the arc of the sherd rim to a standardized chart of arcs of circles of known diameter (see example in exhibit case).

Archaeologists have noted that unlike earlier black-on-white painted bowls, which were mostly fairly small, early glaze-painted bowls were also made in “feast bowl” sizes. The spread of glaze-painted pottery to Rio Grande villages, including Tijeras Pueblo, may have been associated with the introduction of new beliefs and practices from the Western Pueblo area that included communal feasts. It's not surprising that many “feast bowls” at Tijeras Pueblo were the fancier-looking glaze ware pottery—but there are large utility ware bowls at Tijeras as well. This unusual finding suggests that utility ware bowls were used alongside glaze ware bowls during feasts. Glaze-paint technology was just being introduced to the local Rio Grande villages around this time, possibly by immigrants from the Western Pueblo area, so perhaps local potters met the growing need for specialized “feast bowls” using a pottery tradition that they were more familiar with.



Comparison of the relative distribution of rim diameter sizes (in centimeters) among Tijeras Utility Wares and Glaze A Red bowls from Tijeras Pueblo (LA 581) and Glaze A Red bowls

from other fourteenth century sites throughout the Northern and Central Rio Grande as reported by Spielmann (1998). Courtesy Judith Habicht-Mauche.

To dig deeper, see:

Habicht-Mauche, Judith A. and Hunter D. Jones Burgess. 2016. The Life and Times of Tijeras Utility Ware. *Papers of the Archaeological Society of New Mexico* 42: 129–145.

Spielmann, Katherine A. 1998. Ritual Influences on the Development of Rio Grande Glaze A Ceramics. In *Migration and Reorganization: The Pueblo IV Period in the American Southwest*, *Anthropological Research Papers* 51, edited by Katherine A. Spielmann, pp. 253–261. Arizona State University, Tempe.